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WOMEN AND PRESBYTERIANISM IN SCOTLAND

c 1830 to c 1930

Volume One

Lesley Anne Orr Macdonald
Ph D
University of Edinburgh
1995
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I declare that this thesis has been composed by me, and is entirely my own work. All references have been acknowledged.

Lesley A Orr Macdonald
July 1995
ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis is a consideration of the changing relationship between women and presbyterianism in Scotland during the period c1830 - c1930, focussing particularly upon its effect on the developments which increased the involvement of women in public, social, ecclesiastical and political realms. It claims that women were historical agents who acted critically and creatively in response to their circumstances, and so were active participants in the processes of change.

The values and beliefs expressed by Scottish women were not biologically essential or uniform, but shaped by their historical location. They were differentiated by a range of factors -including class, race, gender, character and geographical location - which belied the prevalent archetypal understanding of 'True Womanhood'.

The period witnessed significant developments in the options available, especially to certain groups of women in church and society. Many women welcomed the potent concept of mission to justify and define their moral agency in religious work, philanthropy, education, and campaigns for social and political progress.

The topic is introduced in chapter one with a brief consideration of its treatment (and neglect) in Scottish historiography, highlighting the significance of a presbyterian ethos in shaping the social and cultural landscape. I discuss sources, methodology, and limitations of the study. I contextualise the narrative by outlining the evolution of patriarchy as an organising principle in post-Reformation society, and of the 'separate spheres' doctrine which dominated discourse about women throughout the period.

Chapter two looks at the development of women's work within the presbyterian denominations, and how that was related to the general industrial and professional employment of female labour in Scotland. Chapter three explores the involvement of women in the foreign missions of the church. Chapter four examines the official position of women within the presbyterian polity of the main denominations, and the options available to those who sought to challenge and change female exclusion from status and responsibility.

Chapter five discusses the participation of women in four major campaigns to transform aspects of their society: anti-slavery; temperance; the struggle for access to higher education; the women's suffrage campaign. It focusses particularly on the ways in which people, policies and practices were influenced by presbyterianism, and vice versa and analyses, in the Scottish context, the claim that Protestantism was an almost essential precondition for the development of feminism in the western world. Chapter six is an attempt, based on the research, and on insights from contemporary feminist theology, to assess whether presbyterianism in Scotland during the period could be characterised as a source of liberation or oppression for women. Appendix I is a comparative case study of two local branches of the Church of Scotland Woman's Guild.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.'Where is my history?'

'Always it is the simple, homely things that bless and satisfy - this fire now, and Iain the dog lying asleep at her feet; the hot bread, new-baked from the oven; the taking of a book in both hands (as now, reaching for a volume of Buchanan's sixteenth-century History of Scotland, which she reads in the original Latin). These things - fire, bread, books - reach right back to her girlhood in Sutherland, her father also a cleric, her mother a schoolteacher, a life at once hardy and nourishing...The book in her hands is an early edition, as precious perhaps as the whole house over her head. When the book creaks open, and she spells the words over to herself, Buchanan springs alive into the room, she overhears the voice of a mind, speaking in the here-and-now, with all its biases, subterfuges, struggles and conflicts. So, George Buchanan, she challenges him, What have you got to say to me? It is all one long tale of antipathy and violence, the dog-fight of the murderous clans, the depravity of the English, the hell-fire theologians warring it out on the page; the voice of the historian, an implicated judge. But where is my history and Isabel's? she wonders, raising her head from the book. The voiceless, nameless women bent in the fields, at the looms, gutting the herring at the docks, hanging over the cradles, seem to crowd the margin with acts for which there is neither testament nor memorial.'

(from Arms and the Girl, a novel by Stevie Davies)

I cannot claim to have read Buchanan - in the original Latin or otherwise - but the question which Isla, the minister's wife, ponders, echoes a refrain which has been repeated throughout my life - as child and adult; in school and university; in work and play; in solitude and relationship; in family and church and politics: in all my experiences as a Scottish woman - where is my history? My own roots in the heritage of this country run deep. They
are in working class and middle class, east coast and west coast, radicalism and conservatism, mining and commerce. A common and centrally important factor linking my disparate antecedents was the institution and practice of presbyterianism: that form of Christianity which has had such a profound influence in shaping the character and ethos of Scotland.

I believe that history is not simply a record of the past, but a resource for contemporary understanding and action - both individual and collective. In my own 'search for a usable past' I discovered that there was an absence at the heart of the standard texts which presumed to tell the story of Scotland: Women were rarely named or discussed. Those individuals who were, seemed only to appear as exceptions or deviants, queens or witches. The experiences and ideas of women were largely omitted. They were an undifferentiated mass, acknowledged (if at all) only in terms of their relationships to the men who were the protagonists of Scotland's development. The invisibility of women concerned and perplexed me, for I knew from personal experience, observation, and the recollections of others, that persons of the female gender constituted at least half of the Scottish population. And surely they were deeply involved in shaping, sustaining and struggling for the people and values that mattered to them. Did women really have no history?
It has become a truism (but no less salutary for that) to acknowledge that the literature of human history has largely been written by, and in the interests of, the winners. The myth of universally true and objective scholarly activity has been exposed, as the motivations, privileges and partiality of historians are revealed. Research into, and analysis of the stories of marginalised, oppressed and forgotten groups, has not simply given a broader and richer picture of our past, but has radically changed the conceptual foundations and practices of historical study. The relatively new, but already quite sophisticated and multifaceted field of feminist studies, has begun the task, for different places and periods, of restoring women to history: not by inserting them into otherwise unchanged narratives, but by challenging liberal historiography to recognise that all social, political and economic orders have impinged on, and been affected by, the diverse experiences of women. This implies, at the most basic level, confronting the long standing assumption that the absence of women from historical accounts is to be ascribed to a 'natural' order in which the biological nature of women determines their role and functions as essentially private and ahistorical, whereas men are the agents of political and cultural change.\(^3\) In a general sense, the feminist project has argued that the invisibility and marginalisation of women has been a function, not of nature or essence, but of structures and ideologies which are constructed and
maintained by human beings. The question then arises about the extent to which particular structures and ideologies have been imposed on, accepted or resisted by women - how they have served to oppress or to liberate their human potential.

In the Scottish context, the long silence about women has started to shatter. Especially in the last five years, a number of books and articles on the history of women in Scotland have been published, and as two leading members of the growing community of interest note, in the introduction to a recent valuable collection:

'This welcome development serves to underline not only the breadth of women's experience and their contribution to Scottish society, but also the potential richness of this historical seam'.

The conclusions reached by most of these social and economic historians, sociologists and activists about the status and experiences of Scottish women suggest that they share many similarities with women in other parts of the Western industrial world. However, it has often been maintained that the post-Reformation dominance of Calvinist presbyterianism has in particular ways served to subjugate and repress the women of this country. As Barbara Littlewood wrote in a recent article on 'Sex and the Scottish Psyche':

'In the popular imagination, Scotland is often conceived of as a sexually repressed and repressive culture, with much of the blame put on the special tradition of Protestantism which took root here. Closely linked with this is a misogyny manifest in both violent and non-violent ways, in the burning of witches and the writing out of women from Scottish history. The heroes and villains of our popular
history, with the exception of Mary, Queen of Scots, are invariably male, and the alternatives only replace kings, lairds and politicians with an equally male dominated roster of Red Clyde heroes. Scottish socialism offered no relief from the puritanical ethos of Calvinism; a good socialist could be just as much a patriarch in his private life as any Kirk elder.15

As Littlewood says, Scottish Calvinism has been accused by many (and is still admired by others) for the masculine severity of its doctrines and practices. These, it is claimed, have extolled a patriarchy (hierarchical rule of the father derived from Hebrew patterns of social organisation, providing the Old Testament model for family, church and state - the word in itself implies no value judgement). This patriarchy, argue critics, at worst formalised and encouraged a deep and tenacious misogyny (hatred of women), affecting people of all classes. However, there have been few attempts to assess the reality, singularity and extent of this ethos, or its impact on Scottish women. The recent standard works of Scottish church history (eg Burleigh 1960, Donaldson 1960, Drummond and Bulloch 1973, 1975) are examples of the historiographical neglect of women, and demonstrate little critical awareness of the potential of presbyterianism as an instrument to exercise social and sexual control over women. Texts dealing with the significance of the Scottish church in modern social history (eg Boyd 1980, Smith 1988 C Brown 1987) pay surprisingly little attention to gender categories in their analyses (although Callum Brown acknowledges this shortcoming in a brief consideration at the conclusion of his book, and has
subsequently made a helpful contribution to the debate. There has been more acknowledgement of these in work dealing with particular aspects of female experience in Scotland. Christina Larner, in her study of the Scottish witch-hunt, argues that the Reformation made the practice of Christianity a personal responsibility (rather than that of specialists) for the first time. However, it preached a strongly patriarchal message about the ritual, moral and practical inferiority of women which compromised the potential egalitarianism of that central Reformed doctrine, the priesthood of all believers, and the church was determined to eliminate that which did not conform to its required pattern of female behaviour. Leneman and Mitchison (1991) examine the role of church discipline in controlling the sexual and social lives of Scots in the early modern period. They maintain that the Church acquiesced in the expectation that husbands should rule their household, and would express that authority through the use of violence. There was particular censure for working class girls and women who appeared to depart from puritanical moral standards. But they also give examples of Kirk Sessions which attempted to modify the extreme physical abuse of women, and demonstrated some paternalistic concern for the needs of single women and their children. Dobash and Dobash subtitled their 1979 study of violence against wives (based largely on Scottish empirical research), 'A Case Against the Patriarchy'. They contend that the Reformers, and especially John Knox, were
uncompromising in their restriction of women to the roles of obedient and submissive wife and mother:

'What was manmade, enforced by men, and to the benefit of men was attributed not to men...but to God, and therefore both just and immutable. Religion was indeed a powerful arm of the patriarchy because it was not defined as political in nature or as manmade. It was an invaluable tool that was used most effectively in achieving what Cato the Roman had pleaded for: that husbands control their wives within the confines of the household and thus save men in general from being publicly confronted with women's pleas for change or their accusations of injustice.'

Dobash and Dobash also highlight the public degradation and chastisement to which women were subjected until the 19th century in Scotland, if they were seen to be 'provoking' or outwith their husband's control.

JD Young's *Women and Popular Struggles: A History of Scottish and English Working-Class Women 1500-1984* (1985) is a recent attempt to consider the impact of Calvinism on the lives of Scottish women, and he is to be commended for characterising Scotswomen as agents rather than as victims of history. However, the book is decidedly a mixed blessing, for it is poorly constructed, confusing to read, and contradictory. His argument that there was a clear distinction between the experiences and freedoms of Scottish and English working class women, and that the Scottish Reformation was the source of female efforts for liberation, proceeds by assertion and repetition, rather than clear evidence or analysis.

Kay Carmichael's contribution to the 1990 collection of
essays, Sermons and Battle Hymns: Protestant Popular Culture in Modern Scotland, is entitled 'Protestantism and Gender'. It is impressionistic and includes a number of unsubstantiated generalisations, but also some perceptive commentary about the pervasive significance of the Calvinist ethos for the personal, sexual, social and economic relationships of women and men:

'The Protestant church has acted as the most powerful protagonist of patriarchy as a justification of authority. Those Old Testament images of a fierce, punitive, unforgiving and judgmental God bit deep into the Scottish psyche both in personal relationships and in institutions. Social and economic factors interacted with the church's emphasis on the women's role as being one of subservience. When men had to work hard in industries such as the shipyards, it was essential for the economy of the family that the husband's health be protected, that he get the most nourishing food, that he be not disturbed when he needed to sleep. While not all men succumbed to this very seductive role, the majority could not help but see themselves as powerful. Many embraced the role of tyrant with eagerness.'

Carmichael believes that the self-denying ethos of presbyterianism was only positive in helping working women to survive the ravages and hardships of the industrial revolution. Its legacy of guilt, repression of the sensual, and conformity is now anachronistic.

While the works cited make some attempt to consider the impact on women of Calvinism as a shaper of Scottish culture, there is almost no published research about women as church members, as believers, as active participants in the network of ideologies and institutions which constitutes organised religion, or as recipients of the religious work of others. What has been the
significance of the presbyterian church in shaping the self-understanding, the attitudes, the options and the actions of Scottish women in different times, classes and locations? What have been the variations and contradictions in religious experience? Has the church been a force of reaction or change; of oppression or empowerment? Has the monolithic hegemony of Calvinist patriarchy been total, or have historical developments impinged upon and transformed orthodoxy, in theory and in practice? These questions, and others, must surely be investigated if we are to understand the similarities and diversity in Scottish women's lives. For presbyterian religion has been, until really very recently, one of the primary and dominant contexts within which they have been born, grown up, worked, sought recreation, formed relationships and struggled to find meaning and purpose in their lives.¹¹ But such investigation has not been done. The Women in Scotland: Annotated Bibliography (1988) compilers found the section on religion the most difficult to compile, and were unable to list anything other than a few descriptive and biographical sources.¹² Since then, apart from several articles in the Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Biography (1993), only the chapter by Callum Brown and Jayne Stephenson in Out of Bounds (1992) has attempted to tackle the history of women and religion in the modern period. They are well aware of its neglect in Scotland, and limit themselves to these modest but admirable aims:
'Using oral history testimony and autobiographies] we explore the varieties of religious experience of Scottish women between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. We seek to establish the extent and nature of women's links with organised religion...drawing on the evidence of both childhood and adulthood to explore the religious constituents in women's lives. The evidence we dwell on is that from working-class women - those most neglected in the existing literature.'

From this material, Brown and Stephenson conclude that religion was important as a focus for meaning, self-esteem and leisure activity at a time when little else could fulfil these needs for working class women. Its moral and social control was diffuse, rather than enforced, and was not exercised without some circumvention and resistance.

At the end of this brief survey, it should be clear that the relationship between women and presbyterianism in Scotland is a vitally important and unexplored field of historical study. My interest in entering that field is, as I have suggested, personal as well as academic, and my motivation is practical as well as scholarly. I hope to address, if not always to answer, some of the large questions mentioned above. In section four of this introduction, I shall outline the scope, sources and limitations of my thesis, but first, a short detour into the realms of definition might be useful.
2. Are 'women' born or made?

So far I have used the term 'women' in an uncritical way, and indeed the general presumption of 'women's studies' is of the unity of the object of enquiry – that 'women' do indeed form a distinctive social group which can be categorised and analysed. This hypothesis, though it appeals to commonsense and is enshrined in language, is not unproblematic. The use of the word 'Woman' (singular and capitalised) was very popular in religious, scientific and conversational discourse throughout the period covered in this study. It presumed to signify a universal, abstract and stable category. All the qualities, defects, characteristics, and functions of 'Woman' were thereby assumed to pertain to every person of female gender, as a matter of nature. One consequence of this essentialism was that individuals who did not conform to the definition of 'Woman' were regarded as deviant, un-sexed or monstrous. Another consequence was that all individual, group and class differences and distinctions were collapsed into a reified theory which purported to be timeless and universal but was actually constructed on a limited bourgeois model – itself subject to considerable modification. As I have hinted, the widespread assumption that the qualities and characteristics of women are inherent by virtue of their biology, encouraged the habit of making sweeping ahistorical assertions about what 'Woman' could or could not do. In particular, 'Woman' was excluded from the
public territory of autonomous political and economic agency, and hence, by virtue of her 'nature', from the making of history.

Part of my task in this thesis will be to reveal and explore the mass of assumptions which so many Victorians and Edwardians made about what constitutes nature and history. But at this point, it is important to be careful about definitions and meanings, so that I do not fall into the same universalising trap of those I seek to criticise. For feminists too, both then and now, have been guilty of using 'Woman' for their own ends. I take heed of the postmodern warning about the dangers of essentialism, and agree with Denise Riley that 'Woman' is in blatant disgrace. As Riley says,

'All definitions of gender must be looked at with an eagle eye, wherever they emanate from and whoever pronounces them, and such a scrutiny is a thoroughly feminist undertaking'.

That applies to use of the collective 'women', which is also historically constructed, and in relation to other, changing categories. Indeed, it is worth asking whether gender canmeaningfully be isolated from other elements of identity — it is surely empirically mistaken to assume that there is a sense of community or solidarity between all women, regardless of race, class, ethnicity or situation. Some varieties of contemporary feminism, perhaps particularly in America, have tended to build theories based primarily on the experiences of white middle class women, thus eliding the real differences
between women and the forms of sexism to which they are subject.

However, having entered that caveat, I will continue to use the word 'women': not to build any grandiose or unitary theories of their oppression, but recognising that, because the subordination of women has been pervasive, multi-faceted and cross-cultural, gender is basic in human history in important ways. Yet it never appears in some pure or idealised form, but always in the context of lives which have been shaped by many influences. If, as Gayle Rubin suggests, the feminist task is to account for the oppression of women 'in its endless variety and monotonous similarity', then historical work is especially important, because it takes account of specificity and diversity in different societies and periods.

In this thesis, I shall certainly make use of some general hypotheses as resources for analysis, but I shall try to beware of manipulating evidence to fit the theory. I want especially to avoid assuming that the whole story of Scottish women and presbyterianism (even for a 100 year period) can be told by using the sources which have formed the basis of my research. The records, journals, minutes and biographies to which I refer are largely the record of relatively privileged, wealthy women and the churchmen who took it upon themselves to ponder their role in church and
society. As Brown and Stephenson rightly note,

'The relationship between middle-and upper-class women and organised religion reveals very little about the very different sets of economic, social and cultural situations within which working-or lower middle-class women formed relationships with religion'.

I hope, nevertheless, to be aware of the importance of class (and also race and culture) in undermining the mythological unity of women and enabling some - albeit sometimes unwittingly - to control or repress others.

3. A testament and memorial

What, then, do I want to say about those women who, between 1830 and 1930, were in relationship (as members, opponents, missionary objects and so on) with Scottish presbyterianism? My basic premise is that they were moral agents, with the capacity:

'To respond creatively and critically to their environment instead of simply taking it as given. Whether symbolised religiously or otherwise, the exercise [of morality] as a critical response to life is the basic means by which human beings are creatures not simply of nature, but of history and culture. The world is not simply given but constructed'.

It is important to claim that potential of women to transcend the givenness of their situation, because the idea that female actions (especially of care, nurture and self-sacrifice) were simply functions of their biological or divinely-ordained nature, that this confined them to personal or private responses, and that they had no capacity for universal justice, was vigorously promoted
during this period. As a contemporary critic, writing in the 1890s, observed:

'To be forced, by popular clamour, into a blind self-annihilation, is not really conducive to the health of the moral faculties; and this is why the goodness of so many women has in it a morbid quality. Von Hartmann says: "Nothing can be reasonably designated moral except a will self-determining and legislating for itself"...Not tenderness and sympathy for all that lives and can suffer is the underlying idea of feminine goodness, but devotion to individuals who are selected by mere accident of birth or hazard of circumstance. And this merely instinctive form of attachment is applauded as a woman's highest impulse and privilege.'

The narrative of this thesis attempts to show that the values and beliefs and actions of women were not somehow essential or innate, but shaped by their historical location. They were differentiated by a range of interlocking factors which belied the monolithic understanding of 'Woman' so energetically proclaimed. It is a story of diverse women refuting that understanding in a variety of ways - more often in deed rather than word - and in the process not just responding critically to their environment, but changing it.

The period from 1830-1930 was a time of significant changes in the theology, structures, laws and opportunities which shaped the experience of women in church and society (though the benefits of change were distributed unequally). Throughout the Victorian and Edwardian eras, the language of mission was in wide currency (in Scotland as elsewhere in the English-speaking Protestant world). Many women seized upon the concept of 'woman's mission' (a novel idea
which was widely defined and discussed from the early 19th century) to justify and define their moral agency in religious work, philanthropy, social and political campaigns. Other women, both in Scotland and abroad, had to deal with that mission as its objects. They responded to the message and its bearers in a variety of ways which belie facile stereotypes of passive acceptance or belligerent rejection.

I shall examine the moral agency of Scottish women, using the concept of mission as an important (although by no means the only) explanatory factor, as that agency was exercised within the institutional church, and in a number of campaigns for change. The thesis follows a thematic rather than a strictly chronological structure. I hope this serves the interests of clarity, and also helps to demonstrate the interlocking and changing nature of women's concerns and experience in church and society.

In chapter two, I consider the development of women's mission, in theory and practice; at their work within the presbyterian denominations, and how that was related to the general industrial and professional employment of female labour in Scotland. Chapter three explores the involvement of women in the burgeoning foreign missionary movement, and chapter four examines the official position of women within the institutional church during a century of upheaval for Scottish presbyterianism. In chapter five I discuss four different movements within which Scottish women sought to challenge and change the world in which they lived: the
anti-slavery struggle, the temperance movement, the fight to secure higher education for women, and the women's suffrage campaign. Using these examples of female engagement with the church, and with other institutions and concerns, I shall consider how Scottish presbyterian culture was affirmed, contested or altered by the complex interaction of female attitudes, actions and beliefs. From this research, some conclusions about the significance of presbyterian structures and ideologies for the lives of Scottish women will emerge. In particular I shall ask, in chapter six, whether it is possible to reach any judgement about presbyterianism as a source of liberation or oppression for women throughout the period.

I emphasise that this study does not pretend to be, all-inclusive. My concern is largely about women in what is commonly referred to as the 'public' realm, and I have not systematically considered the sexual, psychological, relational or spiritual dimensions of female experience during the period. However, as I will argue, the boundaries between private and public, personal and social are neither natural nor immutable. Their permeability, and the interaction of apparently discrete realms was one of the realities, submerged under the weight of convention, which deeply affected women in the 19th and early 20th centuries. And certainly one of the interesting questions about the connections between presbyterianism and women's lives relates to the effects of
inner religious experience. So there will be some references to personal, spiritual and family issues. I hope that as the study of Scottish women flourishes, these will be given the attention they merit.

4. A godly commonwealth?
Having made these remarks about how I shall approach the study of 'women', it is important also to say something about the presbyterian ethos of Scotland. In this section I shall outline the distinctive doctrine, church order and social principles characterising the religious Calvinist reformation which introduced presbyterianism into Scotland from the mid 16th century. I shall consider the attitudes to women and their role embodied in Calvinist theology; and some of the problems and possibilities it contains. There will be a brief survey of the intellectual, social, moral and religious changes which eroded orthodox Calvinism, and altered the presbyterian ethos of Scotland during the period under consideration.

The presbyterian ethos
Presbyterianism is a form of church government based on the principles elucidated by the French reformer Jean Calvin during the 16th century. It evolved as a distinctive expression of protestantism, consciously seeking to return to what was understood as the Apostolic pattern of faith, order, discipline and worship. Calvin and his followers emphasised the supreme authority of Scripture, 'In the
which', as the *Scots Confession* of 1560 put it, 'we affirm that all things necessary to be believed for the salvation of mankind are sufficiently expressed'. From this premise, Calvinists asserted that God, in his transcendent glory and majesty, could only be known by revelation through his Word. In Scripture, Christ was revealed as the divine head and authority of the universal church invisible. Only truly repentant sinners, elected by God as members of the church invisible, were predestined for eternal salvation. Christ the Saviour died to save those who were thus chosen and called, and were justified by faith. The visible church, of those who confessed Christ as Lord and were obedient to his authority, (but which could also include hypocrites and the reprobate) was of great importance. According to the Scots Reformers, the essential marks of the church as defined in their *Confession of Faith* (1560) were orderly preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments of communion and baptism, and ecclesiastical discipline.

Calvinists subscribed to the great reformation principle of the priesthood of all believers, whereby no sacerdotal caste could stand between the individual and God, and claim to be the sole mediators of the means of grace. But Calvin's own teachings do not make much of this. His own emphasis was on church structure and discipline, which were to be maintained by an orderly ministry of elders (or presbyters). Ordained ministers exercised a teaching office
of oversight and authority, and had to be well educated in order adequately to equip the Christian community. Calvin, compared with some of the other Protestant leaders, had quite a high doctrine of ordination, and believed ministers to be the sinews holding together the living organism which was the body of Christ. Their vocation would be recognised in election, examination and admission. Discipline, exercised through private rebuke, public admonition, and in extreme cases, excommunication was to be maintained in parish kirks by a body of lay ruling elders, who would live honest, faithful and circumspect lives. The authority of these officials was to be derived from the community, which would call its minister and nominate its elders. It was this principle which gave the Church of Scotland its lay democratic character and potential (and led to Disruption).

Parochial organisation was at the heart of the ecclesiastical and social vision of Scotland as a 'godly commonwealth'. But a hierarchy of ruling courts evolved, each covering a broader geographical area than the lower court, and each including both ministers and elders in membership. Church government by Kirk Session, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly was confirmed in 1592, and established, after the political and ecclesiastical struggles of the 17th century, by the 1690 Revolution Settlement. The General Assembly, which met at least annually and exercised both judicial and legislative power, became (especially after the 1707 Union of Parliaments) a
significant, if not the only, expression of corporate national identity.

The Assembly was a potent symbol of the vision of the whole nation submitting to the Word of God in all aspects of its life, with the visible church as a key element in moulding the Christian character of individual, family, community and state. This social strand of Calvinism was expressed in the responsibility of local parish churches and their Kirk Sessions, for education, health, welfare and care of the poor, as well as for discipline. In particular, in a faith where the Word was supreme, the reformers proposed a scheme of compulsory national education to promote literacy through a structure of parish schools.

The reformation vision of Scotland as a godly commonwealth - of people attending to the Word of God, engaged in plain and dignified worship, submitting to discipline by representatives of their community, showing corporate concern for the poor and needy, extolling the virtues of hard work and education - clearly shaped the ethos (though not always the practice) of presbyterianism. So too did the strict scholastic Calvinist orthodoxy which was enshrined in the Westminster Confession, ratified by the General Assembly in 1647. It became increasingly important as a statement of presbyterian identity against the threats of episcopacy, and adherence was imposed in a strict formula which all ministers had to sign from 1711. Its 33
chapters, expounding the Christian faith from creation to last judgement, recast Calvinist theology in the political context of the 17th century struggles for control of the Scottish Kirk. It emphasised the doctrine of total depravity: Adam and Eve became 'wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body', and after this Fall, all people are 'utterly indisposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil'. (WC Chap VI). It distinguished two covenants made by God: that of works made with Adam and his descendants, and that of grace made with the elect - only they, and the church, belong to the order of redemption. This doctrine of double pre-destination asserted both the sinner's responsibility for depravity, but also that salvation could only be by the sovereign grace of God. The psychological effect was that there could be no sure knowledge, either of salvation, or of God's love. The believer had to examine his or her life for evidence of election and worth, and seek to respond through a life of faith, obedience, and sanctification. The Westminster Confession also upheld the distinction between the visible and invisible church, and stressed the identification of the Jewish Sabbath with the Christian Sunday, which should be observed as a day of rest. These were the characteristics of puritanism.

Confessional (or Federal) Calvinism, with its stress on full doctrine, and ecclesiastical and moral rectitude, became so strongly identified with the nation that in 1707
the General Assembly believed that Scottish interests would be guaranteed when presbyterianism was established by the Act of Union. Several writers have perceived a continuing tendency in Scottish life – heightened during the 19th century – to transpose national and political issues into an ecclesiastical key.21

In summary, then, the presbyterian ethos evolved in Scotland as a religion of the Book, through a combination of reformed theology and ecclesiology, a vision of the 'godly commonwealth', and a subsequent emphasis on strict federal Cavinist orthodoxy which formed the basis of the Catechism. This ethos was shaped and reshaped in the social and political context of post-reformation Scotland – of Covenanters, union with England, the 'golden age' of Scottish Enlightenment, dissent and evangelicalism. It was austere, not ornate; cerebral rather than emotional in expression; overwhelmingly auditory rather than comprehensively sensitory. It emphasised striving and rectitude; good order; seemingly obedience to authority; strict observance of the Sabbath. It included appreciation of the value of community and solidarity, anda periodically expressed desire for corporate reform in national life. But ultimately the stress was on heaven and hell; on individual effort and profession to prove worthy to a judgemental God. The journalist Neal Ascherson has described the legacy of this as a fundamental contradiction between self-assertion, and self-distrust.22 William Storrar expands on this
'national pathology':

'For the Scottish Calvinists, their human experience became the entrails that had to be dissected for evidence that they were of the Elect, not the area God himself had entered to assure them of his love. God's love for them became conditional upon their own moral performance, proving that they were saved and not damned. If the enjoyment of their humanity was dependent on God's love for them, and if that love was conditional and not certain, then the effect was to make their own humanity something precarious and conditional upon their own constant moral striving. If Jesus Christ did not 'pay' for the sin of all humanity on the Cross, but only for the sin of the Elect, then we'll pay for it. And we cannot be sure how sair the Lord will be with us on the Day of Judgement.'

Presbyterianism and women

The Protestant reformation in 16th century Europe was the outcome of a long struggle against the authority, doctrines, and abuse of power of the medieval Roman church. It reflected a genuine and widespread desire to recover Biblical teaching and practice, and to make these accessible to ordinary, non-professional Christians. Reformers saw that the whole organisation and (to some extent) the theology of the church required radical reshaping to meet the changing needs and perceptions of the times. A fundamental insight was that every Christian had a vocation, and the existence of a separate, superior estate of priests exercising spiritual and sacrificial power was a distortion of New Testament teaching. There was a new emphasis on the participation of the whole people of God in religious life. The theoretical and practical responses worked out by different reformers impinged on the lives of women in various ways, both positive and negative.
In Calvinism, women, as individual human beings, were recognised as having spiritual equality with men. They also were to be beneficiaries of the movement to remove the hierarchical power, and attendant corruption, of the priestly caste, and to bring liturgy and worship back as the work of the whole people of God. Those who exercised the reformed ministry of word and sacrament, and lay leadership, were officials exercising functions on behalf of the whole community. They did not mystically stand as alter Christus, and at least in this sense, their maleness was not essential. Calvin, and a few other continental reformers (notably Bucer) did perceive in New Testament texts (especially I Tim 5:9f) a diaconal ministry for widows, under the supervision of men. But these tentative suggestions did not receive wide support, and the Scottish reformers say nothing of this. However, 19th century church reformers did appeal to a female diaconate in the early church as sanction for their own endeavours to extend the official ministry of women (see chaps 2,4).

The emphasis on literacy, and right to read Scripture for oneself, was potentially revolutionary for females, who were not excluded from Knox's desire to bring education to all the people of Scotland. Those who were able to read the Bible for themselves would find in its pages two strands of thought relating to women - subordinationist, and egalitarian. Texts affirming the worth and equality of women must have been liberating for those who had not
previously had direct access to the Scriptures, and whose self-understanding may have been largely shaped by the extremely derogatory, if not misogynist views of the church fathers and medieval theologians, as mediated to them by priests. And the equivocal nature of the biblical evidence was usable in the 19th and 20th centuries by those who argued for equality on the grounds that injunctions concerning the submission of women were culturally conditioned, whereas those promoting equality were part of God's unchanging truth (see chaps 4 & 5).

The reformers, as we have seen, were concerned about good and edifying church order, and developed that according to their understanding of biblical texts. However, church organisation was never an end in itself, but was to enable the people to hear the gospel and glorify God. The *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* had, in principle, freedom to change in order to serve those purposes. As Calvin wrote in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*:

'Establishing here no perpetual law for ourselves, we should refer the entire use and purpose of observance to the upbuilding of the church. If the church requires it, we may not only without any offence allow something to be changed, but permit any observances previously in use among us to be abandoned.'²⁴

Jane Dempsey Douglass, in *Women, Freedom and Calvin* (1986) highlights what she describes as Calvin's 'startling' inclusion of Paul's admonition regarding women's silence in church, as an example of matters in which the church is free to change (*adiaphora* - things indifferent).²⁵ This notion that the church was not forever bound to a
particular mode of being, but could be moved by the Holy Spirit according to the needs of the times, was appealed to by many women and their supporters seeking change in their position within the Scottish presbyterian tradition. The relative claims of Word and Spirit were recurring themes in the discussions about women's role in the church.

But the potentially revolutionary implications of the reformation for women remained largely dormant. In practical terms the Scottish Kirk, like others in the Calvinist tradition, did not promote an expanded public role or greater freedom for women in church and society: rather the opposite. Calvin and Knox both agreed that the natural order, created by God and knowable by all people, was for women to live in submission and obedience to men. As Knox declared in his First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (1558):

'Nature, I say, doth paint them froth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish, and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruel, and lacking in the spirit of counsel and regiment.'

This natural incapacity for rule, they believed, was confirmed by the authority of Scripture in Genesis and the pastoral epistles of the New Testament. Knox was particularly vehement about the curse of Eve:

'After her fall and rebellion committed against God there was put upon her a new necessity, and she was made subject to man by the irrevocable sentence of God...As God should say:"Forasmuch as thou has abused thy former condition, and because thy free will hath brought thyself and mankind into the bondage of Satan, I therefore will bring thee in bondage to man. For where before thy obedience should have
been voluntary, now it shall be by constraint and by necessity; and that because thou hast deceived thy man, thou shalt therefore be no longer mistress over thine own appetites, over thine own will nor desires. For in thee there is neither reason nor discretion which be able to moderate thy affections, and therefore they shall be subject to the desire of thy man. He shall be lord and governor, not only over thy body, but even over thy appetites and will." This sentence, I say, did God pronounce against Eve and her daughters, as the rest of the Scriptures doth evidently witness. So that no woman can ever presume to reign over man, but the same she must needs do in despite of God and in contempt of his punishment and malediction.28

Knox's intemperate Blast may have been a source of embarassment for his friends, including Calvin, and was politically motivated. But essentially it expresses a view about women with which his fellow reformers would have generally agreed. Knox presumes to issue a very radical form of female subordination from the mouth of God, depriving women of the right to control their own wills and desires, as well as their bodies. For their whole natures (like the natural world in general according to Calvin's dualist cosmology) were regarded as potentially evil and polluting. It would have been as unthinkable for Knox to imagine women exercising the kind of orderly ministry of teaching and oversight which was so central to presbyterian polity, as it was distressing for him to contemplate the secular rule of queens. Indeed, if he meant his words to be taken seriously, it is difficult to conceive of anything less liberating for women than this divinely ordained bondage! In his attitude to women, Knox did not depart from the classical and patristic traditions which had denigrated women for centuries, but appealed to them as
authorities in his diatribe.  

One apparently valuable element in reformation teaching was the emphasis on the dignity of lay vocation as a valid Christian way of life. Allied to this was an affirmation of marriage, against the primacy of celibacy. Certainly Calvin spoke well of the companionship and mutuality which was possible and desirable within marriage. Yet there was a loss for women when the only vocation available to them became that of wife and mother. No longer was there the opportunity to choose an alternative life as part of a community of women in monastic orders. The virginal life at its best had given women (those who could afford the convent dowry!) a measure of autonomy, learning and purpose. Now the only legitimate place to be a Christian woman was in the home. And the Calvinists developed a highly patriarchal model of domestic life, based on their reading of the Old Testament Jewish pattern. The husband and father became priest in his own home, exercising religious authority and entitled to exact obedience from other household members in the name of God. Because this was such a fundamental and pervasive feature of the reformation legacy in Scotland, I shall consider it in more depth in section four of the introduction.

But the loss of female community as an acceptable way of life was accompanied by a more thorough masculinisation of religion. The cults of the Virgin Mary and other female
saints were suppressed, and with them went the feasts, festivals, processions and other features which had made Romanism a sociable and ceremonial expression of religious faith. Little of this public and celebratory dimension remained in the austerity of presbyterianism, ruled by men and worshipping a distant male God, whose stern judgement was scarcely tempered by the touch of compassionate human mercy which Catholics believed was mediated by Mary. During the period covered by this study, women (especially influenced by evangelicalism) found other ways to 'feminise' the asperity of Calvinism, and to build community with one another.

Much of the substance of this study concerns the efforts of women and men to reconcile, to overcome, sometimes to abandon, and often having to live with tensions: between the more expansive, affirming and liberating elements of the presbyterian ethos and theology, and those which were more harsh, oppressive and punitive.

Changes in the ethos and theology of Scottish presbyterianism 1830–1930

In 1830, the Church of Scotland, established by the State, organised on a parochial model, and with extensive involvement in the provision and administration of education and welfare, presented an apparently unitary face to the world. The Kirk, especially in the rural areas where most of the population still lived, was perceived as a cementing force in communities which tended to embody a
static social hierarchy. Ministers were prominent and prestigious figures, both locally and nationally. Church affairs were considered to be of great importance. Religious belief and practice dominated the aspirations and fears of ordinary Scots. There was an identifiable Scottish presbyterian ethos which seemed to give the nation its distinctive character.

By 1930, after a century of division, the Church of Scotland was once more a unitary organisation, but with a much less central role – both practically and symbolically – in Scottish life. The intervening years had witnessed internal differences, Disruption, rivalry, and then the gradual reunification of the shards of presbyterianism (though small fragments remained broken off). Even by 1830, however, the singular character of Scottish presbyterian was becoming pretty frayed. A tradition of dissent dating back to 1733 had already established several hundred congregations which at various times, and for different reasons, had seceded from the Established Church. These tended to be around Fife and the west central belt, and were dominated by artisans who found little opportunity for participation and power in a Kirk dominated by the landed and professional classes. In 1847, the various groups of seceders combined to form the United Presbyterian Church – a denomination characterised by the Victorian values of thrift, sobriety, pragmatism, and also a commitment to evangelical and progressive causes. It provided a
significant number of politicians, especially in the Liberal Party which dominated 19th century politics.

Within the Church of Scotland, there were two 'parties' - the Moderates and the Evangelicals. Both adhered, by and large, to the theological tenets of the Westminster Confession. But the Moderates were generally more conformist, tolerant, willing to accommodate themselves with the political elite and the system of patronage which undermined the principle of ministers called by popular election. The Evangelicals were more fervent and enthusiastic in their conviction that salvation was only available through personal faith in Christ. In 1834 the Evangelicals gained ascendancy in the General Assembly, and set in train the Ten Years Conflict against the State's right to intervene in internal church affairs. Their vision of Scotland as a nation under God found its most coherent expression and model in the work of the Evangelical leader, Thomas Chalmers. Between 1819 and 1823 he attempted to re-invigorate the old parochial model of evangelisation, education and welfare, in his massive and poverty-stricken inner Glasgow parish. He also promoted a church extension campaign within the national church. 

Ironically, Chalmers also destroyed the possibility of that vision of a 'godly commonwealth' by leading ministers and lay people out of the established Kirk in 1843, to form the Free Church of Scotland. From that time, presbyterianism in Scotland was profoundly divided. The new denomination
devoted phenomenal resources of time, money and energy to creating the buildings and infrastructure which replicated (and competed with) those of the old Kirk. Despite its affirmation of the principle of a national church, the Free Church was de facto dependent on voluntarism, and hence undermined one of the tenets of the reformation. The State assumed from the Church of Scotland responsibility for administration of poor relief in 1845, and for education in 1872. The three main presbyterian denominations became preoccupied with ecclesiastical matters, rivalries and missions, and ceded their ability to promote that truly inclusive national identity which had been at the heart of the Scottish presbyterian ethos.

The election doctrines of federal Calvinism, which had never been entirely secure from the influences of Arminianism and Universalism, came under sustained attack. In the early 1830s, Edward Irving and John MacLeod Campbell were both condemned by the General Assembly for departing from the confessional standard of the church. MacLeod Campbell preached universal atonement and assurance, and as the century proceeded, these were increasingly adopted, to challenge the supremacy of double pre-destination in Scottish theology and preaching. The influence of Anglo-American revivalist evangelicalism was significant - especially during 1859-62, and the Moody and Sankey campaign of 1873-4 (supported by clergy from all three presbyterian churches, and making a marked impact on the
Free Church). The aggressive mission strategy employed to attract the 'lapsed masses' was generally based on the more comforting and less terrifying arminian doctrines, and hastened the relative decline of the old orthodoxies - though they by no means lost their compelling power. Nevertheless, towards the end of the 19th century church worship, and especially congregational life, did alter in many places. It become more sociable, populist, and appealing to people who found rigid Calvinism tedious and difficult to understand, as well as frightening in the hellish destiny it seemed to signal for too many. It was during the Victorian era that religion was often perceived as becoming more 'feminine' in tone and emphasis. Certainly many ministers and local congregations made more room in sermons, hymns and meetings for emotional expression, talk of God's love, and the promotion of Christian qualities which were understood as quintessentially female.

In the second part of the 19th century, new developments in science, history and Biblical criticism raised profound doubts about the literal truth of the Scriptures upon which the reformed faith was founded. Within the Church of Scotland, the influence of German Idealism affected 'Broad Church' ministers, while those of the 'High Church' aspired to some of the aesthetic and liturgical qualities of the episcopal traditions. New intellectual trends also brought into focus elements of Christianity which had long
been neglected - especially the Old Testament prophetic legacy, the historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God. These provided resources for presbyterians who were concerned and perplexed by the dark side of industrialisation: social dislocation and inequalities which plagued urban Scotland. These seemed to point to the failure of the churches' home mission strategy to solve social evils, and of their accommodation with the liberal individualism of a \textit{laissez-faire} political economy. From around 1880, the churches had to face challenges, not only to traditional Calvinist orthodoxy (both the United Presbyterian Church (1879) and the Free Church (1892), after acrimonious debates, passed Declaratory Acts which modified strict adherence to the Westminster Confession. The Church of Scotland passed a similar measure in 1905), but also from collectivist socialism, Darwin's theory of evolution and its sociobiological offshoots, and the reformist Women's Movement. I shall discuss each of these at greater length in subsequent chapters. The presbyterian churches responded to these challenges in a number of ways, up to and during the years of the First World War, including significant efforts to develop a Christian social and economic critique, and practical social service. At the same time, the dominant world-view in Scotland (and certainly in the churches) was imperial, and the conservative Unionists challenged the long-standing political pre-eminence of the Liberals. After the War, there was a noticeable mood of retrenchment within presbyterianism, as the conservatism of
the dominant upper and middle classes asserted itself in
the face of political and industrial unrest. In this
context, the presbyterian churches mounted a long-lasting
campaign (1923-39) against the Roman Catholic Irish
immigrant population of Scotland, which was regarded as
morally and ethnically polluting. Thus did the growing
insecurity of presbyterian identity issue in ugly sectarian
and class-conscious attacks against the threat of the
'other', to preserve an ethnic religious nationalism. The
1929 Union brought together the United Free Church (itself
the result of a 1900 union between the UPC and the FC) and
the Church of Scotland. But the hope that organisational
unity would restore the Kirk as a central symbol and
reality in Scottish life, had to reckon with the experience
of the previous century. It had witnessed the dilution and
fragmentation of a coherent presbyterian ethos, and the
changing position of women in church and society was one of
the factors which challenged the old certainties.

If 1830-1930 was a period of upheaval for Scottish
presbyterianism, it was also a time of major debate about,
and change in, the role of women. Several of the above
mentioned trends and developments in religious, social and
intellectual life during the Victorian and Edwardian
eras were of considerable significance for many women, as
they were for the Scottish church. In 1830, women in
Scotland (along with most men) had no political rights.
Their legal and economic status, especially if they were
married, was negligible. None had formal access to higher education or professional training. Within the church (apart from some seceder congregations where they could vote in a call) they had no official role (although some were beginning to work as Sabbath School teachers). Their parish church offered no organisations where they could meet, work and enjoy the company of other women.

By 1930, the position of women (in theory at least, and in practice for many) had been transformed. After 1928, every woman over twenty-one was entitled to vote. Women had gained new property and matrimonial rights. Universities and professions had been opened up, and new forms of employment were available. These achievements were due to the efforts of a Women's Movement: a 'first wave' of feminism, which most scholars perceive as coming to an end some time between 1920 and 1930.31 Women also played a much more important and active collective role in church work and affairs, and campaigns had begun to seek official parity in ministry and church government. Especially after the First World War, there may have been, among many suffrage activists who were also church members, some feeling that the position of women in the churches represented unfinished business for the movement, and indeed the issue appeared on the agenda of most British Protestant churches during the 1910s and 1920s (see chap 4). To be sure, most Scottish women were still excluded (by law, attitudes, circumstances, tradition) from full and
equal opportunities in employment, politics and other aspects of life. But during these 100 years contestation of the 'Woman Question' was high on the cultural agenda of the whole English-speaking Protestant world. And for my purposes, the period is of interest because it was marked by a largely new phenomenon in religious and public life – the self-conscious collective agency of women. The rise of evangelicalism; the intellectual legacy of the liberal Enlightenment; challenges to doctrinal orthodoxy; the impact of new studies in physical and social sciences; the human consequences of industrial capitalism. All of these impinged on the 'Woman Question' as they did on the churches. It is part of the task of this thesis to identify and discuss the relationship between women and presbyterianism in Scotland during a period of great change for both, and if possible, to observe features of that interaction which may have been distinctive Scottish expressions of a general cultural movement.

Although there are problems in attempting to cover such a broad and complex sweep of time and subject matter, I decided (encouraged by many people within the academic, church and feminist community) that a general survey of the period, highlighted by some more detailed studies of particular movements, groups, and individuals, might be a helpful contribution to an important and neglected aspect of Scottish church and social history. While there have been times when I have felt frustrated and overwhelmed by
the the scale and complexity of the task I set myself, I think on balance that it is a valid endeavour to attempt an overview of the theories, dynamics and experience of female agency and presbyterian culture.

There is a wealth of source material available to those interested in such a study. I have sought out and made extensive use of records created by women themselves: minutes of church organisations (at local and national levels), charity organisations, young women's groups, debating societies and campaigning groups; addresses, lectures and letters. Magazines and journals written by women in guilds, mission agencies, clubs, colleges, and articles by women in a range of periodicals. Autobiographies and memoirs of aristocrats, missionaries, philanthropists, political activists, evangelists, reformers, suffragettes, minister's wives and farmer's wives, doctors, servants and millworkers. These help to tell the story of how women saw themselves, what they believed in, what their hopes and dreams were, what obstructions they confronted, and what they actually did with their lives. I have referred also to official church records of General Assemblies, Committees and Commissions, and the large and varied church and local press which was such a feature of the Victorian era. These materials, along with numerous books, pamphlets and tracts published throughout the period, give some indication of the deep and enduring public interest in debating the nature and role of
women. They also throw light on the extent to which the church and its representatives either shaped and changed perceptions, or were forced to react to currents and movements. Analysis of this variety of text is not straightforward. Motive, circumstance, censorship (whether self-imposed or external) and audience all affected what was written, whether it was kept or published, and why. Conversely, these factors also contributed to (for historians) frustrating gaps and inadequacies in many existing sources: and to the absence of record for many events and people. I have tried to keep these problems and limitations in mind, while endeavouring as much as possible to allow the experience and agency of women to be revealed through their own words. This approach to interpretation of historical texts has much in common with the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' developed by feminist and liberation theologians in their biblical interpretation.32

With such extensive primary resources for research, it was in part a practical decision not to undertake a systematic study of Scottish fictional literature (though I have read a considerable number of books, stories and magazine serialisations written by both women and men during the period). The exercise of seeking historical evidence in literature, with its own problems of interpretation, merits the kind of careful professional consideration of others much better equipped for the task than I am!33
Similarly, I have chosen not to engage in oral history to any significant extent, although I have spoken to several individuals whose memories and insights have been of great value. Again, this was in part because to do justice to such an important method of recording history, would require contacts, access, skills and techniques which I simply would not have had time to develop in the context of a wideranging study. It would certainly have been a valid approach had my research concentrated on a shorter and more recent time span. The work of, for example, Jayne Stephenson and Callum Brown, or recent television series about aspects of women's history, illustrates the great value of studies based on oral recollections. They are especially helpful in recovering the views and experience of working class women, and others who did not have access to written forms of record.

This is plainly one of the main problems and limitations of my own work. For all the variety and contention expressed in discursive writings about women, most comes from the pens of a relatively small number of men and women, during a time when practical literacy was far from universal. Most of them came from similar class and demographic circumstances, and from positions of prestige or respectability within the churches. It is very hard to hear the voices of those masses of ordinary women on the receiving end of religious prescription, mission campaigns or charitable activity. And to avoid the old trap of
characterising them simply as victims or objects. Nor has it been easy to find much by women who were disillusioned enough with church theology and culture to abandon it, and then write about why they did so. So perhaps the temptation is to cite the experience of people like Christian Watt or Helen Crawfurd too often, in the conjecture that what they have written from their own experience is representative of their silent sisters.35

There have also been difficulties in finding and making helpful use of minute books kept by church women's organisations, and I discuss this particular problem in the introduction to Appendix I. One general bias of the sources I have used is a lowland urban one. It is oversimplistic to speak of 'Scotland' as if it were an unproblematic single entity (though I am as guilty of this as anybody). The Highlands and Islands; the North East; the Northern Isles; the Borders - they were all areas with distinctive religious identities and ways of life.

Likewise the women in different parts of Scotland often had characteristic work opportunities and patterns - as, for example, the 'fisher lassies' who were such a feature of the North coast, or indeed the female-dominated workforce of the Dundee jute mills. Most of the materials I have used emanate from the religious urban elite of Edinburgh and (to a lesser extent) Glasgow, though I also refer to women in Fife, especially in the Appendix. That elite could be just as patronising and prescriptive about folk in
rural Scotland as they could about the 'lower classes' of their own cities. I am sorry that in some respects I have conformed to the urban bias, and hope that other studies, based on more substantial local materials, will help to challenge and correct these inadequacies.

Another limitation to the scope of the thesis is that it pays little heed to the women who belonged to other faith communities within Scotland - and especially to the growing and notable Scoto-Irish Roman Catholic community. Roman Catholic women clearly had a very distinctive religious and cultural framework - especially in urban areas where the priest and local parish played such an important role. And these women, in their growing numbers, had to struggle with their identities as Catholics and women in a society where presbyterianism (for all its own dilemmas) was the dominant cultural force. Unfortunately, I have been able to find almost no secondary writing about Scottish Catholic women, and have not explored primary sources. In the end, it simply remains an unconsidered issue, and there is surely a need for work to be done in this area.36

Having confessed some of the limitations and unsettled issues of the thesis, I hope that it is useful at least in opening up a previously unexplored field of study.

As this introduction indicates, the women of Scotland who acted as agents of their own history throughout this period
did not do so out of a vacuum. They existed within a society in which religion, the law, political economy and literature all contributed to the promotion of a domestic ideology. Peter Gay, in his interesting study of Victorian aggression, argues that the cult of womanliness and its symbiotic opposite, the cult of manliness, were central to 19th century bourgeois culture. They both gained force from the domestic ideology which sought to encompass the whole existence of women according to the private realm of home and family, and to their relationships with men. It presented female exclusion from public participation in power and authority as natural and desirable. The evolution of the domestic ideology, and its corollary of separate spheres for women and men, was inextricably linked to the patriarchal model of family life promoted by the reformers, and to the development of liberal political theory. A study of women and presbyterianism would hardly be intelligible without understanding how important, pervasive, and obvious these notions seemed during this period - although that doesn't mean that they were not subject to controversy and change. So my final introductory task must be to outline the emergence of the domestic ideology and the common roots of what seemed to be separate private and public, female and male, spheres.
In 1862, a Free Church of Scotland Pastoral Address claimed:

'The institution of the family is so immediately Divine, as to have been from the beginning, destined no less to be to the end, absolutely one -a government unchanged and unchangeable, in all countries and ages of the world.'

In fact the government of the family was far from being 'unchanged and unchangeable in all countries and ages' but subject to considerable variation. The writers could have been excused their ignorance about kinship organisation in the non-Christian world (despite imperial and missionary contacts with other forms of human community), but they might have had a better appreciation of the family's historical development before and since the Reformation. There was, in medieval and early modern Scotland, great diversity in the size and composition of households. During the Middle Ages, large kin groups ruled by feudal lords were the basic organising institution of society, controlling production and distribution of goods. In these patriarchal households, the lords or chiefs ruled over women, children and servants, and engaged in power struggles with one another. Marriages were contracted for economic or political gains, and the women who were thus exchanged were considered to be the property of their patriarchs. Although such households were relatively few in number, they could be very large indeed, and were a real expression of wealth and power. Within ruling families, and certainly among the peasant
class, marriage could be a haphazard affair: it might be assumed on the basis of intercourse or conception, or exercised by force, or it may not have been regularised or acknowledged at all. The church struggled for hundreds of years to assert its role in the institution of marriage, and in wedding ceremonies. In any case, the Catholic Church's teaching, while making marriage a sacrament, also promoted celibacy as the ideal for devout Christians, especially the ruling priestly hierarchy. Women, too, had the option of a virginal conventual life, within which education and work were often available. And despite the severe restrictions imposed, there were some opportunities for married noblewomen to exercise power and influence, especially in the absence of the feudal lord.

The Protestant revolution replaced celibacy with marriage as the ideal condition for Christian life, and in Scotland reformers sought to regularise marriage and make it a public event. They also wanted to promote much higher standards of marital conduct, and church courts, especially Kirk Sessions, devoted considerable time and energy to the task of surveillance and punishment for sexual misdemeanours. Adultery in particular was a heinous sin and crime. Church discipline was, in theory, even-handed on this matter: against the age old double standard which expected total fidelity from women, while allowing husbands much greater latitude. But Calvin appealed to the Jewish property basis of patriarchy, when he demanded
the Levitical sentence of death for adulterous women:

'Not only on account of their immodesty, but also of the disgrace which the woman brings upon her husband, and of the confusion caused by the clandestine admixture of seeds. For what else will remain safe in human society, if licence be given to bring in by stealth the offspring of a stranger? to steal the name which may be given to spurious offspring? and then to transfer to them property taken away from the lawful heirs? It is no wonder, then, that formerly the fidelity of marriage was so sternly asserted on this point.'

All the Protestant reformers agreed that the supreme Christian duty of women was to fulfil, in submission and obedience, the role of wife, mother and housekeeper. I have already mentioned that the Genesis account of Eve's responsibility for the Fall of humankind was central to the enduring presbyterian perception that female subjection was essential. As an 1840 article in the Relief Church Christian Journal put it:

'Had she kept her proper place, and been guided by man, instead of attempting to guide him, the great disaster would not have befallen our race.'

By the 19th century, it was a widely accepted protestant convention that the Reformation had been a great benefit to women, because it purified and dignified marriage. Certainly, the hierarchy of human ranks was regarded as a positive blessing, designed to preserve order against the chaos of rule by the weak or dangerous. The Christian ideal for marriage as a kind of loving despotism was founded on texts such as Ephesians 5:22-23, which presented the submission of wives to husbands as analogous with the church's relationship to Christ. Mona Caird, in a
series of articles published in the *Westminster Review* between 1888 and 1894, was more critical of the Protestant model:

'In breaking the back of the ecclesiastical tyranny, Protestantism undoubtedly did one great service to women, for up to this time, their fate had largely been determined by Canon Law...Still, all improvements being allowed for, the woman's position, as established at this epoch, was one of great degradation. She could scarcely claim the status of a separate human being. She was without influence, from the dawn of life to its close, except such spurious kinds as could be stolen or snatched...She figured as the legal property of man, the "safeguard against sin", the bearer of children *ad infinitum*...A man might indeed be a tyrant in his own home, in the devout belief that he was doing no more than exercising his just rights, nay, performing his bounden duties as ruler of the household.'

In post-Reformation Scotland, the presbyterian church made strenuous efforts to impose patriarchal rule through the combined offices of ecclesiastical and civil authority. For a range of offences, from gossiping and slander, to adultery, harlotry and witchcraft, women in the 16th and 17th centuries were subjected to punishments which were intended to silence, to humiliate, to shame, to demonise and above all to control them for behaviour which was not in keeping with the submission required by the defenders of the faith. Those who committed sexual misdemeanours, or who chose to live on their own and not in a male-headed household, were liable to particular pursuit and censure. This atmosphere of repression, abuse and contempt of women reached its nadir in the periodic witch hunts of the period. In 1727, the last of thousands of Scottish women was tortured and burned. However, sexual control continued, and many women were
tragically committing infanticide (as traditional ballads like 'The Cruel Mither' indicate) well into the 18th century. However, the very levels of coercive activity by the church suggest that women were by no means wholly socialised or terrorised into acceptance of religious dictates. Leneman and Mitchison cite evidence that there was widespread adherence to traditional social and sexual customs which subverted presbyterian values, and Boyd suggests that rural laxity in particular continued to concern churchmen throughout the 19th century, by which time their powers of coercion had all but disappeared.44 And as defenders of presbyterianism itself during the 17th century struggles, female Covenanters displayed courage, determination and independence. Patriarchal rule was not, apparently, a hindrance to those whose persistence led the Government to decree in 1666 that husbands would be held responsible for the religious sentiments of their wives.

One man complained to the Privy Council:

'Many husbands here who yield to the full length are punished by fining, cess and quarter, for their wives' non-obedience, and ye know, Sir, that is hard. There are many wives who will not be commanded by their husbands in lesser things than this.'45

The behaviour of Scotswomen was, apparently, not amenable to being wholly defined or determined by church-imposed decrees about their role and position.

The Protestant Reformation was one element in the dramatic social and political changes leading to the emergence of the modern state, which replaced the feudal
household as the main organising institution of society. As mercantilism and early capitalism grew in importance, the significance of the kinship household, and the relation between lord and tenant as focus for economic production was diminished, and there was a gradual demarcation of domestic and economic activity. The unitary focus for family and political life was divided and replaced by the political state and the nuclear domestic family. But each of these was rooted in patriarchal kinship, and were inextricably linked. 46

The 17th century philosopher John Locke was influential in developing a new ideology for political authority. Rather than competing households, his concept was of a unitary state which served with the consent of propertied individuals. The family was removed from the political sphere and became private. But women (and unpropertied men) were not granted individual political rights. Locke believed that women were exempt from the 'natural freedom' which pertained to men, and upheld 'the Subjection that is due from a Wife to her Husband'. This is the only instance in Locke's theories, of a natural difference justifying domination of one person by another. In fact, his 'social compact' is presented as a contrast with the original patriarchal compact between men and women, whereby wives consented to obey their husbands in return for protection. In both Treatises, Locke assumes that the natural condition of women is to be in a family, married and bearing
children, for whom they are incapable of providing on their own. The resulting structures of dependence and authority, argues Locke, are created in the state of nature. The husband is in charge because he alone has the ability to control and dispose of property. Locke's main concern is the certainty of paternity and consequent legitimacy of inheritance.47

Although Locke was widely read in Scotland, his contractual theories differed from the characteristic philosophies of sentiment and common sense developed by writers of the Scottish Enlightenment.48 In some respects, their emphasis on good manners, civility and sympathetic relations opened up new possibilities for women in the domestic sphere. For example, Francis Hutcheson argued for marriage as an equal partnership, which would be a training ground for moral conduct in other spheres:

'Hutcheson's insights encouraged British moralists to view the private arena of home and family as something other than a distraction from more important, civic roles. The 'little platoon' of the affectionate family is, in Burke's words, "the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country and to mankind." The love between a man and a woman is the first step in the forging of this ethical chain."49

However, Hutcheson and also later authors perceived the roles of women and men to be highly differentiated, with the female duty and virtue of sympathy to be cultivated according to the needs and desires of husbands. Social control was to be preserved, and among the things which
threatened good order were women who asserted their own rights and wishes instead of practising the art of pleasing others. James Fordyce, an influential minister whose widely read didactic works included *Sermons to Young Women* (1765) and *Character and Conduct of the Female Sex* (1776), described assertive women as 'moral monsters', 'absolute demons' and 'female furies'.50 As for Adam Smith, his 'emphasis upon self-control and the spectatorial distance...caused him to emphasise the virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude. Though Smith conceded that women were more humane than men, since "Humanity is the virtue of a woman", he did not consider humanity the greatest virtue...For Smith, as for Voltaire...even a woman of erudition and genius could not overcome the fundamental weaknesses of her sex.'51

Scotland's greatest Enlightenment philosopher, David Hume propounded sceptical views about the limits of abstract reason, which might seem to disengage the philosophical connection between maleness and reason, but Hume's own writings confirm that he drew a conventional differentiation between male and female, public and private. He argued that reason must conform to natural propensities, and that it is always motivated by passion. But for the reflective passion of reason to be efficacious, it had to be embodied in a publicly imposed system of 'justice'. For Hume, the individual whose private interests are to be controlled by public justice is the male head of household, while women are associated with the 'private' passions whose satisfaction requires the action of men in the public realm. Women had no absolute claim to the rules of justice, because they were too weak to resist
wrong. Only their 'insinuation, address and charms' allowed them to share the rights and privileges of civil society.\textsuperscript{52} Steven A Macleod Burns has also argued that Hume was typical of Enlightenment thinkers in assuming maleness as normative for the 'model human being', while his model female has different and inferior qualities. Chastity is the most distinctive virtue required of women, though scarcely mentioned for men: 'The smallest failure here is sufficient to blast her character'.\textsuperscript{53} Once more, the close connections in liberal thought between male identity, legitimate offspring, and economic power are made. For although chastity is of no intrinsic value, it is required so that men can identify their own children:

'Men are induc'd to labour for the maintenance and education of their children, by the persuasion that they are really their own, and therefore tis reasonable, and even necessary, to give them some security in this particular.'\textsuperscript{54}

So the restraint exercised by women is not primarily a matter of their personal autonomy, but to secure the parental and economic interests of men. This bore great resemblance to Calvin's position on adultery. In general, Hume's references to the nature and situation of women consistently depict them as inferior to men in both mind and body. Although he recognises that the conventional distinction between male and female is unfair to women, who are generally confined to a private realm, and unable to share in the 'artificial virtues', he simply asserts that their political activity would be contrary to common human sentiments.\textsuperscript{55}
There was, it seems, a general failure in Enlightenment philosophy to distinguish between making an *explanation* of the inferior status of women, and a *justification* of that status as morally reasonable. Patriarchal authority was maintained as the male head of the family represented its interests in the public realm. From Rousseau, through Kant and Hegel, the development of the liberal belief in the natural freedom, equality and reason of individuals, who thereby must have public standing, was seriously compromised by the consistent theoretical and practical restriction of 'individual' to 'man'. John Stuart Mill was the only prominent liberal philosopher to challenge this to any degree. Indeed, the Enlightenment project tended to conceive of rationality as the transcendence of those qualities regarded as female, which was rooted in nature and particularity. This had implications for women in the 19th and 20th centuries who attempted to appeal to the ideal of sexually neutral reason to achieve individual rights, because the cultural paradigm of liberalism had defined itself in opposition to the female, and so had great difficulty in accommodating the notion that women could or should participate in the cultivation or expression of Reason.56

In many ways the rigorous orthodoxy of presbyterianism was not amenable to Enlightenment ideas. But the changes wrought by the 1707 Act of Union and the nascent industrial revolution; the emergence of an anglicised
urban elite in Scotland's 'Golden Age'; and an evangelical revival which restated many of the 'rational' virtues in religious language, ensured that liberal humanism became a key element in the development of 19th century politics and culture. 57

During the 19th century, the function of the patriarchal family, as the main social unit in relation to the state, underwent considerable change, as the concept of individual citizenship took hold. Throughout the Victorian era, from the First Reform Act of 1832, political rights gradually shifted from belonging to propertied men in their capacity of family heads, towards inhering in autonomous citizens. However, although patriarchy no longer formed the official basis of civil government, the 19th century Reform Acts were explicit in formalising the continued exclusion of women from political power. And the family remained an important ideological element in modern social democracy. The public sphere of political activity was for men; the private sphere of domestic nurture was for women; and both were under male control.58

As in politics, so in economic terms the doctrine of separate spheres developed and was reified in the wake of industrialisation. The rapid growth of factories and towns brought about a partition of economic and domestic labour. Home and workplace were increasingly separated for bourgeois and working class families, and so were the
contractual arrangements for labour. Capitalists employed workers on the basis of hierarchical and exploitative contracts, whereas domestic work (typically and increasingly exclusively performed by women) was subject to private and patriarchal forms of control, including moral exhortation, religious prescription and physical chastisement. In terms of the wage economy, this separation of paid employment and domestic labour inevitably devalued the latter, for it was excluded from the measure by which worth was calculated. Industrial capitalism had a highly ambivalent effect on working class families. Women and children entered the labour market and contributed to the family economy throughout the period. Indeed, the early exploitation of their toil was an almost disastrous onslaught on the very survival of the family. However, at both ideological and practical levels, the division of spheres was increasingly promoted and accepted. Eleanor Gordon writes:

'Home and work were not two separate worlds, and women's participation in the labour market was more extensive than has previously been assumed. But the reality did little to diminish the force of the ideology - whose social origins became obscured so that it appeared as a natural phenomenon."

And Beatrice Gottlieb summarises the evolution of post-1800 domesticity as a process of stripping away:

'The household lost one after another of its functions but the few it retained took on increasing importance, particularly those connected with nurturing, love and recreation. It is a convenient image, though the process was neither so simple nor so mechanical...In particular the separation of work from the household is by now a reality for almost everybody...There may be something in the often-heard characterisation of domesticity as 'bourgeois', since
neither very poor households nor very aristocratic ones found it easy to slough off their multiplicity of functions. But much of the sentiment about domesticity as both private and enjoyable was voiced by aristocrats, and by the middle of the 19th century one of its best known advocates was Queen Victoria herself. The very poor were catapulted into their version of the new domesticity - a household likewise stripped of many functions but not so charming - by becoming industrial workers.60

Among the growing urban middle classes, the tendency to see the home as both analogy and preparation for heaven was promoted to the status of a cult. By the 1830s, they were experiencing the world as chaotic, immoral, distracting. Scotland, with its poverty, squalor and degradation was a political powderkeg.61 And yet the very wealth and power of the burgeoning bourgeoisie was based upon the exercise of competition, self-interest and aggression in the economic realm. In this confusing and contradictory world, the home was increasingly regarded (by men) as a haven - a calm and loving retreat from anger, fear and alienation. It was the space in which the man was in control, and would have all his needs serviced by a submissive wife and unobtrusive domestic staff. Spacially removed from the industrial workplace and the miserable masses, and enjoying conspicuous new material comforts, the home was worshipped as a place of order, private virtue and spiritual reinforcement. The domestic sphere was abstracted (rhetorically at least) from the harsh public world, and the role of 'Woman' as custodian of Christian values assumed an increasing and sentimental importance. Middle class women were, in law, the property of their husbands. Their work was not meant to
be economic, but emotional and religious. It was supposedly motivated, not by the crass standards of the marketplace, but by the self-sacrificial love which was assumed to be part of 'womanly' nature:

'Having confined all those virtues inappropriate within the market or boardroom to the hearts of their womenfolk, middle class men were then left free to indulge in all those unfortunate vices necessary for successful bourgeois enterprise. The fate of women and Christian selflessness having been thus bound together, the dependency and social powerlessness of the first became the virtual guarantee of the social irrelevance of the second: once God had settled into the parlour, Mammon had free range in public life, and the exclusion of women from virtually all areas of public existence guaranteed that the tidy division was maintained. An ideal of femininity which combined holy love with social subordination not only served to suppress women, it also tamed and contained the anti-capitalist implications of Christian love itself. Domestic Christianity, like domestic womanhood, was the most comfortable kind for bourgeois men to live with.' 62

To conclude this brief consideration of patriarchy and separate spheres, I want simply to highlight the following points which, among others, undermine the claims that such a domesticity was wholly natural and benign.

1. Contrary to the 1862 Pastoral Letter, it is apparent that the private family, as these churchmen understood it, was not universal but simply one historical form of domestic and kinship relations. Nor was it monolithic even at the time the Letter was composed, for a range of circumstances and expectations radically relativised the experience (and for some the existence) of family life. Apart from economic pressures on the rural and urban poor which made the division of private and public spheres a
largely middle class exercise, there is (as I have already mentioned) considerable evidence that there was widespread resistance to, and subversion of, the strict sexual mores of the presbyterian church; that traditional courtship and more relaxed attitudes were prevalent among large sections of the working class population. It has also been suggested that alongside the harsh - sometimes brutal - exercise of male household authority, there co-existed an informal matriarchy, whereby many strong-willed women exercised considerable power in home and community, while not challenging the broader social structures of patriarchy. Willa Muir wrote of Scotswomen in 1936:

'They carried on their shoulders the whole burden of keeping the race together. The women of the Lowlands, sking and receiving no credit for being women, developed a strength of character and a vitality on which their contentious and cocksure men depended utterly...In Scotland, women had less support and showed more individual character than anywhere, I think, in Europe.'63

2. Was the home really a refuge, autonomous in all respects from the public world? Of course not - the 'tidy division' was a chimera. All the goods and services which provided bourgeois families with their comfortable lifestyle had to be purchased on the open market - including the domestic servants. They were wistfully supposed to be a relic of the old feudal household, but had a habit of failing to conform to their prescribed role as loyal (and cheap) family retainers, and so 'the servant problem' became a subject of endless concern and fascination.64 And the unpaid work of wives was not just about personal care - they were deeply implicated in the
process of socialisation whereby appropriate values were passed on to maintain the ascendancy of the middle and upper classes. For many women, the domestic arena was no refuge, but a space of anxiety or stress or frustration. It could also be a place of fear and violence for women and children. The sentimental idea that home was a hermetically sealed benevolent autocracy, over which the father ruled with reason and kindness, gave strength to the pernicious attitude that whatever went on within the four walls of a household was a private affair, with which neighbours, relations, the church or the state had no right to interfere. The social contract had characterised women as dependents to be protected, rather than as individuals with rights. As Victorian middle classes became somewhat more sensitive to the use of violence to maintain dominance, some measure of public concern was expressed about the apparently horrendous levels of wife-beating. The domestic ideology presented male superiority in terms of self-control and exercise of the will, rather than naked aggression. The debate about wife-beating during the 1870s contrasted these middle-class virtues with the brutality of working class men. This was connected both with the assumed right to interfere in the private lives of the lower orders, and the contention that such depraved behaviour undermined arguments for the extension of male suffrage. For good male citizens maintained the legitimacy of the patriarchal marriage contract by protection rather than beating. Those in church circles who condemned the worst
excesses of wife abuse as a crime which pervaded and sapped society, associated its committal with working class drunkenness, usually counselled female silence and patience, and suggested that women were at least in part to blame for failing to fulfil their domestic duties satisfactorily.66

I have discovered no public acknowledgement or criticism of male violence taking place in 'respectable' middle and upper class families. The domestic ideology, extolling the absolute 'yet very safe and salutory' rule of the man, and the loving helpmeet role of the women, no doubt underpinned many companionate partnerships; but it also concealed the harsh reality of cold, dreary or abusive marriage relationships.67

3. I have suggested that the two spheres had common roots in a patriarchal model which shaped both private and public realms. But although I have indicated the different strands of Calvinist and liberal thought which helped generate and maintain the domestic ideology, I have not explained how Knox's harsh belief that women were morally dangerous and unruly (a venerable Christian tradition) could have been recast, so that according to the mythology which dominated the 19th century debate, 'Womanhood' became a potent symbol of righteousness and purity. For in the Victorian age, those female traits which old-style presbyterianism had sought to discipline and control - sensuality, licentiousness, deceitfulness - were
now regarded as the aberration, not the essence of womanhood. Peter Gay believes that the Victorians, behind the facade of the 'angelic' rhetoric, remained profoundly anxious about the potential danger and depravity of women, who were perceived in paradoxical terms as the 'powerful, weaker sex'. An Edinburgh minister expressed this in a sermon preached in 1892 when he claimed that 'a good woman is a great moral force; a bad woman is an incalculable power for evil'.68 But the change in emphasis owed much to the evangelical revival which had gained such momentum by the 1830s, and to the developing understanding of mission as divine responsibility for all Christians. I shall explore the idea of mission in the next chapter.

These changes were also deeply affected by related perceptions of class and sexuality. While middle class women were increasingly characterised as chastely confined within their genteel parlours, and their daughters required chaperones for every conceivable occasion, working class women were the targets of concern and repression because they still claimed access to public space. In streets and parks and public houses, they were condemned for their crudeness and noise and vitality. This threatening behaviour was associated with carnality, and they were often accused of prostitution.69 The trade in sex apparently reached epic proportions during the Victorian age, judging by the anxiety expressed, especially in Edinburgh and Glasgow. It is not difficult to
conclude that there was a close connection between the ethos of bourgeois 'purity' and the sale of sex by poor women to middle class men. Christopher Smout notes the Edinburgh tradition that the Rose Street brothels did their best business during the General Assemblies, though he is no doubt right to caution that this may have been just an 'amusing calumny' about the clergy. 70

The influences of patriarchy and the domestic ideology were powerful, but not total in determining the experience of women and men. They were accepted and resisted, transformed and subverted in all kinds of ways by individuals and groups. And the presbyterian church, in its structures and beliefs, provided one of the main arenas in which their domination and validity were tested. In that process women amply demonstrated, in various, sometimes conflicting ways, a capacity for critique and action which made them central, not marginal, to the course of Scottish history. This study is my testament and memorial of them.
CHAPTER TWO

'WOMAN'S MISSION' AND WOMEN'S WORK

1. 'Woman's Mission'

'We claim for them [women] no less an office than that of instruments (under God) for the regeneration of the world – restorers of God's image in the human soul. Can any of the warmest advocates of the political rights of woman claim or assert for her a more exalted mission – a nobler destiny! That she will best accomplish this mission by moving in the sphere which God and nature have appointed, and not by quitting that sphere for another, it is the object of these pages to prove.'

Thus wrote Sarah Lewis in Woman's Mission (1839), a widely read publication which contributed, at the outset of the Victorian era, to the debate about the nature and role of women in the English-speaking world. While many elements of the sexual ideology which Lewis and others extolled were not new, they owed their language and conceptual framework to the evangelical revival which swept through that world from the end of the 18th century. The idea that anyone, far less women, could or should have a 'mission' which might engage them in anything more strenuous than prayer or pious platitude, was fairly novel in presbyterian Scotland. In the Larger Catechism of the 1647 Westminster Confession there is only one reference to the subject of mission. The phrase 'Thy Kingdom Come' in the Lord's Prayer is expounded to included a prayer 'that the Gospel may be propogated throughout the whole world, the Jews called and the fullness of the Gentiles brought in'. But this was a theoretical position rather than an active commitment. In 1732 the General Assembly did state that outreach at home
and abroad was necessary and good, but that poverty in Scotland precluded such work. During the 18th century, there were endeavours to provide Christian instruction to remote communities in the Highlands and Islands, and in 1762 the Society for the Propogation of Christian Knowledge asked the General Assembly to appoint a collection on behalf of its mission to North American Indians. But the institutional church by and large held aloof from official participation in missionary work. As late as 1786, William Carey, Baptist pioneer of the British foreign missionary movement, was described as a 'miserable enthusiast' for suggesting that the missionary task might be encumbent on Christians of their own generation. And opposing a motion at the 1796 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Rev Mr Hamilton of Gladsmuir argued

'To spread abroad the knowledge of the Gospel among barbarous and heathen nations seems to me highly preposterous, in as far as it anticipates, nay as it even reverses the order of nature.'

But it was the enthusiasts, with their call to conversion and action, who increasingly found a receptive audience in a rapidly changing Scotland. Some evangelicals, especially from the skilled working class and emerging middle class, helped to create entirely new churches. Others were involved in a reforming movement within the Church of Scotland. By 1834 the Evangelicals had replaced the Moderate tendency as the dominant expression of Scottish presbyterianism. The new mood, both within and outside the Kirk, presented a dynamic challenge to the complacency and social control of Moderatism. In the first years of the
19th century, the evangelical movement was often accused of being a refuge for Jacobin tendencies, intent on fomenting unrest in Scotland. At any rate, their concern for mission indicated the evangelicals' desire for change — and the wave of revival set in train new ideas which deeply affected women as well as others who had traditionally been excluded from an active role in church and State.

The concept of 'Woman's Mission' transformed conventional notions of female influence into the proposition that the moral power of women was crucial to the evangelical task, and became a key component in the self-understanding and action of many Scottish churchwomen. It is important, therefore, to understand the context of the evangelical revival in Scotland, and how it affected traditional religious beliefs and practices.

This is not the place to consider the origins of that extraordinary wave of fervour which revitalised a rather moribund Christian church from the middle of the 18th century, but it should be noted that the movement was not indigenous to Scotland. While the impact of revival, and its contribution to the reshaping of church and society, was experienced in particular ways because of Scotland's unique religious, political and cultural heritage, the phenomenon happened throughout the English-speaking Protestant world (and also, in the somewhat different form of pietism, in continental Europe). Post-reformation
Scotland had certainly witnessed the religious passion and sectarianism of Covenantors and seceders, but by the time of the Scottish Enlightenment, their ecclesiastical and doctrinal concerns were diminished in social and intellectual importance. Agricultural developments and the nascent industrial revolution brought a period of expansion, prosperity and fluidity to Scottish society. A growing urban class, based on artisan skills exercised in the laissez-faire liberal market expounded by Adam Smith, had increased wealth, leisure and education, and was looking for opportunities to exercise power and influence in public life. It could not do so under the patronage system of the Moderate Established Church, so it is not surprising that this growing social force on the cusp of the middle classes was receptive to the new style of religion which had penetrated England through the efforts of the Wesleys and Whitefield, and had roused America, with which Scotland had many links.

Evangelicalism was a religion of personal commitment and action. Its emphasis was on the saving grace of Christ and the perfectability of the redeemed life, through the exercise of self-discipline and benevolence. It was not much concerned with the doctrinal disputes which had exercised Scotland's leading presbyterians, but it preached the validity and possibility of personal advancement to the individual who sought to overcome sin. It was a creed which owed much to the transposition of Enlightenment
values - individualism, autonomy, liberty, benevolence, progress - into a religious mode, supported by Scripture. Revivalist religion was not inherently antipathetic to the need for social and political change. In the earlier years of its influence, it inspired reform campaigns at home and abroad which were viewed as dangerous by the political establishment - especially in the wake of the French Revolution. The anti-slavery movement, foreign missions, temperance - these gave political education and practice to groups, including women, which had hitherto not experienced such involvement. Evangelicalism resonated with the experience and aspirations of the newly prosperous urban classes - both in their private lives, and in their desire for the exercise of authority. Those who responded to its attractions were able to join either dissenting denominations, or the reform party within the Church of Scotland which wanted to abolish patronage. These offered male members structural opportunities for power and status, and promoted ideas about the nature and role of women which were fundamentally conservative, and yet more purposeful, and with greater potential, than those propounded by Knox and his fellow reformers.

At the heart of this new style of religion which swept through the Anglo-American world was arminianism - the belief that all human beings are sinners, and alike are in need of God's saving grace, which is available to any person who hears the gospel and believes. This was
accompanied, in different forms, by a progressive view of redemption, whereby God's saving action would lead finally to the millenium of Christ's reign on earth. It encouraged a sense of dissatisfaction with sinful self and world, but also an enthusiasm to work to eradicate that sin, in the assurance of God's final victory over evil. The evangelical Christian was encouraged to apprehend a sense of vocation and accept that he or she had a divine duty to act for the sake of the gospel. There was a growing sense of urgency about the need to preach the good news to all before God's judgement. In other words, mission became an obligation.

This, of course, was very different from the doctrines of election and predestination which were distinctive elements of Calvinist presbyterianism. An urgent commitment to save souls was difficult to reconcile with the doctrine that God had already elected the redeemed and the reprobate. The extent, and pace at which universal atonement replaced predestinarianism in Scotland is a matter of historiographical debate, and many of the prominent evangelical party members (including those who left the established Church at the 1843 Disruption, and others who stayed), remained firm in their scholastic Calvinist orthodoxy. Indeed, they were among the most vigorous opponents of Edward Irving and John MacLeod Campbell, whose advocacy of universal atonement in the early 1830s led to heresy trials and expulsion from the Church of Scotland. But the universalist doctrines which were anathema to men
like the theologian William Cunningham, and the Free Church leader Thomas Chalmers, grew in popularity and influence during the middle years of the 19th century. Revivalism was a recurring feature of Victorian protestant life, culminating in the 1873 - 74 campaign of the Americans Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey, which was supported by ministers of many denominations. This made a major and lasting impact, not just on countless individuals, but on the content and style of Scottish church life and mission. As a later strict Calvinist observed, arminian revivalism was a challenge to the 'solid and serious introspection' of the Puritan tradition, and

'Those who were the advocates and fruit of the newer Evangelicalism could scarcely be reckoned upon in the day of battle to stand as champions of the Reformed Tradition.'

Callum Brown argues that evangelicalism was 'not so much a theological system as a framework of response to the emergence of modern urban society'. One of the main elements of that framework was the idea of woman's special mission, and although its working out was influenced by some of the distinctive historical features of Scottish presbyterianism, the idea itself was alien to Calvinist orthodoxy as expressed in the Westminster Confession which was the subordinate standard of presbyterian faith. It is evident that, although denominational allegiance and ecclesiastical politics were important signifiers in the identity of many, the range of beliefs and actions of Scottish churchwomen - especially those of the upwardly
mobile and middle classes - were similar in important ways to those of their English and North American counterparts, and to that extent I agree with Brown's assessment that presbyterianism of the industrial period was largely 'a product of evangelicalism of the style and doctrine which took a hold amongst the English Methodists and other nonconformists'.

Many writers have observed that the 19th century witnessed a process of change (long and not absolute) from the bleak rigour of Calvinist dogma towards a Christianity which was at once more sentimental and more aggressive. Domestic piety co-existed with an array of church-based voluntary and philanthropic organisations which utilised the time, money and energy of the middle classes - what the Clapham Sect in England called the 'benevolent empire'. By these means, they expressed both self-determination and religious commitment in the attempt to transform a degenerate and irreligious world in their own respectable image. The evolution of 'Woman's Mission' as part of this process was clearly posited upon the domestic ideology: the 'regeneration of the world' was to be accomplished from within that sphere ordained by God and nature to be the realm of female influence. The evangelical revival revitalised the home and family as locus for religious formation and expression. It was to be the centre for devout and pious life - the daily struggle against the forces of sin and chaos, for virtue and order. The duties
of discipline and self-examination were thrust upon the family, as church courts became less able or inclined to exercise their right to public control of morals. And if the patriarch was to be priest for his household, ensuring the practice of daily prayer and worship, the mother had a special duty to instruct children in the precepts of religion, so that what was taught would be 'interwoven gradually with all that is most sweet, sacred, endearing, enduring in the associations of home.'

The moral power invested in women, it was argued, derived from their God-given attributes: love, compassion, self-sacrifice, patience, mildness, purity. In the exercise of these virtues as wives and mothers they were agents of God's redeeming purpose:

'The medium of our intercourse with the heavenly world, the faithful repositories of religious principle, for the benefit both of the present and the rising generation.'

However, this high evaluation of women's moral worth paradoxically required them at all costs to avoid stepping beyond their ordained sphere. Their 'feminine' qualities may have been the Christlike virtues required to make the grimy world a godly place, but they could only fulfil their destiny and mission by remaining anonymous to the world:

'It was the wise intent of Providence in this arrangement to elevate her to the highest point of most excellent worth and influence, to protect her...source of most transforming and benign influence upon the world from all temptation to seek more outward and vulgar forms of honour...Hers was to be pre-eminent intrinsic worth, essential honour, the pure moral influence of personal excellence; always unaspiring, modest and delicate, gentle and kind, full of mercy and good fruits.'
Christian women, then, were worthy of adulation in proportion to their willingness to conform to a life of self-abnegation in the service of men. Indeed, by the circular logic of the cult of 'True Womanhood', those who failed to comply were condemned as unnatural and repulsive. An article entitled 'Woman's Work and Mission', published in the 1871 volume of the Free Church Watchword magazine argued:

'Ambition, pride, wilfulness or any earthly passion will distort her being. She struggles all in vain against a Divine appointment...Woman's worst enemy is he who would cruelly lift her out her sphere, and would try to reverse the laws of God and nature on her behalf...Woman has her sphere and work; and she is only happy when she finds pleasure in lovingly, patiently and faithfully performing the duties and enacting the relations that belong to her as woman.'

'True Womanhood' and 'Woman's Mission' were two sides of the same coin. Their advocates claimed that the former was natural and immutable, and that the latter was the working out, in obedience to God, of the former. But the quantity and content of the literature which appeared especially around the middle decades of the 19th century, suggest that its intention was prescriptive rather than descriptive. Religious writers exhorted their female readership to accept the strange combination of spiritual elevation and social subordination; for the old fear of female capacity for evil and subversion had not been consumed by the new cult, and evangelical woman-worship (like Catholic mariolatry) was reserved for asexual, submissive angels:
'If you are a pure, chaste, noble Christian woman, you will be a blessed central power in the household, mighty to raise all around you...If you are base, impure, unchaste, ungodly, your power will be great to pollute and pull down to your own level of degradation.'"14

It is usually the case that apologetic writings appear precisely because a set of ideas or conventions is challenged, in theory or in practice, and this was surely the case with the domestic ideology. It was neither as coherent, monolithic nor uncontested as some historians have made it appear. Especially around the 1830s and 1840s, alternative models of women's rights and responsibilities were derived from the Enlightenment, from utopian feminism and from evangelical Christianity itself (see later chapters). The very idea of 'Woman's Sphere' was subject to a range of emphases and uses throughout the period under consideration - even for competing or conflicting goals. What for a relatively small number of women may have been an accurate description of their experience, was for others a goal, a challenge, a judgment, a convention to flout, or an irrelevance. 'Women's work' was a particularly ambiguous component of evangelical dictates. In the private sphere, the work of women was supposedly domestic and religious. It was not renumerated because man was the breadwinner who earned enough in the public domain to support his wife and household. The economic dependence of women was enshrined in the patriarchal system and upheld in law.15 By the time of Victoria's accession, it was increasingly the case that for women of the upper and middle classes, entrance into paid employment would signify personal disaster and social
anathema, and the work which expressed their divine mission - domestic, charitable, voluntary, philanthropic - was acceptable precisely because it was unpaid. However, it depended largely for its clients and goals, on the existence and labour of the mill-girls, fisher-lassies, domestic servants, working mothers, sweated workers, prostitutes and destitute women whose own precarious and toilsome existence relied on the wage economy which provided bourgeois ladies with their hours of leisure.

A Scotswomen named Marion Reid wrote *A Plea for Women* (1843) as her contribution to the debate about women's rights - of which she claimed that 'there has lately been a good deal of discussion' - and particularly in response to books such as Sarah Lewis's *Woman's Mission*. She was quick to point out that use of the phrase 'woman's sphere' simply begged the question, and asked:

'If all woman's duties are to be considered as so strictly domestic, and if God and nature have really so circumscribed her sphere of action - What are we to think of the dreadful depravity of thousands upon thousands of unprotected females, who actually prefer leaving their only proper sphere, and working for their own subsistence - to starvation? Is it not shocking to see their consciences so seared that they are quite unaware of the dreadful nature of the course they are following? Ought not such wicked creatures to be exterminated? Or if we charitably allow them to cover their sins under the strong plea of necessity, what are we to think of that state of society which absolutely forces thousands of unfortunates to contradict their own nature - not by enlightening or enlarging their sphere - but by thrusting them entirely out of it?' 16
2. Women's work

Much of the industrial revolution in Scotland was instigated and sustained on the basis of female and child labour. A growing body of careful research demonstrates the reality and extent of female participation in paid employment. Their work was concentrated in low pay and low status jobs. In 1841, domestic service, agriculture, clothing and textiles accounted for 90% of the female workforce, though the balance between these sectors differed markedly according to geographical location.

By 1911, that figure had fallen to 65%, largely due to the development of female teaching, nursing and clerical work. In 1839, 41,000 out of 59,000 Scottish textile workers were female, and most of those were teenage girls. As the century went on, increasingly rigid census categories (which themselves reflected the doctrine of separate spheres) excluded from record the large numbers of women – single, married, widowed – who relied on casual and seasonal work. But the 1851 census returns indicated that two million of the six million adult female population of Britain were self-supporting. As an article in the 1859 Edinburgh Review declared:

'It has now become false, and ought to be practically admitted to be false – that every woman is supported (as the law supposes) by a father, brother or husband...The need and supply of female industry have gone on increasing, while our ideas, language and arrangements have not altered in any corresponding degree.'

The census had also shown that 42% of women between the ages of 20 and 40 were single, and that women significantly outnumbered men in the population. In Edinburgh, for
example, there were 47,049 men over 20, and 64,638 women. This peculiarly Victorian problem of 'surplus' or 'redundant' women (disproportionately of the genteel classes) was addressed by different arguments. Those involved in the middle class reformist Women's Movement suggested that the logical response was to open up better and more extensive educational and occupational opportunities. In 1872, the editor of *The Attempt*, a magazine of the Ladies Edinburgh Debating Society, noted:

'The remarkable preponderance of female population in Edinburgh revealed by the 1871 Census lends added weight and interest to the gallant struggles of a little band of intrepid women to secure for themselves the means [higher education] of conferring lasting benefits on the whole sex.'

Others suggested mass deportation of women to the colonies, believing that it was evil:

'to endeavour to make women independent of men, to multiply and facilitate their employments; to enable them to earn a separate and ample subsistence by competing with the hardier sex'.

Such attitudes, betraying a firm commitment to the view that women should be, as a matter of definition, dependent and bound to the patriarchal household, were ascribed by Harriet Martineau, in the 1859 article already cited, to:

'The jealousy of men in regard to the industrial independence of women...The immediate effect is to pauperise a large number of women who are willing to work for their bread'.

There is no shortage of evidence of the appalling pay and conditions which most women workers endured throughout the period 1830-1930. The overwhelmingly male Trade Union

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movement was increasingly influenced by the domestic ideology, and rather than fighting for the independence, dignity and equality of female workers, its officials agreed that the place for women was at home, providing services for menfolk. In general, female industrial labour (though not in the traditional 'female' sectors) was considered to be unfair competition which undercut male wages, and the Unions campaigned for a 'Family Wage' based on the patriarchal notion of the male head and breadwinner for the household. With female wages running at an average of 42% of male rates, in a low wage economy, the reality for the many women who had to provide for families was grim indeed.

Middle-class women who had to be self-supporting may have been spared the spectre of the poorhouse, but they were a source of embarrassment and anxiety for male relations, who were under pressure to conform to the masculine stereotype as successful and solvent protectors of women. Making a good marriage had to be the ambition of mothers and the aspiration of daughters, and the social stigma of spinsterhood loomed for those who failed. The commercial ethos in Scotland had not always excluded women, married or single, from active involvement. A 19th century biography described the subject's parentage, and noted (of late 18th century Edinburgh):

'It was customary in those days, among all grades of the mercantile community, for the wife to assist her husband in business; and in the present case she did so, and proved to him a valuable coadjutor.'
However, the development of male professionalisation and career structures had, by mid-century, closed off significant female access to work in medicine, commerce and serious education - fields in which women had a historical and honourable role. In the second half of the 19th century, developments in teaching and nursing provided new opportunities for training and employment, but placed women at the bottom of economic and structural hierarchies. Twentieth century access to medicine, public service and social work was largely restricted to areas deemed 'suitable' for women, under male control.

And yet, in spite of all the hardship, the monotony, the drudgery of the double burden which was laid upon working class women, and the genteel poverty of bourgeois women, there is evidence that female employment was not simply driven by sheer economic necessity. The 'mill-girl' culture of Dundee, for example, bore testimony to the fact that 'over-dressed, loud, bold-eyed girls' enjoyed the companionship, status and freedom of their lifestyle.25 Research by Stephenson and Brown suggests that working class women in the early twentieth century enjoyed and celebrated female solidarity in the workplace.26 In 1914, the Church of Scotland magazine, Life and Work reported an address given by a deaconess who worked with some of the itinerant fisher lassies who followed fleets from the north coast of Scotland to Great Yarmouth:
'Miss Rettie said that, looking at the very strenuous life which the girls live, one was tempted to wonder why they chose it, until one remembered what an absolutely independent life it was, and for many girls therein lies the charm. They generally live and work in groups of three, and within very wide limits are allowed to do absolutely what they like. This freedom from all home restraint is one of the reasons why the friendship and advice of ladies, who go with them to the fishings every years, are so needful.¹²⁷

Conversely, there is also evidence that the form of female working class employment which was most acceptable to Christian philanthropists - domestic service - became increasingly unpopular among those in the job market.²⁸ And while middle class employment was sometimes a matter of economic compulsion, arguments in support of opening up professional opportunities more often took the form of pleas for purposeful activity, intellectual challenge and personal autonomy. As the Scottish educationalist Louisa Lumsden claimed:

'Woman, as a human being, has surely the right, and right implies duty, to realise what is best in herself, and to devote the powers so developed to the service of Society.'²⁹

Lumsden's appeal to the rights language of liberal humanism indicates one direction from which opposition to the domestic ideology came. It was also undermined by the lived experience of so many women for whom private incarceration and financial dependence was never an option: those who worked alongside men in agriculture, in the fishing industry, in hotels and lodgings and pubs. The married women whose homes were in slum tenements, and whose limited personal space spilled out into the communal stairs, water closets, back courts and steamies of urban Scotland.³⁰ For
them, homes and streets were also a source of desperately needed income - through sweated work, hawking, prostitution, charring or taking in laundry. But if the domestic ideology did not stop women from participating in the capitalist economy, it certainly affected attitudes towards, and possibilities for, working women. In Dundee, where the jute industry functioned on the basis of a substantial reversal of assigned male and female economic and social functions, religious concern was expressed in a flood of tracts and books:

'It is obvious that ere long...our mills will have none but female operatives, and a few boys...A system which is undomesticating the females in our families, and unqualifying them for those home duties, for the discharge of which God has prepared their hearts.'

The complex and changing relationship between the domestic role assigned to women, and their 'special mission' in a world where so many of their gender failed to conform to the myth, was deeply affected by the class divisions of the Victorian and Edwardian ages. Gerda Lerner has argued that:

'The division of women into "respectable women" who are protected by their men, and "disreputable women" who are out in the street and free to sell their services, has been the basic class division for women. It has marked off the limited privileges of upper class women against the economic and sexual oppression of lower-class women, and has divided women one from the other.'

If we accept the general truth of that statement (though always subject to qualification), its implications had direct bearing on the development of women's work within the churches. First, the separate spheres doctrine required assent to the principle that it was unwomanly to seek work
for personal satisfaction or gain. Since woman by nature supposedly desired only to be a good wife and mother, she could have no independent ambition, and her labour, as appropriate to the domestic sphere, would be unpaid and voluntary. This affected the style and content of work done by churchwomen, and also attitudes towards renumeration. Second, the doctrine was also the general standard by which most church workers attempted to judge and control the lives of the labouring classes: religious conversion and domestication were the means by which working women might share in the regeneration of Scottish society. Even progressive Christian women whose goal for their own class was equal opportunity preached the primary importance of housekeeping skills for women of the 'industrial classes'. Third, the inherent dynamism of the mission principle, and an increasingly positive assessment of the redeeming power of women, produced tensions for some women who recognised a more liberating potential in the evangelical ethos for themselves and others. They demonstrated that the boundaries between private and public were elastic rather than rigid, and engaged in purposeful activity in a space which fell between classic definitions of the two spheres, but which was of growing importance in the 19th and 20th centuries - the social. Christian women intervened in the social dimension, not by renouncing their central familial role, but by arguing that such activity was appropriate precisely because it was an extension of that role.
3. Women's Mission - work in the Church

'The service of Christ in His Church, what is it but the permeating of society with that gentleness, sweetness and tact, and that sympathy with all forms of human need and suffering, which is peculiarly woman's own province, and towards which her tender nature turns as naturally as a flower turns to the sun. Her's is a unique and glorious mission; and today more than ever your Saviour and Church are inviting you, my sisters, to arise and fulfil it.'

Thus spoke Rev JFW Grant at the 1894 Church of Scotland Woman's Guild Conference in Kirkcaldy. His combination of sentimental idealisation and evangelical fervour was characteristic of the methods adopted by those who exhorted the 'Angel in the House' to become an 'Angel in the World'. If women's sphere was the home, how could they, without damage to themselves and the acceptable order of things, possibly engage with the public, male domain? The answer was not to go beyond their sphere, but simply to exert their 'blessed power' in an entirely womanly extension of domestic virtues into the villages and slums of Scotland by their personal charitable and evangelistic dealings with the poor. Protestants increasingly warmed to the idea that the unpaid protector of the hearth was quite entitled to act as the voluntary guardian of Christian values and the social status quo. From before the turn of the 19th century, individual women - often minister's relatives, or from urban liberal families - had taken it upon themselves to engage in deeds of philanthropy. But the rise of evangelicalism was marked by a deliberate policy of developing agencies designed to tackle the moral and spiritual decay of the nation. The evangelicals
believed that the fundamental cause of social disorder was individual sinfulness, and a plethora of educational, charitable and visiting organisations developed, especially from the 1830s to the 1860s, to engage in aggressive home mission work. It was a conscious response to the disturbing and potentially revolutionary dislocation of society. For most Scottish presbyterians, including those artisans and aspiring working class members who had found a home in the dissenting denominations, it was private morality and respectability, rather than radical political solutions, which were the means of reforming social ills. And the personal seriousness and enthusiasm engendered by evangelical faith encouraged large numbers of lay Christians to believe that involvement in such work was a matter of vocation.

Women were an obvious source of labour for certain elements of this work – partly for the ideological reasons outlined above, but also because their gratuitous time and talents were available in ready supply. The arguments used to justify their involvement demonstrate the flexibility of 'women's sphere', and the fact that models of appropriate female activity varied considerably, even within the bourgeois classes. Evangelical presbyterian writers often criticised the prominent mid-Victorian definition of female gentility and refinement, which portrayed women as decorative and indolent adornments in households where all the real work was done by domestic servants. Such a mode
of existence was not acceptable for morally serious Christians:

'Their lives, compared with what they might be, are an almost barren waste, a dead blank on the scale of being...labouriously employed in doing nothing. Their health becomes feeble, their spirits droop; they become nervous, peevish, unhappy...
Let them learn to do all with the utmost fidelity, diligence and despatch; and always before retiring, let them call themselves to strict account for the manner in which they have spent the day.'

This 1840 writer lists the activities he believes are appropriate for women - domestic duties; disciplining their minds; cultivating their moral powers and affections; training and educating their children; administering relief to the needy and sympathy to the afflicted; promoting religion by assistance in Sabbath schools; offering prayers and cheering sympathy:

'In a word, securing and sustaining the elevated character and influence requisite to their successful promotion of the noblest, most valuable interests of our existence. Without this...they fail to rise to the proper dignity and glory of their sex.'

For many bourgeois women, restless and anxious to escape the stultifying confines of their parlours, religious and church work provided an acceptable opportunity to exercise purposeful activity, and gave them some experience of power and control over other people's lives outside their own homes. As the perception of female usefulness became more widespread and acceptable within church circles, there was pressure to participate in certain activities as a matter of convention. A contributor to the 1869 edition of The Attempt commented:
'Charity is acknowledged to be a perfectly genteel occupation for a lady. Whether as parish visitor or Sabbath School teacher, she is becomingly and usefully employed in working among the poor. These occupations are unrenumerated, hence their gentility. No matter whether a lady have a vocation for parish visiting or Sabbath School teaching, it is expected she will take her share of one or the other...Is it not too often the case, especially with teaching, that the work is carried on in obedience to the expressed wish of society, and for the sake of not appearing singular, rather than from any love of it in itself? Is it not performed by unloving and inefficient hands, from the mistaken idea that it is part of a lady's duty as a member of society?'40

Whatever the response of individual women, motivation and encouragement to engage in church work was expressed, not in terms of personal development and satisfaction, but of self-giving duty and obligation in response to the saving graces of Christianity:

To Christ you owe all. He has raised you from darkness and shame, placed you in the light and glory of immortal hopes, and called you to be a fellow-worker with Him. Your true life is not for yourself, but for Him.'41

In the hundred years from 1830 to 1930, women's work in the presbyterian churches grew from tentative beginnings to become a major and significant phenomenon on Scottish religious life. Its ideological roots were the cult of domesticity and the domination of the emerging middle-classes, and for the most part it remained a conservative bolster for traditional gender and class roles. But the notion and practice of women's mission also contained radical possibilities. It created space and opportunity outwith the home, which many women used to discern their potential, learn new skills and develop powers of organisation and (sometimes) solidarity.
Experience within the churches led the most able and articulate to challenge the auxiliary functions assigned to women, and the whole concept of unquestioned male leadership. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, voluntary philanthropy was for numerous women a springboard into education, training and employment in public service and social work. The reaction of church authorities to this development was initially one of concern, for they perceived professionalisation as a threat to their idea that women chose to work for love rather than money.

Many women, in keeping with the spirit of an age preoccupied with the 'Social Question', challenged the churches' lack of adequate social and political critiques with models for the transformation of the world which were constructed upon intensely optimistic assessments of female qualities and potential. For them, 'women's work' included the exciting new task of engaging, on the basis of their own experience and perspectives on the times, with the scriptural texts and history of their presbyterian heritage. Some concluded that women's altruistic power should supercede the reign of force imposed for so long by men. They claimed to be a moral vanguard, ushering in a new Christian era of justice and love. For a minority, religion itself was responsible, not for the elevation of their gender, but for its continuing oppression, and they abandoned their faith.
'Everything depends on the lady who presides' voluntary church work c1830-1880

By the 1830s, a network of associations and organisations committed to the recently defined home mission work of the presbyterian churches were emerging. City Missions and Bible Societies were among the first to form, and as with foreign mission, the original initiatives were non-denominational. Evangelical members of both Dissenting and Establishment congregations gave their support to such agencies, which took the offer of salvation to the urban masses. It was these organisations which were first to give women the opportunity to share in some co-ordinated way in the work of mission. Female duties were narrowly defined. In 1834, the Edinburgh City Mission Report stated:

'The design of the District Ladies' Association in aid of the Edinburgh City Mission shall be to raise a sum adequate to the support of one or more agents of the ECM.'

To that end, the ladies elected a small committee, and appointed collectors, all of whom had an area of the city within which they raised funds. This pattern was repeated by agencies throughout the country, and also by numerous denominational societies which were established for specific purposes: Ladies Associations for Missions to Roman Catholics; in support of Gaelic Schools; for providing Religious Instruction, and so on. In 1845, the Elders' Wives and Daughters Association was founded to collect money for the Church of Scotland Education Scheme:
'It appears to be peculiarly the province of the daughters of elders to assist, as far as in them lies, those schools which are more immediately intended for female instruction...[they] should exert themselves to endeavour to supply funds for endowing and maintaining schools of this description.'

Such associations were auxiliary bodies. They did have committee and prayer meetings, and sometimes female office-bearers. But they were always under male supervision and direction – they were reactive and supportive, rather than initiatory. And this was as far as many Christians were prepared to go, for

'Every Christian ought to be engaged in the great work of harvest. Some are marked for a more public sphere of labour, and others may labour faithfully in the more retired, but not less useful, path of duty. Among this latter class of Christian labourers may be included the female portion of our community.'

But there were opportunities for more direct involvement in philanthropic work directed at females of the labouring classes. The 1845 *Home and Foreign Missionary Record* of the Church of Scotland carried an account of the Ladies Association for Perth Female School of Industry, which aimed to train destitute girls

'Not only to habits of moral and religious feeling, but to the kind of industrial exertion which will fit them for their future position in life...and not, either by dress, food or education, to give them ideas and hopes associated with a higher position.'

Perth ladies were responsible for all the preliminary and ongoing arrangements for the School. They visited regularly, supervised the matron, and wrote reports. Similar ladies committees took on work in female prisons, poorhouses, Magdalen institutions (for the 'rescue' of
prostitutes) and other agencies for exercising control over working class women. Linda Mahood's recent work on the methods adopted by Magdalens and reformatories for girls demonstrates that their programmes of moral correction were harsh, if not penal. They were directed at girls and young women whose behaviour defied conventional middle class ideas of female propriety, and the primary purpose was to inculcate appropriate behaviour:

'The two moral reform programmes used by the Institution were moral education and industrial training. The first was accomplished through a regime of hard work and Bible reading...The scriptures would reveal the extent of the inmate's sin, defilement and guilt, and she would learn to accept herself as a 'sinner'...By individualising punishment, the directors could gloss over the consequences of class inequalities, poverty and hypocrisy which were responsible for her troubles. Furthermore, through Bible stories, inmates were taught a morality centred on self-sacrifice and duty. Through the Christian chain of command which paralleled the Victorian social-class hierarchy and sanctioned female inferiority, self-abnegation and duty, she would learn her appropriate gender-role and social-class position.' 46

Mahood concludes that this approach, combined with systematic attempts to train inmates for domestic service:

'Was part of a larger programme to control their sexual and vocational behaviour, which reflects the desire to impose a middle class social code on working class women'.47

Some women conducted philanthropy on their own account, without formally instituting a voluntary society. One such was Mrs Blaikie, wife of a Free Church Professor of Divinity. In 1870, after a visit to Canada, the couple decided that emigration of children to work in farms and businesses could be 'a valuable outlet for the disposal of multitudes of children in our large cities who would
otherwise be brought up in vice, misery and degradation'\textsuperscript{48}
Believing that Edinburgh was already overrun with charities, Mrs Blaikie set up a Home by private subscription. It operated for twenty years, took in 708 children, and sent 301 of them to Canada. It ceased operation when it became increasingly difficult to get parental consent for the practice. The family, whose nature the church pleaded as absolute, was frequently undermined by well meaning people who were prepared to break up families of drunken or 'unrespectable' parents - sometimes using considerable pressure and bribery. But Mrs Blaikie's scheme was not without its critics, and certainly the douce people of Edinburgh would have recoiled in distaste from scenes such as one at the Caley Station:

'Parents and friends had been invited to bid [the children] goodbye. It was a great mistake, for they made quite a sensation, and created something like a furore by abusing the promoters of emigration. One woman, very drunk, insisted on getting back her little girl and almost dragged her from the railway carriage; and Mrs Blaikie was denounced for stealing the children of honest folk and selling them to foreigners.'\textsuperscript{49}

In congregations and parishes too, women were increasingly encouraged to give their time to appropriate pastoral and missionary work. In 1850 a third of all Sabbath School teachers were female; by 1880 women teachers were in the majority. In 1830, Mrs Catherine Knox Macnab of Glasgow introduced Mothers Meetings, first to Greenock, then Glasgow, and they quickly became a ubiquitous form of women's churchwork. In 1871 the Church of Scotland's new Life and Work Committee reported that:
'There is abundant testimony to the general employment of Mothers Meetings - usually held in the afternoons. They are superintended by some experienced lady. It begins with singing and prayer, and closes with the reading and explanation of Scripture. In between there is industrial work while a lady reads a book...[The meeting] strengthens personal sympathy between rich and poor. Ladies become acquainted with the history and family circumstances of those who assemble, and are enabled to give judicious help to them in bringing up and providing for their children...Everything depends on the lady who presides.\textsuperscript{150}

Classes were a popular form of Church work. In a country parish:

'Classes for young women are instructed by ladies in sewing, reading and the Bible, and perseveringly countenanced and encouraged by Lady\textsuperscript{151}

And in a manufacturing town, a minister commended the classes held by ladies for working girls as 'a means of helpful intercourse between millgirls and people of a better culture.'\textsuperscript{152}

Accounts of such classes, whether in official reports or in biographies, generally emphasise what was regarded as the peculiarly female ability to win the loyalty and devotion of working class women. The following letter was written in 1879 by mill girls who attended a class conducted by Eliza Fletcher of Glasgow:

'Our beloved teacher's earnest and persuasive way endears her to everyone, and wins so many. A number have told me they have got far more good from Miss Fletcher than ever they have got from any minister...There is also a silent work going on in one of our mills, through the influence of some of the girls who attend the class, and which we hope and pray will end in large showers of blessing...She is able to help with a strong and loving hand; and oh, what need we have of such teaching, when in our own Christian land so much error and false doctrine is afloat.'\textsuperscript{153}
Home visiting was a crucial part of the churches' home mission strategy. The pattern of church growth which developed was of a middle class, prosperous congregation taking responsibility for the spiritual welfare of an impoverished 'mission district'. It became ever more dependent on female volunteers. By the 1870s, according to contemporary reports, male visitors were almost exclusively ministers, theological students and professional lay missionaries. The 1875 Life and Work Report claimed that 'in cities, and generally in all populous parishes, the minister is assisted by ladies who act as district visitors', and gave the example of a city parish which had twenty elders, and 73 lady district visitors. Where it was possible to form an association of ladies, the common features appear to have been that each woman would visit, on a monthly basis, ten to fifteen families. They would keep extensive notes, and make regular reports on their district, to workers' meetings. Material assistance or relief was generally strictly regulated and restricted. Evangelicals believed in self-reliance, and not in what they considered to be indiscriminate charity. If this pattern was as widespread as evidence suggests, then working class lives were subject to intrusion and record on a very large scale by those who wished to remake them in their own bourgeois image. When Professor Archibald Charteris of Edinburgh University took on responsibility for the mission work of Tolbooth Church in Edinburgh's Lawnmarket, he was assisted largely by a team of ladies and
the University Missionary Association. His wife kept

'Two large volumes, regular ledgers, in which a certain number of pages were devoted to each family in the district, and reports were carefully engrossed to keep them up to date. All important particulars were condensed and recorded: so that in time the Tolbooth Church possessed a family biography of all the inhabitants, and new visitors had this history to look back upon, and to guide them in their dealings with the people'. 55

But it would be wrong to assume that all female church workers were upper or middle class, even if the values of these social groups tended to shape their endeavours. One minister responded to the Life and Work Committee:

'My assistant has charge of the Parish Mission, but he would be the first to acknowledge that its success is mainly secured by his staff of workers (all ladies). Some few are of recognised social position, but the majority are pious girls and women unknown to 'society'. Through their labours the district is systematically and regularly visited. We send them out two by two - each with a defined portion to visit...My experience points to a large store of unworked energy in our parishes among female members, and the possibility of working it, if the effort be heartily made.' 56

By 1884, after fourteen years of gathering information about lay involvement in the parochial work of the Church of Scotland, Professor Charteris, as convener of the Life and Work Committee, could write:

'When one looks clearly at work done by a congregation in aid of the minister, women obviously get most of it to do...The duties of elders, as commonly understood, are not exacting...yet elders and a few young men who teach in Sunday school are for the most part all the male allies of the minister, whereas the woman-helpers are numerous...The Sunday school itself is mainly taught by women...The Clothing Society and Mother's Meeting are of course handed over to the female workers...The District visiting - hardest, most trying, but most effective of all mission agencies - is as a rule entirely done by the minister and his 'lady visitors' 57

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While neither the Free Church nor the United Presbyterian Church conducted such extensive surveys of church and mission work on behalf of their national courts, there is plenty of evidence in Congregational Reports and histories, and in memoirs, that women of the Dissenting denominations were at least as involved as their Establishment sisters. Indeed, individuals from these churches, with their greater historical involvement in benevolent and philanthropic causes (eg anti-slavery) and evangelical zeal, might have felt more personal and religious motivation for taking up the characteristic forms of congregational and mission work identified by the Life and Work Committee. It would be unhelpful to draw any general conclusions from individual biographies of women who were obviously considered (by family and friends at least) to be in some way unusual or exceptional. But such sketches do offer an interesting insight into their thoughts and beliefs. Agnes Renton (1781-1863), for example, was a member of a prominent Edinburgh Liberal Seceder family. Her daughter became the second wife of Duncan McLaren, who as Lord Provost and MP was a central figure in Victorian Edinburgh. Agnes was deeply interested in political reform and the Voluntary Controversy. She was involved in the Temperance, Anti-Slavery and Peace Movements in the early and mid 19th century. She visited female prisoners and prostitutes for over 30 years, and was well known in the slums of the Grassmarket and Canongate. According to her biography:
'Religion obtained an early hold upon her mind, and exerted a powerful interest upon her character and conduct. From the time she distinctly apprehended that salvation is free and complete to the sinner...she seems to have had a greater or less measure of peace, and hope, and gratitude and love.'

And of her wide ranging public and charitable work, which appears to have encroached largely on her domestic responsibilities, her son wrote:

'Her's was no sentimental, spasmodic, imitative benevolence, begotten of fitful impulse, or fashion, or persuasion of neighbours, or other artificial influence. It was moved by the desire to do good to suffering or indigent fellow-creatures...She was brought into contact with human misery and vice in all their forms; but the effect was not to repel and discourage her, but only to stimulate and strengthen her desires and resolutions to relieve and rescue as promptly and as greatly as she could.'

Helen Lockhart Gibson (1836-1888) was born into a wealthy Kirkcaldy manufacturing family, which maintained friendships with evangelical families of many denominations. She, too, was brought up in an atmosphere of daily discussion of public and religious questions, and came into contact with the leading lights of the anti-slavery movement. In 1859, under the influence of the visiting American evangelist E P Hammond, she committed herself to engage in Christian work, 'to advance the Kingdom of God by faithful dealing with individual souls'. She subsequently ran Sabbath Schools, wrote and distributed tracts, held regular meetings for destitute women and mill-girls, and conducted general visitation in Kirkcaldy (where her husband was minister of Abbotshall Free Church). She also conducted open air meetings and evangelistic
campaigns, and regularly addressed audiences of several hundreds. She later helped form the Free Church Manse Ladies Total Abstinence Society, and served on her local school board. Her basic motivation for her work as, in effect, a full-time evangelist, was expressed in her diary:

'Being persuaded that the cause of Christ suffers much from the unfaithfulness of his professed followers to those who are without, I have for some time past endeavoured to speak to all with whom I daily come into contact, about their soul's salvation.'

Like Agnes Renton, Helen gave of her personal means to support individuals and religious causes, for:

'The offer of the Bread of Life could not be expected to gain acceptance, if, in the first place, no provision were made for the starving and shivering body.'

And, in common with other earnest middle class Christian women, she was optimistic about the consequences of her contacts with those living in poverty:

'How blessed indeed it is to have such fellowship with the poor in this world. All distinctions are broken down, when we meet as children of God. I would not give up such intercourse for all the honours this world could afford.'

Such accounts certainly give a one-sided view of relationships which were bound to be unequal. And both Agnes Renton and Helen Gibson were nothing if not persistent in their efforts to convert and reform individuals (although Helen Gibson's diary does indicate that some sceptical recipients of her visits and tracts put up spirited resistance). No doubt the clients of many lady visitors resented them as invasive and condescending. But an analysis which criticises their endeavours simply as
attempts to secure an obedient, dependent and depoliticised working class does little justice to the convictions, effort, skills and courage of such women. Their understanding of social ills may have been simplistic, but a good number were also aware of the importance of political reform, and were not entirely quietistic in their religious and voluntary work. Mrs Renton and Mrs Gibson were both upbraided for spending too much time and affection on the 'riff-raff' of society – an interest in 'respectable sinners' would have been more becoming. Their strength of character and Christian convictions gave them liberty to act, where they believed duty required it, against the conventions of what was 'seemly' behaviour for a lady, and to risk accusations of eccentricity and singularity. It is difficult to assess the extent to which their actions carried a conscious commitment to extending or defying the bounds of 'woman's sphere', since the framework within which they and others record their stories is evangelical, and not in any way feminist. But Agnes Renton did belong to a milieu which was aware of the women's rights developments out of the radical anti-slavery movement (although she resisted the 'infidel' wing of that movement 63), and she was the antecedent of women who were deeply involved in the Women's Movement of the late 19th and early 20th century. Helen Gibson, who was quite willing to confront men as well as women in her efforts, was also aware that her public speaking gave her a curiosity value, and that she could be spoken of as a
'female preacher'. But her criterion for success was to welcome whatever increased her opportunities for mission work and conversion. In writing their biographies, the male relatives of both women point to traits of character which were far from the insipid, superficial attractions beloved of so many propagandists of the domestic ideology. In particular, they are honoured for their intellect, courage and energy.

The period c.1830-1880 witnessed the entry of large numbers of women into voluntary church work as an increasingly important aspect of militant home mission within presbyterianism. The purpose of their work was generally portrayed as a benevolent effort to bring a little of their supposedly heaven-like domestic world to lighten the squalor and indifference of the urban poor. In practice, their endeavours were probably as diverse in their quality as in their effect. The results of their labours no doubt varied from genuine individual conversions and affection, through the provision of some material and leisure benefits, to intrusive moral control – or a combination of all of these. In sociological terms, they contributed to the dominance of an individualistic evangelical liberalism, and to the growing ascendancy of the domestic ideology as an ideal for all classes. But the lives of working women continued to evade such tidy classification, and the philanthropists who were supposedly extending their intrinsically feminine qualities were often anything but
gentle, compassionate and self-effacing. Some rather seemed to establish relationships with their clients which, being based on judgement, control, condescension and assumed superiority, reflected the image of traditional male-female relationships. For many who took part in this work, the effort was half-hearted and unreflective. For others, it was a deeply felt personal commitment which broadened horizons and gave real purpose and power to women who were able to exercise a measure of self-motivation and independence in their lives.
'A Potent Force' – voluntary church work c.1880-1930

In 1894, Rev JFW Grant, convener of the Church of Scotland Life and Work sub-committee with special responsibility for the recently inaugurated Woman’s Guild, cast his view over changes in the position of women which had occurred during the previous generation:

'It is somewhat startling to find that there is hardly a form of manual toil, or any walk of public or private life, where female talent is not heartily honoured, and does not command its deserved success...The great mass of women workers [have] new opportunities of earning their livelihood, and of maintaining their own independence...Nor can man any more exclusively speak of himself as 'breadwinner' – three million out of six million women work for subsistence...

Will these changes, personal emancipations, and all this development of women workers be for good or evil? If result is to be wholly good, must not the industrial and world side of women's work be accompanied and paralleled throughout by a religious movement, by a nobler personal and social ideal within the Church itself? Along with a growing recognition of her in human affairs as the co-equal and co-worker of man, must there not be a more distinct acknowledgement of her mission as an "angel of peace and love, as a power to elevate and purify and save"? Not otherwise can this great modern movement be rescued from the fatal grasp and spirit of mere secularism.'

In his address, Grant alludes to two major challenges which directly affected women's church work in the period c.1880-1930. He explicitly refers to the growth of the movement for women's rights – in property, law, education and professions, and politics – which had already achieved some changes in perception about the role of, and opportunities for, women in Britain. Some presbyterians were directly involved in these campaigns, and younger women were beginning to enjoy some of the fruits of their struggles. Universities had finally opened their doors to women, and
new job opportunities had developed in teaching, nursing and 'white blouse' occupations. Rigid social conventions and restrictions were not as impregnable as they had once appeared. A spirit of solidarity and confidence, and a sense of achievement, were personal benefits of participation in campaigns. Even women who were not directly involved in the Movement – or who opposed it, acknowledged that horizons were expanding, whether they liked it or not. For numerous women of all classes, church worship and church-based organisations had for long provided the only significant community beyond the domestic domain. That was no longer true: organised religion would now have to compete for the time, talents and means of some of that erstwhile silent majority which it had invariably taken for granted.

Grant links the development of the Women’s Movement to contemporary church concern about the encroachment of secularism in society. Dr Corbett, editor of the United Presbyterian Record, was more pointed in his 1890 assessment of the progress of ‘Women’s Rights’:

'Many things have happened since first, not many years ago, that portentous expression struck dismay and bewilderment into the sober, sleepy traditionalism that never dreamed there were such things as 'women's wrongs'...In many orthodox circles, moreover, The Cause was often branded as radically irreligious. There was, so good Christians thought, a flavour of atheism about the thing...Was not this novel claim but one of many signs that the world was in a bad case, that the Bible was losing its authority, and that flood-gates were being opened through which fierce, foul streams would rush towhelm everything in chaos and death? After this the deluge, was the mournful, despairing conclusion of many devout souls, who were sure the end
could not be far off when such enormities were to be seen as women in pulpits or on platforms.' 65

Corbett's wry style captures something of the besieged doubt of churchpeople who felt they were fighting a rearguard action against the second challenge to presbyterianism from the 1880s. After an era of supremacy, the evangelical liberalism which had dominated the Victorian age was under serious attack. Its confident prescription of personal conversion and economic laissez-faire individualism had failed to revive Scotland as a 'godly commonwealth'. The country in its advanced industrial state was more complex and divided than ever. Enormous inequalities of wealth and poverty, and associated indicators of the quality of life, were beginning to shake confidence in the divine inexorability of the political and economic order. 66 Aggressive Christianity had substantially failed to raise the 'moral tone' of the nation. The development of social sciences and empirical research was beginning to reveal the systemic extent and depth of poverty, and discredit the long held view that individual sin and character defects were its primary causes. Helen Crawfurd, as an earnest young woman married to the minister of Brownfield Church in the Anderston slums of Glasgow, began to question the conventional evangelical response:

'To me, it seemed all wrong that the religious people should be so much concerned about heaven and a future life, and so little concerned with the present, where God's creatures were living in slums, many of them owned by the Churches, amidst poverty and disease'.67

She was deeply affected by a controversy incited by the
opposition of the leading evangelical Lord Overtoun to the proposed Sunday opening of the People's Palace. In response, the *Labour Leader* published a pamphlet by Keir Hardie condemning the hypocrisy of Overtoun, whose employees endured shocking pay and conditions (including Sunday labour) in his Rutherglen chemical works. Crawfurd suggested that the pamphlet 'sowed the seeds of socialism in the minds of many of the youth of the city'. Hardie himself represented many in the labour movement who, although personally connected with evangelical Christianity, were fiercely critical of the patronising cant of the institutional church. Indeed, members of the Independent Labour Party used the conceptual framework of mission and transformation to proselytise for the socialist cause. They believed that they were reclaiming the social agenda which was part of the evangelical Protestant heritage, and which had been largely abandoned by the establishment church.

Many presbyterians, in their new, large and prosperous suburban congregations, simply retreated from these perplexing challenges. According to Callum Brown, they lost whatever interest they had taken in direct home mission work and concentrated on developing the social and leisure aspects of congregational life. Others, especially those with personal experience of life and work in city slums, took the 'Social Question' seriously and struggled to find the theoretical and practical tools for a Christian
response. In 1891, for instance, the Church of Scotland Glasgow Presbytery commissioned a report on *The Housing of the Poor in Relation to their Social Condition*, which took evidence and statistics from a range of sources. This kind of work certainly helped to challenge prevailing religious attitudes, but the Presbytery still perceived the social role of the church in terms of effecting the transformation of defective character:

'It is essentially the function of the Christian church to organise such agencies and to bring to bear such influences as shall move the poor to live decent and clean lives in the decent and clean houses provided for them.'

However, the presbyterian churches did respond to the challenge presented by socialist analysis of injustice and prescription of state intervention, with a significant change in strategy. Utilising recent developments in Biblical studies and theology, a group of ministers - influential, though not in the numerical majority - emphasised the recovery of Old Testament prophecy and commitment to justice, combined with the incarnate love and service of Jesus, to preach a kind of ethical socialism.

In practice, they did not countenance class struggle, but felt that it was urgent for the churches to demonstrate loving concern in action, to counter the understandable attractions of secular socialism. As Scott Matheson, a United Presbyterian minister from Dumbarton, wrote in 1893:

'[The working classes] have got to think that the Church is on the side of the strong against the weak; of capital against labour; of rich against poor; and they resent being put off with promises of justice and happiness in another world.'
From the late 1880s, all the presbyterian churches began to develop a strategy based on the provision of social services. While Callum Brown has argued that this was anti-evangelical, I believe that in fact it signified a recasting of missionary endeavour, which was still firmly rooted in the premise that it was possible to reconstruct both individuals and structures and create a truly Christian civilisation. Indeed, there was a millenarian confidence in the rediscovered category of the Kingdom of God which inspired a revitalised religious fervour among many presbyterians. A simplistic assessment of the relationship between political and religious culture of this period might argue that evangelicalism was essentially private and lacking the dimension of justice, while the new socialist theory was a repudiation of that in favour of public policy and collective action, and that the church responded to the labour movement by abandoning its concern for private conversion in favour of social work and ethical socialism. I have tried to argue rather that to consider the private and public spheres as fixed and autonomous does not aid our understanding of the complexity, fluidity and tensions of human beliefs and action. Progressive presbyterians in fact made considerable use of a familialist, rather than a collectivist model to develop their understanding of justice and the role of the State. In this model, women and their 'distinctive gifts' had a key role to play in reproducing 'home' values by intervening in the social dimension. This would, it was
believed, help to preserve the influence of religion in Scottish society. Both men and women contributed to developments in the 'separate spheres' doctrine which were in keeping with the times, and yet which were always struggling to cope with the pace of change in social and gender relations. The emergence of more formal structures for women's church work was rooted in the evangelical ideology of a distinctive woman's mission. These structures came to be regarded as an essential element in the new approach to the Social Question. However, their membership and service continued, by and large, to express an attitude towards cultural relations which betrayed the underlying conservatism of the presbyterian churches, and they failed to make much impact beyond the traditional parameters of religious philanthropy.

The Church of Scotland Woman's Guild

Dr Charteris, convener of the Church of Scotland's Life and Work Committee, and Professor of Biblical Criticism at Edinburgh University, was the moving force behind the scheme to develop a national organisation for women's work. In 1885, after fifteen years of assessing the nature and extent of lay involvement in parish life, the Committee was given authority to consider possible ways of recognising and organising work done by members. The 1886 General Assembly agreed to proceed to the formation of a Woman's Guild. Charteris was particularly interested in women's work, but the foundation of the Woman's Guild should be
seen in the context of an overall strategy which he
promoted to encourage lay service within congregations.
The Young Men's Guild was sanctioned in 1881 'to stimulate
the spiritual and intellectual life of young men, and
encourage them to undertake works of Christian
usefulness'.74 Charteris believed that the consciousness of
belonging to a national association would help to stimulate
pride and activity in local congregations, where ministers
often felt isolated by the lack of practical support from
their elders. Many of the same principles informed both the
Young Men's and the Woman's Guild. But there was no
shortage of traditionalists who were still reluctant to
approve of women acting in any but a strictly domestic
capacity. Charteris had to work hard to persuade many
ministers that his proposed scheme for organised women's
work was acceptable. He argued, notably in the 1888 Baird
lectures, published in 1905 as The Church of Christ, that
an adequate theology of the Church as the Body of Christ
must encourage the discernment and utilisation of the gifts
of all its members, and not just the professional ministry.
And he appealed to the New Testament for evidence that
female ministries were given official recognition in the
apostolic age:

'When therefore I suggest the enrolment of women who are
willing workers in Christ's service I have New Testament
authority. Why should we not have a Church of Scotland
Association of women? Why should it not have a Centre?
Branches in every district? Why should it not be an object
of honourable ambition to young women to be enrolled in it?
And rules and regulations requiring of all who enter it
some sufficient proof of their fitness for such work as it
implies?' 75
Charteris was particularly concerned that the national Church appeared to be abdicating its mission and service responsibilities to sects and non-denominational organisations – often with a distinctly proletarian ethos, such as the Salvation Army. As a constitutional presbyterian who wished to uphold the prevailing social order, he wanted the Established Church to inspire and direct a spirit of duty among upper and middle class women. His sentimental paternalism envisaged a focus for bringing together women of all classes on friendly terms, which would nevertheless present no challenge to social hierarchy. His plan for the Woman’s Guild reflected those concerns. In 1887 the organisation was established, and its general object was:

'To unite together all women who are engaged in the service of Christ in connection with the Church, or desire to give help to any practical Christian work in the parish, as well as all who are receiving Christian teaching and looking forward to Christian service.'76

The Guild was to have three grades. At the bottom of the pyramid were women engaged in congregational and parochial work, for whom Guild membership would introduce coordination, official sanction, companionship, and an element of training. No substantially new fields of labour were envisaged:

'In nearly every parish there are practical agencies carried on almost exclusively by women...In some parishes, such work is formally organised and superintended by the Session. But it many more cases, ministers see that female work should be further encouraged and approved. Ministers face to face with the misery and poverty of large cities feel this strongly.'77
The second grade - the Woman-worker's Guild - was to consist of experienced workers not less than twenty-one years of age, to be enrolled by the authority of the Kirk Session, after service of at least three years. This attempt to offer incentive and recognition never really established itself. Certainly by 1897, it had been replaced by a system of awarding diplomas and badges to nominated Guild Leaders within branches.78

The apex of Charteris' structure was an order of Deaconesses - women of means who would be able to devote full-time service to the Church. His original plan was that they should be set apart by Presbyteries, but the General Assembly took exception to that, for it seemed to place deaconesses above ruling elders and deacons in the Church hierarchy. Instead it was decided that the setting apart would be by Kirk Sessions. It was also made clear that the deaconess would be a servant, not an official, and would exercise her office under the authority of the Kirk Session. I shall consider the order of deaconesses later in this chapter, and in chapter four.

Thus was born an organisation for women - conceived, approved of and under the supervision of men. It was based on the principle, as Charteris put it, that 'to minister is woman's special function; her ministry is as manifold as life'. 79
There is scant primary source material for the first few years of the new movement. The series of minute books, held in the Scottish Record Office, for the Guild Central Committee (which consisted initially of the all male Life and Work Guild sub-committee. Added to this were some women who were not directly representative of the membership, but seem to have been chosen for their social status, their marriage to male members of the committee, or because they did administrative unpaid work for the Guild), begins only in 1896, and I have discovered almost no local records from this time. But the organisation did not impose a unified structural framework on local situations. The leadership wished to emphasise the importance of individual enrolment and commitment (as symbolised by the membership cards which the Central Committee wanted issued to every women who joined a local branch). The Committee received a report in 1896 that there were 380 branches with around 27,000 members, but expressed concern that many of these did not have cards, and that many branches had not returned detailed schedules.80 There was much early diversity, (perhaps also confusion and uncertainty) with some branches emerging from already existing groups, and others being established as a result of deputation work (whereby women were appointed to the honorary task of visiting potential and nascent local branches to encourage the movement) and ministerial support. The latter feature was essential, but not always forthcoming, and in 1892 one of the Central Committee members, Rev R Blair of Cambuslang, used the
pages of Life and Work to encourage his less enthusiastic colleagues:

'Authorisation [of women's work] is not fully recognised by many ministers and sessions, and the development of work is slower than it would otherwise have been. The Woman's Guild is no unconstitutional movement originated and carried on outside official knowledge - but has the full sanction of our Supreme Court. It is often called the Young Woman's Guild, but it aims at including all the women of the Church...A Union in which rich and poor, member and adherent, can come together on common ground.'

In 1891, an annual national conference was introduced, as was a Guild Supplement to the Life and Work magazine. Both of these were crucial elements in building and sustaining momentum, and gave opportunities for those who felt tentative and uncertain about how to develop their local initiative, to share ideas and experiences with one another. They were also used by the national leadership to shape the general ethos of the emerging movement, and to develop the more intangible qualities of solidarity, purpose and belonging among women. Margaret Anderson, a female missionary in Greenock from 1863-1913, was sent as the West Church's delegate to the 1895 conference, held in Aberdeen, and her account conveys a picture, both of the event itself, and also of characteristic difficulties encountered in trying to establish a local branch of a new national organisation. She describes being given hospitality by a doctor's family in the city, and attending sessions with the eldest daughter. There was a reception given by the City Corporation, welcoming speeches, and a packed public meeting - all of which were addressed by men. Daily prayer meetings were held, and papers read on
different topics. One was on 'The cause of lapsing from the Church by servant girls':

'It was a splendid paper and every conceivable cause was mentioned. The presiding lady said, "we have got the disease, now we want the remedy". We waited for a good while and were urged to say something. At last I got up and simply described the formation of the Guild in Greenock. One of the deaconesses came from Edinburgh (Miss Anderson). We had a very nice meeting indeed, tea, singing and a speech from the lady; then about sixty or seventy of us joined the Guild, gave or promised a small yearly subscription, got our membership tickets, put them safely past, and did nothing. We had an idea that all that was expected had been done. Some time after we had another lady from the Deaconess House, Edinburgh, a regular rouser, and she did give us the idle lot a few strong words. She said that every Guild member was expected to work, and every member could do something. We set to in earnest, and at that time we had about three hundred working members. We started to support a bed in the Kalimpong Hospital, work for the Deaconess House, help in the service of praise in the Church, teach in the Sabbath School, visit among the poor, help in the Dorcas Society, and other forms of service beside. We had no lapsing in these days, so I hold that work of some kind that the individual can do is the best preventive for lapsing.'

That the essence of the Guild was work, rather than meetings, was an important principle for its founders and promoters. And the work at Greenock West, as described by Margaret Anderson was a typical combination of giving financial support to central Guild schemes at home and abroad, and local mission and service. (See Appendix I for more detail about the development of two local Woman's Guild branches).

By 1900 there were 529 branches with 37,000 members, and eleven provincial councils, which brought together branch delegates for regular meetings with others in their own city or area. In the early years, Dr Charteris' wife, Catherine, was an enthusiastic President (though not that
regular an attender at Central Committee meetings), and she also edited the Life and Work Woman’s Guild Supplement from its introduction in 1891 until 1901. As a national organisation, the Guild was able to draw on and develop the talents of a number of enterprising and articulate women, offering information, encouragement and challenge to the growing numbers who were joining local Guilds. The yearly National Conference, the Supplement, and travelling Guild Deputies were effective channels for such work. A number of central initiatives and projects were established and supported by the Guild, including Deaconess House (1887), a residential training centre in the run-down Pleasance area of Edinburgh; Deaconess Hospital (1894), which was opened to provide suitable nursing training, and offered free care to church members and others in need; Kalimpong Medical Mission in India (supported also by the Young Men’s Guild); and Robertson Orphanage in Musselburgh. These were followed by a Home-House for missionary children (1900); the Guild Temperance Tent (1902), which did the rounds of fairs and shows as a counter-attraction to beer tents; a Guild Cottage (1904) ‘where those who had fallen under the bondage of strong drink could be helped and strengthened’; and a Rest Home for deaconesses (1907). These agencies were supported by Guild branches around the country, and were one effective means of establishing a strong shared identity and sense of common purpose. (Although Guild headquarters occasionally chastised branches which failed to donate to any of the special Guild
concerns). Some urban and rural branches also entered into partnership arrangements, which were supposed to foster friendship and practical help across geographical and class divides.

While these initiatives represent an apparently straightforward extension of the domestic concerns which were considered appropriate women's work, the leaders of the Guild were not afraid (within the traditional framework of service) to exhort more conventional or timid members to move beyond what polite society might have considered 'proper'. So Catherine Charteris rallied the 1901 conference with these rousing words:

'A great change has come in our day in the extent of women's power and influence and opportunities...There is however a cry on the part of some that it is not good for women, not even good for the causes in which we are interested, that we should come too much to the front. We must not forego opportunities because such an objection is taken, but we can act so as to make it visibly baseless...And so, if the sight of the woes of others call any of you to work beyond what have been hitherto the ordinary limits of women's work...you need not fear surely to listen to the voice, nor think that it calls you beyond a woman's province: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, Do it."' 84

Such sentiments, however, were not enough to prevent popular impressions forming about the Guild - some of which hardened into conventions and expectations. In 1906, a contributor to the Supplement complained:

'Even today, after twenty years, people still imagine the Woman's Guild is a kind of class for young women, chiefly millgirls and shop girls, with a sprinkling of well-to-do elderly ladies as teachers. A more mistaken idea never existed.'85
That particular stereotype may not have endured, since by the 1920s, the widespread view seemed to be that the Guild was mainly for older women, with girls and young women increasingly choosing to join other organisations, or opting out of church-based groups altogether. But the Supplement editor warned of a more enduring problem in the same year:

'There is a danger lest too much energy is absorbed in fundraising...We should be careful how we lift all the burden for raising money for parish needs off men's shoulders'.86

The years of rapid numerical expansion were also those when the Social Question absorbed the church, and the movement did not ignore the issues. In 1908, a year of deep recession, the theme of the national conference was 'The Church's Duty to Working Women', and the President, the Hon Mrs Scott, called for:

'A deeper and more practical interest in the condition of our people, a knowledge of our laws...pity for the opporessed and wronged...Too long have we shut our eyes to the social evils in our midst...Is it not time that we woke up to consideration of these problems and to the subject of social reform?'87

But while such concern was commendable, the shortcomings of the Guild as a mass movement which could act as an agent for change are evident. The 1908 conference presents a fairly typical scenario for such meetings: An aristocrat with a social conscience addressing a largely middle class audience about 'working women' - a species which seemed as utterly alien as the more romantic heathens in the foreign mission fields. And the main solutions proposed for their problems were the time-honoured ones beloved of their
Victorian predecessors: personal conversion from sin, and improved domestic standards:

'Our most difficult duty to the working woman is to know her...our different training blinds us to her difficulties...in many there is a lack of awareness of personal responsibility to God, and of sin as sin. Their ideal of home is sometimes painfully low, and children are in many cases absolutely untrained.'

It hardly surprising that such a forum did not propose radical measures for social or economic change. Indeed, the Guild sought to avoid any possibility of developing an image as a broadly political or campaigning movement, and other women's organisations increasingly filled the gap, especially after the First World War.

From the pages of the Supplement, and also minute books of individual branches, a pretty consistent picture emerges of the range of activities and concerns adopted by Guilds around Scotland. Reports 'from our branches' in the Supplement tend simply to list Bazaars, sales of work, and other fundraising ventures, and the beneficiaries of such events. Work parties and efforts to raise sums of money for Church schemes at all levels, were predominant. These practical skills, and the range of interests which women supported, should not be underestimated. Apart from their own local and national projects, sums were raised for the general home and foreign mission, and social work schemes of the denomination. Guild subscriptions also contributed largely to the restoration of the sanctuary at Iona Abbey in the first decade of the 20th century. Kirk Sessions did
rather quickly form the habit of turning to the Guild for fundraising events, or 'lady collectors' to organise subscriptions, when they needed parish funds. Evidence suggests that many Guild branches actually began when work parties, whose primary object was to raise such funds, decided to affiliate to the Guild. Often it was the Kirk Session alone which had powers to allocate the sums raised, even although they sometimes 'allowed' the women to disburse a due proportion.

Concern for family life and childrearing features in many Supplement articles, reflecting the early 20th century bourgeois obsession with ideal motherhood, and also the reality that these were the primary occupations of many members. The ascription of so many Scottish ills to alcohol abuse issued in temperance work and campaigns - including support for the Local Veto Act (1913), which led to local campaigns during the 1920s, although the Church of Scotland Guild members were not uniformly active or enthusiastic about this cause. (I shall consider the temperance movement in chapter five). Lectures, addresses and slide shows tended to focus on foreign mission and temperance themes, although they sometimes dealt with contemporary public issues and the role of women. There were essay competitions on subjects such as 'The Ideal Home' and 'Self-denial', and baking competitions for scones and cakes. There is little indication of ordinary guildswomen engaging in the kind of direct home mission
work and aggressive evangelisation which had been characteristic of the 19th century. The impression is rather of a very large group of women of all classes (but in which the leadership and values of upper and middle class dominated) using their resources to provide a network of support for a much smaller number who were directly (and sometimes professionally, as Bible women, Parish Sisters, Deaconesses, female missionaries) involved in work with the poor. Although there was much genuine charitable concern, expressed for instance in gifts of flowers, produce and clothing, and the 'twinning' of country and city branches, the evidence of some articles in the Supplement also suggests that some more aware women believed there was widespread ignorance and complacency about the causes of poverty and injustice, which, to be fair, the national leadership did try to counteract at conferences and in the Supplement.90

The Woman's Guild certainly gave position and opportunity to some aware and able women who attempted to inspire their sisters with a more dynamic and challenging understanding of their role in church and society. However, the lack of adequate or confident leadership was a recurring concern, and at local level, such evidence as there is tends to suggest that a great deal of responsibility for the Guild's success depended on just a few women - and often on the minster's wife in particular. Where ministers were lukewarm or antagonistic to the Guild, the women felt the
lack of support quite acutely. One guildswoman expressed these grievances in the 1906 Supplement:

'There is a want of sympathy with the Woman's Guild which prevails too frequently in the manses of parishes...too often a lack of comprehension of the true nature of the Guild, and a consequent lukewarmness about it against which even the most enthusiastic members find it difficult to make headway. We Scotswomen are born with a wholesome reverence for the powers that be, and we cannot bring ourselves to move in any church or parish work without the sanction and sympathy of our minister.'

Perhaps the Guild could have done with a healthy dose of irreverence, for the common, and no doubt largely accurate, perception was of the Guild as the repository of traditional female benevolence and usefulness within a male dominated, bourgeois institution.

Questions about the Guild's relation to women's work and struggles were raised more acutely in the wake of the Great War, during which the organisation, as the largest national structure for women, took on enlarged responsibilities at local and national levels. As the war began, the National President suggested avenues of service - like knitting socks for servicemen, and avoiding the temptation to stockpile food or money - and issued a rousing call to unity and service:

'So shall we in the Woman's Guild in our National Church of Scotland be doing our part in this hour of anxiety. Let us work, and watch, and pray, assured that the issues of life and death, peace and war are in the hands of Almighty God'.

From 1914-1919, the Guild co-ordinated much fundraising and practical support for the war effort. It also established, from June 1918, its own War Work committee, which set up
huts and canteens for women in the Service Auxiliaries and munitions factories, in different locations around Scotland. It was keen to do similar work in France, but to the committee's disappointment the War Office failed to provide an opening. There was no expression from the leadership of anything other than full support for military engagement.

Traditional work and meetings of local branches were increasingly disrupted by blackout, high cost of materials, bereavement, voluntary war service at home and abroad, and because more and more women were engaged in paid munitions, industrial, transport and agricultural jobs. One consequence of this major change in the lifestyles of so many women, was that the Central Committee of the Guild felt compelled to review its relationship to girls and young women, and in 1916 established a committee to consider this 'with a view to interesting them more fully in the Guild and its activities'. In 1917, the General Assembly accepted the re-organisation of the Guild into two sections: Women's and Girls'. The latter was to be for those aged between fifteen and thirty. Its avowed intention was to attract and hold onto girls and young women who would, it was feared, otherwise remain outwith official church organisation; and to utilise their wartime experience and enthusiasm within the Guild structure. It was to have parallel executive committees, and was encouraged to develop fresh methods of study and service.
The Girl's Guild was intended to serve as a training school which would pass able and eager young women into the senior Guild. This new development was a recognition that the traditional ethos and activities of the Guild, based on sewing work parties and fundraising events, were increasingly out of keeping with a new spirit emerging among young women:

'It is plain to all that the outlook for women generally has been immensely widened during the past four years, and that women's influence has never been more powerful outside the home than at present. What is the Woman's Guild doing to lead this to the highest expression? As compared with the time when the Guild was born, women today are living in a new world, and there is an urgent need that this should be reflected in new forms of activity...We shall never be right until Christian service on a wide interpretation (including national and social service of all kinds) becomes a chief motive of every woman in the Church.'94

The process of reconstructing the Guild organisation continued apace throughout the 1920s, under Mary Lamond, who replaced Lady Polwarth as National President in 1920, and remained in post until 1932. Lamond built a career spanning more than thirty years in the service of the Guild: as Supplement editor, Superintendent of Deaconess House, and President. She was the convener of the sub-committee on the constitution, and was the key strategist in reshaping the Guild. The changes were designed to build a truly representative structure based on the distinctive feature of presbyterian churches - the presbytery itself. Provincial Councils were gradually replaced by Presbyterial Councils, which were to meet 'as often as possible' - sometimes monthly, as with presbyteries. Each Council sent one representative to the Central Committee, and that
forum, minus its male Life and Work Committee members, became an acting President's Committee, which was responsible for all internal Guild business. Councils were specifically requested to defray travelling expenses, so that members who had to come from a distance would not be dissuaded or disadvantaged. (A kind of voluntary pooling system was later introduced to offset the long-standing privileged position of Edinburgh women). Council office-bearers were not to hold office for more than three years. And a new, simplified membership card was issued, along with a campaign to re-enrol every individual member in both sections of the Guild. The departmental women's work of the church - Temperance, Home Mission Foreign Mission and Jewish Mission - was also brought under the aegis of the Guild, with designated Presbyterial Council representatives serving on each of the national committees. And from 1924, the Guild were given a few places on General Assembly Committees in which women's work was deemed to have some concern.

A conferring committee, bringing together leading women from the Established Church and the United Free Church, met during the latter part of the 1920s, and agreed to adopt the Woman's Guild as the organisational framework within which women's service should be conducted in the re-united national Church of Scotland. By 1930, the Guild had 1176 branches and around 68,000 members, and Lamond was optimistic about the future:
'The inspiration and impetus given by the act of uniting will lead to new enterprises and fresh effort for the remedying of social evils at home and the extension of Christ's Kingdom throughout the world.'

No doubt the Guild leadership looked forward to a fresh injection of vigour from the substantial numbers of United Free Church women, who had developed their institutional life in a different way, and had a particular commitment to their much more extensive programme of foreign missions. They would bring significant resources of sagacity and leadership - especially, perhaps, the rather more progressive and dynamic quality to be found in the Women's Missionary College and the Girl's Auxiliary (see below p).

The Guild too, from late 1927, had made efforts to counteract a longstanding problem: an apparently chronic lack of adequately trained and confident public speakers, especially at presbytery and branch levels. Schools of Study were conducted on the art and techniques of speaking, with critiques and group discussions. These schools also gave an opportunity for women to consider the various aspects, problems and potential of the Guild. In those settings, as in Central Council, three main interlinked concerns were addressed without coming close to resolution. First, there was the overriding public perception that the Guild's main purpose was to raise church funds - especially through bazaars and sales of work. It was therefore constantly beset by narrow horizons and a weak sense of its spiritual aims and responsibilities, although there were no
doubt many individual members and branches who found their religious life enriched though Guild membership. At the same time, work parties, which had been the main (and in many places the sole) manifestation of the Guild’s presence at local level, seemed, in the words of one Supplement contributor, 'in imminent danger of being pensioned'. The writer continued:

'[The work party] seems to have been the natural outcome of women's desire to help, along their own special line, in days when different avenues of social service had not opened up. Sewing, embroidery and knitting were done, and sold for church funds, thus enabling both service and profit. These arts are no longer so ardently pursued. The rapid growth of 'ready-to-wear' has meant that the home made garment has gracefully retired from the struggle. Many work parties have found no outlet for their goods...This has led to discouragement, a refusal to sew, and the end of the work party...

Many woman's guilds which formerly had no other activity, have tried to compromise. They are reluctant to see the work party go - it is the only thing in which many women can share - but try to meet the demands of young women by introducing a varied programme of winter meetings.'

But, as this article suggests, the association of Guild activity with work parties and sales had not endeared the movement to young women. The Girl's Guild had begun as a way of drawing them into the Guild, but its development as a distinctive organisation, with its own leadership, responsibilities and activities, actually had the effect of increasing the stigmatisation of the senior organisation.

In 1928 the Central Committee held a special meeting to discuss 'how could it be made easier for girls to pass on from the Girl's Guild to the Woman's Guild when they are thirty', and it was clear to those involved that the older groups seemed singularly unattractive, unwelcoming and dull.
in their style and activity. While there was some sympathy for 'modern girls' who did not care for sewing, many in the Guild seemed perplexed about what they sometimes criticised as the 'pleasure-loving' spirit of the age.98

These concerns should be seen in the wider social and political context of the 1920s. The partial enfranchisement of women from 1918 gave them some measure of direct political power and potential. Both the political establishment, and women's groups themselves, had to assess and respond to the new situation. A recurring fear expressed throughout the suffrage campaign by those of differing political hues, was that women would form a separate party - or at least would tend to cast their votes in a particular direction. Despite early attempts, especially by the Pankhursts, the 'women's party' never materialised as a serious feature of political life, but as Catriona Burness has shown (see Out of Bounds (1992) 152ff) existing parties did make strenuous efforts to attract female support immediately after enfranchisement. Although the Liberal and Labour parties had, in their different ways, a constitutional commitment to female equality, it was the Unionist Party which was especially vigorous in its efforts to win women's votes. Appeals were made to the 'vital contribution' of women, and to their concerns as both wives and mothers, and as citizens. The party agenda was based on the domestic premise of protecting women and family from the threat of Bolshevism, and as the bed-rock
of the British Empire.

Other organisations sprang up to encourage the wider promotion of female citizenship and political awareness. Women Citizens Associations were consciously designed to extend the scope and agenda of the suffrage movement. The Scottish Women's Rural Institute, founded in 1917, grew rapidly, which surprised and even alarmed politicians of this period. Townswomen's Guilds and, within the labour movement, the Women's Co-operative Guild, also offered women a combination of practical and social activity, and political education. All of these, and especially, it seems, the Women's Institute, encroached on the territory the Woman's Guild occupied. The Story of the Women's Institute Movement (1925), written by J W Robertson Scott, says of the W I in Scotland:

'At first we found ourselves very often up against the Kirk. So many of the women had only worked for the Kirk and the parish priests (sic) did not relish them diverting their energies. In one parish the minister, his wife and a small coterie of dames have never been to a SWRI function or meeting...I have heard of other parishes where a similar attitude is adopted. On the other hand, I have had the greatest help often from very jolly parish ministers and their wives.'

A series of articles in the 1928 Supplement tried to show that there was no reason why women should not be members of both. But there was no escaping the fact that the Institute seemed to many rural women a much more lively and imaginative forum for the practice of traditional and new female skills. As Mrs Robertson Scott suggested:
'I find our members are keenest on the Institute because what they learn there is of use to them. They are proud of it. It thereby ranks higher than the Mother's Union, Woman's Guild and others'.

Some effort was made to adapt the Guild to the higher public profile of women, in the first flush of post-1918 enthusiasm. The idea of expanded female citizenship was promoted periodically during the 1920s, at least in the pages of the Supplement, to encourage members to take part in the Local Option campaign, and to demonstrate concern about municipal and welfare policies. Speakers on health and child development were particularly endorsed as appropriate for branch meetings. But these headquarters efforts did not seem to bear much fruit, if reports of branch activities, and presidential exhortations are anything to go by. There was little to suggest that many local Guilds were benefitting from injections of new ideas, and much which hinted that the postwar organisation was suffering from grassroots stagnation in leadership and imagination. And the Guild's response to the industrial unrest of the period was to reprise the old refrain about the duty of Guildswomen to eschew class conflict, and preserve their founder's aims of social harmony. In October 1920, the Supplement's editorial column commented:

'At home a certain proportion of those in the industrial world seem bent on nullifying the sacrifices of their comrades who fell, and on shattering the future of the British Empire...Yet we must not lose heart, nor above all, lose faith; God is still in his heaven, and His hand guides the helm...Christian people must close up their ranks and work and pray for a better National life, for purer ideals, and worthier standards of work. Especially must the women of the country strive to create kindlier feeling between class and class, and closer trust in the love and power of our great Father. Let our
Guildswomen do their part in the struggles of Peace as they have done already in the dark days of War.\textsuperscript{102}

This kind of comment belies any simple assumption that the Guild maintained political neutrality, and indeed the prevailing tone of its public voice during the 1920s often reflected the domestic and imperial agenda of the Unionist party.

While there were many working class members of the Woman's Guild, those who were most politically active in the Labour movement would not have found the church organisation a comfortable place — especially if they had tried to air class-conscious socialist views, or (what would have been even further beyond the pale of respectability) to advocate some of the pro-women legislation (e.g. on birth control) which even their male comrades in the Labour Party baulked at. The Women's Co-operative Guild was potentially a more favourable environment for discussion of such concerns, within a framework which in other ways had much in common with the Church Guild.

A discussion at the Central Council meeting held on April 11 1928 suggests that the official non-involvement position adopted by the Guild in relation to contemporary political issues was not uncontested. A letter had been received from the Edinburgh Women Citizen's Association, inviting the Guild to appoint two members to a special committee representing women's organisations. This was to plan a
Demonstration in the Usher Hall, 'to celebrate the achievements of electoral equality, and to arouse the interest of new voters in their citizenship'. Such an event was surely not particularly controversial, and the Guild itself had promoted good citizenship. However:

'After considerable discussion, on a vote being taken, it was decided by a majority that the Woman's Guild could not accept this invitation which was in connection with objects outwith the purpose for which the Guild exists.'

That rather narrow interpretation of the Guild's aims, which excluded the largest Scottish women's organisation from a symbolic and active role in promoting a respectable celebration of female equality in the political sphere, is perhaps indicative of the Guild's failure to develop its potential as a central force in Scottish public life.

By the end of the decade, the Guild retained its numerical supremacy among Scotswomen, but the traditional ethos of uncomplaining service, of older members watching anxiously over the 'welfare' of young women, and of respectful 'friendliness' between working women and their social superiors, was not the best ground upon which to build the movement of the post-union future. Despite the concern and efforts of Lamond and her colleagues, the Girl's Guild, in its own negotiations, was eager to embrace independence from its progenitor through union with the more autonomous Girl's Auxiliary of the United Free Church. And the Guild entered upon church union as a movement which claimed a huge membership, but was struggling to justify itself as a
vigorous or creative force in Scottish church life.

As the major lay organisation of the reunited Church, the Woman's Guild was bound to be a significant factor in the ethos and practice of early twentieth century presbyterianism, and its very existence marked a real change in church life from the 1880s. It fulfilled an important function as focus for the social life of thousands of Scotswomen of all classes, urban and rural, who enjoyed friendship, association and, for many, the expanded horizons and spirit of unity which they found in belonging to a nationwide movement. But it had to contend with increasing competition from a growing range of women's groups and recreational alternatives, particularly during the 1920s. It was also a channel for the imagination and talents of many able people, who operated both nationally and locally. But evidence suggests that it failed to shift the bulk of its membership beyond a rather conventional understanding of themselves and their responsibilities as Christian women. I doubt whether the limitations of the movement could be blamed entirely on those who exercised national responsibility. Most of them had no brief for challenging the fundamental gender divisions to which the Church of Scotland conformed, (although Lamond and some of her cohorts did express support for the ordination of women in the years leading up to Union.104). But they did have a clear desire to extend the competence, confidence and participation of women
within the Church of Scotland. However, the seepage of younger potential members, and the growing pressure on the church to compete for the recreational time of people for whom a greater range of religious and social options were becoming available, meant that the most successful Guild branches were those which adapted themselves to become providers of whist drives, picnics, outings, Cafe Chantants and other entertainments. The more narrowly religious and paternalistic model for women's service certainly retained a strong hold, but tended to age along with the membership. Yet even by the standards of its founder, Dr Charteris, there was a lack of vision. In 1934, the secretary of the Church of Scotland Home Department described the state of women's work as chaotic, and claimed:

'It has been forgotten that the first intention of the Woman's Guild was to further active service...It must resist and disown the estimate of its value to individual congregations as a money making machine...it has far greater objectives awaiting its attention, and it can yet save itself by reaching out to these.' 105

The dissenting denominations

Prior to 1900, the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church had no equivalent to the national structure of the Woman's Guild. But at congregational level the same panoply of duties was taken on by networks of individuals and associations - sometimes linked into a co-ordinating body given various designations. Enthusiasts might hire halls to run classes which were specifically evangelical and non-denominational. Others gathered for work, study or
recreation as branches of organisations such as the YWCA, Scripture Union, Girls Friendly Society, and the British Women's Temperance Association. But by the 1890s there was a general feeling abroad that the times required better trained and supervised women workers within denominational structures. Dr Corbett, in the 1894 UP Record article already cited, specifically located the need for such service not just in personal dealings, but in campaigning against the dreadful working conditions of Scotswomen as detailed in a report of the Royal Commission on Labour. The article is a good example of the prophetic but paternalistic tone adopted by social reform Christians of this period:

'Let our women who have leisure undertake the cause of their downtrodden sisters, both young and old, and champion it as they have successfully done other causes, and a change will speedily be effected, another step forward will be taken, not simply in...the emancipation of women, but in that all-round amelioration and redemption of humanity which the Gospel of love is designed and destined to achieve.'

The United Presbyterian Synod discussed women's churchwork between 1896 and 1898, but was reluctant to suggest the establishment of any new order or department, and contented itself with the suggestion that more definite associations of 'lady visitors' with Kirk Sessions should be encouraged, to

'deal almost exclusively with special classes....whose cases the elders might not be able to meet so easily or so skilfully.'

In the Free Church press, Mrs Anna Lendrum wrote in 1897:
'To share in the work has always been open to women - as collectors, Sunday School teachers, missionary workers and district visitors...Might there not be in every congregation a number of women who would perform some at least of the duties [associated with the order of deaconesses]? They are often found in city churches, but are needed just as much in smaller towns and in rural districts. At present there is very little systematic visiting by women except to collect money.'

The most distinctive women's association in the Free Church was one which reflected its strength in the Highlands and Islands, and the duty towards their impoverished cousins felt by urban lowlanders. The Ladies Highland Association, formed in Edinburgh in 1850 in response to the destitution caused by the potato famine, had as its object 'the improvement of the temporal and spiritual condition of the people, mainly through instruction of the young'. It maintained schools and employed teachers - some of whom also acted as Free Church missionaries, with the hope of going on to become ordained ministers.

The Committee on the State of Religion and Morals, reporting in 1887, discovered, in connection with women's activities, that YWCA groups were widespread, and that congregations in many fishing ports had a 'stranger women's committee, attending to cases of distress, and seeking to promote the highest good of women.' Guilds of Women and Ladies Associations were quite common, operating 'to render much help to the minister in the way of visiting the sick and informing him about special needs'. Congregational reports, such as those of the Free College Church, Glasgow, convey an impression of women's work which
matches the local picture in other denominations. Each elder's district had a 'lady collector'. There was a Young Women's Guild with an industrial (sewing) section, a literary section and a prayer meeting. In North Woodside Mission District, the work of a Bible-woman/nurse was supported by a 'ladies visiting and clothing society', which organised a Mothers' Meeting, a Girls' Club, a Young Women's industrial meeting, junior sewing class and cookery class. 112

There were many in both denominations who believed that the 1900 formation of the United Free Church marked an opportunity for the further development and organisation of women's work. The first General Assembly of the new Church agreed to authorise the formation of a Women's Home Mission Association. The new movement was inaugurated on May 29 1901, and the UFC Record noted:

'A wonderful spirit pervaded the meeting. One felt that a decided step forward was being taken, and that the great power of women's work for women in the Church was becoming conscious of itself and its responsibilities... "Women can teach, visit, listen, sympathise, weep; and so long as we can do these things, God gives us work to do."' 113

Dissenting presbyterians were concerned at the failures of their home mission work at the close of the 19th century and the seepage of active lay men working in a voluntary capacity. It is not surprising that the new denomination capitalised on a growing general belief that, in a world which was not static, but bound to change and progress, women had special qualities which would act as a unifying
force in a society which, though divided, comprised (and shared the character of) a collection of human families. The maternal love and compassion of women could, it was claimed, serve not just their immediate families, but the wellbeing of the social fabric and the preservation of religion. There is certainly more than a hint of expediency in Principal Rainy's address to the 1903 public meeting of the UFC Women's Home Mission (WHM):

'Perhaps there had been a tendency on the part of women to restrain themselves, or on the part of the Church to restrain them. There were very special reasons in the circumstances in which the Churches were now placed for such work as the Mission undertook being done. They were face to face in this country with the problem that the habits and conventions of religious life seemed, in regard to various classes of the community, to be giving way...These were circumstances in which they could not afford to go to work with one hand tied behind their back...They required all the gifts which God had given to women in order that as a united Church they might accomplish all that lay before them.'

There was more structural variation in the WHM than the Woman's Guild. It centred on Presbytery committees and representatives. They shared ideas and experiences, engaged in some co-ordinated local activity, and reported to the Central Committee. Central initiatives included work in fishing stations and at fruit farms, and in the growing Fife mining villages where there was no formal church presence. During the war, huts for female workers operated at Cromarty and Gretna.

But the emphasis in the yearly WHM reports is on work done by women in congregations, towns and districts - in Sunday
Schools, Bible Classes, Bands of Hope, Flower Missions, Dorcas Societies, study circles, New Year Temperance Cafes and the inevitable bazaars. Much effort and comment revolved around the problem of endemic drunkenness, while reports tend to emphasise the quiet, steady, nature of work designed to bring domestic warmth and comfort to bear in many circumstances, and for various client groups. Churchwomen were constantly reminded of the lack of 'home life' in the slums, and exhorted to ensure that the meetings and work they did should aim at the transformation of the home. A speaker at the 1909 Conference summed up the challenge which women's work in both denominations accepted as its *raison d'être* when he described the home as 'the root and central problem of our time.'\textsuperscript{116} Despite the high levels of involvement in such activities, congregational reports indicate that it was difficult, especially in city areas, to find enough workers for face-to-face visiting. The 1909 WHM National Conference highlighted a visitation scheme in the homes of a 'lower class' district of Dundee, conducted by what were described as 'female elders drawn from the ranks of teachers, domestic servants, clerkesses and that class known as young ladies'.\textsuperscript{117} But the 1912 Report for Lansdowne UFC in Glasgow's West End declared: 'In our Mission district many families are still without a visitor, and thus opportunities are being missed of interesting these poorer sisters in higher things.'\textsuperscript{118}

The First World War had a major impact on the range of work available to women, and the levels of responsibility they enjoyed. At local, regional and national levels,
churchwomen's organisations became the co-ordinating agencies for much voluntary support and social work.

Lansdowne Church WHM committee reported that

'We are to be the official representatives for our district of the national relief Fund, Soldiers and Sailors' Families Association, Health Association, Unemployment of Women Fund, and Invalid School.'\textsuperscript{119}

And within congregations, female members took on office-bearing responsibility - on a strictly pro tem basis - in parish and mission organisations. But even before the War, there is evidence of a growing female solidarity fostered at least in part by organised church work. Within the UFC, the Girls' Auxiliary, founded in 1901 to promote, within their own generation, an interest in the missions of the Church, soon became a lively forum for those under thirty - young and confident women who felt that the world offered them a future more interesting and substantial than that endured by their mothers and grandmothers (see chapter 3).

And for some women in the UFC especially, there was a growing unwillingness simply to accept the status quo in personal life, in church and in the nation. By 1915, some of their frustrations were being expressed in answer to questions raised by a special committee on the Recognition of the Place of Women in the Church's Life and Work. Respondents felt limited in their service for the Church, by lack of representation, responsibility, consultation or control over plans and ideals for which they were asked to labour. They believed that custom, conventional views about the subordination of women, failure to realise the
changes in women's position, and misinterpretation of Scripture were among the causes of the Church's denying them 'the capacity to become'. 120

A new mood was abroad among a significant minority of presbyterian churchwomen, as a 1914 leader in the UFC Record recognised:

'The claim of women in now beginning to make itself felt within the Church. Many are restless and dissatisfied with their position, particularly among the younger class... They have hitherto been content to do what might be called the drudgery of Church work, and it is universally admitted that they have done it with a self-abnegation, patience and thoroughness beyond praise... But apparently the time is coming when they will no longer be satisfied to do this work, fine as it is, without some ampler responsibility than they have at present... the assumption is that they will wish some sort of say in the government of the Church.' 121

The churches had responded to the perceived challenge of the reformist Women's Movement by developing structures, organisations and attitudes which suggested that without a religious gloss, the growing prominence and freedom of women would be a negative (if not dangerous) influence on society. Although women participated in voluntary church work in large numbers, and in traditional spheres of female usefulness, one outcome, in the context particularly of pre-war suffrage agitation, was a challenge to the low status, and indeed the very concept, of allotted and subordinate spheres. I shall consider the struggle for official responsibility and authority within the institutional church in chapter four.
In response more particularly to the challenge of the gulf between rich and poor, religious and unchurched, and the call to usher in the Kingdom of God, the busy-ness and competence of churchwomen in certain spheres of activity failed to have more than a palliative impact. Official presbyterian policy moved away from reliance on the individual voluntary efforts of church members towards the provision of social services on a more professional and co-ordinated basis. In 1904, the Church of Scotland's Department of Social Work was established. The full-time employment of women was vital to the success of this new approach to home mission and social work. But although the Women's Movement had pressed for, and begun to gain new opportunities for paid work, the churches remained thirled to traditional notions that to receive a salary was somehow rather unladylike. They were hopeful that a sprit of noble sacrifice would motivate those of private means to devote themselves to church work, and it was upon deaconesses, parish sisters and church sisters that this burden of expectation fell.

4.'Wise, loving sisters of the poor' – Vocation or Profession?

From the 1850s, presbyterian churches began to make use of Bible-women in their mission districts. These were mainly working class women – often widows. But the title (which was used well into the 20th century) was subject to no standardisation or control. Individual ministers and Sessions simply appointed women to take on a usually
limited range of tasks and responsibilities, with no agreed procedures for selection or conditions. Bible-women tended to combine, in their visits and meetings, practical sewing, cooking and nursing work, with simple scriptural instruction and encouragement.

Bible-women were considered useful mainly because they knew, and had easier access to, women and families of their own class. However, by the 1860s, the value of full-time 'lady missionaries' was discussed - the class distinction being significant. In an article about missions among the Edinburgh poor, the 1865 *Home and Foreign Missionary Record* declared:

'In many respects, a woman is better adapted than a man for this work. She has more tact and kindness...She must be a lady of more or less refinement, but she must thoroughly realise the universal sisterhood of female humanity...Bible-women are mainly useful in so far as they instruct in shaping and sewing at mothers' meetings.'

One of the presbyterian concerns about the existence of Bible-women was that so many were employed by non-denominational societies, and the need for more women of 'good social position and education' was noted in the 1881 digest of the Church of Scotland Life and Work Committee:

'There are gentlewomen in the church who would be glad of such employment...There has been a great recent change in the social position of nurses.'

The work of Florence Nightingale in transforming the image and social status of nursing, and the example of Pastor Fliedner who had established a training house for
deaconesses in Germany, inspired Archibald Charteris with a vision of upper and middle class women who would devote their talents and means to full time Christian service 'as the chief object of their life'.

The Order of Deaconesses, founded in 1887 as the apex of the Woman's Guild, was an interesting development for a presbyterian church. Charteris was well aware of the expanded role which a number of women had found within millenarian sects (see chap 4 p.), and the contribution of women as helpers during the Moody and Sankey campaign (which he, unlike many of his Church of Scotland colleagues, warmly supported). The novelty of the Salvation Army's 'hallelujah lassies' also made a considerable impact in urban Scotland during the 1880s. Charteris respected the Roman Catholic conventual sisterhoods which the Reformation had so ruthlessly suppressed, but which were recognised for their effective organisation of female service. His committee were anxious to allay any fears that the Church of Scotland Order would countenance the 'evils' of that system but there were undoubtedly ideological and practical similarities. Nevertheless, Deaconess House, the Edinburgh training institution established for probationers, was modelled more on the Protestant paternalistic household. An upper class woman, Alice Maxwell, was appointed as Head, but Charteris especially, and other men, fulfilled supervisory duties as benevolent and concerned _pater familias_. In the House, communal and
worship life was overlaid by a rigorous programme of lectures, Bible study and training in practical home mission work. Oversight of the Pleasance area of St Cuthbert's parish, with 3000 of the poorest slum residents in Edinburgh, was entrusted to Deaconess House, under the overall direction of Charteris. For the privilege of this exhausting life, residents had to pay £1 a week - and many subsequently worked for a lifetime entirely at their own expense.

For the although the new movement recognised the value of training and co-ordination, it remained rooted in the old ideology of women's work. The life of a deaconess, though it did not call for lifelong vows, had the character of a celibate religious vocation, and not a profession. Flora Blair of Cambuslang, in an 1892 Life and Work article, alludes to the perceived connection between this and their essentially conservative social role:

'The truth is, our Christianity has not kept pace with the population. The 'lapsed masses' are simply the 'abandoned classes'...What we need here, and what the deaconess has to give, is her religion of love; for it is only by living the true Christian life alongside the poor, ignorant and sorrowing in this world, that they will believe her about the next...That ladies of culture and position and intellectual power under the seal of the diaconate, should be willing to throw themselves into the work of bridging the deep social gulf, is one of the best signs of promise for the expansion of Christianity, for linking East and West Ends, and for the continued stability of the Church of Scotland.' \(^{126}\)

It must be said that the order did not fulfil that promise. The intention was that ladies of private means would choose to work in areas of poverty. But the small number of women
who elected to train as deaconesses chose a diversity of avenues in which to fulfil their calling. Some were unwilling to submit themselves to ministers and sessions, and found freedom and purpose in non-parochial training, administration and deputation work for the Woman's Guild. Others went abroad to serve as missionaries. They were seizing the first opportunity, however inadequate, to discharge official power as churchwomen, and exercised choice and initiative in doing so. Indeed, constructing the edifice of organised women's work depended to a large extent on a handful of deaconesses who occupied key positions in the early years of the Guild movement. The combination of class background, ability and (in some cases) previous education and experience of such women did not lend itself to the rise of a mass movement of unsalaried dedicated slum workers. There may have been women from less wealthy backgrounds willing to do the work, for a salary, but the areas which needed them most could not afford to pay for them.

So in 1893, the Home Mission Committee, at the recommendation of the Committee on the Religious Condition of the People, formed a new association to provide central funding and organisation for female missionaries. But even this new initiative hoped that it would get something for nothing:

'All who have worked in the poor parts of towns or mining districts must know what an incalculable blessing the help and presence of a good kind woman is...quietly guiding
people to help themselves instead of expecting help from others. The Women's Association for Home Mission (WAHM) has been formed to employ women more generally in ministering to the poor of Scotland. Agents may be trained or not...[we] trust that many ladies will come forward who will require and demand no renumeration.  

And from 1905, the United Free Church, (which probably had more Bible-women employed by individual congregations than the Established Church) had on its agenda the need to train, recognise and offer employment to women workers in mission and social service, arguing that:

'The Social Problem makes its appeal with peculiar force to women rich in spiritual experience, of ripe attainments in the apprehension of the Gospel message, and with ample knowledge of the conditions under which women and children of the slum population live, and calls them to consecrate their gifts and education to the service of the suffering, sorrowing and sinful'.

In 1916, the UFC regularised the training and employment of such workers, giving them official recognition and the title of Church Sister.

But in both denominations, the central resources allocated to the development of women's work were never adequate to meet the needs and requests of poor parishes. Women from poorer working- (and also middle-)class backgrounds were largely denied the opportunity to take up training and employment, while ministers continued wistfully to bemoan the ruling class refusal of vocation:

'The [United Free] Church has now responded fully to the call made to open up spheres for women's work...It was encouraged to think that there would be forthcoming ladies of means and leisure who would be glad to prepare for, and devote their lives as a calling, to work like this in definite spheres, at their own expense. That class has not come forward...This is a disappointment.'
By 1930 in the re-united Church of Scotland, there were 53 Parish Sisters (ex-WAHM) and 60 Church Sisters (ex-UFC). Although some of the 62 deaconesses served as supervisory and field staff for Woman's Guild projects, many in fact worked as Parish Sisters. Others were employed by the Church of Scotland's Social Work scheme, set up in 1904. They ran institutions to extend 'an understanding hand towards helpless and hapless womanhood'.

According to the rhetoric which poured out in praise of these women, in sermons and addresses; reports and magazines, they exemplified the height and glory of female service to God and His Kingdom. Their's was an exalted calling. But if that was so, why did such a small number seize the opportunity? I suggest that the expectations of the Church were increasingly at odds with those of women themselves.

The whole edifice of female work was built on the paradox of woman's mission as self-immolation, for 'the power of absolute self-devotion is a gift given especially to women'. Their lives would be ones 'of unselfish giving, not of self-seeking'; and their influence would be felt in 'sweetening, consoling, brightening and elevating lives that are often crushed under sore burdens'. The models for this lifestyle were Jesus himself, and especially the women of the gospels. Mary was rescued from her fallen state as the object of Roman idolatry, and became worthy of
'As Mary, most honoured of women, lived a life of obscurity and sacrifice, we remember the strange fact that she was not present when Christ broke bread...But she is with him at the last when, abandoned by his own...he bows his head...To minister in affliction was the service left for women - the last, highest and best. In this lies the glory of the deaconess.'

The Christian glorification of female self-sacrifice was, in the second half of the 19th century, supported (and for many people, supplanted) by the Social Darwinism of contemporary evolutionary theory which made it ever more difficult to counter 'the saturating influence of primary maleness or femaleness'. Scientists - who were becoming the new arbiters of orthodoxy - argued that the full development of the human species was based on the extreme specialisations in the functions of men and women. Many writers, of whom perhaps Herbert Spencer was the most influential, raided Darwin's arguments in order to draw crude parallels between biological and social systems and structures. Spencer suggested that the psychological differences between the sexes had evolved to fit men and women for the roles they played in society. In fact, Spencer's attempt to justify separate spheres as a natural and progressive development, was based on circular reasoning. He assumed, on the premise of his own cultural experience of Anglo-saxon race, class and gender roles, what he was trying to prove - that biological fitness for respective parental functions implies radical differences between the sexes. Spencer invented one phrase which encapsulated the immense popularity and ubiquity of Social
Darwinism as an expression of late Victorian and Edwardian social, political, economic and imperial ideology. He used Malthus' theory of population to argue that 'The pressure of population on the means of subsistence would lead to perfect adaptation to the conditions of existence, and to the survival of the fittest.'

Early formulations of biological determinism proposed that women were simply vehicles for reproduction, and on a lower evolutionary level than men. Later, as social concern was expressed in eugenic terms about quality of the race, there was a more positive evaluation of the essence of 'Woman' as 'Maternity'. As Henry Drummond, the Free Church populariser of Darwinism, claimed in 1889:

'It is in the endless and infinite self-sacrifices of Maternity that Altruism finds its main expression... All that is moral and social and other-regarding has come along the line of self-sacrifice.'

Even as Scriptural injunctions about the role and function of women were being challenged in the light of higher Biblical criticism, supposedly scientific theories of sex differentiation were becoming almost impossible to refute. These somehow conflated the old view about the unchanging, divinely ordained nature of womanhood, with the new idea that organic change from homogeneity to heterogeneity, guaranteed social progress. So, anti-feminists maintained, the Women's Movement was actually retrogressive in its efforts to secure equal opportunities, and was doomed to failure. As Patrick Geddes and J Arthur Thomson wrote, 'What was decided among prehistoric protozoa cannot be
annulled by Act of Parliament'.

However, many women did not attempt to refute the fashionable theories of the day, but instead seized upon a positive evaluation of the nobility and superiority of their distinctive maternal qualities as the means by which social and political, as well as domestic and religious life could be transformed. The idea of Spiritual or Philanthropic Motherhood, combined with a progressive, future-directed model of the Human Race reaching its evolutionary and religious apotheosis in a Golden Age, offered women a powerful self-image as potential saviours of a corrupt and outworn order. One Edinburgh presbyterian woman claimed in the aftermath of the Great War, and in anticipation of her newly acquired citizenship:

'The most potent force of the future in recasting the moulds of civilisation, is the expansive power of woman's idealising instinct...If the free course of her spirit be not obstructed, there is no limit to the possibilities which this power could accomplish, even in the lifetime of those who are babes among us now.'

So women were not necessarily unhappy with the rhetoric of distinctive vocation, nor with being called to emulate both Jesus Christ himself, and the women of the New Testament. Recent theological interest in the Incarnation and Christology had highlighted Jesus' radical acceptance of female friendship, worth and discipleship.

But the reality for too many deaconesses and sisters was isolation, genteel poverty, exhaustion and breakdown. And women of intellectual, practical and spiritual capacity
discovered that their position in the church was restricted, subordinate, far removed from decision-making. The framework of vocation in fact concealed the reality of exploitation and marginalisation for women through whom the church vicariously expressed the courage and compassion of the gospel. With scant resources or authority, and little useful support, they often provided the only meaningful point of contact between the urban poor and the presbyterian church. Those who depended on the work for their livelihood received a salary:

'Utterly inadequate to provide lodging, food, clothes...and insufficient to prevent anxiety from shadowing these faithful women and from depressing their brave hearts...The Church must wipe away the reproach of being a party to sweated labour.' 142

Such conditions were hardly designed to attract able young women whose expectations and opportunities had improved considerably since the 1880s, and especially those with degrees and access to professions. Attitudes towards the recognition and evaluation of women's work were changing. Even that archetypal angel of mercy and dogsbody, the minister's wife, felt able (with some apologies) to express a grievance in 1906:

'The minister has an easy time compared to his wife, who has to bear the double burden of parochial work and home duties...I heard of an old man complaining to a lady of the minister's wife. The lady listened, and then enquired what salary she received - "Salary? It's the minister's wife I'm speaking o'" - "So am I - I thought you probably paid her a salary, and so had a right to grumble she was not earning it!"'143

The churches were slow to recognise the reality that they
were in competition for the full-time trained services of women. At first, they tended to criticise professional women in secular philanthropy for being hard and mercenary - lacking the graces which they fondly believed were a feature of the old amateurism. And they appealed to women's absolute obligation to reciprocate for the liberation which Christianity had secured them, by giving their all for the sake of the Church. But as jobs in social work, medicine and public services opened up with the growth of State welfare, and extended especially during the war years, the threat began to dawn:

'The Church should take into serious consideration the fact that there is a tendency among able Christian women to seek opportunities of service in public and philanthropic activities because they find in such forms of service larger scope for the exercise of their special gifts and qualities.'

In the early years of professional education and employment for women, most opportunities were predicated on the tenacity of the domestic ideology. Career structures and the nature of work available for men and women respectively were patriarchally determined. The increasing prestige and specialisation available to men depended, especially in teaching, medicine and office-based employment, on recruiting a large workforce of subordinate, 'hands on' women without access to proper career development, equal pay, or to top decision-making positions. The Church mirrored and accentuated this pattern, with its ambivalence about the professional status, and potential threat, of deaconesses and sisters. Its theology of women's ministry
underpinned a gender hierarchy in which the subservience of female workers to male ministers and Sessions was institutionalised. So the United Free Church Moderator of the UFC told new Church Sisters in 1917,

'This, we are told, is an age in which work is passing into the hands of women...But I should like to remind you and this House that you are not being called to take the place of men or to do the work for which men cannot be found'.145

Increasing numbers of theologically literate and competent women must have agreed with Elizabeth Hewat, who in 1926 graduated in divinity from New College, Edinburgh, when she wrote:

'Can one feel that the limited, tentative action so far taken by the Church is in any way commensurate with the greatness of the change wrought by the Women's Movement? The situation, it may be said, has been adequately met by the foundation of Deaconesses and Church Sisters...[but] one cannot help feeling that such orders...are built theoretically on uncertain foundation, in so far as they ignore the basic question of the place of women in the existing framework of Presbyterian polity.

...It goes against the grain to use words like 'inferior' or 'subordinate' in connection with Church service...Yet facts are facts, and the fact remains that women in the Church hold a subordinate position. And the women of today ask why...Of one thing they are certain, and it is this, that it is not Christ who is barring the way.'146

Hewat, like others, found some measure of job satisfaction and responsibility in the mission field. She became professor of history at Wilson College, Bombay, and a church elder in the Church of South India long before that was possible in Scotland. But an increasing number of Christian women sought greater latitude and financial recompense outwith the institutional church.
5.'An Old Tale'

At the Assembly which marked the union of the two main presbyterian denominations, on October 3, 1929, Dr Norman MacLean moved that:

'The Assembly resolve to record their gratitude to God for consecrated women who have devoted their lives to the service of their Lord at home and abroad, and for the continuing development of women's work in the Church'.

As the *UFC Record* summed up succinctly,

'It was an old tale he told, of incalculable service rendered to the Church, and of her debt owed to selfless devotion.'

The one hundred years between 1830 and 1930 witnessed a significant feminisation of patriarchal Scottish presbyterianism. The religious framework which had once confined women to strictly private lifestyles offered sanction and encouragement to engage, one way or another, with the public domain, and many thousands of women were inspired, cajoled or otherwise motivated to do the work allotted to them. It provided opportunities for friendship, challenge, purpose, and the learning of new skills and confidence. It was clearly a source of power and personal liberation for individuals throughout the period. As a potential threat to the status quo, women's work was stubbornly contested by a minority of presbyterian men and women who refused to countenance each new development until it became part of the unquestioned fabric of the institution. Others accepted the changes without excitement, while some were enthusiastic promoters of new organisations and attitudes to women's work.
But the feminisation of the church must be measured largely in terms of service rendered, rather than status bestowed - as a fairly successful attempt to draw on female labour and goodwill without giving up the male monopoly on official power. There was a price to pay. Firstly, as tenacious propagandists for the domestic ideology in its more conservative forms, the presbyterian denominations eventually alienated many of their more creative and ambitious women members. This is a feature of the period which requires more detailed and careful research, but the concern was expressed with such regularity in Assembly debates, church press and committee meetings that it must have had some grounding in reality. Most may not have left the church, or given up their religious beliefs, but in practical terms their motivation and energies were directed elsewhere - in work or campaigns or ways of life which were regarded with indifference or antagonism by the religious establishment. A smaller number did appear to reject the church entirely, and discontent about the position of women was one reason.\textsuperscript{149} Despite attempts to get the church to reckon with the Women's Movement (especially 1890-1920), they felt stifled and frustrated by the limitations of traditional church women's work. By the 1920s, the more progressive male supporters of women's rights had died, or moved elsewhere, or been marginalised by the ecclesiastical retrenchment of the churches in the years before reunion, and it was an optimistic female leader who could claim, in
1928, that:

'In facing the Social Problem in Scotland, we have in our new political power, a weapon to use for the glory of God, and in the Union, a new fellowship to work for his Kingdom.'

Secondly, the utilisation of women workers failed to solve, or indeed seriously to address, the perplexing constellation of religious and social questions thrown up by industrial Scotland in the wake of the evangelical era. Their employment was based on a class-shaped and sentimental ideology of womanhood (forcefully endorsed by even the most committed proponents of Christian ethical socialism), and an abdication of collective responsibility for injustice in a Christian culture. By 1928, the efficacy of a parish sister was measured by many in terms suspiciously similar to the self-righteous individualism of 19th century evangelicalism:

'What our poor and non-churchgoing people need is religion, and they don't know it...The Gospel would be good news to them if they saw religion in action...embodied in a person. They will see in her a level of life higher than their own. They will admit its superiority and will want to be like her. But they have not the power.'

The real, as opposed to the mythological, parish and church sisters, were often much more realistic and respectful of the fortitude of the poor. They recognised common human frailty and, although often overwhelmed by the personal and structural dis-ease which they faced, did what work they could with compassion and imagination.
But by the 1930s, the strategic failure of women workers was apparent. There were criticisms that many Sisters had become little more than congregational assistants to ministers – that they were denied scope to fulfil their calling among the poor and depressed of parochial Scotland, and were also relieving Woman's Guild members of their traditional congregational responsibilities.\textsuperscript{154} As for the impression that most ordinary working people had of the volunteer church ladies who decided to take an interest in them, perhaps Chris Colquhoun, heroine of Lewis Grassic Gibbon's trilogy, \textit{A Scots Quair}, might have the last word:

'Syne Miss McAskill was asking Chris, sharp, \textit{Are you fond of social work, Mrs Colquhoun?} and Chris said \textit{Not much, if you mean by that going round and visiting the kirk congregation.}

Miss McAskill raised up her brows like a chicken considering a something lying on the ground, not sure if it was just a plain empty husk, or an interesting bit of nastiness, like. Mrs Geddes said she was very disappointed, she'd hoped they'd have Mrs Colquhoun to help – with the work of the WRI, she meant, and why didn't Mrs Colquhoun like visiting?

And suddenly Chris understood her and hated her - she minded the type, oh, well, well enough! So she smiled sweetly at her and said \textit{Oh you see, I wasn't always a minister's wife. I was brought up on a croft, and married on one, and I mind what a nuisance we thought some folk, visiting and prying and blithering about socials, doing everything to help us, or so they would think - except to get out and get on with the work!} \textsuperscript{155}

I have suggested throughout this chapter that the ideology of womanhood was not a fixed and unchanging reality, but that it was shaped and challenged by historical developments. In a variety of ways, it was espoused, subverted and circumvented by churchwomen of different classes and times. It certainly produced some tensions and
feminist offshoots. But the overall impact on the institutional presbyterian church was conservative. In all the main denominations, structures were modified to incorporate women's work without risking any fundamental changes to the patriarchal, stereotypical and bourgeois character of Scottish presbyterianism. Annie Small, ex-missionary and principal of the UFC Women's Missionary College, which was founded in 1894, was a loyal but critical and visionary member of the Church. She wrote in 1931:

'I was never a member of the Church at home until the end of my missionary service (1892) and entered therefore upon membership as a woman of considerable experience...The conditions of Church service at home amazed and shocked me...The great proportion of work in many congregations is done by women, silently and unobtrusively, without even the pretence of comradeship on the part of men...In due time the Church must realise that true and perfect comradeship must inevitably express itself through true and perfect colleagueship.' 156

It was clear to many besides Annie Small that most women workers in presbyterian churches were neither comrades nor colleagues, but a silent and largely disregarded majority,
1. **Introduction**

The rights of woman! what are they?
The right to labour and to pray
The right to comfort in distress
The right, when others curse, to bless
The right to love whom others scorn
The right to comfort all who mourn
The right to shed new joy on earth
The right to feel the soul's high worth
The right to lead the soul to God
Along the path the Saviour trod.
Such, women's rights! and God will bless,
And grant support, and give success. 1

The organisation and conduct by women of work in the foreign missions of the Church was one of the most distinctive and significant aspects of evangelical religious life in the 19th and early 20th century Anglo-Protestant world. The foreign missionary movement was inspired in part by the characteristic twin beliefs of revivalist evangelicalism - arminianism and benevolence. The corollary of the conviction that all human beings are equal in sin and guilt before God was that those who accepted the gospel and were redeemed, were also equal by virtue of their conversion. The urgent desire of evangelicals was to preach that good news, not just to individuals, but to nations. For their vision was of a Christian civilisation which would perfect and save the whole world. 'Religious and moral interests are our first concern' commented Wilberforce during a Parliamentary debate about missions, 'but of course what we recommend tends no less to promote temporal wellbeing than eternal
welfare'. The global system of slavery, which for many converted Christians was the paradigm of sin and spiritual darkness, threw into sharp focus their moral responsibility. They believed that in both anti-slavery legislation and foreign mission, Britain could act as a mighty power, not only atoning for national guilt, but vindicating Protestant Christianity as a progressive force. As such, it was not just a matter of individual faith, but of commerce, imperialism, culture and lifestyle. In Scotland, Adam Smith's free trade theories were invoked against slavery and in support of world-wide British expansion. Among the emerging artisan class were many evangelicals who were inspired by the possibility of self-improvement and of contributing to global progress - especially in the places where trade routes had planted British influence. By the turn of the 19th century, the scene was set for Britain to fulfil what became seen as a God-given task to liberate and save the world. At first, the model of conversionism which informed foreign missions accepted the potential equality of all human beings, regardless of race, and concentrated on attempts to develop indigenous communities which demonstrated the benefits of Western civilisation. Later, under the influence of Social Darwinism and high political imperialism, missionaries generally came to accept the belief that humankind was a hierarchy of races, in which the evolutionary destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race was to embody the highest form of civilisation and progress. The model which dominated late
19th and early 20th century mission work was trusteeship-based on the idea that people of other races were inferior and needed to be looked after.\textsuperscript{3}

Scotswomen who participated in the foreign missionary movement initially did so because of their relationship to the first male missionaries (though wives and sisters very often shared their sense of vocation). But their involvement fairly quickly came to be based on the distinctive premise of 'women's work for women'. Under that banner, women were recruited as pioneers to demonstrate and inculcate the blessings of Christian civilisation to pagan, infidel or savage females. Later, and in much larger numbers, they shared in the perceived Providential white burden of educating and caring for Indian, African and Caribbean women and children under colonial rule. For the hundreds of presbyterian Scotswomen who ventured beyond their native shores, and the many thousands who developed a complex structure and culture of support at home, the foreign missionary movement represented the logical (and glamorous) outcome of Woman's Mission. I concluded the previous chapter with a quotation from Annie H Small, in which she draws a clear distinction between her negative view of Scottish church life, and her positive experience as a Free Church missionary in India.

In the same article, she wrote:

'In the mission community we were a team – we aimed at coordination and the balanced interrelation of all departments, guided by constant consultation.' \textsuperscript{4}
Small valued the co-operation and authority which she implies were enjoyed by women in the field, and mission work certainly offered women opportunities for personal and professional development and autonomy which would have been unimaginable at home. But the poem at the head of this chapter, used by Emma Pitman Raymond in her widely read *Heroines of the Mission Field*, published in 1880 at the start of the massive expansion in women's foreign missions, suggests that the cult of true womanhood had a central ideological role in the development of the movement. 'The Rights of Woman' offers, as the context for women's missionary endeavour, an implicit rejection of the claims of the contemporary Women's Movement, in favour of a classic exposition of self-abnegating religious service.

In fact, from the outset in the 1830s, the doctrine of separate spheres was a fundamental aspect of the missionary enterprise. As a basic tenet of the civilisation which was to be exported around the world, it was bound to be. Women were exhorted, in the light of their elevated status as Christians, to take responsibility for spreading the gospel to their degraded sisters in the East. Only women could fulfil this obligation, for only they could witness effectively, by teaching and example, to secluded or savage females. And the task came to be regarded as crucial, for without women, converted and domesticated according to the Protestant Christian ethos, heathen societies could never be civilised in the image of the evangelising nations. The domestic ideology, which constrained so many women in
Scotland, was also the basis of outreach and emancipation proclaimed by missionary women. And Scotswomen in increasing numbers accepted and gloried in their special and distinctive task.

The foreign mission field in one sense offered quintessential work for evangelical Victorian women – the epitome of their God-given role as 'Angel in the World'. But the complex dynamics of race, gender and class in very diverse places, times and circumstances challenged and frequently undermined the very ideology which informed that work.

The domestic ideal was, I have argued, regarded generally as unchanging, essential, ordained by God and nature. Exposure to different beliefs and practices in the South disturbed and shocked Scottish missionaries, who found it difficult to come to terms with men and women acting counter to bourgeois Western mores and values. In Southern Africa, for example, men did all the sewing whilst women engaged in hard agricultural and construction work:

'Women of Nyasaland were not only ignorant of women's work, but required to be taught how to act generally. They were deficient in washing and household work, and many were uncleanly, lazy, disobedient, deceitful and untruthful.'

Most missionaries proceeded on the unquestioned assumption that Christianity in its Anglo-Protestant form represented the highest development of civilisation, and that their duty was to inculcate that in all aspects of life, including dress, marriage roles and morals. In this respect
their attitude to people of other races and habits was similar to their view of Scottish working people who did not conform to a 'respectable' lifestyle. But the fact that domestic arrangements and structures were relative and culturally conditioned led to some interesting consequences in situations where the gospel they preached was not embedded in the social fabric, but was at every level a strange intruder.

1. In Scotland the domestic ideology was a conservative ideal which in various ways exercised control over women's lives. By contrast, it represented a radical attack on other cultures. Women who, at home, were expected to exercise a cohesive and unifying influence were, in the field, agents for social change. The spheres in which they contested might seem genteel and unspectacular - schools and dispensaries and homes - but they brought values which directly collided with prevailing norms in Africa and Asia. The confrontational role was a novel one for Scottish women, and some revelled in a militant enthusiasm for transforming the lives of indigenous women.

2. If women missionaries were engaged in racialist and cultural imperialism, they were also exposed to the possibility of cultural assimilation. Involvement in places so far removed, in every respect, from Scotland, provoked in some a critical perspective which enabled recognition of the good and valuable in other societies,
and a deprecation of what was inappropriate, arrogant or unjust in missionary or imperialist practice. Mary Slessor, an ex-mill girl from Dundee, rejected a pattern of mission life modelled on bourgeois conventions, in favour of a poor West African lifestyle. Her bare feet, bare head, cotton shift and mud hut were external symbols of an intelligent understanding and solidarity. A deputation from Scotland recommended that she continue thus, 'because she prefers this manner of life to being associated with another white person on a station'. Although the working class Slessor was atypical because she seemed to feel less at home with the stifling manners and attitudes of compound life than in her down-to-earth dealings with local tribes, others were also challenged by the conjunction of two cultures. Annie Small recalled:

'As between Britain and India in their mutual relation I was on the side of India every time...I criticised hotly our British restlessness, acquisitiveness, self-assertiveness; our talk of commerce while intending conquest, our attempts to gloss over our not very admirable ambitions with a hypocritical profession of desire for the good of India...Our national manners aroused my fierce indignation also. When one heard a lordly young Britisher issuing his orders, often in execrable Urdu, with insulting epithets, to an Indian double his age, and probably with twice his brains...shame took hold of me.'

Others were content to replicate a Scottish way of life in mission stations, and never challenged (even if they recognised) the conceptual or political framework for their endeavours. But it is possible to argue that the more imaginative and critical women at least raised some important questions about the nature and value of the civilisation they were exporting. On the whole, though,
even missionaries who developed an appreciation of, and affection for other places, languages and cultures remained publicly loyal to both church and state.

3. Missionary women themselves made a direct impact upon those with whom they came into contact – both on mission stations and in local communities. As examples of the message they sought to convey about the place and role of women in Christian life, they were confusing, to say the least. Whatever the circumstances they might have left in Scotland, in the mission field their primary function was neither strictly domestic nor maternal. Many were adventurous, independent, competent and indomitable. Even those who were more conventional and modest in their aspirations presented a puzzle to people who were told that the highest duty for a woman was to provide moral and domestic support for a husband and family. The language used to describe women missionaries in tributes and biographies is usually quite striking in its evocation of individuals who displayed, not just the traditional 'feminine' attributes of the time, but also so-called 'masculine' qualities. The American theologian, John B Cobb Jr, in attempting to explain his surprise at realising the extent to which patriarchal society has undermined the self-confidence and completeness of women, has written:

'I believe the deepest reason...is that the image of woman I formed in childhood was based on what I now see as quite a special case: Protestant women missionaries...Such women were not the sort who derived their identity from relationships with men. Presumably they required more
courage for their solitary adventures carving new institutions in distant lands than did the men who rarely went without wives. Several such women were part of my childhood. 8

The kind of integrated personalities of women who demonstrated independence, compassion, love and courage, and were rewarded with great fondness and respect by the communities in which they served, were powerful countersigns to the rhetoric of separate spheres. Even missionary wives did not always conform to the conventional pattern of domestic relationships. They typically participated actively in mission work, while many of their domestic and childcare responsibilities were delegated to servants within the station and relatives or schools back in Scotland.

4. By the 1880s, as the number and range of opportunities for female missionaries grew, and as they became the dominant numerical force in the field, it became increasingly difficult to maintain any meaningful lines of demarcation between male and female missionary spheres. In 1901, J W Jack argued in his book Daybreak in Livingstonia that appropriate roles were clearly defined:

'To men belongs the task of opening a way for the gospel, making straight in the desert a highway for God, striking vigorous blows at the citadel of heathenism, superintending various agencies, planting the standard of the gospel, and accomplishing other deeds of strength and wisdom. But to women belongs the quiet, patient labour in the homes of natives, striving to win the hearts of wives and mothers, and to gain the love of the children. Let women hear the tender call of Christ to the foreign field!' 9

But Jack's picture of the male shock troops of muscular
Christianity backed up by the female devotion to sentimental family values was already, by then, based more on wistful nostalgia than on accurate description. For women were already doing all that he listed as male duties - in exploration, education, preaching and teaching, construction and medical service - as well as the more traditional women's work. By the turn of the century they were in the vanguard of a social service, rather than a strictly conversionist, approach to foreign missions. And in 1910, the Report of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference went so far as to claim that the slogan, 'women's work for women' was a fallacy, which 'has served to narrow the conception of the mission of Christian womanhood to the great loss of the whole movement. A vision of the place of women in the building up of the whole fabric of national life, and a statesmanlike conception of the way to realise that vision, is urgently demanded.'

5. Missionaries were white women. They entered the field as symbols of a white culture which was always supremacist and became increasingly racist. Their relationships with non-white individuals and structures were always affected, if not wholly determined, by these realities. In particular they had to confront assumptions about the 'essential nature' of Woman with the reality of fragmented and highly differentiated female experience. Initially that was explained by reference to indigenous savagery or heathenism, but latterly many missionaries accepted the widespread theory that women of colour (especially in Africa) were congenitally inferior and in need of special
kinds of care, treatment and education. By the 1880s, under the influence of racial theory developed by writers such as Herbert Spencer and Benjamin Kidd, it became accepted wisdom that so-called higher races - especially those of northern Europe and their American descendants - were naturally superior to others, over whom the Anglo-Saxons were destined to expand and rule. On the other hand, there were also female agents who went out of their way to affirm the equality and potential of the women they encountered, and extended them opportunities (based on the conversionist model) which were not always available to women back in Scotland. Their vision of what would liberate the women they worked with was largely shaped by the project of Christian civilisation, but was not always totally insensitive to local circumstances and traditions. The relationship between class, culture and race in female missions was always complex and changing. But on the whole, it tended to be based on the fallacy that the white, bourgeois model of womanhood was normative - the standard according to which the practical worth and morality of all others would be judged.

6. Changes in the field affected, and were reflected in, changes at home. The female missionary agencies were the first and in many respects the most important large scale presbyterian organisations for women. They did not always enjoy an uncomplicated or harmonious relationship with their workers, but together they constituted a network of
information and support, which received regular injections of fresh ideas and challenges. The women at home, too, gradually developed new skills and confidence as their operation expanded along with their global perspective. They played a key role in the overall missionary movement, as the main fundraisers, collectors and publicists for general (ie male) as well as specifically female work. But their treatment by the church at large, and certainly by the power structures was often patronising or contemptuous. Within the three main presbyterian denominations, different approaches were taken to the organisation and employment of women missionaries. Different incidents and developments suggest that the extent to which it was an advantage for women to operate independent of church courts and male leaders, was never a settled question. But there was certainly political and literary capital in maintaining the rhetoric of a uniquely female missionary task, even when missionary reports told a different story.

The tensions which arose wherever realities collided with the ideology which had provided the women's missionary movement with its raison d'être, were neither progressively nor completely resolved during the period 1830-1930. One recurring problem was the question of authority and responsibility within mission stations. Some notable women learnt to their cost the acceptable limits of female assertiveness within the hierarchy of a mission. Others enjoyed the support of more flexible colleagues and
committees. In any case, records reveal a level of bitterness and acrimony in mission politics (both within stations and between missionaries and home committees) which might have shocked supporters for whom missionaries were heroes and heroines of the faith. One notorious example which did become public was the Calcutta Mission Scandal of the early 1880s (of which I shall have more to say). A leader in *The Scotsman* of May 31, 1884, concluded that printed reports always gave a rosy impression of pious missionaries and effective management:

'It has often been suspected that behind these conventional pictures there was another aspect of mission affairs bearing a closer resemblance to imperfect human nature. Mr Hastie and Dr Scott have beetween them rent the veil, and the seamy side of missions is revealed to the profane view of heathen at home and of mild Hindoo.'

The story of Scottish presbyterian women and foreign missions is complex and fascinating. It offers valuable insights into a range of female responses to the potent ideas of women's sphere and mission as those were tested and preached in Scottish and foreign contexts. There is a huge resource of printed and archive material awaiting a much more intensive study than I have conducted. What follows is simply a general survey of the origins, development, opportunities and difficulties encountered by the movement within the Scottish churches. By referring to individual examples and notable events, I hope to give substance to my assessment of the movement's central significance in the changing relationship between women and presbyterianism.
2. The origins of a Scottish women's missionary movement

'Come, as many as you will...the fact is appalling, that none will come over to aid us! The cry has been made with tears and supplications.'

So wrote Margaret Bayne, wife of Dr John Wilson, who had gone to Bombay with the Scottish Missionary Society in 1828. It was the inspiration of the work she did during the seven years she survived before an early death in India, and the appeal made to her two sisters in Scotland, which led to the establishment, in 1837, of the Edinburgh Ladies Association for the Advancement of Female Education in India.

In the early years of the 19th century, pioneering Scots missionaries went to Africa and India with non-denominational societies. They often took wives or sisters with them. And from the beginning, women supported this new movement with money and prayers. As early as 1797, a female correspondent to the Scots Missionary Magazine was calling for a more active involvement in societies:

'Why are females alone excluded from all ostensible share in these labours of love? It cannot be denied, that some among them possess both ability and inclination suited to the purpose...The common accounts of receipt and expenditure, together with minutes of proceedings etc might, I think, be easily accomplished by females in the middle classes of life; and I doubt not some of their married brethren would kindly assist in any matter of difficult emergency.'

In 1800, the Northern Missionary Society, based in Inverness, established a Women's Society which raised and allocated its own funds, and organised meetings, sermons...
and collections. By 1820, the Missionary Magazine was carrying reports of ladies auxiliary associations in towns like Peebles and Lanark.

However, it was not during these years of inter-denominational activity, but after the Church of Scotland had sanctioned foreign mission work, that the direct participation of women as agents in their own right began. As model and inspiration, Margaret Wilson was an impressive character. She was an exceptionally gifted woman who had enjoyed the unusual benefits of an education to the highest standard (she joined in classes at Aberdeen University for several months). In the strange, often hostile climate and culture of Western India, she attempted to make full use of her talents. The biography written by her husband—a four hundred page eulogy of her intellectual and spiritual capacities—conveys a vivid, if verbose, impression of her achievements. In the funeral sermon he preached in 1835, Dr Wilson summed up Margaret's contribution to the pioneer mission:

'The difficulties arising from superstition, custom and corrupted feeling, which are in the way of female education, she found to be numerous and formidable, but she resolved to encounter them...She instituted and organised six female schools; she trained teachers; she visited scholars and parents at home. She taught several adult females to read. During my long journeys she managed, with much fidelity and prudence, the general concerns of the mission, and she always freed me from many secular cares connected with its business. She was its principal attraction to many native visitors. She wrote several striking papers in native periodicals—and did much translating and writing in Marathi...Amidst all these personal exertions, she ever communicated with me the most valuable counsel, and the most exciting encouragement in my work.' 15
Margaret pleaded with her two sisters to join her in her work. Instead, they travelled to India after her death, and at their own expense, to continue her labours. Captain St Clair Jameson, a Scottish soldier in India who had admired Margaret Wilson's efforts, wrote early in 1837 to a female friend in Fife:

'I am in hopes soon to send you a very strong appeal on behalf of native female education in Bombay which, I doubt not, your favoured sex in general, appreciating the advantages they possess over the degraded females of the East from their moral and religious education, and the benefits of institutions which owe their rise to Christianity, will respond with feelings of sympathy and actions corresponding to its importance. Some few friends of the cause here are in hopes of getting ladies in Edinburgh to form themselves into an association to aid in promoting Female Education in Western India, and it is believed that the fact of the Misses Bayne leaving to take up labours...will have an effect on the public mind.'

A meeting held on March 8 1837 filled the Queen Street Religious Institution, and several men addressed the gathering. A committee of twenty-two New Town ladies was formed, with male office-bearers, to further the aims of the new organisation. These included

'To give a religious and general education to the Females of India. For this purpose it shall raise funds, procure information, form auxiliary branches throughout the country, and procure the services of well qualified teachers. These teachers shall be appointed by the General Assembly's Committee, and shall be under the superintendence, and their operations under the control, of the missionaries of the Church of Scotland in India.'

In 1839 the Glasgow Ladies Association for promoting female education in Kaffraria was formed, because 'women accustomed to savage life needed much Christian training, which only Christian women could give, to fit them for
their proper place in home and Church'. Unlike the Edinburgh Ladies Association, it was not connected with the Church of Scotland, and it remained autonomous until 1865, when it entered into partial union with the Edinburgh Ladies Society in connection with the Free Church.

These societies were among the first in the English speaking world to organise and support female agents. They preceeded North American initiatives by thirty years, and according to many sceptics, they were indeed premature, for the state of Indian and African society, they argued, was incompatible with the employment of 'unprotected females'. They must either marry or die. In the first tentative years of the new venture, one or other of these fates befell most of the pioneer agents. Those who succumbed to matrimony were automatically deemed to have resigned, though most married other missionaries and in fact continued their labours unpaid. Whereas it was expected that male missionaries would enjoy the companionship and support of marriage, females were required to repay their expenses if they married within five years of appointment. Thus at an early stage, the principle was established that those who were to teach heathen women about the blessings and family ideals of Christianity were themselves to be single and childless.

Another early difficulty for the Ladies' Associations was finding women who were physically and mentally suitable for
the work to be done. There were complaints from India that the Scottish Ladies Association (SLA) had engaged 'persons quite unacquainted with any practical system of tuition, and who have even in some instances displayed little tact and indeed no great inclination or fixed resolution to acquire a method.'19

The SLA responded by introducing new rules. These included the requirement that all candidates should answer in writing a set of approved questions; that they should produce medical certificates of good health and fitness for an eastern climate; that they must possess or acquire a knowledge of schoolkeeping, and take preparatory training as required by the committee. It is hardly surprising that well qualified candidates were so rare, when the general standard of female education in Scotland at the time was lamentably far removed from that enjoyed by Margaret Bayne, and Normal Schools (which trained teachers) had only recently made training and certification available to women.

Problems in the field were compounded by hindrances at home. As an 1885 historical sketch recalls:

'The ladies in 1837 had but a faint idea of the difficulties in India...But they were sure to be aware of obstructions to their work at home. The Church of Scotland was in the midst of the ten years conflict. The ordinary scale of Christian liberality was far down. Dr Chalmers had inaugurated his Church extension scheme at £50,000, and Dr Duff was pleading for Foreign Mission among men. In fact the ladies, at the outset, got little countenance from the Church generally.'20

Indeed, they could not raise enough funds even for the modest demands made upon them from India. They were widely
suspected of undermining the effect and prosperity of the Church's officially sanctioned mission schemes. All the public and executive offices of the Association were carried out by men; but even the tasks of fundraising and publicity among women were new and uncomfortable for many of the female members.

Nevertheless, they persevered, and much had been learnt by those concerned with women's foreign missions when the 1843 Disruption divided the SLA. Most members of the Association joined the Free Church, and from 1843 two organisations existed - the continuing Scottish Ladies Association for the Advancement of Female Education in India, and the new Female Society of the Free Church of Scotland for Promoting the Christian Education of Females in India.

3. The development of women's work in the Scottish Mission Fields

'It is to improve, to teach, and if possible to convert [Hindu women] that is the object of the SLA - to make them obedient daughters, better wives and fitter mothers - and what philanthropist can gainsay such a purpose?'

In the years following the Disruption, women served in Scottish mission fields under the auspices of the three main presbyterian denominations of Scotland. Until the 1880s, the numbers of single female agents were small. Much of the work attempted was fitful, or effectively sustained by missionary wives and locally appointed
workers. The Church of Scotland Association had particular difficulty in raising adequate funds and finding candidates from within the denomination. Its efforts were concentrated in Calcutta, Madras and Poona. The Free Church Society, which took with it most of the missionary enthusiasts after 1843, was able to employ more workers - by 1880 it had appointed a total of fifty agents. From 1865 the partial union of Glasgow and Edinburgh Ladies Societies to form the 'Society for Female Education in India and South Africa' widened the field of operations and achieved General Assembly recognition as being 'in immediate connection with the Foreign Missions of the Free Church'. But it too struggled to raise sufficient funds, which remained separate from those collected (largely by women) for the Assembly's own Scheme. Women who served on behalf of the United Presbyterian Church were under the direct jurisdiction of the Synod's Mission Board, which in 1881 itself established a Zenana Mission. Prior to that, there were no single women in India, and only a handful in Africa. Only from 1886 did women participate directly in the management of female agents employed by the Board.

From 1880-1930, there was a tremendous expansion in opportunities for women missionaries, as the denominations finally adopted, officially or otherwise, a policy of having female agents employed at every Scottish mission station, and as new fields were opened up in parallel with high political imperialism. By 1930, in the newly united
Church of Scotland, there were 256 single women missionaries (plus 193 wives, many using professional skills) at work throughout India, Africa, China and the Caribbean. The total male agency was 253. I shall consider this notable feminisation of the foreign missionary movement, and its impact at home and abroad, under three general headings: the work which women did; the principles and ethos which justified and promoted that work; issues of responsibility and authority in the field.

1. Changing tasks and responsibilities in different mission fields

The titles of the original female missionary societies indicate that the first perceived need for work among women was educational. This was less a matter of intrinsic concern for their improvement, and more to do with their influence over men who were seen as the shapers and controllers of society. Their socialising role as wives and mothers was recognised. As an article in the Church of Scotland's Missionary Record claimed;

'It will be in vain that we make Christian converts of men, whilst girls grow up in heathenism. Unquestionably, one of the chief causes of moral degradation of Asiatic, in comparison with European society, is the miserable state of ignorance in which women have been brought up.'

Scottish women used different approaches, with varying success, to combat that 'miserable state of ignorance'.

Initially, the most fruitful method was the establishment of institutions for outcastes and orphans, for such girls were not subject to the seclusion, early marriage, and
caste laws which determined the lives of caste Hindus and Muslims. Margaret Wilson's bazaar schools in Bombay provided the nucleus of a Christian boarding school—the first for girls in Western India. Others were established during the 1840s in Madras, Poona and Calcutta. They offered the best hope of developing a full programme of elementary, and in due course higher, education. By the 1880s, Free Church boarding schools offered a curriculum up to university entrance. One Calcutta student, Chundra Mukki Bose, was the first female MA graduate in India. Orphans could also be given teacher training, for, as Christina Rainy pointed out in 1887:

'All missions are beset with particular difficulties in procuring and employing young women as teachers. Old maids are a Christian institution not yet tolerated by the natives of India. Even Christian parents deem it a disgrace not to have daughters married by twenty.' 23

A more daunting challenge, then, was to confound centuries of Hindu tradition and rigid social structures. Mr Anderson of the Free Church Mission in Madras argued in 1843:

'If caste girls are not reached, every scheme that aims at India's amelioration must in the long run prove abortive. Pariah girls may be obtained in any numbers.' 24

And it was in Madras that the first day school for caste girls in India was established, by Mrs Braidwood of the Free Church. Attendance was induced by the offer of a farthing a day to each pupil, but objections and wild rumours greeted its appearance. By 1847 there were over four hundred pupils, but the worst suspicions of high caste
Hindu society were confirmed when that year five girls became baptised Christians. There was violent local opposition; the girls had to come to live in the mission house, and with them began the Christian Girls Boarding School. But the day school eventually recovered, expanded, and within twenty years was charging fees instead of offering inducements. By 1870 there were six schools in the city, and others in the surrounding district, run under Free Church Society auspices. Similar efforts to create and maintain viable caste education were repeated in other Indian stations, and indigenous opinion became less hostile. In Calcutta, an 1861 editorial in the Indian Field declared:

'We congratulate Dr Duff and the country on the success of his school to educate the Hindu females. When we see the effect of education on these young creatures — how it has already made their eyes to sparkle and their countenances to beam with lively intelligence, and thereby added even not a little to their natural graces...we cannot tell how our heart yearns, in the intense longing for the universal enlightenment of the Hindu female mind.'

Scottish presbyterian women were among the key pioneers and providers of female school education in India. It was a notable achievement that within sixty years, a few Indian women had moved from a position of total, enforced ignorance, to the possibility of university education and professional training before women in Scotland had achieved those goals. But by 1881, only one out of every 849 girls had access to any form of instruction. Miss Kind, a SLA agent in Bombay, wrote of the main cultural obstruction which hindered the value of schools:
'What I deplore is, that the girls, on account of early marriages, are left such a very short time under the influence of Christian education.'

Although the system whereby girls, who could be betrothed as young as three and commonly by the age of twelve, were thenceforth obliged to live in the total seclusion of their in-laws' household zenana, was not as universal as Western writers made out, it did present a formidable obstacle to the development of female education and evangelisation in India. The Free Church Society in Calcutta, and later the Church of Scotland Association in Poona (one of the centres of Brahmanism), were among the pioneers of organised zenana missions.

As early as 1840, Rev Thomas Smith on Calcutta had published an article proposing a plan for zenana education, which he submitted to his local Missionary Conference. Back in Scotland, the fathers and brethren of the General Assembly found it impossible to countenance such a scheme. In 1853, Mr and Mrs Fordyce arrived as agents of the Free Church Ladies Society. For two years, they worked alongside Smith to plan and publicise zenana missions, which they considered the only realistic way to stimulate and sustain widespread and effective female education. Smith offered to introduce Mrs Fordyce and a colleague, Eliza Toogood, to 'a few native gentlemen who would admit ladies to their zenanas to teach their wives and daughters'. In 1855, the two women made their first visits into a strange and
previously impenetrable world:

'Many thought we were attempting the impossible, but we told ourselves, "this is the beginning of a new era for India's daughters."' 28

All this was reported to the Ladies Committee in Edinburgh, but not by way of seeking sanction or funding. The whole business was viewed in Calcutta as a doubtful experiment, and the Fordyces felt they could not ask for donations until they could claim some success. But in September 1855, the Bengal Missionary Conference heard a report of seven months work by Miss Toogood and Isabella Marr. The following resolution was passed unanimously:

'They rejoice in the hopeful commencement of the zenana school scheme, both as a sign of progress and as a NEW MEANS for the elevation of women in India.' 29

Similar schemes were organised in different places by agents from different Western societies, and Scots were happy to take their share of the credit for initiation. Zenana work quickly came to be promoted, not only as a new epoch for Indian women, but as the distinctive form of women's missionary work, for which new money from Scotland ought to be forthcoming. 'Zenana' became synonymous with any work done by female missionaries, and the United Presbyterian Church used the word in the title for its new department, established as a committee of the Mission Board in 1881.

By the 1880s, a flood of sentimental literature was in circulation, romanticising zenana missions, emphasising the
vast gulf between the blessings imparted upon women by Christianity, and the dreary oppression endured by their Indian sisters; and promoting the work as the key to heathen conversion and civilisation.

The reality was somewhat different. Annie Small, for example, held a low opinion of such publications, and the foolish or ludicrous impressions and questions which arose from them. Zenana work was often experienced as tedious and extremely frustrating. The basis on which entry to households was negotiated placed workers in a weak position. As Mary Pigot wrote of Church of Scotland efforts in Calcutta:

'The desire for some culture among their women is so keen that, notwithstanding the rooted prejudices against Christianity, the Bible is tolerated for the sake of secular education.' And in Poona, 'Instruction is given in anything, as long as the Christian religion is accepted as part of it.'

Reading between the lines of letters and reports, the impression conveyed is of male caste Hindus taking advantage of missionary fervour to provide the women in their households with a gloss of the Western-style education and refinement which, in many circles, was becoming something of a status symbol. Christian instruction was tolerated, graciously (especially in the form of singing) or otherwise, but as an evangelistic method, its efficacy was far from proven. Women who were known at home as zenana missionaries in fact were likely to be spending only part of their time in direct visiting and
teaching of women in their homes. From the 1880s, as the institutional base and commitments of each mission station grew, administration and superintendence of schools and teacher training facilities were more common tasks for European agents. Likewise, the zenana work was increasingly delegated to Indian Biblewomen, who after all had distinct linguistic and cultural advantages in prosecuting the task — although their Scottish employers were constantly concerned that their teaching and witness should impart the right message. In general it is difficult to find evidence of zenana converts who were able in turn to Christianise their households. But the missions persevered, and into the 20th century, as school education became more acceptable and accessible for girls, the Scottish societies certainly viewed zenana work as primarily evangelistic rather than educational. But one clear consequence of this more intimate contact between European and Indian women was the most interesting and consequential development in the field —female medical missions.

The 1929 book, The Work of Medical Women in India, describes the circumstances which led to this new departure, which was radical in its implications for both Indian and Western women:

'Most [pioneers] came to India as zenana missionaries, and scattered in different parts of the country, came to the same horrifying realisation of the fatal and almost unspeakable tragedies, which were common events in the zenanas they visited. They saw their pupils dying in childbirth without any advice other than that of the dirty and ignorant old dai. They saw precious babies snatched away by pneumonia or dysentry, untreated, because their mothers could not take them to a male doctor. They saw the
women sinking into chronic illhealth and fatal disease unrelieved, but when advised to go to the hospital, holding up their hands with horror at the idea of consulting a man...
Medical books were begged from friends and the first furlough was often the opportunity of haunting hospitals...
Unfortunately, there were not many facilities in those days of the sixties and seventies for giving medical knowledge to women...Institutions began to spring up where a short training in medicine and midwifery was given to missionaries.  

Evidence from Scotland bears out this general picture of women responding in piecemeal and practical ways to perceived and urgent need. The *Free Church Monthly*, March 1889, gives an account of its medical missions in India.

In 1860, Mrs Smith began zenana work in Serampore, but 'sad experience led her to develop into a medical missionary to women, as far as that was possible without qualification. What she witnessed, and often in vain tried to relieve, can be told only to women...Mrs Smith gave up her little leisure to plead for 127 million women of India — that they should have Christian physicians of their own sex.'

Dr Alexander Duff, the pioneer and leader of the Free Church missionary movement, was willing to concede the importance of medical work, but more ambiguous about whether women should actually be entitled to full qualification as doctors:

'If a female missionary knew something of medical science and practice, readily would she find access, and while applying medical skill to the healing of the body, would have precious opportunities of applying the balm of spiritual healing to the worst diseases of the soul. Would to God that we had such an agency ready for work! Soon might India be moved in its innermost recesses!'  

In fact the first Scotswoman to take a full medical course and qualify for entry onto the Medical Register was Jane Waterston, who trained between 1874 and 1879 with the
intention of working in Central Africa. She was scathing about the willingness of the Ladies Society to employ agents without full training:

'I simply detest the fashion in which the Edinburgh coterie does its work. They train so-called medical missionaries at some expense and send out agents to India...But when a woman works for some years on a pittance and then spends hundreds on a complete, instead of a sham medical training, and at the end is a woman with considerable knowledge of life as well as of Mission work, instead of a raw girl with no experience of any kind, there are no funds to send her out. R awness, greenness and cheapness are the things they want, and very dear they have proved to be.' 35

The Free Church never officially utilised Waterston’s skills as a physician (see below). She spent most of her long life as a private practitioner in Cape Town, where she was involved in and honoured for a range of medical and public services.

The first female doctor in India was an American who began work in 1869. At that time it was not possible for women to gain medical qualifications and licences in Britain, but the campaign for these was just beginning. The fact that missionaries argued for women doctors on the grounds of service, benevolence and evangelistic opportunity (and not in terms of personal and professional fulfilment) no doubt helped secure the support of many church people in the struggle for female medical education during the 1870s and 1880s. That is certainly the tone of the 1889 FCM article:

'Long opposed by teaching and licensing bodies in the UK, Christian women yearning to relieve the misery, bodily and spiritual, of millions of their sisters in the East, were driven to America or Switzerland for training...Now the first woman medical missionary has been sent by the Ladies Society to Madras.' 36
And although women continued to be offered, and to embark on, para-medical training, all of the Scottish societies eventually agreed with Dr Lowe of the Edinburgh Medical Missionary Society, about the necessity for missions to be headed only by fully qualified physicians:

'It is most inadvisable to send out partially trained ladies to undertake medical mission work on their own responsibility...the heathen to whom they are sent have the right to expect skilful aid, and especially in times of emergency when all other help has failed.'

Dr Letitia Bernard, who went to work for the Church of Scotland SLA at Poona in 1884, was the first representative of the new movement. She was followed by presbyterian women - Matilda Macphail, Agnes Henderson, Jean Grant and others - whose impact, as first generation female doctors, was considerable in Scotland as well as India. A tribute to Dr Macphail at the end of her long career in Madras recalled that

'Her care for those whom she attended was without bound...Government doctors, members of the Indian Medical Service, have spoken with glowing admiration of her marvellous powers...Time and again Dr MacPhail has been consulted by Government; in every endeavour to promote the medical education of women, she has taken an important part...Her medical skill was so highly esteemed that exercise of it took her to the furthest parts of the Presidency.'

That commendation gives some indication of the range and scope of opportunities available to medical women working as missionaries. Such pioneers not only practised medicine, but established dispensaries, raised funds to build hospitals, and occupied prominent positions of responsibility. Scottish doctors were particularly noted
for their training of nurses, and for the encouragement they gave to local women who wished to study medicine.\textsuperscript{39}

Female medical missions quickly became the strategy in which immense hope was placed, as offering an effective entrance into the confidence and obligation of those women and their families who received treatment. Medical work represented perhaps the greatest cultural challenge to Indian tradition, and yet its effects (notwithstanding many misunderstandings and unrealised expectations) were generally positive. So female physicians were particularly highly regarded, both in the field, and also at home, during a period which witnessed the steadily increasing dominance of women as the major mission agency.

In India, the major stages in the development of women's work were determined by response to a highly complex and religious society, under a well established colonial regime. In Africa, the main concern appears to have been to challenge what was regarded as the unrestrained savagery of tribal society. As early as 1839, the Glasgow Missionary Society had declared that, by evangelism and Christian education, they hoped to

'raise the female character above mere animal propensities and brute labour, to induce in them the habits of industry and the wearing of modest and suitable clothing, to make them acquainted with their high destinies in another world, and so to give them a sense of self-respect.' \textsuperscript{40}

The outward appearance, lifestyle, and apparent subjugation
of women in West and Southern Africa certainly presented a challenge to the earnest Victorian women who first ventured into the 'dark continent'. With their voluminous clothing, bourgeois conventions, and all the genteel trappings of the domestic ideology in their baggage, the task they set themselves seems as enormous in retrospect as it must have seemed at the time. When Mrs Waddell and Euphemia Miller of the United Presbyterian Church first arrived at Old Calabar in 1849, 'and saw the unclothed state of the women, as well as their manners and customs, such was the shock to their sensibility, that the two devoted women fell into each others arms in an agony of tears. The elder lady was the first to regain calmness, and comforted her young companion by reminding her, "We have come to raise them up from their degraded state; let us be strong and labour."' 41

The juxtaposition of such opposing images, and the aim which gave such missionary women heart, has led to accusations that they were simply agents of crude cultural imperialism. Certainly women who found their way to Africa were (at least in the first generation) lamentably ill-prepared, and rarely questioned the assumed superiority, not just of Christianity, but of Western values and lifestyles. Nor were they in the habit of criticising the principle of British rule. But they responded with courage and compassion to what they observed, and were honest champions of women against practices which by any standard were cruel. In West Africa they confronted polygamy, slavery, twin deaths, wife-fattening and other customs which oppressed women, by using a range of confrontational, diplomatic and compassionate strategies. Mary Slessor (who
served in West Africa 1878-1915) was the best known of the Old Calabar women, and she was certainly an individual of outstanding intelligence, insight and guts who directly opposed ritual acts of brutality, mission officials, European traders and imperial agents with equanimity. But she was preceded by a generation of women who, though more conventional in outward appearance and lifestyle, displayed similar character and forbearance.

While the ultimate aim of most women in Africa was to reproduce an indigenous Christian community in the monogamous domestic image of Scottish home life, the range of tasks they undertook was generally much wider, and less easily defined, than that of Indian missionaries. They were not confined to working with girls and women, and commonly taught mixed sex and age groups in their little schools. They often came into direct contact with tribal chiefs and authorities, and although they encountered much amused disdain and contempt, they could also find themselves in positions of considerable power, if they won chiefs over on certain issues and practices. Of Mrs Louisa Anderson, it was said that she 'ruled her household with a rod of iron, and even the chiefs of Duke Town trembled before her. Sometimes they resisted the missionary, but yielded to his wife. One old chief commented:"I tell you for true, them woman be best man for mission!'''42

That little vignette conveys some impression of the way many missionaries regarded even political and cultural
leaders as somewhat like disobedient children requiring to be subdued.

Single women could quite regularly find themselves in charge of out-stations, with responsibility for all aspects of mission work, and with only occasional visits from an ordained missionary. From her Old Town base, 'Mammy Sutherland' (the ex-Miss Miller) conducted Sabbath meetings, organised schools, gave refuge to twins, widows and orphans, and went on occasional exploratory sorties to places where she was the first white person to be seen:

'I have reached a place which I have long wished to get at, on the great Qua River. I got to it with my alphabet boards and books, and was kindly received by the people.' 43

In 1852, the UP Missionary Record carried a report of 'Miss Thompson's labours among the Fingoes' which encapsulates the image of the lonely Scottish woman missionary in Africa:

'She lives four miles from the nearest European in a small wattle and daub cottage, with a schoolhouse adjoining. There are fifty pupils of both sexes, aged from four to forty years. Twenty-four can read the Bible in Caffre, eight can read English. She has also been assiduous in training them to the habits of civilisation - how to build houses, and teaching the females to sew, knit, make butter, and bake bread. Mr Calderwood and a minister from Lovedale lead worship on the Sabbath. Here there is a single person - a female - separating herself from all civilised society, and casting in her lot with a tribe of barbarians, and devoting her whole time and energies to promote their social and spiritual benefit. Piety, decision of character, vivacity, obligingness, method, patience, firmness, perseverance, zeal and consistency have won her respect, confidence and affection.' 44

Mary Slessor not only lived among the Okoyong people (who were previously considered too dangerous for white people to meddle with), but was appointed first Vice-Consul in
1892, and thus became responsible for mediating and adjudicating colonial justice among indigenous groups. From 1903 her main work (in the face of much opposition) was exploratory and itinerant, and she rejected as inappropriate the organisation of large mission stations with presbyterian-style churches, arguing that 'there is the essential need for something in-between, something more mobile and more flexible than ordinary congregational methods.'

Slessor also became increasingly concerned to promote economic self-reliance and independence for women from the servility, degradation and destitution which tribal custom imposed on them – especially widows. Although her Christian faith was unshakeable, she was not bound to scriptural literalism, but allowed anger at the way men treated women to influence her vigorous dialogue with the Bible. In one of her copies, against the Pauline text commanding that wives should be subject to their husbands, Slessor scribbled 'Na Na Paul laddie! This will no do!' She proposed a women's settlement, where they could build their own huts and farm their own land. Although her plan did not bear full fruit in her own lifetime, Agnes Arnot (the first 'Mary Slessor Memorial Missionary') developed this work. In 1918 she wrote home:

'The new buildings are being erected – a school and women's meeting house, a dwelling house, and three double houses for girls, and we hope to occupy them in the near future. One is to be a house of refuge for young Aro widows, who seek our protection and help in their pitiful position under Aro law, and for any others who need sanctuary. Also for churchwomen from various districts...who will stay for a few days, talk with the girls and give them advice about their position as Christians.'
Other women who went to work in Africa pushed out the boundaries of their own work and ideals, and of commitment to the rights of women from apparently conventional starting points. Jane Waterston from Inverness went to Lovedale - the flagship of the Free Church's Southern African mission - in 1867. At the age of twenty-three she established and superintended the girls department at the famous boarding school, where 'from the start, she began to impress on the school her own vigorous and original personality'. Although her declared aim was 'Not to turn out school girls but women...Homes are what are wanted in Kaffirland, and young women will never be able to make homes unless they see and understand what a home is', the academic standards and achievements of the school were high. Waterston was proud of the fact that:

'The girls were ambitious to get on so as to be up to the boys...It was at Lovedale that boys learnt that girls were not beasts of burden but their friends and companions.'

But Jane Waterston was not content with her undoubted success at Lovedale. As early as 1869, she wrote,

'I am happy here in everything but one, and that is these poor wretches of women up country. I am a woman myself and it haunts me more than I can tell you, the thought of these poor women whose present life is misery...The question of responsibility for these black sisters rests heavily with me.'

In 1874 she returned to Britain to begin medical studies, with the firm conviction that she would serve as a doctor in the proposed Central African mission which was established as Livingstonia in 1877. She was one of the
first twelve women to study at Elizabeth Garrett Anderson's London School of Medicine, where she was highly regarded and offered a post teaching anatomy. But in 1879 she returned to Africa. Her sojourn at Livingstonia was short and extremely ill-fated, due to circumstances which are considered below. In 1880 she went back to Lovedale, where for three years she worked unofficially, and by 1882 she was treating 7038 patients. But the Free Church Mission Committee would not countenance a medical mission there, and so Waterston was lost to the mission enterprise.

Marion Scott Stevenson went to Gikuyu, Kenya, as an unpaid missionary in 1904. By 1910 she was in charge of the educational work at Tumutumu – a new station five days journey away. The Phelps-Stokes Commission on African Education gave her a glowing report:

'We can assure the Government that they will travel far and wide throughout the world to find a better educational worker than Miss Stevenson. Considering the time that the Mission has been organised, it would hardly be possible to discover a more brilliant system of village education. Miss Stevenson directs the school activities at headquarters as well as the supervision of no less than 43 little out-schools surrounding it.'

Stevenson was also an enthusiastic itinerator. Her biographer claims that she spent 483 out of her 583 last days sleeping under canvas, and moving, through scorching and difficult terrain, from village to village to work with women and girls.

Medical missionaries in Gikuyu became embroiled in an issue which had serious cultural and political ramifications. It
marked an early clash between feminist imperialism and the apparent mysogyny of local ritual, over a practice which remains highly controversial in current cross-cultural debate. Scottish nurses and doctors were puzzled at the difficult labours, stillbirths, and infertility among the women they attended. By 1906 they had identified female circumcision as a major cause, and they began a campaign against it. This outraged Gikuyu people, for whom circumcision was a rite of passage, and the Christian stance presented converts with a real ethical dilemma. In 1922, some Christian student nurses witnessed a death during childbirth, the doctor explained its cause, and as a result they declared their opposition to female circumcision. Five nurses vowed to the local chief that they would never have their daughters circumcised, and three of them explained their position to the British District Commissioner. Women members of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa then formed an organisation to shelter and protect girls. They called it Kiama kia Ngo (Council of the Shield), and the title was not just symbolic. Sometimes women had to arm themselves with machetes, and even so, many girls were kidnapped and forcibly circumcised. Nyambura Njoroge writes:

'The Gikuyu circumcision controversy reached its height in 1928. Through the Kiama kia Ngo more Christian women from other mission stations and societies joined in resisting the degrading operation. Later, the woman's organisation merged with the girls' guilds and Bible study groups which missionary women had begun in various mission stations. By taking action against female circumcision, the women of the PCEA carved out an "independent space" within the larger church...It is unfortunate that the church adopted the name used by the Church of Scotland [Woman's Guild], dropping
the original name which signified women's struggle for wholeness and dignity. All the same, the women of the PCEA have never lost sight of their struggle, for it is through this "space" that they continue to fight for the full participation of women in the church and its ministries.153

This story illustrates the complex consequences of the female missionary presence. They certainly used their Western medical knowledge and moral standards to judge a practice which was of deep ritual significance to indigenous people. But their stand against circumcision enabled local women to understand the practice as something which damaged and endangered female quality of life, and they chose to defy their own culture and assert their rights. They were empowered, not only to show solidarity with one another, but to struggle for dignity and worth in the church as well. It is interesting also that a contemporary Kenyan feminist historian should affirm the importance of the female missionary contribution to the lives of the women among whom they worked, in the context of an article which concludes that 'We need to revisit our history in order to critically reflect on the question of African Christian womanhood on a continent in which the social status of women is not taken seriously'.54

The establishment of mission fields in China was a later development in the Scottish mission story. The first single woman to be sent there was Barbara Pritty of the UPC Zenana Mission in 1889. The generally low status of Chinese women was compounded by particular challenges - footbinding, complex languages and a volatile political climate. Without the support of a colonial government, missionaries were
much more vulnerable at the basic levels of acceptance and survival, as they discovered during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion and the inauguration from 1912 of the Republic. But these circumstances made the development of an indigenous church much more important, and in addition to educational and medical work, Scottish women shared in preparing Chinese Christians for leadership and evangelism. In 1927 the Moukden Theological College began to take women as regular students, and Elizabeth Macgregor, along with a Chinese colleague, trained female evangelists there. During the 1920s, the Manchurian church, which emerged from a union of fifteen churches and missions, also opened all its Courts to women. As an elder remarked,

"Paul has told us we are all one in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, and we follow that; there is neither bond nor free, and we follow that; there is neither male nor female - why do we not follow that? Where are the women?" and he pointed round the assemblage of men. So women were also made eligible for election to Church courts."

Under the banner of 'women's work for women', then, Scotswomen engaged in a wide range of tasks and responsibilities which offered able and innovative individuals levels of independence, professional development and authority which they could never have aspired to back in Scotland. As the UFC Women's Missionary Magazine acknowledged in 1918,

'The inspiration of Miss Slessor has fired the women of the Church, and many intrepid spirits have followed her into the wilds...Women missionaries are to be found, doing the work of men; teaching, healing, preaching, laying foundations of new industries, introducing new forms of agriculture, and renewing the life of people through their homes. The Church at home debates whether women may rightly serve as deacons, while the Church abroad thrusts almost
the whole office of ministry upon them...Some are lonely, in danger, and all are weary and overstrained, but none is timid or regretful of the choice of her life-work. As one has just written from the remotest of our stations: 'I am so well, and enjoying life and work so thoroughly. I had far rather be building mud-houses out here than doing deputation work at home - a thousand times more. It is the people at home who ought to have the sympathy.'

2. The justification for separate women's work

In 1884, Miss Maclnnes of Glasgow addressed the UPC Zenana Mission Ladies Conference, on the subject, 'Woman's indebtedness to Christ a reason for engaging in zenana work'. She claimed:

'There is good reason why every Christian woman should take a prominent part in telling the Good News. For it is to the incarnation of God's dear Son that she owes everything that is elevating in her lot... Above all, let our girls be impressed with the supreme importance of the missionary enterprise. Let them know that it is the noblest cause in which anyone can engage... Then when the church's sons shall eagerly press forward to enrol themselves in the army of the conquering Christ, so also, her daughters, realising that woman's true position in the church as in the family is that of 'help-meet', shall go forth in joyous bands, strong in numbers as in love, bearing with them into the dark and suffering homes of heathenism the gifts of healing and the lamp of light.'

The impact of the doctrine of separate spheres on the work of foreign mission is clearly seen in three inter-related justifications for distinctive women's work. They were all utilised in writing and discussion about such work from its outset until, in the first decades of the 20th century, they began to be challenged by those with first hand experience.

First, Scottish women were continually exhorted to recognise, and give grateful thanks for, the exalted
position which their sex enjoyed in Christian lands. As a rhetorical device, the contrast which was drawn between the comparative situations of women in different cultures was a powerful tool utilised to great effect by advocates of the domestic ideal. Could the 19th century evangelical woman fail to be moved by the following?

'Two pictures arise before the mind's eye - one of an English wife, the other of a Hindoo wife. The English wife sits in the bright, warm, cosy sitting room - herself the centre of all the household joy. The Hindoo wife is shut up in her apartments like a prisoner, or waits upon her lord and master like a slave...

Two more pictures arise - the one of an English bride, the other of a Hindoo bride. The one wooed and wedded for her own sake, goes with the husband of her affections and of her choice to a home sanctified by love. The other, a poor, timid, crying, terrified child, whose age varies between five and twelve years, is bought and sold for money, carried off forcibly from her childish home to dwell among strangers, who may or may not be kind to her - the child-wife of a man who esteems women as a polluted, worthless race, expiating in their sex the sins of a former life.'

Such literature was hardly designed to excite much recognition of the common oppression suffered by both Indian and Scottish women of the period; nor to challenge the less rosy reality of Western marriage and family life concealed behind the sentimental idealism of the visions conjured up by Emma Pitman Raymond and her ilk. What it did was to confirm for readers the assumed superiority of Christian civilisation in which the 'natural' order of gender relationships prevailed, over the 'unnatural' practices of other religions and cultures. The purpose of such writing was to instil a sense of obligation in evangelical women to share their blessings with benighted sisters in distant lands.
The second reason advanced for women’s missions was the urgent need to alleviate social and spiritual suffering. Individual acts of compassion, and later social welfare strategies, were, as I have already argued, central manifestations of the ethos of ‘true womanhood’. In the foreign mission context, the possibilities of such essentially womanly action were extensive and potentially radical. Not just friendship and relief of suffering, but also liberation and transformation of life were on offer. As Mrs Parker of the UPC Zenana Mission in Benares told a meeting:

‘In order to reach the poor and downtrodden amongst the despised daughters of India, Christian women preach every day in religious festivals, streets and villages. The emancipation of Hindu and Mohamaden women can come only through the Gospel of Him who has done so much to elevate, and to place her in the position she occupies in Christian lands as equal and helpmeet of man.’ 59

Yet even in this expression of female solidarity, and the recognition that only women could thus minister to other women, there is a hint of the third reason for women’s mission to women. For the equality and emancipation on offer was that of helpmeet to man. The importance of female conversion lay, not just in its inherent redemptive value for individuals, but more particularly because only Christian women would be able to influence and service new and potential male converts according to the domestic precepts which were fundamental to the evangelical gospel. As at home, so abroad, women were considered primarily in terms of their relationship to men. The Church of Scotland
Foreign Mission Report of 1855, in commending the work of the Ladies Association, made this clear:

'Who can calculate the influences yet to be exerted by her who, touched by the power of God's grace and rescued from superstition and degradation, is enabled as sister, mother, wife, to exhibit in her appropriate sphere, all the graces and proprieties of the Christian character.' 60

And as an enthusiastic new missionary, Mary Slessor wrote in her first letter home from Old Calabar:

'Something more must be done for the women here, if we are to raise the men...they are the great drawback to our success'. 61

The equation of female equality with an auxiliary and circumscribed role permeated 19th century missionary culture. In fact it was advocated as positive and Biblical by women in the movement. In 1891, the Free Church Ladies Society decided to call their new magazine The Helpmeet, because:

'This name, first given to woman by her Maker, indicates her legitimate sphere, as the associate of man in work and worship - one specially fitted to help him...Yes, sisters in Christ, of whatever age or condition, may we not, every one of us, rejoicingly believe that He has set us in His Church to be 'helps', and that He is able to make us meet for His own use.' 62

What were the effects of this ideological justification for women's special mission? It certainly shaped the aims of the work attempted in the different mission fields. Whatever the particular challenges of each situation, female agents strove to inculcate the values and activities associated with the role of Christian wife and mother. The material and moral conditions of homelife were important - Western notions about clothing, cooking, childcare and
division of labour were criteria for judging the success of the enterprise. As Christina Rainy remarked on her 1887 tour of Free Church work in India:

'We are raising up Christian wives and mothers who may become a power for good. On going to Toondee, I was quite struck with the nice tidy houses, well trained children, and modest, womanly bearing of the young married women who had been educated at Pachamba.'

African missionaries often commented that Christian men asked them to train up their wives, and Agnes Arnot in Calabar perhaps revealed more than she intended about the reality of 'Christian marriage' when she commented in 1918:

'There is no greater need than the development of pure home life on a Christian foundation. These girls have everything to learn...In heathen homes there is always someone a little lower in the social scale to do the drudgery, but in a Christian home there is but the one. In every way we are trying to train our girls for this.'

An uncharitable assessment might discern that this lays bare the truth of 'women's work for women': Scots presbyterian drudges encouraging other women to accept the domestic shackles of 'Christian marriage' while pontificating about elevation and equality. But the reality, as I have tried to indicate, was more complex and positive for both groups of women. It is important to acknowledge the real and life-transforming advances which the Scottish brand of feminist imperialism brought to many thousands of women - in the shape of educational opportunities, medical treatment, personal compassion and respect and a sense of their own human worth. Likewise, the missionary women themselves - at least a significant
portion of them — were far more than subordinate servants of the cause, modelling and teaching acceptable womanly spheres of activity as prescribed by evangelical Christianity and Victorian morality. Throughout the period, there were Scottish women whose qualities, actions and lifestyles belied the 'helpmeet' role which the female societies claimed for themselves. They all shared to some extent the concept of Christian woman as moral guardian of society. But another fundamental belief was in the equality of every human soul before God. Salvation or damnation was a matter of inescapable individual responsibility. Mrs Ross, the Church of Scotland chaplain's wife who helped initiate zenana work in Poona, described the women who engaged in this mission as being shaped by 'a strong sense of individual responsibility before God', and recalled a conversation with a zenana woman:

'You Hindus always look upon yourselves as belonging to a class, as community, nation, caste or family; but God deals with people as individuals; the husband cannot answer for his wife, nor the parent for his child. The day will come when you must go forth alone to meet God — you know that you must die alone.'

Missionary women, like their peers in Scotland, may have failed to acknowledge the importance of class and community in shaping their own society and presumptions, but both for themselves, and for the women they worked with, this individualism was an important corrective to the pervasive denial of female personal autonomy.
And Scotswomen were not slow to show respect for the individual - including themselves - even when that conflicted with convention or propriety. Perhaps they had an advantage over, for example, their Anglican sisters, because personal accountability counted for more in the Scottish cultural and religious heritage than right order. The Anglican Church Missionary Society Regulations made it quite clear that female agents' work was subordinate and circumscribed:

"Being a woman as well as a missionary, each sister has assigned to her, a distinct limit of service, and a definite sphere."66

Scottish women may, on many occasions, have had reason to doubt practical recognition of their status and liberty of action, but they were never explicitly subject to rules which restricted them in this way.

While there were always individual women who, in their missionary work, effectively contravened or ignored the doctrine of separate spheres (even while upholding it in theory), it was only in the 20th century that it began to be challenged as a theory. The numerical superiority of women at mission stations, the expansion of their roles and responsibilities, the improved standard of their education and professionalism, the impact of the Women's Movement - all of these factors tended to make the understanding of women's work as auxiliary and separate increasingly obsolete and misleading. As the report of the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference argued,
'In the field, work which once seemed so distinctively for women is not now so clearly differentiated. Christian effort for both men and women presents a far more united front. Many urge for an end to the 'artificial division' between the work of general and women's societies.¹⁶⁷

3. Supervision and jurisdiction of women missionaries

It was over questions of management and authority that these issues came to a head. By the 1910s, they were firmly on the Churches' agendas as structural and organisational matters, but the politics of gender recurred periodically at different times and places. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to give any systematic assessment of such questions, it may be illuminating to consider three individual cases of assertive women in potential or actual conflict with their colleagues and societies, and representing the three main Scottish presbyterian denominations.

Jane Waterston

Jane Waterston, the first Scottish female missionary (probably the first Scotswoman) to qualify as a doctor, belonged to an established Church family, but served with the missions of the Free Church in Lovedale and Livingstonia, South Africa. Her family did not support her vocation, although she ended up supporting them (including a mother and sisters who suffered from that most Victorian ailment, hysteria) after her father's bank crashed in 1878. She was a forthright woman who was never afraid to express her strong views. As such, her mixed fortunes as a
missionary depended largely on her male colleagues, and their ability, or otherwise, to comprehend and value a capable and unconventional woman.

At Lovedale, she enjoyed an excellent working relationship with Dr James Stewart, and formed a lifelong friendship with his family. The founder of Lovedale, William Govan, had told Stewart that the proposed Female Institution 'should be presided over by a male head', but when Waterston was appointed in 1867, she was given a free hand to develop the school as she saw fit. During her eight years there, with the support of Stewart, she established a successful and renowned Institution, and she came to be widely known as 'Mother of Activity'. Although Waterston enjoyed her position of authority and respect at Lovedale, she had much to say in criticism of other local missionaries, of Dr Duff and the Foreign Mission Committee, and of the Ladies Society. As she commented in one letter: 'That Mound, it deserves its name for I think plenty of good work gets buried there.'

Her main complaint concerned the poor terms and conditions offered to female missionaries. Although she demurred in a ladylike fashion at the salary first offered in 1866, writing, 'I am very glad to hear that it is to be no more than £80...and the allowance for outfit I would like to be as small as possible', by 1869 she had discovered the harsh reality:
'I have considered the LSD and find that I am just living at that rate at present...A woman's life can never be the broad, strong thing a man's may become, but still, you might allow her to do what she can in the way of living. I like to live. I don't like to exist.'

And not every male missionary had such high regard for her as Dr Stewart. As he wrote to his wife in 1871:

'Dr Dalzell and Miss Waterston did not get on well. He has not sufficient esteem for the sex as a whole to please her. When she came out with her strong views about women's rights and women's ability, then he would rap out something about a "philosopher in petticoats" - one of his expressions to her - and so they went on.'

In 1874 Jane Waterston returned to Britain to train as a doctor. It was her ambition to work as a medical missionary in the proposed Central African Station, which in 1877 was established as Livingstonia, with Dr Robert Laws in charge. Her time in London brought new challenges and a strengthening of feminist convictions. In 1878 she confidently stated her terms for going to Livingstonia (in the face of attractive offers of work in London). She made it clear that she considered that her main work would be medical, but that she should also be the head of any female department or school, with full powers and financial control. She upset the Society by asking for a salary of £200 to be paid in advance, along with passage and expenses, claiming:

'I make these two conditions from personal experience of unpleasantnesses and inconvenience of a difficult arrangement.'

She arrived in Livingstonia in November 1879 on a five year contract. She left in April 1880. Her time there was an unmitigated disaster. Laws treated her with uncomprehending
hostility - a feeling which was returned. Neither he nor his colleagues could understand or cope with her opinions and manner. He refused to acknowledge or value her educational and medical experience (which was greater than his own), and relegated her to teaching elementary subjects and sewing. He took all the credit for establishing the medical practice of the mission, though she claimed that she took 'the heavy end of the medical work'. She was incensed at the insinuations that she was there mainly to procure a husband, and felt lonely and ostracised. Perhaps her worst crime, in Laws' opinion, was her continuing criticism of the basis upon which he had established relationships with the local people. She felt that his harsh regime of discipline and corporal punishment was a reproach to the mission and to Christianity itself. Only a few weeks after her arrival, she was writing to Stewart:

'It is the gun and not the Bible that they rely on at Blantyre [a nearby Church of Scotland mission] and even here...I can't believe that this is the Gospel...It is a terrible pain to me to find the thing I had looked forward to and worked for turn out to be a very apple of Sodom.' 73

The extent of her bitter disillusionment is clear in a letter dated February 14, 1880:

'I have resigned...I will never repent having come here but once, and that is to the last day of my life, for it has shattered my faith in God and man and I fear I will never recover it...I have got a horror of religious humbug that will last me the rest of my days.I just hate being up here...It is my profession and the use that it has made me able to be of, that has kept me alive and prevented utter despair.' 74

The Foreign Mission Committee, who had found her problematic in the past, struck her off the register of
missionaries, and demanded that she repay her passage and outfit, although she had returned to Lovedale and intended to see out her contract by engaging in medical work there. James Stewart was stalwart in her support, and wrote to a Glasgow man who was prepared to make a private contribution to help her establish a hospital:

'Her feeling against the Committee for their very summary justice in cutting her off is very strong. It is possible Laws' letters may have had something to do with their precipitousness. He did not like her and she just as cordially detests him. Placed up there as she was, a lonely woman - and seeing more clearly, I fear, than any of them that their general policy towards the natives was to be a disastrous one - there was nothing left for her but to come away...

Now though she is reckoned to be difficult to get on with, I get on with her very well. She does her work excellently, is thoroughly loyal...she can be trusted implicitly and is in reality a splendid doctor.' 75

The Foreign Mission Committee would not sanction a medical mission at Lovedale, and in 1883 Jane Waterston moved to Cape Town, where she became a prominent doctor and citizen until her death in 1931. She apparently also recovered her faith enough to become a loyal member of St Andrew's Church. In 1929, an honorary degree of LLD was conferred on her by the University of Cape Town. The citation said of her:

'She has been a jealous fighter for the prestige of the medical and nursing professions, but the most authentic record of her life work will be found written in the "humble annals of the poor" by whom her deeds of mercy and healing will long be remembered.' 76
Mary Pigot

Mary Pigot was a Eurasian woman who was first employed by the Church of Scotland Ladies Association in 1870, to take charge of their work in Calcutta. She became well known on her first furlough to Scotland, 1875-6, when she spoke at over forty meetings around the country on behalf of zenana work, which she claimed was woefully underfunded. She was the first agent to address public meetings on her own behalf, instead of sitting mute while men did the talking.

But her main impact, and notoriety, was achieved as the instigator of a libel case which shook the Church of Scotland Foreign Missions, and indeed the whole institution, to its foundations during the early 1880s.

For lovers of scandal, the Calcutta Mission Case had everything - sex, race, class, power struggles, violence, internecine presbyterian rivalry. It is difficult to find clarity or to draw conclusions from the morass of legal and ecclesiastical documentation. But the crux of the matter was a bitter personal conflict over issues of authority between the heads of the Male and Female Missions in Calcutta, which had direct results on the management of women's work both at home and abroad.

As a voluntary agency, rather than an integral part of the Church's official Mission Scheme, the Scottish Ladies Association and its agents were not under the jurisdiction
of the Foreign Mission Committee or its field management. However, arrangements were made whereby supervision and financial control was carried out in consultation with the local Corresponding Boards (which consisted of ministers and elders of the colonial church, plus male missionaries of the Church). This arrangement had apparently operated quite harmoniously in Calcutta, and Pigot was on friendly terms with her male counterparts, until 1879, when William Hastie arrived to take charge of the General Assembly's Educational Institution in the city. Within two months:

'In consequence of the machinations of [Hastie], who desired to place the Female Mission in subordination to the Corresponding Board, which [Pigot] resisted, a spirit of alienation appeared between members of the Board and Mary Pigot, who resigned.'

The SLA refused to accept her resignation, claiming that she was employed by them, and not by the Mission in Calcutta. She stayed on, but all connection with the Corresponding Board was severed, except that money was still channelled through the treasurer. Pigot believed that Hastie was engaged in an active campaign either to subordinate her or get rid of her altogether - and this feeling was exacerbated when Georgina Smail, who arrived in 1881 to act as her assistant, soon began to criticise Pigot's character and management, and refused to fulfil her contract. The SLA at home were anxious about what was happening, and invited Hastie to exercise his influence to restore harmony. He wrote a Memorandum to the SLA, and in the meantime Pigot sought leave to go to Scotland so that
she and George Gillan (chaplain at St Andrews Kirk, Calcutta, and Corresponding Board Secretary) could be interviewed in the presence of the SLA Acting Committee, in an attempt to resolve the situation.

When she arrived in Scotland, Pigot discovered that 'Georgina Smail had written to various SLA members, bringing charges of a serious nature against her, and that William Hastie had sent a Memo, alleging amongst other things, that his missionary efforts had been most seriously impeded and bitterly opposed by influences operating from the Female Branch of the Church's Mission.'

The SLA asked a number of prominent churchmen to investigate the charges against Pigot, and they exonerated her. However, in November 1882, Hastie sent documents to Dr Archibald Scott, convener of the Foreign Mission Committee, which he claimed provided authenticated evidence of immorality and malpractice by Pigot. In Scotland, Scott handed over the documents (which were letters solicited by Smail's sister, Mrs Annie Walker), to Pigot, and told her to vindicate herself, or else she would be prevented from returning to her duties as Superintendent.

It was on this basis that Pigot brought a libel action against Hastie, filed in Calcutta High Court on March 21 1883. She claimed that he had conspired with Smail and Walker to discredit and damage her reputation and livelihood.
The Judge found that there was malicious intent on the part of Hastie, but also that his defence had substantially succeeded, because allegations of immorality, impropriety and ill-treatment of orphanage pupils by Pigot were found to be true. He gave the verdict to the Plaintiff, but awarded token damages, and instructed each party to pay costs.

Pigot went to the Court of Appeal, and the judgment was reversed. Hastie was ordered to pay damages. He was suspended by the Foreign Mission Committee and spent time in Calcutta jail because he was unable to pay his debts. Eventually he had to declare himself bankrupt. Mary Pigot, though apparently vindicated, was never re-appointed, although some of her Scottish supporters set up a pension fund on her behalf.

That, in outline, was the Calcutta Mission Scandal. It was the detail of scurrilous allegations which appealed to the salaciousness of the public in both Calcutta and in Scotland. Mary Pigot was accused of having affairs with James Wilson - Professor in the Institution, and with Kali Churn Banerjee - a high profile convert of the Free Church Mission in Calcutta, and scourge of William Hastie in a dispute over which Church had the right to claim Dr Duff as founder of its mission. Both men were married. More seriously, Pigot was also accused of keeping the orphanage in a filthy condition; of beating and imprisoning certain
girls; and of providing inadequate food and clothing. She had resolute supporters in both Scotland and India, but the SLA eventually came to the conclusion that her management practices were not satisfactory - which they attributed largely to overwork and ill-health. The Committee never accepted the imputations on her moral character, but it is difficult not to believe, as most members of the public (including supporters of the SLA) apparently did, that there could be so much smoke without fire.

However, William Hastie was not a blameless paragon of virtue (in spite of the efforts of his biographer to make him seem so 79). As the Secretary of the Foreign Mission Committee wrote in a private letter to Scott,

'His infirmity of temper, his intense self-conceit and his want of common sense in my view more than neutralise all his splendid qualities' 80

His language was invariably intemperate, and he described Pigot as an illegitimate half-caste, a whore, and 'that abominable woman'. 81 He held a very exalted view of his own status as male ordained missionary, and while he was no doubt justified in criticising aspects of Pigot's management, his proposed solutions were not diplomatic. He recommended in his Memo of 1882 that the Corresponding Board should be official correspondent, should control finance, sanction appointments, and have power of summary discharge over all non-Scottish SLA Agents. He proposed a Board sub-committee with the right to visit and oversee all departments of the Female Mission, and with sole power of
management, concluded that he was 'entirely opposed to the policy of separation and independence pursued by the Ladies ever since I came to India' and claimed that 'these powers seem to me moderate and reasonable'. 82 The SLA (or more accurately, the little group of men with whom they consulted whenever things got complicated) had been struggling for years to find appropriate mechanisms for local management. They did not agree with Hastie, and suggested instead a consulting committee, elected from within the Corresponding Board, with the Lady Superintendent as a full member, claiming that:

'Any lady competent to take such superintendence and of such sufficient age and strength of character to leave home for the field, and to have charge of such a Mission, is not likely to be willing to be virtually under the orders of the Corresponding Board.' 83

When Hastie received their response to his memo, he was scathing and contemptuous. In a letter to the Corresponding Board, he was critical of the educational thrust of the Mission's work. He thought its priority ought to be promotion of Christian family life, rather than

'entering upon the exciting career of striving to come up to a native institution in producing a set of Hindu Blue Stockings.'84

And he was sarcastic about the

'logic of the whole report which seems to be founded on some new feminine system that may have been worked out in Edinburgh of late.' 85

The Judge at the High Court concluded:

'What appears to have weighed much with William Hastie was a feeling of annoyance that the Ladies in Scotland were, for some reason or other, desirous that he should have practically no part in the control and guidance of the Female Mission.'
As head of the Male Mission, he seemed to consider he ought to have had more direct control, by virtue of his position...his pride had been mortified, and a condition of things had arisen between them, which animated Hastie with the desire, either to get rid of Mary Pigot, or to place her under close subjection. 86

The repercussions of the whole sordid affair, apart from the effects on the individuals involved, and on the reputation and finances of the already beleagured Foreign Missions of the Established Church, directly affected the Ladies Association and its operations. An overture came before the 1883 General Assembly, asking that the whole subject of management be taken into consideration. Dr Scott described the events leading up to the libel action, and then, as The Scotsman of May 30 reported:

"He ventured to add that agents of the SLA should be supervised by the same body as supervised the missions of the Church. This trouble would never have occurred had the SLA had the benefit of the protection of a proper board. Foreign Mission Committee representation should be increased on the SLA committee, and the convener should preside at all meetings of the acting committee of the SLA, and so get rid of the anomaly of the ugly word, "chairwoman"." 87

Apart from the central clash of two opinionated and apparently imperious personalities, the SLA as an autonomous organisation was on trial, and found wanting by many in the Assembly who were only too ready to sneer at a group of women who seemed to prevaricate and lack decisiveness. There was, apparently, much laughter during the 1883 debate about the competence of women to manage missions, and their admirably ladylike, and yet feeble inclination to turn to their husbands and other men for solutions to intractable problems. For those men there was
also criticism. The leader in *The Scotsman* of June 2, 1884 (at which Assembly Hastie argued against his suspension in an epic eight hour speech) was a typical example of the patronising attitudes which were so much in evidence:

'A man of real business ability would have known how to deal with conduct of this kind...and would never have let the case drift among the good, but not always wise, women who seem to be regarded as a mainstay of the mission. There is no doubt one excuse to be pleaded. The ladies do not seem to have been much more unwise than those of the other sex with whom they were associated...The public may be excused for thinking that the management of Foreign Missions has of late been given over to old women all round.'

Mary Slessor

Mary Slessor was a working class woman whose early experience was as a mill worker in Dundee. Her father was an alcoholic, but her mother was a pious member of the United Presbyterian Church, who was determined that her son should serve as a foreign missionary. Mary was a self-confessed 'wild lassie' in her teens, but her character and intelligence were recognised by her teachers and church elder. After the death of her brother, Mary began to consider her own vocation to the mission field, and she applied to be an agent at Old Calabar, where she arrived in 1876.

She was a plain speaking and down to earth individual, and was at first extremely frustrated working within the conventions of life in the mission compound of Duke Town, which involved polite pleasantries with the colonial community and with the wives of chiefs. She wanted instead
to make contact with the ordinary people who belonged to the tribes of the surrounding country.

Her life as a missionary was marked not only by recurring disease and ill-health, but also by a succession of disputes with her colleagues and the Board in Scotland about how her time and talents were to be deployed. The latter had certainly not employed her to adopt African food and lifestyle (and children too); nor did they envisage that any woman would choose to spend her time living on her own among notoriously fearsome peoples such as the Okoyong or Aro. But Mary was a woman of iron determination and unquestioning faith in a God whose will for her superceded any personal or ecclesiastical discipline.

Fortunately, her colleagues at Calabar were sufficiently perceptive and flexible to recognise that it was in their own, and the mission's, best interests to let Slessor have her way. In 1886, the senior missionaries Anderson and Goldie at first opposed the seemingly outrageous suggestion that she should live under tribal conditions with the Okoyong. But Slessor persisted, and also made several preparatory visits. In 1887 the local mission agreed to her plan, and 18 months later, so did the Mission Board in Edinburgh. In 1892, her knowledge and involvement with the people was such that she was appointed Vice-Consul by the colonial government to supervise the work of the newly established 'native' courts. In 1895 she submitted a
lengthy report of her work, which was published in the *Mission Record*, and declared that it was time to move further inland to open up Itu territory, leaving the Okoyong to ordained missionaries.

And so her career went on, as she pushed deeper into new and unexplored lands. Her style was that of a dynamic initiator, rather than detailed organiser. She presented her schemes and suggestions as declarations of intent, and left the mission authorities to respond as they saw fit. But as they saw the fruits of her uncommon gifts and personality, and as her fame grew, they were expedient enough, in general, to let her develop her own career (and the achievements of their mission) as she pleased.

Her most radical proposal was made in 1903. She believed that the time had come to fulfil the original intentions of the Calabar mission – that Africans should be their own evangelists – rather than concentrating on setting up large stations and churches according to incongruous Scottish models:

'I think that it is an open secret that for years the workers here have felt that our methods...were far from adequate to overtake the needs of our immense field...The scattered, broken units into which our African populations are divided...make it necessary for us to pay more than an occasional visit...even if that visit results in a school or church being built.

Many plans suggest themselves, Church members organised into bands of two or three or four to itinerate for a week over local neighbourhoods; native teachers spending a given number of days in each month in the outlying parts of their districts; trading members of the church undertaking service in any humble capacity on up-river trading stations...in these and many other ways the gaps may be bridged...and communications be opened without the material expense which the opening of new stations involves.'
Slessor proposed a survey which she would undertake herself, by canoe, to assess possibilities for expansion.

The Mission Committee of the United Free Church had already banned further development in the Cross River area, but the plan was sent for their consideration. In the meantime, Slessor took her senior colleague, Mr Wilkie, on a tour of the proposed new territory, and he reported to Scotland that this was a great opportunity and Mary Slessor should receive full support. In *The Expendable Mary Slessor*, James Buchan comments:

'A less democratic church might well have insisted that even a famous missionary must toe the line. But...what Mary was saying made sense, and the FMC, with even less money to spare since the union, decided to take her up on her offer...This on the face of it was a very good bargain for her church. Its mission would expand its operations at no cost to anybody except the Africans and its expendable Miss Slessor. She, it seemed, was determined to go her own way and whatever happened to her would therefore be her own responsibility.

So Mary spent the rest of her life, in WP Livingstone's words, "dragging a great Church behind her" into Africa.'

Mary Slessor's disregard for standard mission behaviour derived in part from her own experiences in the factories and streets of Dundee. But had she remained in Scotland, her tremendous gifts and potential would surely have been frustrated, and perhaps entirely stifled, if channeled within the constraints of teaching or home mission work.

Indeed when she came home on furlough, Mary the explorer and dispenser of colonial justice was diffident and uncomfortable in church circles. But in the life she developed for herself in West Africa, she demonstrated the
truly liberating possibilities of foreign mission work for women.

It is not necessary to draw any overall conclusions from these three examples of forceful women in relation to the authority they sought and gained for themselves in very different circumstances; except that the only available local frameworks of management and support were those designed for and controlled by men. While many women enjoyed considerable personal autonomy, co-operation and encouragement, the structural inequality of their position was eventually recognised as anomalous. In the 1901 regulations for the Women's Foreign Mission (WFM) of the UFC, agents were placed under the supervision of local Mission Councils, but were allowed to speak and vote when their own work was under review. However, dissatisfaction with this arrangement was widespread by 1915, when the whole question of women's position in the Church was under consideration. Professor A H Hogg of Madras pointed to the inequality of status assigned to women:

'While there is no provision for giving women a share in the discussion and control of men's work, women missionaries are set under the control and supervision of Mission Councils which are local representatives of the (men's) Foreign Mission Council...The separation between men's and women's work is artificial...Hence any system is mischievous that restricts to men consideration of any given problem.' 91

It was proposed that women missionaries should become full members of Mission Councils, on the same terms as men (including the possibility of co-option for women -notably
wives - who had responsibility for aspects of work, but in an honorary capacity), except when Councils exercised presbyterial powers. Women missionaries were overwhelmingly in favour of this. Men were less universally enthusiastic, and several Mission Councils suggested other compromise measures. But the proposal was passed at the 1916 General Assembly.

Throughout the first decades of the 20th century there was a growing mood in favour of doing away with separate female missionary societies, and in the post-1929 Church of Scotland, women's mission was incorporated into the Foreign Mission Committee, thus marking the end of almost a century of independent organisation. An article in the 1912 *International Review of Missions* outlined both the opportunities and potential drawbacks of this new order:

'The separate women's missionary society works in unsuspected isolation at a time when fresh light from God is streaming on the essential unity of humanity, which can no longer be segregated by race, class or sex...Many sided problems call for all available insight, both of men and women - new issues in the field belong to the body politic - their administrative treatment must be in the hands of men and women combined...The absence of cooperation is not satisfactory to woman missionaries. At least women in separate societies can administer their own work, and develop without interference, and to ask them to exchange this realm of influence for an uncertain place in joint administration is unwelcome. But *true* administrative co-operation would be welcome.' 92

On the whole, the post-1929 incorporation of women's work into the general administrative structure was experienced as a loss of power, as direct control was replaced by tokenism. It was disingenuous to assume 'the essential
unity of humanity' without taking due account of the disadvantage and exclusion experienced by those who did not conform to the normative male, white, Western and middle class image of that 'humanity'.

4. On the Home Front - Women's Missionary Associations in Scotland

'One innovation after another! Envelope collections, missionary prayer-meetings, speechifying ladies!' 93

There were certainly those within Scottish presbyterianism who believed that the organisations which supported female missionaries abroad represented innovations in the activity of women which were faintly ridiculous, or even rather threatening. That they had an impact on the lives of thousands of presbyterian women is undeniable, but the case for arguing that the impact was radical or transforming is much less cut. As the societies progressed and grew in size and complexity, they did extend the range of skills and activities of those who were involved, especially in leadership and advocacy. But they remained firmly embedded in - and indeed came to exemplify - a female evangelical culture which did not reject, but expanded the boundaries of, the concept of woman's sphere. However, that general assessment does not preclude recognition that for many individuals, and certain groups, involvement in the missionary movement required substantial personal change, growth and courage in particular situations. And for some it inspired deeper awareness of, and challenge to, church and societal structures which restricted opportunities and
justice for women.

The history of the women's associations is marked by continual struggles for two basic necessities - recognition and money. The general reluctance of Scots to give adequate countenance and support to Foreign Missions was magnified in the case of female missions. The Established and Free Church societies were voluntary agencies (although individual ministers gave them help and support) and they could not make appeals for money through official church channels. And in the first years of their existence, they were constrained in the methods available to publicise their cause. All the associations began as groups of women in one town or city, without the benefit of a national organisation or network. Difficulties in travel, communications and female mobility meant that in practical terms their decision-making powers remained with members in Edinburgh or Glasgow. They did recognise the need to publicise the cause of female missions around Scotland, and to set up fundraising auxiliaries in different parts of the country, but accepted that men would have to act as their agents in this work, which was not regarded as seemly for women. A male deputy was appointed by the pre-Disruption Edinburgh Ladies Association, and in 1844, Captain Jameson advised the new Free Church Society:

'Your secretary should be a gentleman, and not on any account a lady...Not that ladies of the Committee should not do all in their power to promote its interests by active and vigorous correspondence all over Scotland.'

Indeed, letter writing to friends and relations, and the
seeking of personal donations, was the main early activity of members. As auxiliaries grew and awareness of women working abroad developed, other ways to support the work were adopted. In 1850, it was first proposed that an individual or group (such as a Sunday School) might choose a project or person to sponsor. In 1853, a collection of 'fancy work' (sewn and knitted goods, toys etc) was sent in a box to Calcutta, and the 'mission box' soon became a mainstay of home effort. In churches and manses all over Scotland, hundreds of work parties became regular features on church calendars. (They provided the basis for many a local branch of the Woman's Guild from 1887, and were no less ubiquitous in the Dissenting denominations). Some of the goods they produced were for sale in bazaars (often to expatriate Britons), and some were for use at the stations.

At these work parties, it was usual for extracts from missionaries' letters, or some other appropriate literature, to be read out loud. Local groups were supplied by a network of letter-copiers, who in the Free Church Society formed the basis of a national organisation, and were sometimes directly inspired to volunteer for service themselves.

Missionary publications were also deemed a suitable avenue of communication for women. In 1844, the SLA entered into an agreement with the Missionary Record to include information about its activities. The Free Church ladies
Society actually produced its own magazine, *The Eastern Female's Friend*, from the same year. In 1859 the Church of Scotland SLA published a quarterly, *News of Female Missions*. The first edition carried an appeal for a thank-offering fund after the Indian Mutiny. As a direct result, an orphanage was built at Sialkot.

In the mid-Victorian years, then, foreign missions were the focus for considerable church-based activity. A few women were engaged in organisational and literary enterprise, while many more shared their traditional female skills on behalf of the movement. David Smith Cairns (later a Professor at the UFC College in Aberdeen) recalled his childhood in a Borders manse:

'There were countless tea-parties with the women of the church - always for some practical objective. [My mother] had a deep interest in Foreign Missions so we saw and heard a good many missionaries. We in Stitchel had a special interest in Calabar. Under the leadership of my mother, women made garments for Calabar children and their mothers. I remember a great display of all these in the old church, which was festooned all around. These were despatched in a large wooden trunk on the Smith Elder steamer. In return Calabar people sent home hampers of tropical products...All these things humanised and popularised the mission idea for children and plain folk, long before one could really understand it.'

But although women throughout the country were beavering away on behalf of missions, it was hard for the female associations to ensure that support was directed specifically to their work, as long as they had a low public and official profile. To counteract the former problem women broke genuinely new ground within church
circles, by engaging in progressively more extensive levels of public address and debate. I have referred elsewhere to Mary Pigot's 1875 tour of Scotland when she directly campaigned for contributions to the Calcutta zenana scheme.

In a 1900 article, Christina Rainy wrote of this general development:

'With much misgiving, women began to speak, first to little gatherings of their own sex, then to mixed meetings; and finally to congregations and presbyteries! Some were shocked, but even the shock wakened them up. The speakers did not like it, but necessity was laid upon them.'

The difficulty, and yet also the resolution, with which prominent women like Rainy accepted these developments was recognised by Annie Small, who claimed that Rainy was 'a conservative by instinct and a radical by principle':

'She loved the ancient paths, especially for women...But when, on the other hand, the need for missionary information throughout the Church seemed urgent, Miss Rainy threw herself wholeheartedly into the business and planned a crusade concerning which she wrote to me that we must be "willing even to ascend the steps of the pulpit that we might reach larger audiences, even to visit Presbyteries, should these exclusively masculine bodies vouchsafe their permission or invitation!!"'

And Mrs Sutherland of Calabar exemplified the changes in her own lifetime:

'During some of her earlier visits home her information was mostly imparted in private family circles; afterwards, friends held drawing room meetings for her; then came public women's meetings, and the last time she visited this country, she addressed several large general meetings.'

In order to achieve public recognition and acceptance, the women's organisations had to tread a fine line between gaining the sanction (or at least commendation) of the General Assembly, and maintaining their autonomy and
distinct purpose. They also evolved different degrees of internal control, while never entirely dispensing with the services of men in key practical and policy making positions.

The Edinburgh Ladies Society of the Free Church, and its counterpart in Glasgow, which had no official links with any denomination, both struggled to make much impact on public awareness and purses before their partial union in 1865. In that year they agreed to exchange minutes and notify appointments to each other and to the Foreign Mission Committee of the Church. They also decided to pool their resources in a common fund, and to place agents under the express control of local Mission Councils.

The Assembly thenceforth annually commended the duly constituted 'Society for Female Education in India and South Africa' to the liberality of the Church, but this bore little fruit until 1883, when the Society obtained Assembly sanction to form Presbyterial Auxiliaries. These were developed from the informal district associations, which in turn had brought together letter copiers to share information and support. The 1883 deliverance resulted, according to the 1884 report, in an increase of eighty-three congregations contributing to funds, bringing the total to 342 (which was still only a quarter of all Free Church congregations). Income that year went up by £900. A national meeting of women from the various presbyteries
evolved into an annual delegate Conference, and in 1885, the previously self-selecting Edinburgh Committee put its election in the hands of the conference. In 1892, the Glasgow and Edinburgh committees, which had retained responsibility for work in Africa and India respectively, resolved to unite. The Society was renamed the 'Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Free Church of Scotland', and it submitted its Annual Reports to the Assembly. But it transacted its business independently of the Foreign Mission Committee, and all members, except for President, Vice-President and Secretary, were women. Between 1883 and 1900, the number of European workers employed increased from twenty to seventy, and those appointed locally at stations from one hundred to four hundred. By 1900, the home income of the Society was over £16,000, and it raised around £9000 abroad in fees, Government grants and local contributions. This increasingly sophisticated and complex business operation was sustained and stimulated by a network of enthusiastic and competent women, who nevertheless felt that the burden fell unfairly upon them.

The 1896 WFMS Report claimed:

'It is evident that Free Church women are developing business powers which were hardly suspected 20 years ago. Perhaps there is room for improvement still...Let us be well assured that in wisely enlisting the sympathies of all our ministers and people, we are really conferring a benefit on them. One Presbyterial secretary writes, "The meetings of women in our different congregations have been helpful, not only in fostering interest in Foreign Missions, but also in stimulating us in reference to all the different departments of congregational life and work".'
The Ladies Association of the Established Church also evolved a structure based on an acting committee supported by, and passing on information to, groups which met at congregational, presbytery and national levels. After years of struggling to meet its financial commitments and to encourage popular support for its efforts, the Calcutta scandal brought the SLA into the purview of the Church at large in a negative light. Organisational changes placed it much more directly under the control of the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC), but the mid-1880s also witnessed a marked increase in interest and activity at home and abroad. By 1885, the acting committee and sub-committee for each station, for finance and for publications, were under the overall chairmanship of the FMC convener. There was a sub-committee of the FMC which was to 'advise and co-operate with the SLA', and also a group of male financial advisers elected from the FMC. On the other hand, a full time female organising secretary - Helen Reid - was employed, and she was particularly successful in developing the association at parochial and presbyterial levels. As the Woman's Guild developed within the Church of Scotland, those involved in foreign missions shared their experience with, and were integrated into the framework of, the growing movement. In the 1920s, a few members of the Women's Foreign Mission finally found their way into token membership of the Assembly's Foreign Mission Committee.
In the United Presbyterian Church, the Zenana Mission Committee, formed in 1881, was an initiative of the Foreign Mission Board, which appointed a sub-committee of eight men to consider the employment of single women in India. It was they who sought the assistance of women to promote the scheme and help raise funds. In 1884 a Conference was held to bring together local representatives of concerned women, and in 1886 a 'Conference Committee' of eight women was appointed to co-ordinate information and arrangements. Eventually this small group became associated with the Zenana sub-committee to form, in effect, the executive of Women's Mission work (including, after 1886, all female agents at Calabar). These women were invited to attend the Foreign Mission Board itself when decisions they had taken were under review.

Miss Adam, who was convener of the Conference Committee and the only woman invited to address the UPC Jubilee Conference in 1897, told that gathering:

'The Conference Committee now helps with all administration; conducts regular correspondence with each missionary and Presbytery Secretary; regulates mission boxes; organises visitation work by those on furlough, and publishes the Zenana Mission Quarterly, which was first issued in October 1887. It is well managed and with a credit of £220. The work at home is important. Women's work has brought a fuller life into many a heart. One writes, "I am conscious of my relations to the whole world. I feel that with my own hand I am unlocking forces which will speedily bring the world to its Lord and Christ."' 100

While these developments gave some scope to women to participate in structures which deliberately mirrored those
official presbyterian institutions from which they were excluded, all the societies depended upon the support and active involvement of men, whilst the Free and Established Church bodies enjoyed none of the real benefits of being official schemes of the Church. Leadership positions were still largely occupied by women from Edinburgh and (to a lesser extent) Glasgow, who were usually the wives, sisters and daughters of prominent ministers and other advocates of the foreign mission cause. And their efforts did not enjoy the unqualified support of church members. Mrs Watson of Dundee feared that they were

'much inclined to consider the newfangled 'Zana' scheme as an unreasonable fad being urged upon them by ministers and a few rich ladies in want of something to do...When missions are the object [of fundraising], people are smitten with cold indifference or even provoked to anger..."Dinna ye give to those missionaries; they're just an idle lot, and Christian natives are all hypocrites."' 101

The 1900 Union of the United Presbyterian and Free Churches provided an opportunity to review the methods employed by proponents of women's missions in both denominations, and to consider ways of combining the advantages, as they perceived them, of both. Christina Rainy of the Free Church was a corresponding member of the UPC Conference Committee, and she wrote in *The Helpmeet*:

'I can testify from personal observation that while the ladies exercise all legitimate influence in management, there is an advantage in having the gentlemen of the Mission Board taking their own share of responsibility, were it only because you thus have the leading office-bearers of the Church prepared to explain and defend the decisions arrived at, should these be challenged in Church Courts or elsewhere, and also as it tends to unify the administration of both sides of the work.' 102
The regulations for the Women's Foreign Mission of the United Free Church established a Central Committee, consisting of 40 members (26 ex-FCS, 14 ex-UPC) elected annually by a representative Conference, plus ten representatives of the Foreign Mission Committee. A number of members were associated with the FMC when it considered and confirmed the minutes of the WFM. Subject to these provisions:

'The WFM Committee shall manage its business, select and correspond with missionaries, and administer funds connected with its own department'.

And in 1916, the UFC Assembly passed a resolution which gave a small number of women full voting membership of, among others, the Foreign Mission Committee. It also authorised the addition of women to Presbytery Committees, 'as they see need.'

Two other developments are worthy of note. One emerged from within the movement, as the initiative of women who had been involved in the promotion of mission work for a long time. The other brought new blood, ideas and challenge into the organisation, both at home and abroad. Both were connected with the growth in opportunities for the professional training and higher education of women.
The Women's Missionary College

Christina Rainy and her friend Mrs Cleghorn (daughter of Lord Cockburn), provided the inspiration and practical backing to establish a College in Edinburgh. For some time, they had recognised that Normal Colleges and private paramedical institutions were of limited value in offering adequate preparation and encouragement to women who claimed a missionary vocation. As the work grew in scale and complexity, the fallacy that earnest piety was sufficient qualification for such women was ever more evident. Discernment and development of appropriate character and skills had to be undertaken systematically.

In 1894, the new College opened in George Square, near to the Rainy home, with Annie Small as Principal, and three students. In 1897 it moved to Atholl Crescent, and in 1908 it took up residence in purpose built accommodation at Inverleith Terrace. Its general aim was:

'To provide, in view of the complexity of the modern situation, an adequate general preparation for women who are anxious to devote themselves to religious work at home or abroad.'

The College, which attracted students from many denominations and nationalities, was ahead of its time in the quality of theoretical and practical education, and of corporate life, which it offered. It played a pioneering role in the international missionary movement which coalesced at the 1910 Edinburgh Conference and influenced many subsequent developments. It owed its success largely
to the vision and creativity of Small. She combined intellectually advanced teaching in Biblical criticism, comparative religion, languages, sociology and methodology; with an imaginative programme of practical experience and group work. These elements were underpinned by a community life which emphasised solidarity, individual character and tolerance, rather than the uniformity, obedience and conventions which characterised so many female residential institutions. She had a truly global perspective, accepting no rigid divisions between sacred and secular; Protestant and Catholic; 'civilised' and 'heathen'. One former student recalled:

'The curriculum was designed on a very liberal scale, and on attractive as well as practical lines...Looking back and considering the very Victorian character of her education and ours, I am filled with admiration at the sweep of the curriculum and its adequacy, both in conception and realisation. We left with our minds opened in many useful and essential directions...She did not try to force us all into the same mould: charity, toleration, fellowship, this was the spirit which she inculcated, and in which she herself lived.' 106

The Women's Missionary College continued to develop its system of training after Small's retirement in 1913. Staff members were committed to the affirmation and increased participation of women in church life. The spirit of sisterhood and mutual support which was imbued in alumnae around the world cannot fail to have influenced the attitudes and actions of those concerned with female missionary work in the first thirty years of the 20th century.
The Girls Auxiliary

In 1901, two young Edinburgh women attended a missionary conference held by the presbyterial committee of the UFC Women’s Foreign Mission. No one else present was under thirty, and they decided they should do something to interest young women in the mission work of the Church.

Eleanor Lorimer recalled in 1951:

'The Girls Auxiliary was born to link the more go-ahead girls to the direct service of our own Church...Missions generally had become the province of old ladies or of very pious and rather 'stuffy' girls...The Church in that day did not use girls as such: it merely set them to help mildly in organisations run by other people.' 107

The 'go-ahead girls' in fact belonged to the first generation of women to enjoy the benefits of University life and education. Most of the original GA leaders had experience of debating societies and the British Colleges Christian Union, which became the Student Christian Movement. The SCM was a notable early training ground in ideals of equality and comradeship between men and women and a channel, through the Student Volunteer Missionary Union of Britain and Ireland, which first met in Edinburgh in 1892, for commitment to 'world evangelisation in this generation'. The Girls Auxiliary quickly developed into a national network of young women aged between fifteen and thirty who engaged in prayer, study, debate and fundraising for the work of WFM. By 1922 there was an office, a full time secretary, 14,000 members and six 'Girls' Own Missionaries' supported in different fields.
The GA injected new life into what seems to have become a rather moribund and unimaginative home organisation. It brought both older women, and other young church women into contact with some of the more progressive currents and developments in the Women's and Foreign Mission movements. And it provided a forum for some serious discussion about the nature and purpose of mission, and the role of women in church and society. However, the ideas which were considered progressive during the Edwardian period were heavily influenced by Social Darwinist understandings of race and gender. With the influx of large numbers of middle class women (and also men from higher social classes than had previously sustained foreign missionary endeavour) came a new emphasis for evangelism: the optimistic sense of national and racial destiny to conquer the world for Christianity:

'Nowadays we must link on the Imperial to the missionary idea. It is our duty, not only as Christians, but as fellow-subjects of the British Empire, to send the best gift we possess to these lands.'

Scots who believed in the essential goodness and glamour of the British Empire were perhaps understandably more excited at the prospect of contributing to its benign rule over benighted people, than with struggling to solve the intractable problems at home. The development of sophisticated mission compounds and institutions concentrated in areas which had been incorporated into the political Empire, led also to the widespread abandonment of genuine attempts to build up indigenous churches. Instead,
increasing numbers of white agents with professional skills ran the religious and philanthropic services of missions. And women, having recently gained access to medical and teaching qualifications, were prominent in determining their ethos. At this time, there is little evidence of missionaries engaging in any radical critique of imperial political economy.  

The feminisation of the missionary workforce at home and abroad met with a range of male reactions. A minority were genuinely supportive and welcomed every change, including increased participation on management and decision-making. Others adopted attitudes ranging from mild derision and scorn to outright hostility – especially when women sought entry into the hallowed portals of exclusively male bastions. On the whole, male support was conditional on women accepting their ascribed auxiliary status – especially in the home organisations. In 1884 Principal Rainy commended the work of the Free Church Ladies Society in terms which may have reflected awareness of troubles in the Established Church, but which nevertheless seem rather insulting to his own sister Christina, and other capable women:  

'There was in some quarters no adequate appreciation of the importance of women's work. People failed to remember that half the mission field was work among women. He dared say that as this work was in the hands of the ladies, there might be a polite feeling on the part of the male classes (laughter) that the work could not be very complete or well done. But he might comfort the Assembly by telling them that though the Ladies Society gathered the funds for the support of their agents, yet all their arrangements were sanctioned by the Foreign Mission Committee. In their work
they had also the guidance of some of the very best elders. When sent forth to work, their agents did not work at their own hands, but under local mission councils in the field. So there was every reason to believe that the work would go on in a well regulated way.\textsuperscript{110}

A Ladies Society Women's Work pamphlet, 'Doubts and Difficulties Dispelled - A Dialogue', took the form of a dialogue involving several women and men from a country parish meeting in the Edinburgh parlour of a former member during the 1884 Assembly. While the dialogue is, no doubt, a construction, it is reasonable to assume that it reflects the range of male attitudes which women in the Ladies Society encountered. The pamphlet was clearly intended to serve as both resource and encouragement to its readers, who would have to promote the cause of female missions at parish level, after the Society had been endorsed at the 1884 Free Church Assembly. At the very least, it reveals the way in which male attitudes were perceived by women activists:

'M - But why does not the Foreign Mission Committee undertake both sides of the work?'

W - We are able to create more interest, and raise more money, by co-operating with men in this great enterprise...

'M - But did you ever hear of any other church that managed its foreign mission so..?'

W - Nearly all Presbyterian Churches do so

'M - Some of us have our doubts about the management of the Society

W - What do you find fault with?

'M - I heard you lost several good agents who offered you their services, and were afterwards picked up by other societies. This is what comes of the "monstrous regiment of women"!'
W - What you refer to applies to the FMC as well as to the Ladies Society...(There follows a discussion about raising interest and funds)...The missionaries on furlough are all very ready to help. At all events, we could perhaps send a lady to address the women of your congregation.

M - One innovation after another! Enveloped collections, missionary prayer-meetings, speechifying ladies!

W - (aside) It is lucky we did not mention our Presbyterial Auxiliaries

M - All I can say is, that you have a talent for inventing jaw-breaking names. No wonder people are afraid of you!

W - Auxiliaries are simply meetings of ladies who reside within the bounds of a presbytery, for mutual consultation and encouragement...

M - They will soon tire of it!

W - (aside) You will see that we meet with a good deal of discouragement.'111

There were frequent complaints that the courts of the church either lacked interest in, or were actively antagonistic to the work of the societies. And although changes in the UF Church theoretically entitled women to representation on certain committees, the 1918 Report of the WFM claimed:

'Presbyteries have been slow to follow the Assembly recommendation to appoint representatives of WFM to serve on committees for Foreign Mission - only Dunoon, and Irvine and Kilmarnock have done so, although the secretary of the latter's WFM says "We have not, so far, been called to any meetings". In Edinburgh, representation has been increased from four to eight at the presbytery's request. For the rest, co-operation between FM and WFM rarely goes beyond the sending of a report once a year - or the occasional social evening.'112

This grudging attitude, with its reluctance to concede competence as a female attribute, and unwillingness to accept female enterprise on equal terms, co-existed with an
underlying fear, occasionally expressed, that women were trying to set up their own church, in competition with the real thing. There were many men who recoiled at the very idea that their age old monopoly on ecclesiastical power was under threat. Lady Frances Balfour, who was a staunch supporter of both the Church of Scotland and the Women’s Movement, recalled:

"Which of us, acquainted with the church history of our day, but remembers the General Assembly when women missionaries were first invited to stand by their fellow workers and be addressed by the Moderator...It was a great shock to the Fathers and Brethren, that their sex should not disqualify them from standing in the Assembly."\(^{113}\)

Nevertheless, there is little to suggest that the women’s missionary organisations perceived themselves to be in the vanguard of the struggle for women’s rights. Although I have claimed that missionaries were exercising a kind of feminist imperialism in alien cultures, I have tried to show that its basis was the essentially conservative domestic ideology, allied with the conviction that Christianity was a beneficent influence on the position of women. The leading lights of the movement had close personal ties with eminent churchmen, and a reverence for presbyterian traditions. Most missionary candidates and home supporters expressed their motivation firmly within an evangelical framework. Agnes Cunningham was typical:

"My heart having been led to take a deep interest in the Mission field in early years, and having been brought to personal knowledge of Christ as my Saviour, I longed to go and tell those who know not Christ, of his love and saving power."\(^{114}\)

It is not helpful to adopt the approach of some social
historians who underestimate or ignore the reality and
strength of religious faith as a motive force in individual
and corporate life, and who regard it rather simplistically
only as a socio-economic framework. It was, first and
foremost, a deep and genuine Christian conviction which
induced most missionary women to undertake and thenceforth
to expand the boundaries of work abroad. On the whole, I
see little evidence to support any suggestion that
missionary fervour was used by those directly involved to
justify pre-formed arguments about the changing role and
rights of women. It was the reverse process which
characterised the changing experience of so many women -
they found courage to push back the boundaries of their
'sphere' precisely so that they could be more effective in
their Christian vocation.

But if the women's foreign missionary movement did not
adopt a conscious feminist position, it offered plenty of
grist to the mill of Christian women who were involved in
the reformist campaigns of the late 19th and early 20th
centuries. Helen Reid, for example, was deeply involved in
the movement for the higher education of women, and edited
The Attempt magazine, before she became SLA secretary. She
remained a political conservative throughout. From around
1870, the same Edinburgh establishment names crop up
frequently in connection with a range of social and
philanthropic causes, including female suffrage and foreign
missions. Commitment to these was quite compatible with
traditional church membership and activity.

But dissatisfaction with the Church itself in its attitudes toward, and limitation of women was also felt and increasingly expressed. Those who experienced obstruction and petty restrictions abroad, and conversely those who felt that church life at home compared unfavourably with opportunities in the field, both made some impact through the network. The patronising and contemptuous attitudes of so many presbyterian men towards the societies also aroused much irritation and reaction.

These rumblings of dissent, allied to a growing sense of history and achievement within the mission organisations, and the new input from such as the Missionary College and the Girls Auxiliary, certainly stimulated a significant minority, in the first decades of the new century, to make an explicit connection between the Women's Movement and Foreign Missions. Mary Williamson, daughter of the minister at Dean Parish Church, Edinburgh, gave an address to the Scottish Churches League for Woman Suffrage, meeting in March 1913. The hints here of imperialist maternalism, of millenialism, and of warning to forces of reaction within the Church, are all characteristic of the mood within the pre-war generation of progressive churchwomen:

'The student of history cannot fail to be struck by the correspondence between the Women's Movement in the west and the type of woman missionary required at the front...All over the east women are being educated and emancipated...Who will direct this Women's Movement in the
East and prevent its new found liberty from degenerating into license? The Woman-Statesman is required, but how shall she free and guide others unless she herself is free? Where can missionaries find better training than in the Women's organisations of the west.

Is the close connection between the Women's Movement and Foreign Missions not providential? Should not this consideration give pause to those who, either by active hostility, or by indifference to the cause of women at home, are hindering the progress of God's Kingdom in other lands?  

5. The significance of the Scottish women's missionary movement

'We thought of our whole lives from infancy upwards as an adventure - a reaching forth into the unknown...[We] spoke of the need for adventurous spirits in the high places of the field: to go forth, like knights of old, to succour and heal.'

Foreign mission work was, as it changed and developed from 1830-1930, a symbolic expression of what it meant to be a Scottish presbyterian woman. It espoused and gloried in the idea of a distinctive ministry. It affirmed apparently conservative values relating to gender, race and class. But the movement was instrumental in helping to shape (in a society dominated by religious belief and culture) a more positive view of women's sphere. Involvement in mission - especially in the field, but also at home - had the practical effect of transforming the lives of many women, without necessarily transforming their consciousness. With notable exceptions, mission women consistently applied western evangelical standards of 'womanliness' as the goal for the work, and their criterion for judging its success. The need to serve that cause provided the rationale for
training and qualification in teaching, nursing, medicine and social work. So missionaries were among the first truly professional women. But unlike the 'new woman' of the late 19th century who in the popular view had cast off her femininity to compete with men, the missionaries (notwithstanding acceptable images as eccentric 'old maids') placed womanly qualities of altruism and self-sacrifice at the centre of their work. Missions offered all the opportunities of an independent career, with the added glamour of adventure and travel (and potential dangers too), but without condemning agents to the fierce criticism reserved for women whose personal ambition was seen as a fundamental threat to the ordered spheres of society.

In fact, separation of roles could work to their advantage, even as that separation was surreptitiously undermined or abandoned. Missionary women were able to claim credit for the initiation and completion of their own distinctive work, and this gave them confidence and authority. Those at home learnt new skills in administration and advocacy, and began to overcome traditional self-perceptions of helplessness in any other than domestic situations. The story is not completely positive, as I have indicated. But the movement made an impact on the church, not, on the whole, by directly challenging or contradicting men, but because women gradually assumed for themselves and understood the implications of greater responsibility.
In many respects, foreign missionary work formed a continuum with other expressions of female agency. What made it distinctive, and offered women the chance to live and witness in ways which went far beyond traditional limits, was the exposure to a beautiful yet disturbing world beyond familiar horizons. Some missionaries thrived on situations which offered both opportunity and danger, while others retreated into the safe familiarity of religious and cultural certainty. The geographical and psychological spaces they found for themselves had the potential to offer real liberation - for individual missionaries, for the women they worked among in the field, and, by association and example, for the wider Scottish female public. The number of presbyterian women who served as missionaries did not exceed, in total, more than a few hundred during the period under consideration. The overall impact of the movement on Scottish society must therefore be judged largely on the impression which it made on public attitudes and actions. I think that the foreign missionary movement was tremendously significant at many levels for Victorian and Edwardian society in general, and perhaps for women in particular. I have already shown that it was the inspiration for home organisations which dealt with substantial sums of money, an increasingly complex administrative infrastructure, and an extensive network of communication between the missionaries and their supporters, conducted by letter and by furlough visits. All this involved the effort (great or small) of thousands of
Scotswomen. The growing size, importance and sophistication of these organisations was enough to establish the innovative value of the movement for Scottish presbyterian women. But foreign missions functioned also at a deep and symbolic level, helping to shape and confirm a national psyche in an age of imperialism. At the heart of this process were the unquestionably brave, complex and remarkable individuals around whom a huge hero-making industry developed. The stories of these missionaries were told in innumerable church and secular journals, and in cheap and popular biographies. They were read, not just in homes, but at countless work parties, sewing meetings, mission soirees. Magic lantern slides and dramatic tableaux also brought scenes and incidents from the field to life in church halls across Scotland. John Mackenzie has written of imperial folk heroes:

'They served to explain and justify the rise of the imperial state, personify national greatness, and offer examples of self-sacrificing service to a current generation. They were used as the embodiment of the collective will, stereotypes of a shared culture, and promoters of unity in the face of potential fragmentation'.

Mackenzie considers that David Livingstone, that archetypal Scottish Victorian hero, fulfilled all of these criteria. But it is also true that several female missionaries were the subjects of very positive and powerful publicity. None more so than Mary Slessor, who was really the female working class counterpart (for the next generation) of Livingstone - a man who was her own missionary hero.
The cult of Mary Slessor (for is surely only slightly frivolous to call it that) deserves careful consideration - much more than the cursory attention it receives here. Livingstone was a Victorian hero, but Slessor was a heroine of the twentieth century (although her missionary service began in the 1880s). Her name was invoked so often, and with such pride, in Scottish church circles, that the legendary tales of her character and exploits cannot fail to have affected thousands of men and women, girls and boys. Exactly what was the nature of the 'Slessor effect', it would required more detailed research to ascertain. But whatever the mythmakers did with their versions of the story, it was indubitably the tale of an active, brave, earthy and unconventional woman. While Mary Slessor would, perhaps, have found little to dispute in the poem with which this chapter began, her own work seemed to bear witness to an entirely different atmosphere of female Christian witness. She was an ideal heroine for a new wave of young women (typified by the UFC Girls Association) who were encouraged to believe that a female life of faith could be more adventurous and free, and that their own lives could really make a difference in the world. And because Slessor was a heroine for the whole church and nation, her story must have helped to counteract old notions of 'appropriate' character traits and spheres of activity for men and women. Indeed, much of the Scottish pride in her seemed to have been associated with the image of a no-nonsense, plain-speaking, couthy individual who
treated everyone alike, and did not defer to anyone, regardless of their position. These features endeared her to a public which believed she reflected back to them all that was most valuable and distinctive about the Scottish character. She was described in language which emphasised a romantic individualism much more closely associated with men; she

'was seen to push human action beyond the normal bounds, to be a wanderer who became an energising force through refusing to conform with the normal patterns of life...was fearless, decisive and committed unto death, taking on forces, natural or human, that called forth the exercise of an indomitable will, superhuman physical stamina, and an almost miraculous courage.'

But there was always also the 'feminine' side of her personality - her love and tenderness, her physical frailty, her public reticence while on furlough, her efforts at homemaking and childrearing in 'darkest Africa'. Perhaps this was a real strength for those women who were inspired to emulate her. For surely if Slessor achieved recognition and acclamation for her endeavours, without being criticised for being 'unwomanly', so too could others following in her footsteps.

On the other hand, the popular publications which promoted the Slessor cult (and those written about other women missionaries) tended to be didactic and moralistic in tone. Those intended for children especially used the story to emphasise religious messages about humility, sacrifice, dependence upon God, and the importance of prayer. It was
those elements of the missionary's life which were to be learned and copied in the midst of mundane Scottish existence, while her explorations, conflicts, building, administrative and juridical work were the elements of romance - exciting to read about, but a million miles from the real lives of ordinary Scots. It is not surprising - indeed it was probably inevitable - that missionary stories were used in this way in Sunday Schools and pulpits across the land. But for most people the value and importance of Slessor's life was at one and the same time an affirmation of all that was best in the 'Scottish' and Christian character, and also the celebration of something truly extraordinary, which only a chosen few could hope to follow.

Another feature of biographies was their stress on the savagery and backwardness of the 'natives' among whom the missionary laboured. This served to confirm the validity, not only of religious prosyletising, but also of the whole project of the British Empire, in which church missions occupied a key (though not always acquiescent) role. And it contributed to the mental background of racialist theories which, by the twentieth century were widely accepted. So the 'white man's (or even woman's) burden was justified, and the tutelage of subject peoples was for their own benefit.
A quotation from Mary Slessor, The Dundee Factory Girl who became a Devoted African Missionary, (1923) is illustrative of these points:

'She longed to carry the Gospel to these savages, realising the risk she ran, but fearing no danger if only the news of God's love could be told to these dusky children of Adam... A brawny black having applied to her for medical help she took out the castor oil. The man acted like bad children and would not unlock his lips. She gave him a box on the ear, and when he had been dosed resumed her usual placid demeanour... The while, busy in a thousand sordid tasks, she kept up her reading, feeding her mind and studying the Bible as the source of all her comfort, wisdom and strength. Hence she was much in prayer, and by it was made brave. Thus while traversing the forests where leopards dogged her steps she took refuge in prayer and so won courage and deliverance.

No wonder that her force of character, courage, and that indescribable charm, the kind always possess, brought chiefs and even whole tribes to her so that she might settle their differences, and point out to them the right path."

What really was the impact of such material on girls and women of the Scottish churches? It must have evoked a range of responses: a general sense of interest and pride in the exploits of Scots abroad; serious attempts to base personal and spiritual lives on their example; an excitement that women could act with such independence and valour; a dutiful commitment to produce more dresses and dolls for the poor wee black babies; a distraction from the dreary injustice of so many working women's lives, and from the possibility of political and collective action.

Such evidence as I have found - in women's magazines and supplements, in letters from those who aspired to mission work, in minutes and reports from local church women's organisations - does suggest an important link between the
promotion of missionary heroines, and a more dynamic view of what it meant to be a Christian woman. This was of direct consequence to many who were thereby given confidence and inspiration to 'reach forth into the unknown' in their own lives, and it would not do to underestimate the power of a good model for girls and women striving for adventure.

Perhaps the more general (but not necessarily conflicting) effect of the movement and its mythology was romantic in a less focussed sense. The gulf between the complicated, exhausting, frustrating yet fulfilling experience of many women missionaries, and the lives of their supporters back home, was bridged by accounts and images of noble white heroines. These could be used to challenge old conventions and prejudices at home (as when the situation in India was highlighted in support of the campaign for British women to receive medical education), but more often served to confirm dominant Scottish attitudes to race, religion and Empire.

The women's foreign missionary movement, then, was of central practical, theoretical, psychological and symbolic importance to the many-faceted struggles around women's nature, mission, agency and identity in presbyterian Scotland.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

1. Introduction

In previous chapters I have described the growing involvement of women in the public life and service of the Scottish presbyterian churches during the period 1830–1930. I have characterised this phenomenon as the significant feminisation of an institution which was overwhelmingly masculine in tone and structure from the time of the Reformation and for almost three hundred years thereafter. The evolution of the church as focus for a range of missionary and philanthropic initiatives was inextricably linked with the participation of churchwomen: in home and foreign missions, in congregational organisations and activities, in education, and in moral and social campaigns. By 1930, Scottish presbyterianism had in many respects a significantly altered character and public image.

But I have also indicated that this feminisation was essentially of service rather than of status or authority. The churches remained solidly patriarchal in structure and attitude, in spite of a series of challenges and attempts to change. These came both from within, and as the result of pressure emanating from the transformation of social, economic and political conditions available to women. The official position of women within presbyterian polity was
subject to consideration and debate throughout the period, but by 1930 it remained ambivalent and subordinate. In 1928, a dissatisfied member of the United Free Church described the typical situation of female members, in her complaint about a visit by the local Presbytery to her congregation:

'The Church is a body of men and women, meeting together for worship and service. To meet seventy or eighty or even 100 men out of 1200 members, seventy per cent of whom are women, is surely to leave out of the picture one of its most important features. Are visitors satisfied to see the Church only through the eyes of men? ...Men are in evidence when there is collecting to be done in Church - "taking up collection" is a stately affair! But what about monthly house-to-house visiting, rain or sun, fog or snow, to gather up the Central Fund and Missionary Subscriptions...there is a vast army of women keeping the great organisation at work by tireless ungrudging service in the cause of Christ...Women may have guilds, work parties, Girls' Association; they may organise innumerable activities in mission; they may gather in the funds and indeed make the Church a possibility - but they have no official recognition. Their work is 'appreciated' by Presbyteries and Sessions, but they are not officially part of the Church.

...Is it not time that the Churches in Scotland should make use of the powers they already have to elect women to their courts, and that they should seek for the extension of these powers to include all offices in the Church?...In this way only will the Church attain to its full stature and be fitted to meet the immense calls and responsibilities of the present day.'

In this chapter I shall consider the various efforts and campaigns to open up opportunities for official status, responsibility and authority to women. I hope to suggest some of the underlying concerns and ideologies which influenced arguments advanced for and against these goals, and some reasons why presbyterianism was unable or unwilling to accommodate this major departure from its patriarchal heritage.
The Scottish reformation challenged and eventually broke the control exercised by the Roman Catholic Church. Papal and clerical power were denounced. Knox and his followers preached that salvation was mediated directly to each individual human being by Christ alone. But Calvinism was no charismatic sect, boldly embodying the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in some radical experiment of earthly equality. For the Scottish reformers, the visible church consisted in the true preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered. The emphasis, in the pattern of Church government which evolved from this doctrine, was on order and constitutional authority. An essential feature was a rather high and serious understanding of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. The First Book of Discipline declared, 'In Kirk reformed or tending to reformation, none may presume to preach or minister the Sacraments till orderly they be called to the same'.

Vocation to the ministry required, not just the personal apprehension of a call, but election, examination and admission. As pastor – the watchman over the flock – the predominant function of the minister was to preach and teach Scripture and doctrine to the people, and hence the holder of that office was to be literate and well educated. While Knox's ideal may not have been realised in his own
time, and was subject to subsequent development and compromise, it would not be misleading to suggest that the image of the minister as a central public figure, expecting and receiving considerable respect and status, was at the heart of Scottish presbyterian culture.

If the minister's task was to ensure purity of doctrine within his parish, the duty of discipline was delegated to the elders. The First Book of Discipline decreed that they should reprove, correct and punish vices with which the civil magistrate did not normally deal - by private rebuke, public admonition and excommunication. The powers of the Kirk Session were extensive. Mitchison and Leneman have observed that the Church exercised a formal system of social control in which 'lay activity was most conspicuous in the lowest and highest courts...Even by the 17th century, the Church was equipped with a far more modern system of government than the State - it is not surprising that it tended to intrude into matters of political and penal policy'.

But the main concern of elders was the moral (which usually meant sexual) control of parishioners:

'Disobedience to the demands of the Session entailed civil disabilities well into the eighteenth century: the sinner had to 'compeir' or lose his scanty rights of citizenship. He could be fined, he could be refused a 'testification' enabling him to live in the parish, he could be committed to the Sheriff...Girls murdered their illegitimate children rather than face the ordeal of being pilloried. As late as 1751 the General Assembly...had to order the Act against the concealment of pregnancy to be read from every pulpit.'

As the poet Keats wrote in 1818:

'A Scotch girl stands in terrible awe of the Elder - poor little Susannas - They will scarcely laugh - They are greatly to be pitied and the Kirk is greatly to be
damned...I would sooner be a wild deer than a girl under the dominion of the Kirk.'

Although the civil jurisdiction of elders decreased in the 19th century, their ecclesiastical standing as official representatives of a congregation remained high. They were central figures in their ritual and decision-making capacities. The men who held office in the Church tended to be those whose landowning, professional or business roles in rural, small town or urban settings, gave them standing and power within the local community. Eldership was a conventional honour for the Scottish landed and bourgeois male classes.

The presbyterian system of government was exercised within the juridical framework of a hierarchy of courts - Kirk Session, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly - each of which was composed exclusively, in different combinations, of ordained ministers and elders. Of this system, Principal Martin commented during a debate in the 1915 United Free Church Assembly, 'Our Church is worked by its male members, and that as a matter of principle.'

It was consistently argued that such a principle was founded in Scripture, which was the predominant source of authority for the reformed Church. I shall examine that position in the context of specific disputes. But there were also almost insurmountable ideological and practical hindrances (whose force was, no doubt, derived in part from
the Scriptural contention), which made the idea of women exercising public and official presbyterian ministry virtually inconceivable until the end of the 19th century.

The system of formal ministry which developed in theory and practice, and which came to assume such symbolic importance within Scottish society, might be described (in a phrase used by theologian Letty Russell) as a paradigm of domination. 10 This paradigm regards authority over the community as the suitable model for an orderly church. It is characterised by actions and traits which have stereotypically been designated as masculine. And it is evident in virtually every aspect of presbyterian ministry and eldership. In a society which became so pervaded with the ideology of separate spheres for women and men, it would be literally incredible to envisage women undertaking such office. Knox, in his desire for a decorous and godly ministry, had expressed contemptuous incredulity at the idea:

'We flee the society of the Papistical Kirk in participation of their sacraments, first because their ministers are not of Christ Jesus: yea they suffer women to baptise.' 11

His view of women as essentially subordinate and potentially dangerous, and therefore requiring to be controlled, implied that any dominion exercised by them (whether in Church or State) would be neither seemly nor lawful, but disorderly. I have argued that women, in the wake of the evangelical revival, came to be regarded as
upholders of moral and religious rectitude. Yet in Calvinist theology they remained the descendants of Eve. Their sinful provenance and potential still made them subject to patriarchal authority in home, church and community, for it was only when subject to that control that 'true womanhood' could flourish. For evangelical presbyterians, women who did not submit to that pattern were shameful reminders of female degradation. So there was no question that the female sex were to remain the recipients, not the administrators, of discipline.

The language which was commonly used to describe office-bearers of Scottish churches tended to carry connotations of gender, whether hidden or acknowledged. Reverence, respect and prestige were typically accorded specifically to men. Ministers were generally regarded as 'above' their parishioners - moral exemplars who were yet distant from the everyday activities and concerns of the people. Certainly one has the impression that aloofness and pomposity were among the less endearing traits commonly observed in ministers of the period. In 1934, A H Gray could still write of a minister's wife who told him that all the ministers she knew considered themselves to be 'the great I Am'.

Of course, in a class-ridden society, which nevertheless occasionally displayed the capacity to override barriers of both class and gender, it was not only men who could
inspire such reactions (whether positive or negative), and no doubt there were numerous examples of haughty and intimidating Scottish women. But most churchwomen apparently internalised the association between maleness and the dignity of religious office. In 1931 the Woman's Guild National President wrote:

'Deep down in the hearts of many there are still traces of that age old feeling of awe and reverence associated with elders of the Scotch Kirk. Their highest act of service is identified with the Holy Table and the Sacrament; and the question arises, unbidden in many minds, 'would it make any difference to me, to the spirit of my communion, were there women elders present?'

The physical geography of church buildings, and the placing of ministers and elders within them, seem also to evince a paradigm of domination. Robed in black and displaying his academic credentials, the minister conducted worship from a pulpit 'six feet above contradiction' (leaving members, in the common expression, 'under Dr So-and-So's pulpit'). The elders, gathered for the rare celebration of Communion, dressed in the dreich garb of respectability and executed their ceremonial duties with a military precision. Pew rents, and the positioning of women, working and servant-class members, were graphic symbols of the patriarchal authority believed by churchgoers to have been divinely invested in their institution. In such a setting it would require a deeply disturbing effort of the imagination to picture a woman conducting public proceedings from pulpit or chancel.
The practical barriers confronting women were no less insuperable in the early- and mid-Victorian years, and they only began to be breached in the closing decade of the century. The ethos of the Kirk demanded an educated ministry, and those seeking ordination required a university degree. Since women were excluded from Scottish universities until 1892, they were simply unable to fulfil this prerequisite. Only in 1898 did the divinity faculties begin to address the question of female students. In 1910 Frances Melville was the first Scot to graduate Bachelor of Divinity, but she, and those few who followed her example up to 1930, were not 'regular' students. They either belonged to non-presbyterian denominations, or could not be candidates for ordination.\textsuperscript{15} Throughout the period 1830–1930, presbyterian women were never in a position to have any personal sense of vocation either examined or validated.

More strictly enforced educational qualifications were an aspect of the growing 19th century tendency towards male professionalisation. Those who entered the clerical profession were initiated into an arcane society with its own rules, language, garb and rituals. Their stipends and manses may not always have matched the material comforts of doctors and lawyers, but they were designed for the economic and social support of the minister as \textit{pater familias}. He was the breadwinner - provider for wife, children and servants. This role (as I have suggested in a
previous chapter) was rarely countenanced for women of the middle and upper classes — though some had to fulfil it. The persona of minister as professional man and head of the household was the basis for many objections to the ordination of women.  

Elders likewise were generally men who were powerful within the prevailing social and economic order. Even in largely working class parishes, it tended to be the better-off tradesmen and artisans who sat on the Kirk Session. Women rarely enjoyed social standing independent of male relatives — even when they had to cope with the practical burdens of breadwinning. In church life, they might gradually take on many of the practical tasks which in theory had been those of the eldership, but they did not have the status to assume its formal functions with the approval of the community. In short, women were denied the power which church officials both exercised and reflected, because the qualities and attainments required were, by circular definition, male. If 'true womanhood' was a life of self-effacement in the domestic sphere, the quintessential 'man' was a person of independence and authority, which was exercised in the public realm of church and community. It was these separate worlds which Dr Adamson of Ardrossan longed to retain when he argued against the ordination of women deacons in 1917:

'We must beware of the further masculinising of women and the feminising of the Church. A woman impudent and mannish grown is not more loathed than an effeminate man! In the order of nature there is a distinction which Christianity does not destroy.'
In a church which had adopted such a powerful paradigm of domination as its model for ordained ministry, and in a society so defined by the domestic ideology, the phrase, 'women's ministry' would either have been an oxymoron, or would have required major redefinition to accommodate prevailing understandings of both women and ministry. During this period, those who sought some kind of official position for women within presbyterianism had three basic options. They could accept and develop the notion of a distinctive ministry for women; they could challenge the underlying ideology of separate spheres and propose instead that women should be enabled to exercise office on an equal basis with men; or they could radically question the prevailing paradigm and propose alternative models of the 'living church', thus subverting questions of status and prestige while affirming the credibility of women as bearers of ecclesiastical authority.

These three options were not always discrete or clearly defined, but they were the grounds upon which the struggle was joined, whether by stealth or in open combat.

3. 'The hazards of public debate and collision':

Votes for women in the Free Church of Scotland

One of the most controversial and contested elements of post-Reformation church organisation was the system of patronage, whereby the hereditary owner of the right of presentation could choose the parish minister, thus
compromising one of the democratic principles of presbyterianism. Apart from a period between 1649 and 1662, state legislation enforced patronage until the Revolution Settlement of 1690, which eliminated the rights of individual patrons in favour of those of heritors and elders to present ministers to charges. But the Patronage Act of 1712 restored the privilege of lay patrons to appoint ministers. The General Assembly opposed the Act, but after 1729 began to back patrons in disputes, and dissatisfaction with the situation led to the defection of four ministers to form the Secession Church in 1733 - the first act in the disintegration of uniform presbyterianism. The complex story of expulsions and secessions which split the Church of Scotland need not concern us here, except in its consequences for women members.

Within the Established Church, women and men were equally subject to the imposition of ministers who were not of their choice and were likely actively to support the interests of their wealthy patrons. The patrons themselves were, of course, usually men, but some women exercised considerable power and ambition. As members of the aristocracy, their class gave them access to privileges denied to other women. Lady Glenorchy of Breadalbane, for example,

'founded more churches and launched more new congregations than any private individual in Scottish history...she chose the first ministers for her churches and drew up the rules and regulations by which the congregations were to be governed.' 18
Among those presbyterians who seceded from the Establishment for various reasons, the right of the congregation to elect and call a minister was recognised, but the extent of this privilege was far from consistent, and one of the key variables was the situation of female members. In 1736 the Secession Church declared in its Testimony that ministers and other office bearers were to be set over congregations by the call and consent of the majority of members in full communion. However, when it was pointed out that this formulation apparently gave women the right to vote, it was explained that this was not in fact the practice. The right of call was restricted to male heads of families, while 'wives and children might take part therein by influencing with religious and rational arguments their husbands and fathers in favour of one candidate rather than another'.

However, after the Breach of 1747, it appears that the Burghers generally allowed women to vote, while the Anti-Burghers forbade the practice. At the formation of the United Secession Church in 1820 the issue was one of two points of difference, but within a few years the women's vote was universally accepted, in spite of some Anti-Burgher objections. One minister had it recorded that 'He could not help expressing his disapprobation of female members of a congregation being admitted to vote and subscribe a call, it being in his opinion contrary to the appointed rule, as well as to the law of nature manifested in the constitution of human society'.

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In 1834 the Ten Years Conflict which led to the Disruption was set in motion by the passing of the Veto Act, by which the Established Church attempted to declare that no minister should be imposed contrary to the will of the congregation. Grounds for rejection were to be that the majority of male heads of families disapproved. The Church of Scotland, while asserting its claim for democracy, framed that according to patriarchal presuppositions. But for the people who came out of the Established Church of Scotland in 1843, those presuppositions themselves became a matter of contention. At the first Assembly of the new Free Church, held in October 1843, the debate about the report on the Election of Office-bearers revolved around the question of whether women in full communion with the Church could be counted as individual members with full rights and responsibilities, or whether these could be fulfilled by men speaking and acting on their behalf. In May of that year, interim arrangements had been made which stated that ministers, elders and deacons should be 'chosen by the votes of male communicants on the role'. The only reference during the debate to the question of women's rights was made by Dr Guthrie of Edinburgh, who commented that 'He had no doubt in his mind at all on the subject. It would be a novelty to give female communicants a vote, and he did not wish to introduce such a novelty without the general concurrence of his brethren. (hear hear)'

It is difficult to ascertain how much of an issue this novelty was, but there is some evidence that it was a bone of contention between May and October 1843. Several letters
appeared in *The Witness* and a pamphlet was published, entitled *The Present Crisis of the Free Church, or A Scriptural Examination of the Question, ought Females to have a voice in the calling of Pastors in the Church of Christ*.

The authors summarised their argument:

'Believing that it can be clearly established that the voice of females in the election of ministers is destitute of all warrant and foundation either in reason or in the Word of God - anxious that our Church should shun the greatest calamity which could at present befall her - and apprehensive, lest finding herself no longer fettered but free, she should yield even in appearance to the temptation of being liberal in sacred things.'

The pseudonymous authors were laymen, but women also felt moved to address the Moderator directly. Whether they did so in support of, or opposed to their enfranchisement, they could hardly be described as radical. The 'Female Friend' who advocated the cause appealed, not on the basis of sexual equality in the natural or divine order, but as a kind of reward (along with others she proposed which hardly accorded with anti-patronage principles) for the staunch support which the Free Church received from women. She wrote:

'What we ask is not a voice in the church's legislation, not a hand in the church's government - but simply room for the expression of our choice, as members of the body of Christ, in the calling of our ministers.'

But were women really considered to be full members of the Church? This apparently unequivocal status was in fact the main point of dispute. The woman who (in spite of feeling 'in its fullest extent all the embarrassing novelty and peculiar delicacy' of public correspondence with the Moderator 'by persons of the gentler sex on affairs
connected with the government of the Church') wrote to express her opposition to the female vote, claimed that most women were not truly converted at all. They were 'amateur religiosi' who simply exhibited the natural propensity to religion which was part of the female character. If they were enfranchised, 'Can anyone doubt that the consequences to the ministrations of the Free Church would be most disastrous - that a silly sentimentality, a drawing room theology, would come to fill our pulpits', and she continued, 'I find nothing "harsh or exclusive" in the Word of God - the grand charter of women's privileges - when it assigns to me a position inferior to that of my male relatives in the affairs of government.'

The Report which was presented to the October General Assembly removed any reference to the restriction of voting to male communicants, and declared:

'The principle has already been recognised, and should be fully and fairly acted upon, that it appertaineth to the people, and to every several congregation, that is, to the members of the congregation in full communion with the Church, to elect their minister.'

The fact that this statement gave rise to any debate at all, far less the conceptual difficulties expressed by some commissioners, testifies to the tension between the Protestant acceptance of individual equality among human souls, and the venerable Christian tradition of assuming male humanity to be normative, and the female version to be defective or incomplete. This tension was compounded by the intellectual tradition of the Enlightenment, which proclaimed the natural rights of individuals, but generally concluded that only male head of households had the rational capacity to participate in public decision-making.
However, Dr Robert Burns of Paisley argued that the language of the Report was unambiguous:

'I understand that in the words, 'members of the Church', female members are included, unless you are prepared to prove that female members are not members of the Church at all, and that the restriction contained in the Interim Act of the last Assembly has been blotted out.'

and he continued,

'If any one thing has created a spirit of apathy and discouragement among adherents of the Free Church, it is the doubt...thrown on the rights of female members, and by consequence the virtual exclusion of all females from a voice in the election of ministers.'

But James Begg, while supporting the right of women, believed that

'The advantage of the report, I think, is chiefly in this, that it does not give a definite opinion on the most important question...but leaves it entirely open to every Presbytery to exercise its own discretion, and leaves it to female members, if they choose, to claim and exercise their rights.'

This indeed was the practical effect of the report, which was sent down to Presbyteries, and carried forward in the same interim form until 1846, when it became a Declaratory Act, without being subject to the 'mature debate' and prescriptive legislation which some 1843 commissioners called for.

Although at one level this Act was a concession to the rights of women in the Free Church, it is probable that a variety of attitudes, arguments and circumstances would inhibit the claim of many to those rights. I have already referred to the arguments from nature and culture utilised by the 'female opponent'. Others appealed to Scripture and
ecclesiastical tradition. Dr Cunningham, convener of the committee which submitted the report, and leading theologian of the new denomination, gave his gloss on the casuistry of an apparently lucid piece of legislation:

'It will be competent for [a] Presbytery, or for any superior Church court, to hold that "members of congregations" are to be interpreted according to the laws and practices of the Church as established by former precedents, and in that way to understand the expression as meaning merely male communicants...I think it right to say, since the matter has been mooted, with regard to the question that has divided us, that I am not convinced by the statements of Mr Begg and Dr Burns, that female communicants have a right to vote, as well as male communicants. Though I hold as a general principle that in the election of a minister, their consent and approbation must in some way or other be ascertained.' 30

It is in the context of the doctrine of separate spheres, which was so enthusiastically promulgated in religious circles at this time, that the importance of 'votes for women' in the Free Church should be assessed. Dr Burns' comments suggest that many women, full of enthusiastic fervour for the new denomination, wanted active involvement. And there is plenty of evidence of churchwomen who held strong and passionate views about religious matters. But it would take an extremely unconventional woman to exercise her right to speak at a congregational meeting, rather than seek to exert her 'feminine' influence in the 'woman's sphere' of parlours and dining tables. The consequences for a woman who endeavoured to engage in the 'hazards of public debate and collision' 31 would be serious indeed, if she valued her reputation and respectability; and especially if she was
aware that Dr Thomas Chalmers, the great leader of the Free Church, had no appreciation of the importance of her right of expression. He said in 1847:

'I have always looked upon this as a very paltry and distasteful question; I think that it is revolting to the collective mind of the Free Church.'

It is likely that most churches would in any case try to ensure unanimity and minimise the risk of dissension by the time a nominee's name was presented to the congregation. But this first skirmish in the struggle at least raised the principle that women as church members, might be considered as individuals with public rights and responsibilities. Their official invisibility, and the male prerogative to speak and act for women as if they were minors or imbeciles, could no longer simply be taken for granted. Legislation which did not specifically include them was enacted, but a precedent was set for permitting an official role for women without actually enforcing it. This was far from a ringing declaration of equal rights, and betrayed a continuing tendency to regard women, not as an integral part of the Church, but as a group whose relationship with the institution was regarded as problematic and unsettled.
4. 'Wandering, preaching damsels'

Whatever the significance of the Free Church policy on the enfranchisement of female members, there is no evidence that women within any branch of Scottish presbyterianism were seeking, during the early Victorian period, a substantial or public role beyond the accepted parameters of 'woman's work' in the affairs of the church. This cannot have been because they were all unaware of challenges to the traditional position of women. The 'female opponent' of voting had warned the Moderator that controversy had been stirred up over just such challenges, on the 'other side of the Atlantic'.

In America, one significant expression of evangelical Protestantism was the anti-slavery movement. Believing slavery to be a fundamental sin against God and humankind, many northern Christians pursued abolition with zeal and fervour. Women were deeply involved in the campaign, but while some confined themselves to traditional auxiliary activities, others, most notably the Grimke sisters, engaged in public campaigning work. In 1837, following a speaking tour which filled churches and halls throughout New England, the General Association of Congregationalist Ministers issued an edict to all member churches, condemning the Grimkes for their unfeminine behaviour in addressing 'promiscuous' (mixed) audiences. The anti-slavery campaign was conducted on both sides of the Atlantic, and there is no doubt that Scottish Protestants
would be informed about this novel and controversial situation. Female activists, even if they did not actually read Sarah Grimke's *Letters on Equality* (1838), were probably aware of the gist of her cogent arguments against women's subordination. These surely provided the context for the publication of a series of articles by an American minister, Rev Hubbard Winslow, in the Secession Church's *Christian Journal* 1840, entitled *Woman as She Should Be:*

'But oh! how fallen from this high elevation is she when, impatient of her proper sphere, she steps forth to assume the duties of man...when, forsaking the domestic hearth, her delicate voice is heard from house to house, or in social assemblies, rising in harsh unnatural tones of denunciation against civil laws and rulers, against measures involving politics and state affairs, of which she is nearly as ignorant as the child she left at home in the cradle; against ministers and churches, perhaps even her own pastor...expecting to reform politics and churches, and to put down every real and supposed evil in them, by the right arm of female power...What a sad wreck of female loveliness she is then! She can hardly conceive how ridiculous she appears in the eyes of all sober, discreet, judicious Christian men, or how great the reproach she brings upon her sex.'  

Matters came to a head at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention, held in London in 1840, from which several American female delegates were excluded simply because of their gender. Most Scottish presbyterian abolitionists would have agreed with Rev G Harvey of Glasgow, a member of the Relief Secession Church, who claimed that the appointment of women representatives to the Convention was 'acting in opposition to plain teaching and the Word of God'.  

The interpretations which enabled Biblical injunctions
about slavery to be overridden in favour of a general moral principle - also derived from Scripture - were not, apparently, to be extended to discussions about women in church and society. The Scotsman newspaper, in spite of its reform credentials, simply omitted any report of the embarassing 'woman question'. But some of the female delegates embarked on a tour of the British Isles after the Convention. The support they received in Scotland came almost exclusively from Quaker and Unitarian activists. The schism of anti-slavery societies in Scotland 1840-41 split the movement into camps which were for and against the radical William Lloyd Garrison. His support of equal rights for women was just one of a raft of policies which were condemned as heretical by orthodox presbyterian men and women (see chapter five). The events of 1840 sowed the seeds of organised American feminism in the 19th century, as the excluded women were instrumental in organising the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848.

In America, the Garrisonian women were anathema to Calvinist ministers, and even the liberal sects were not always welcoming or supportive. In spite of their evangelical roots and ardour, many feminist abolitionists departed the institutional church and attempted to live out a practical religion, free from doctrinal restrictions and clerical disapproval. In Britain, even women who supported Garrisonian policy on abolition were quite hesitant about accepting the theoretical or practical connections between
anti-slavery and women's rights, although many were subsequently involved in the range of reformist campaigns which constituted the later Victorian Women's Movement. There was a particular reluctance among British Protestant women to engage with the theological challenge presented by feminism to institutionalised Christianity. In Britain during the 1840s, it was not anti-slavery campaigners who put themselves beyond the pale by embracing that challenge in public, but Utopian Socialists.

Barbara Taylor's fascinating study of feminism in the Owenite movement of the early 19th century has revealed the importance of this radical tradition in the development of feminist thought and action. Taylor discusses the religious origins of militant infidel women, 'whose radicalism was simultaneously a product of their puritanism and a reaction to it', and argues that 'the point from which various styles of Socialist feminist heterodoxy originated was the concept of women as a moral vanguard'. 38 Although Taylor deals mainly with English women and English events, she says enough about Scotland to suggest that there were female propagandists who made some impact during a period of major social unrest. Most of the women she writes about had fervently evangelical non-conformist backgrounds, and she claims that the tensions inherent in the ideology of women's special mission made it inevitable 'that the churches should begin to breed a female opposition'. 39 Did the Scottish presbyterian churches, which shared much
with, and yet were distinctive from, English evangelicalism, breed such opposition? In the absence of adequate research, that question cannot yet be answered. Elspeth King mentions two Scottish female socialist lecturers – Agnes Walker and Mrs A S Hamilton – who asserted, in no uncertain terms, sexual equality, and the complicity of the churches in the oppression of women. But what their background was, and how many other Scotswomen engaged in similar activity, is yet to be determined. However, a report of Mrs Hamilton's activities in the Glasgow Free Press of 1834, is revealing about the extent to which internicine presbyterian rivalry threatened to overshadow every other controversy during this volatile period:

'Her first lecture, which was on Church and State Reform, was delivered on Thursday evening and lasted an hour and a half. The Established Church, or, as she quaintly denominated it, 'the Old Lady', came in for a principal share of vituperation; a course of proceeding which, she says, she finds highly useful in opening to her the doors of the Voluntary Churches in many parts of the country, the managers accepting this redeeming quality as a sufficient expiation for the other heresies which she attempts to propogate.'

Although Utopian Socialism was never a mass movement, it attracted considerable working class interest – especially when there was the novelty of a women on a public platform. One of the most prominent of female socialist freethinkers, Emma Martin, embarked on an extensive Scottish tour during 1844-5. She was anything but coy about her targets and tactics. The Movement newspaper announced her intent:
But in the mid-Victorian period there was another challenge to the conventional religious role of women, and this was firmly located within the boundaries of evangelical Christianity. The first manifestations of a second religious awakening in Britain occurred in Ulster in 1859, and included 'public prayers and preachings' by women. Between then and 1873, when the Edinburgh campaign of Moody and Sankey ushered in a new phase of revivalism, female preachers were a distinctive feature of the popular religious landscape, especially in working class areas where the simple arminian message made the most impact.

Olive Anderson, in her pioneering essay, *Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain* (1969), defines the phenomenon as

'The deliberate undertaking by women of evangelical, spiritual instruction or exhortation in mixed public assemblies held for that purpose, with no attempt to disguise the nature of the activities or audience'.

One of the most successful was Jessie Macfarlane, a presbyterian by upbringing, who began preaching in Edinburgh in 1862. She was encouraged by Gordon Forlong, a member of the Plymouth Brethren who defended female preaching in a pamphlet published in 1863. He and Macfarlane were at the centre of a controversy in the city when she took the platform of the Music Hall in 1864 during a presbyterian mission meeting. Jessie Macfarlane preached extensively throughout East Scotland, the Midlands and London until her death in 1871.

Anderson associates the phenomenon of female preaching with
pre-millenialism: the belief that the public ministry of women was one of the signs of the 'last days' prophesied in Joel 2:28-29. That was certainly the position of one of the most renowned preachers, Isabella Armstrong. She was Irish, and converted during the 1859 revival in County Tyrone. Thereafter she began preaching to relieve those men who were exhausted by the unusual demands of the revival.

Armstrong first preached in Scotland in 1863 at Newmains Assembly in Lanarkshire. This congregation of seceders from Wishaw Evangelical Union Church was at the centre of a new wave of enthusiasm which swept through Scotland in 1866. In that year, Isabella Armstrong published a pamphlet, 'Modern Prophetesses', to argue the case for women preachers against those who believed the practice to be unscriptural.

During her seven years of public ministry, she had borne the brunt of much criticism, disapproval and ostracisation. And although she claims to honour 'diversity of opinion', the context from which she writes is obviously an impatience with men who are more concerned with outward form, status and education - those who obstruct women 'labouring in the Gospel':

'While all the time souls are perishing, iniquity prevailing, scepticism increasing...and the coming of the Lord is drawing nigh.'

Armstrong does not deny that the usual sphere of women is domestic, but she is clear that, according to Scripture, women are not created inferior to men, and Christ is unfettered in who he chooses to be the instruments of his
salvation:

'That prophetesses were called of God cannot be doubted; that their mission was to men as well as to women we know for certain; that their office was public as well as private is clear; and that they taught with an authority no female now, so far as I know, desires or contends for, is evident. How Christian women can now be charged with 'unsexing themselves' and a host of other appellations sometimes freely used, I am at a loss to know.'

There is certainly a spirit of urgency and freedom in Armstrong's writing characteristic of those Scottish assemblies which, in the wake of revival, were drawn into the Brethren Movement. Their premillenialist enthusiasm during the first years of expansion, enabled this small community (which was strongest in Lanarkshire and North East Scotland) to accept women preachers, who were powerful and productive in evangelisation and church planting. For the women and their supporters, such success was vindication that their gifts were fruits of the Holy Spirit, such as those given to women at Pentecost. (Acts 2)

But if the Brethren were the only Christian community to accept female preaching, and if presbyterians were amongst some of the most vehement denouncers, there were also those who offered practical and personal support. The Free Church Presbytery of Brechin, meeting on April 9 1867, minuted:

'It having come to the knowledge of Presbytery that, lately on a Sabbath evening, a woman was allowed to conduct Public Worship and to preach in one of their churches within the bounds, the Presbytery record their disapprobation of that conduct, and their injunction that it be not repeated.'

And in October 1869, The Watchword, a Free Church journal, reported:
'We are glad to see that the Free Church Presbytery of Orkney have condemned [female preaching], which must have been admitted inadvertently. Females have a most important position in Church, but their sphere is not in the pulpit. We hear much of women's rights in those days, but too little, we suspect, of women's duties.'

The surprise is not that both presbyteries rejected the legitimacy of female preaching, but that there must have been ministers and Kirk Sessions who allowed women to use their premises, (even at the risk of reproval by higher courts), and who by implication sanctioned the self-appointed ministry of those women. This demonstrates that presbyterian attitudes about the appropriate sphere for women were not totally monolithic; but it is important to recognise the nature of the challenge to orthodoxy which female preaching presented. As an element of popular revivalism, these women were part of an essentially lay movement which emphasised personal holiness and obedience. Their 'striking indifference to clerical status and pastoral functions...and intense hostility to sacerdotalism' obviously constituted a provocation to the role and prestige of the parish minister. But female preachers were not themselves seeking to become ordained presbyterian ministers, with all the formal status and power that would entail. Isabella Armstrong clearly had little time for the pomp and rank associated with ordained ministry:

'Instead of Christian forbearance, I have met with worse treatment than I might expect if I were an evil-doer...when I have met those who, in clerical finery unknown to the Apostle, clamoured loudly in the pulpit, and extended my hand as one Christian to another, it was not accepted...Where God's servants stand, while they deliver their message of love and salvation, is of no importance;
but for ease and comfort...it is of great advantage to have an elevation, call it what you please. But to believe females must not occupy a pulpit, because it is more holy than any other place, or that a female member is less holy than a male member, is surely blind and absurd to no common degree.51

In no sense did their actions constitute an equal rights campaign conducted from within Calvinist orthodoxy.

As Armstrong admitted:

'I am not contending that women ought to form churches and preside over them, ruling however diligently, and exercising official ecclesiastical authority, however wisely and moderately. But leaving this field clear, we have ample margin to prophecy.'52

Female preaching, as one aspect of a religious phenomenon which was culturally and geographically rather marginal in Scottish life, did not necessarily constitute a severe or direct challenge to customary and religious ideologies of womanhood. For although Armstrong and her colleagues were eloquent and direct, both in their preaching, and in defence their personal rights as women, their focus was on the expected coming of Christ, and not particularly on challenging the existing structures of church and society. (Although in later years Armstrong did lecture on behalf of temperance and female suffrage.)

The Watchword, a Free Church magazine which defended orthodox Calvinism, and was edited by James Begg reported, in its edition dated June 1 1867, an encounter between a woman preacher and a minister. It suggests that the conservative presbyterian establishment regarded female
preaching primarily as a defiance of church law and good order, which was assumed to include the maintenance of boundaries between appropriate activities for males and females, and against which claims of charism carried little weight:

'There is much rage for novelty at present. The apostles commanded that the gospel be committed to 'faithful men who should be able to teach others also', but not a word of women. Women have a most important and useful sphere of Christian duty, but it is not in the pulpit. Christ employed women, but had not female apostles, and Paul would 'not suffer a woman to teach'. One of these wandering, preaching damsels lately came to a worthy minister and demanded his pulpit. When refused, she said she was compelled to preach by love to Christ and could not refrain. The minister replied, "True love is the fulfilling of the law, but your love is the breaking of the law."' 53

Dr William Cunningham, in his influential *Historical Theology*, compared the work of chiliastic revivals and sects in his own time, with that of Montanism, which was a heterodoxical charismatic movement of the patristic period:

'In both there was the same great and offensive prominence of women as the chief possessors and exhibitors of supernatural endowments, and the same perversions of the same passages of Scripture to countenance these pretensions.' 54

By the early 1870s, the women preachers were becoming less acceptable even within their own Brethren Community. Other periods of church history have witnessed times of religious freedom and expectation, when the public preaching and teaching of women has been accepted, but as churches have become more settled and institutionalised, the ministry of women has been renounced and excluded. So it was with the Scottish Brethren Assemblies, as Neil Dickson has shown. During the 1880s, Rhymie Assembly in Aberdeenshire resisted
the prohibition of women preachers, and was ostracized by other Assemblies.⁵⁵ Some of those who had exercised ministry used their gifts on other, more welcoming arenas. Armstrong became a renowned lecturer with the International Order of Good Templars, a temperance organisation which was particularly popular in Lanarkshire, and which was committed to equal rights for women and men (see chap 5). Other working class women made their mark with the Faith Mission, which was founded in 1886. But here a similar pattern prevailed - women's gifts were acceptable for converting and forming missions, but when these became more concerned with order and formality, the public participation of women was forbidden. The Salvation Army's female officers also made an impact in urban working class communities, and were referred to by Charteris and others as a challenge to the presbyterian churches to develop their own, more ordered and acceptable forms of female ministry.⁵⁶

Helen Lockhart Gibson of Kirkcaldy, who experienced conversion in 1859, probably represents the extent of female public ministry which was acceptable for a woman remaining under the jurisdiction of presbyterianism. She visited and exercised spiritual authority over many individual men - most of them working class; but most of her public work was with meetings of women. She was a member of the Free Church (although with a Baptist background), and after intimating a meeting she was to
address, a Highland probationer minister felt obliged to add:

'I wish you to understand that she, who is to conduct the meeting, is not a woman-preacher, but just a woman, who wants to speak to women about their souls.'

Olive Anderson concludes that the shock of female preaching 'probably provoked dismay and thus stimulated the provision of less disturbing, more controlled outlets for female zeal. But it might be that the recognition of a women's sphere of religious activity might have led to the decline or transmogrification of female preaching, which from the 1870s assumed more discreet forms'.

One of the ways in which women's gifts of spiritual counsel and direction were widely used during the 1870s was in the 'enquirers rooms' for the anxious who attended the Moody and Sankey revival meetings which took Scotland by storm during their 1873-74 campaign. Those who were involved in this were usually Biblewomen, female missionaries, and others who already had some experience of Christian public service. But they no doubt enjoyed a renewed sense of their own purpose and power as agents of the Gospel, in the midst of a campaign which had a telling influence on Scottish Christian life. Dwight Moody preached a simple message of salvation available to all through Christ's saving power, and the possibility of new life for the believer. His message cut across the doctrinal debates and denominational divisions of Scottish Protestantism, and had nothing to say about ecclesiastical order and discipline, although he worked along with the institutional churches. For women who were subject to the authority and
restrictions imposed by their denominations, participation
in the campaign, whether as helpers or hearers may have
been a personally liberating experience, which remained
with them as they tried to live out their new or quickened
faith in the parishes of Scotland. Ira Sankey's melodious
songs also made a profound impact, and inspired a major
change in attitude to sacred music and instruments in
Scottish churches. Many women were enabled to develop their
gifts of singing or playing as a valid ministry in church
and mission gatherings after the visit of Moody and Sankey.
And no doubt the campaign alerted many - both ministers
and laity - to the potential of women's work in the
service of an evangelism which cared little for the
niceties of Calvinist dogma and church order.

It is surely no coincidence that Scottish campaigners for
organised women's work in the churches became more
vociferous and successful during the 1870s. They were
responding, not only to the to the burgeoning Women's
Movement, but also to a range of female ministries which
had been exercised in Scotland since mid-century. The
challenge they saw for the presbyterian churches was to
recognise and utilise appropriate models for women's work,
while rejecting what they believed to be the inappropriate
and unwarranted experiment of female preaching. So a
correspondent wrote to the Church of Scotland Mission
Record in 1877:
'In all other departments of work the conviction is gaining ground that men and women were meant to stand side by side - that while they have different and distinct qualities, both are equally needed for the work to be done in God's world. Are our churches to be the last to say that woman's work, as well as man's, should enter in their calculation? Is there no place for organised Christian service, unless they retire into sisterhoods and convents, or force their way into the pulpit?'  

5.'A Sentimental Priesthood'

In her book, Wrestling with the Church (1992), Mary Levison, whose endeavours during the 1950s and 1960s were instrumental in securing the admission of women to ordination in the Church of Scotland, surveys the developments which preceded her own struggle and comments:

'I do not like the term 'woman's ministry'...If it refers to a ministry different from that of men then question it because this will almost certainly mean an inferior ministry prescribed by men for women.'  

There is nothing to suggest that 19th Scottish presbyterianism was willing to consider or countenance the extension of ordination or office-bearing authority to women. Nor did it reassess the prevailing paradigm of domination. Instead, the churches responded to various challenges - popular evangelicalism, the Women's Movement, the Social Question - by attempting to utilise more fully the lay resources at their disposal. In particular, they looked for ways to exploit the goodwill and energy of women in church-sanctioned activity which extended their service and reputation for righteousness, but maintained and formalised their exclusion from the courts of the church.

Since the 1840s, there had been some public debate about
the appropriate form for such full-time female service. In her 1843 letter to the Moderator, the Free Church supporter of women voting in a call also suggested that Deaconesses should

'Find a place under the new administration, sharing in the work of visiting and superintending the poor in parochial districts...Let women act for themselves, carry through the part they undertake, or avail themselves of the assistance of men, without suspending the use of their own faculties, and throwing up their responsibility.' 62

But her call went unheeded. In 1848 an article by John Ludlow, entitled 'Deaconesses or Protestant Sisterhoods' appeared in the Edinburgh Review. The same author wrote two articles for the religious journal Good Words in 1863, as a result of which the Free Church Presbytery of Strathbogie overture the General Assembly concerning the 'Romanising Tendencies' of the articles. In order to repudiate this charge, Ludlow published a book entitled Woman's Work in the Church. Among his conclusions were that the Early Church:

'Set its seal upon the ministering functions of women, by the appointment of a Female Diaconate strictly excluded from functions of public teaching and worship, but nearly co-equal with the male diaconate in active charity',

that a deaconess should be attached to the service of a particular congregation, and that Deaconess Institutions (which seemed to presbyterians to reek of unhealthy conventualism) must be

'under the direction of a man, and that one who is, or at least has been, a husband.' 63

Such Institutions had begun to flourish, though without any official church connection, on the Continent and in
England, and provided interested Scots with some examples of a form of woman's ministry which was ostensibly Biblically based. It was the development and acceptance of this concept in a Scottish context which justified and institutionalised a paradigm of subordination for women who chose to work for the church.

By far the most influential Victorian protagonist of lay ministry in general, and 'woman's ministry' in particular, was Dr Archibald Charteris, Professor of Biblical Criticism at Edinburgh University 1868-98, and convener of the Church of Scotland's Christian Life and Work Committee, which began its work in 1869 by gathering information about activity in parishes across Scotland, with a view to reporting on the best means of furthering evangelistic efforts in the Established Church. In the next thirty years, the Committee originated the Life and Work magazine, the Young Men's Guild, Mission Weeks, Deputations to Fishing and Farm workers, and the Woman's Guild, including the Order of Deaconesses. These were all part of Charteris' grand campaign to breathe life into the moribund institutional life of the church.

Few men of his era matched Charteris' theoretical or practical commitment to an enlarged role for women in presbyterianism (and in other aspects of life - he was a consistent supporter of middle- and upper-class women in higher education, medicine etc). But in spite of the
changes he strived for and was instrumental in achieving, he was theologically, socially and politically conservative. As a Calvinist, he sought constitution and good order in both church and society. Although he was genuinely concerned to extend the potential of women, the model of ministry of which he was such a persistent advocate was located firmly within the patriarchal framework of separate spheres.

Charteris engaged in a systematic investigation of the principles and practice of women's work. That he did so, not only in the light of contemporary events, but also as convener of an enthusiastic General Assembly Committee which had provided evidence of the extent of female congregational activity made his conclusions, which he incorporated into his 1887 Baird Lectures, timely.

He recognised that in the period up to AD100, the 'absolute freedom of the Church' allowed Christian women to fulfil many functions and earn respect and honour. This he attributed in part to the

'Earlier and better principles under which officials of the church were men and women discharging sacred functions along with the duties of daily life'.

But although Charteris was keen to revive the practice whereby ordinary church members were more involved in religious work in addition to their daily tasks, so that the church and its mission would be less passive and reliant on the full-time professional minister, he
perceived the work required to be gender-defined: this was the basis for his proposal to establish a Woman's Guild. And he by no means rejected the principle of full-time vocational service to the Church. He pointed to the evidence of deaconesses in the early undivided church, their absorption into monasticism in Roman Catholicism, and their increasing sacerdotalism, leading to decline, within Eastern Orthodoxy. He argued that deaconesses took no lifelong vows, but were women of experience who were set apart and ordained to work within the Christian community, and accorded honour and status. He wrote:

'There is no ground to doubt that when the "whole church" was assembled to vote...women as well as men were constituent members of the Assembly.' But as time went on, 'The element of independence in the position of the Deaconess made her, especially in the West, troublesome to male ecclesiastical authorities...Councils disputed their ordination and doubted their right to official seats in view of the congregation...Popes found it easier to govern nuns than deaconesses...The Diaconate was too free an Order - of too miscellaneous usefulness - to be under the dominion of men and it disappeared.'

While these features might have suggested a charter for decision-making status and freedom for female church officials, Charteris also seems to have approved of historical evidence that deaconesses were subordinated under male ecclesiastical control:

'When women were subject to one another abuses crept in and fair opportunities were lost...women administered baptism and ordained one another, as an imperium in imperio. If women are to be part of the corporate church, they must be subject to it and owe to it their standing and power...The orthodox church forbade women be bishops or priests and so prevented confusion.'
Charteris was obviously interested in, and sympathetic to, the notion of women exercising official ministry in the early Church, and found in this both warrant and example for his own proposals. But the conclusions he drew from his investigations were first, that such women should be confined to the diaconate: 'an order and ministry of service for which they are specially qualified. [my emphasis] '68 And second, that the diaconate would be exclusively a 'women's ministry', so that certain tasks and functions would be virtually restricted to women. The duties associated with this order of ministry (which was not confined to women in the apostolic church) were those which evangelical Protestantism claimed to be the joy and glory of womanhood. Charteris' proposal to revive the order specifically placed these full time officials at the peak of his pyramid model for the organisation of women's work. Deaconesses were to be both exemplars and leaders for other women, whose Christian work, done in the context of their family life, should follow the same pattern of servanthood. So, as Mary Levison observes,

'From the beginning, there was tension built into the conception of the Order of Deaconesses - they were an integral and leading part of the women's section, but also holders of a New Testament office'. 69

Levison has herself endeavoured in the last forty years to get the Church of Scotland to recognise that the diaconate is not necessarily just a female ministry, but a form of service open to both men and women - 'a catalyst to enable the diakonia of the whole - not inferior but different'.70

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She has had to struggle against the weight of tradition, firmly stamped with Charteris' imprint, that the Order was the one and only recognised avenue of official ministry for women in the Church: that a woman with a vocation would enter the diaconate, just as a man would enter the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

As I have suggested, the ethos within which the Order of Deaconesses was established, as a constitutional feature of the Established Church, was a paradigm of subordination. Although deaconesses were envisaged as the apex of the hierarchy of organised women's work (and several women did demonstrate great qualities of leadership and administration in the work they did as deaconesses), the theory and practice of this form of women's ministry was imbued with that paradoxical combination of elevation and subordination which characterised the domestic ideology. Deaconesses were the models and leaders for other women, precisely because they made a full-time, usually lifelong, and often unpaid commitment to self-sacrificial work on behalf of the church. In as much as they exemplified Victorian ideals of woman as loving carer of body, mind and spirit, they were deemed worthy of honour. Rev Wallace Williamson of St Cuthbert's Church, Edinburgh, typified this view of the ministry of women. In a sermon preached at the setting apart of deaconesses in 1892, he chose for his text 1 Cor 11:7, "the woman is the glory of the man":

'Only the service of Christ will preserve womanly influence and keep it fresh to the end...To Christ you owe all. He
has raised you from darkness and shame, placed you in the light and glory of immortal hopes, and called you to be a fellow-worker with Him. Your true life is not for self, but for Him...Come and unite yourselves in a Holy Guild of womanly service...The true sphere of woman is wherever woman can do good. Arise then.Join the fellowship of service, and crown your womanhood with the grace of true devotion.' 71

And Charteris made it clear that his own vision of the organisation of women did not spring fully formed from the pages of early church history, but from the reality, as he perceived it, of his own time:

'I wonder if any woman ever did a more abiding work than Florence Nightingale when she turned the tenderness and aptitude of womanhood to the work of nursing, as at once a science and a Christian occupation for life...It is from meditating on the progress which nursing has made...that I have come to think that women's work in the Church of Scotland would make better progress if organised. "Lady- Visitors" are often much in want of training. [There is] no attempt to give the moral support of conscious union in purpose and practice with others in the land. It was not so in the early Church...Many women had a definite official position in the apostolic age.'72

The practical and symbolic endowment of nursing skills was at the heart of Charteris' concept of the diaconate, and Deaconess Hospital in Edinburgh was opened as early as 1894 to provide a central element of the training programme. Other aspects of the instruction offered at the Deaconess Training Institute reflected the desire to develop and systematise the kind of church work which was already associated with women. Apart from the programme of classes in Bible study and home mission work, practical experience was gained in the slums of Edinburgh's Pleasance district - home visiting, sick nursing, work with the inebriate; Guilds and Bands of Hope; prayer and evangelistic meetings
were organised in kitchens and at stairheads; services were conducted for children, mothers - the 'deaconettes' got involved in anything except the solid, respectable, Sabbath worship which was the exclusive preserve of ministers.  

The resistance of presbyterianism to any hint of diaconal authority beyond the strictly defined parameters of 'women's work' was indicated by the challenge made to the 1887 proposal that deaconesses should be 'set apart' by presbyteries. Edinburgh Presbytery complained that this seemed to place women above the ruling elders and deacons who controlled local parish affairs. In 1888, Charteris defended his original plan:

'Deaconesses have no official ruling power in the Church...The Deaconess is to be set apart by Presbytery and not by the Kirk Session. This is in accordance with the custom of the early Church...Elders and deacons are appointed - not to work, but to deliberate and rule...To indicate the difference between the official of the congregation and the servant of the Church (who, however, must exercise her office under the authority of the Kirk Session) may remove some possible misconceptions.'  

However, an alternative set of regulations was presented to the 1888 Assembly, and the majority (not being persuaded that women would humbly accept their assigned lowliness) voted in favour of setting apart by Kirk Sessions.

The subsequent development of the Order suggests that a number of women found scope for initiative and responsibility which extended well beyond parish boundaries, and what had previously been available to churchwomen. But its emergence as a gender-specific,
distinctive ministry which was always ultimately subject to male control seriously compromised its potential as a source of real challenge and opportunity. And as I have suggested in chapter two, the original and persisting conception of the Order as an alternative vocation for unmarried upper and middle class women of private means scarcely made it a viable or attractive career choice for women who were unable or unwilling to conform to that image. Alice Maxwell, who was the first Principal of the Deaconess Institute, wrote in 1904 of the extension of opportunities available, but in fact revealed the confines of class and gender into which the Order was boxed:

'When first used in connection with women, [the Diaconate] was met with an indulgent smile. Now, the Order speaks for itself. The spheres of work in which women may serve the Church are on the increase, and new doors are opening: Parishes, visitations in prisons and poorhouses, deputy work for the Woman's Guild, work with fisher girls...The charge of our Institutions...Thus, spheres of service for women grow wider and more varied. Will those of means who are free from home ties think of those openings calling for workers ...offering with consecrated hearts their time, strength and means for the building up of the Church?'76

For all its limitations, the Order of Deaconesses at least offered some status, recognition and community to a few Church of Scotland women. Other arrangements for the full-time employment of female labour were rooted in the unquestioned belief in distinctive women's ministry, but were even less adequate in terms of recognition and reward. I have already alluded to the unsatisfactory terms under which Bible-women (who had been engaged to do parish mission work since the mid 19th century) were contracted.
The introduction of Parish Sisters (who worked under the Established Church's Home Mission Committee from 1893), and of women workers under the United Free Church Women's Home Mission, (who were officially granted the title of Church Sister from 1916), represent the churches' rather half-hearted (and always underfunded) attempts to standardise the conditions under which women were employed to do battle with the perplexing 'Social Question'. But recognised training and qualifications were never compulsory for these positions, the pay was lamentable, and the workers had no place by right at any level of the churches' decision-making hierarchy. And yet, presbyterian men in the new century congratulated themselves on throwing open opportunities for the ministry of women, and made noble pronouncements about their place in the scheme of things:

'There is in Christian thought no rivalry between men and women. Their ministries are different (even as their constitution is), but there is no question of superiority and inferiority, for both are needed by Christ.'

Such men seemed baffled and disappointed when so few women took advantage of these opportunities. But women were disappointed too, and questions about superiority and inferiority; about ordination and subordination, began to be raised. At the 1914 General Assembly of the United Free Church, Professor James Young Simpson of New College moved an addendum to the Christian Life and Work Report, that:

'In view of the varied and invaluable services rendered by women to the Life and Work of the Church, and advantages that would accrue from more definite recognition of their place in Church life and work, the Assembly remit to the Committee to consider how this could be best effected, and report to the next General Assembly'.

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In support of his motion, he argued

'There is much in the conditions under which women's work is carried on in the Church which is a virtual contradiction of the Church's belief [in equality]... Disillusionment and disappointment is suffered in many cases on entering into Church work...It seems to be standing for something which dissipates the spirit of equality...There is a great hesitation to provide untrammelled opportunities for the exercise of all gifts.' 79

6. 'The Thin Edge of the Wedge'

Prof Simpson was the spokesman for a growing mood particularly (but by no means only) within the United Free Church - during the first decades of the twentieth century. A new generation of middle and upper class women who had enjoyed the intellectual, social, and sometimes economic benefits of access to higher education provided a significant minority of energetic, committed and increasingly organised agents for change within society and the Church. Idealistic and confident young women who had experienced some measure of co-operation and comradeship in student societies such as the Student Christian Movement, and who believed in their own power and right to be social activists, were indeed disillusioned by the lack of scope within the institutional church. They were joined in their frustration by older women - veterans both of church work and of the fifty year struggle for political suffrage which had entered its militant phase (in which a significant number of churchwomen participated - see chapter five). Such women were increasingly willing to express dismay at the exploitation of female goodwill and labour in the
Indeed, many had benefited directly from the advocacy of women’s rights, responsibilities and capabilities in the teaching offered at the United Free Church Women’s Missionary College – an education in female community and assertiveness which derived some of its power from the liberating effects of critical perspectives on Scripture and theology. In America, there were liberal feminists from the evangelical tradition, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Gage, who developed critiques of Christian religion based on iconoclastic hermeneutical principles. But while their radical conclusions would have certainly been unacceptable to most Scottish presbyterian women, some of the issues they stirred up would not have been wholly shocking or alien to those exposed to the ‘higher criticism’. Stanton’s *The Woman’s Bible* (1895, 1898), for example, raised this question about the Pentateuch:

‘Why should the customs and opinions of this ignorant people, who lived centuries ago, have any influence in the religious thought of this generation?’

The extent to which Biblical injunctions could or should have influence on current religious thought and practice was (and remains) one of the central issues in the debate about women in the church.

All of this was fertile ground for seeds of female dissent in the Church, and the leading article in the April 1914 issue of the *UFC Mission Record* acknowledged as much:
'Let us take the claim of women to greater recognition in public life. Everywhere we see them bursting the bonds and conventions that have dominated them since the beginning, rising above the old narrow ideas of sex, and desiring a position as co-workers with men in the task of governing the world... There is the more reason for directing attention to this question because the claim of women is now beginning to make itself felt within the Church...The assumption is that they will wish some sort of say in the government of the Church.' 62

Discussions by men about the role of women in the church were not, of course, new. But the debate instigated in 1914, which rumbled on until Church Union in 1929, and beyond, marked a new phase in the controversy. For the first time, presbyterian courts were forced to grapple with a suggestion which would have had Knox and Calvin birling in their graves: that even a modicum of official authority might be removed from the exclusive possession of men. And if these men, moved by the spirit of the age (and no doubt the absence, caused by war, agnosticism, antagonism and apathy, of male sufficiency) chose to accede to that departure from hallowed tradition, would women gain direct entry into the citadel, or be told to exercise their charism from within an 'equal but different' female order of ministry?

A committee of fifteen men, under the convenership of Prof JY Simpson, was set up to consider the matter. In 1915, it reported that it had met seven times, and had consulted with women of the United Free Church, and of other denominations. The Committee acknowledged the 'importance and urgency' of the subject. It noted the revolutionary
changes in the position of women in the community within two generations, and called for action by the Church to meet these new conditions, claiming that there was an 'imperative need to reconsider its organisation and methods of work'.

If women were encouraged by this honest assessment and generous recognition of the need to make changes, to hope that the Committee would make proposals commensurate with its analysis, they were in for a disappointment. The Report introduced its proposals thus:

'Some incline to the view that all offices be open to women on the same terms as men...But opinion is not yet ripe for consideration of far-reaching change involving such difficult questions as the ordination of women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and the constitution of higher courts.'

That cautious rider proved to be a more accurate preamble than the fine words which opened the Report. The proposals of the Special Committee did not indicate that a fundamental or critical assessment of organisation and methods of work had prevailed. They were:

1. To draw the attention of congregations to the eligibility of women for election to all congregational committees, including Boards of Managers, and Committees of Management, and further, that the Assembly declare women eligible for appointment as members of Deacons Courts.

2. That women be associated with Kirk Sessions for consultative purposes and for the discharge of certain duties of a pastoral kind.

3. That there should be an office for suitably trained women - Church Sisters, held by voluntary or paid workers who shall be set apart by prayer.
4. That Foreign Mission, Colonial and Continental, Jewish, Life and Work, Home Mission, Highlands and Islands, Youth, and other Committees as determined by the General Assembly, may co-opt women members up to one sixth of the total membership. Presbyteries be also authorised to add women to committees as they may see the need.

5. The Foreign Mission Committee to ascertain whether the time has come for women missionaries to be represented on Mission Councils for all except presbyterial powers. 85

The superficial and unsatisfactory nature of these proposals (with the possible exception of number 5) offered cold comfort to seekers of real change, and grist to the mill of opponents. Principal Martin of New College, who called for adequate time to consider the constitutional issues at stake, recognised that the proposals attempted to bypass these questions, and identified their basic weakness:

'To suggest that all offices be opened to women would have been revolutionary, but at least the issue would have been plain. Instead, accommodation is now proposed...An adjustment and not a solution - a partial and imperfect adjustment - of an inherently difficult and delicate problem.'86

But perhaps, despite the militant mood abroad the country and the dearth of equality within the church, United Free churchwomen were not looking for a revolution. In his reply to the 1915 debate, committee member JH Oldham mentioned that:

'The Committee devoted two full sessions to consideration of opening all offices to women, and quite deliberately came to the conclusion that this was not the time to raise an issue affecting the fundamental constitution of presbyterianism ...There is no general desire among women that the question should be raised at this time.' 87

Certainly, the questionnaire which was circulated to the four Women's Mission Committees of the Church, and to 160
individuals (of whom 85 replied), did not indicate a great longing among many to assume the duties and privileges of ordination. Although most respondents agreed that "the service of women is carried on under limitations, which prevents them from making, through the Church, their full contribution to the work of the Kingdom" only a small minority declared themselves in favour of opening all church offices and courts to women. Most seemed happy at the prospect of what was suggested in the Committee's proposals, although some sought a kind of modified eldership for women. This would give some status and authority to the work of visitation and mild social control which women already engaged in, but reserved the administration of the sacraments for men only. Clearly, women still had difficulty envisaging themselves occupying the inner sanctum of religious symbolism and prestige, although they acknowledged their fitness to perform most of the practical tasks and responsibilities of church life. Responses to a question about the specific nature of the limitations on women indicate frustration and grievances based on practical experience of work already done in the Home and Foreign Mission Associations: 'Even those who are generally opposed to change feel the anomalies and difficulties here'. They resented the inability to represent their views on church courts; the lack of any share in planning congregational or Church work; the dearth of paid jobs (made worse by the fact that the women's associations had male secretaries, and their Assembly
Reports were given by male conveners; the fact that all initiatives were under the ultimate control of bodies of men. A particular annoyance to women, upon whom the Church relied for fundraising and collections, was the lack of spending control, and the inadequate assignment of legacies to funds for women's work. But when asked about the causes of these limitations, at least some respondents demonstrated an understanding of contemporary feminist insights. They cited:

'Custom; conventional views of women's sphere; a diehard belief in the subordination of women; Protestant reaction to conventual type service, which allowed women of capacity to become abbesses; misinterpretation of New Testament teaching about women; failure to understand the limitation of time and circumstance to Paul's precepts; failure to realise the change in woman's educational, social and economic position, a change that demands "that while showing womanly virtues of gentleness, sensitiveness, purity, quietness of spirit, delicacy of touch, women should also develop courage, initiative, broad-mindedness, independence, justice". The Church has denied woman "the capacity to become".' 90

Several women who belonged to denominations and organisations which had done much more to affirm that capacity were also consulted. One member of the Society of Friends commented 'These questions seem to me to refer to a state of things which must of necessity pass away'.91 But in the meantime, the UF Churchwomen (or at least those who were asked) seemed satisfied with the partial and piecemeal proposals. In 1916, each of the Women's Associations, and the female missionaries serving abroad, gave them their approbation. Perhaps more radical women had already given up on the church in favour of the political suffrage
movement, which was sometimes, in the pre-war years of militancy, characterised as an 'alternative religion' for women. Or perhaps they believed that a policy of gradualism was the best strategy for breaching the patriarchal monolith of the institutional church, in preparation for more fundamental changes. Writing in 1916, Florence Mackenzie, then Principal of the Women's Missionary College, certainly responded very positively to what she perceived as a wind of change:

'Some of us have felt in the past few weeks that a new spirit is arising in our midst. For long we had been bound down to the conviction that what is, must be...Recently, however, different things have shown that there is a willingness to face change...My confidence is based upon the spirit of progress which has shown itself in the life of the Church. Discussions on the 'Recognition of the place of women in the Church' have come to a very wonderful issue...In speaking to us at the House Guild last Friday, Mr Oldham said that he was proud of his Church.'

Interesting and suggestive as the opinions of women might be, they were as marginal to the final outcome as the women themselves - consigned to the Assembly Hall gallery to observe, with a combination of anticipation, bemusement and boredom, the debates in which the same few men participated over a three year period. But commissioners, Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions were all given the opportunity to respond to and vote on the proposals. The suggestion which met with universal approval was that which formalised the acceptable principles and practice of a distinctive female ministry: Church Sisters would constitute no threat to male preserves of power. The same was basically true for the suggestions that committees should consult with women - either by
including a token number as members, or by setting up Women's Advisory Committees, although from the traditionalists there were some perfectly legitimate criticisms that the presence of co-opted women on Assembly Committees would be constitutionally irregular:

'By this decision, a group of women, not elected by congregations, but selected by a kind of disguised patronage, were raised to a position from which [deacons, managers and congregational boards] were rigidly excluded. It was an undoubted anomaly, but presumably those who created it were of the same mind as the Philistine MP pilloried by Matthew Arnold: "That a thing is an anomaly I considered no objection whatsoever."' 95

Indeed, the courts of the Church seemed happy to accept that anomaly if it enabled them to offer women a semblance of co-operation, without having to deal with fundamental issues.

To their great credit, there were men who were willing to contemplate such questions, and to come up with revolutionary answers. Rev James Barr of Govan spoke for the radicals when he said in 1916,

'I am astonished at the timidity of the Church on this question. I am in favour of opening up all offices whatsoever in the Church to women on the same conditions as to men (applause)'.96

That was clearly a minority view, either because it was perceived that the Church was not ready for such a transformation, or because most commissioners simply excluded the ministry of Word and Sacrament from any consideration of the role of women. Yet there were many who genuinely sought deeper, richer and more serious scope for
the gifts and resources of women. Prof Mackintosh of New College commented in 1916 that the women he knew through the SCM 'bring a freshness of vision which is not given to every man. Their minds are unjaded and enterprising and unrestrained by many of the conventional fears and anxieties that beset us. The minds of many of us men have been formalised and stereo-typed by centuries of committees' and he continued 'A large number of women are passing through universities and colleges for whom we must find some other sphere of action in our Church than merely the sewing meeting. These women have alert and in some cases most reasonably radical minds, and we must give them some elbow room in which to work.' 97

And in 1915 the Church historian, Prof McEwen, who was that year's Moderator, left the Chair to make a rousing plea that tradition be disregarded for the sake of present needs:

'Do not let us waste time. Our work needs to be energised without delay...Let us thank God that the position of women is not what it was in New Testament times. Dr Henderson is quite right in saying that the Reformation gave women no place in Church life. The Reformers, including Knox, thought that the regimen of women was "monstrous" and held to the old domineering idea of the authority of males. But in this they were utterly wrong (laughter and applause) and it is fantastic to appeal to them as arbiters'.98

For a church leader to make comments which audaciously challenged the authority of both scripture and the instigators of the Reformed tradition, indicates the extent of the intellectual and psychological revolution which had been wrought by critical scholarship. However, a significant group of traditionalists believed that there was nothing fantastic about such appeals, and that in
making them, they were acting as guardians of Scottish presbyterian heritage. Their spokesman, who seems to have felt honour bound to speak against the extended role of women at every opportunity, and at great length, was Dr Archibald Henderson of Crieff. In 1915 he objected particularly to the proposal that women be eligible for ordination to serve on deacons courts, claiming that there was no legislation recognising the entitlement of women to be elected to take part in ecclesiastical procedure. He led a large group who registered their dissent from the deliverance 'on the grounds that the Report contained statements affecting the law of the Church, which were not in accordance with the law.' But the report was duly sent down to Presbyteries for comment.

By 1916, when returns had been received from around the country, it was clear that, apart from a few Presbyteries who saw no reason to change the status quo, or who wished consideration to be delayed until after the war, there was general consensus that proposals 2 - 5 were acceptable. But there was considerable disquiet about the constitutional and ecclesiological implications of making women eligible for ordination as deacons. The Committee which had wanted to avoid 'difficult questions' could not dodge some theological debate, although the level, depth and context of that debate was far from satisfactory. The 1916 Report included three memoranda on ordination, on the basis of which it maintained that
'The difficulty does not...lie in regard to the "ordination" of women to such offices as they may appropriately fill; the only question to determine is that of the office to which women may fittingly be set apart'.

The proponents of change argued their case on functional grounds. The Deacon's Court was not an essential element of presbyterianism, but just one of the instruments of administrative and financial management which the United Church had inherited from its old constituent parts - and the eligibility of women to serve on Congregational and Management Boards had already been affirmed by the Assembly Arrangements Committee. The concern was to give to women 'Some direct part in the charge and disposition of funds which they do so much to collect, and to which in many instances they so largely contribute';

It was also to make up for the increasing lack of suitable men for these positions - a problem exacerbated during the war years. But Simpson and Oldham were compelled by their opponents to adduce Scriptural and historical backing for their scheme. In doing so, they hedged their bets as to whether the proposal would be an innovation. On the one hand they cited New Testament and apostolic evidence for the ordination of female deacons, but they also emphasised the possibility of Spirit-led change and development in women themselves, and in social conditions, as a compelling reason for innovation, if indeed it was such. As J H Oldham contended:

'Even if there is no Scriptural precedent, I would say that it does not belong to the nature of Scripture to furnish precedents for dealing with social, political or economic
conditions, which were not existent at the time of writing...Christianity, because it is a religion of the spirit, has been able throughout history to adapt itself to changing circumstances in a world full of change."102

Dr Henderson was opposed to every element of the proposers' argument, and in particular their attitude to Scripture:

'Scripture must be accepted as it stands, and the Church has not the power to develop according to changing conditions and experiences...Before Paul comes to the question of public service or office in the Church, he deals with the question, what men may do and what women may do, and he bases distinctions upon their nature as God created them...It is easy to pooh-pooh ancient views as reactionary. I am not ashamed to say that I accept the teaching of Scripture as to the position of men and women in relation to the public offices of the Church'. 103

The debate on women deacons may have provided a forum for the exchange of liberal and conservative theological positions, but the outcome was a victory for the pragmatists who wanted to utilise the talents of women but were unwilling to countenance anything like ordination. The overture (which included the power of veto vested in ministers and Kirk Sessions) was sent down to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act. Thirty-four voted in favour of ordaining female deacons, twenty-five opposed. Of the Kirk Sessions which expressed an opinion, 351 were in favour and 137 were against. Meanwhile, Glasgow Presbytery overruled the 1917 Assembly that deacons might be appointed for a fixed term, rather than ordained for life. In spite of a warning that

'To evade the issue by giving office without ordination, would be like allowing women to take medical classes in university and forbidding them to take degrees or practice' 104

the Assembly apparently shared the relief of Aberdeen's
Principal Iverach:

'If you give some of the best ladies of a Congregation an opportunity, and give ministers the opportunity of welcoming them, you will be doing a great service to the Church. I think that a way may be found along the lines of the overture from Glasgow, whereby you may secure the splendid service of women, and not burden people like myself who hold views of ordination which I shall continue to hold as long as I live.'

In 1918, the Assembly Arrangements Committee proposed that the office of deacon should be tenable either by men ordained for life, or by men and women, appointed for three years. This was finally enacted in 1919.

So, five years after the debate was initiated with rousing references to revolution and equality, and in the wake of a devastating war, the United Free Church had allowed a small breach in the walls of its male bastion. A handful of women were appointed to those Assembly Committees dealing with issues which, according to the men, were susceptible to womanly insight. In theory, women might be invited - by men - to share in certain Kirk Session and Presbytery deliberations. And they were now entitled to take on financial and administrative duties - not with the seal and dignity of ordination, but through the patronising backdoor of expediency.

Dr Jerdan, the Assembly Clerk had maintained in 1916 that 'the nature of woman is such that...she is not intended for public life...that the sphere of our women is domestic'. By 1917 he was feeling threatened by the method of change
he called 'the thin edge of the wedge'. On the long
view, he was probably right, since the only subsequent
changes in Scottish presbyterian polity in relation to
women have extended their rights, to the point of complete
official parity by 1968.

But the crack which had been forced in the door of
opportunity was a less than fulsome endorsement of those
women who had enjoyed four years of war work and wages, the
prospect of political enfranchisement, and in many
congregations de facto responsibility for roles usually
occupied by men. There was actually very little to
intimidate the 'diehard believers in the subordination of
women'. The Church claimed to recognise the transformation
which the war years had wrought in the lives of women, and
acknowledged that:

'The difficulty may be that many of the finest women with
special aptitude may be lost to Church service because of
demands elsewhere for competent and well paid workers'

But it was decidedly reluctant, in most departments, to
make use even of the limited permission of right it had
granted to women. Granted, there was no mass movement of
women pressing to be allowed such rights, but there was a
substantial number who longed for new opportunities to
exercise, test and extend their gifts in the service of the
church. Many were particularly disappointed that, despite
the majority vote from both Presbyteries and Kirk Sessions
in favour of ordination for female deacons, in the end the
Church could not bring itself to introduce that symbolically important change - especially at a time when the State had finally recognised the legitimacy of granting women political enfranchisement.

The Established Church also raised the issue of the role of women in its work and counsels. No doubt there were women members who exerted pressure and advocated change, but the question appeared on the Church's agenda in the aftermath of the First World War, rather than in the immediate context of suffrage agitation. And it emerged from the Report of the Special Commission on the War, which met 1916-1919. As part of its work, the Commission surveyed a group which consisted mainly of middle-aged, professional laymen, about 'The Life and Efficiency of the Church'. Alongside clarion calls for hymns to be 'strong and virile, not sugary, weak and non-masculine', some respondents also commented to the effect that 'women's work should be developed more, and they should be given some say in the councils of the Church'. In its editorial conclusion, the Report to the 1919 Assembly, calling for greater democracy within the Church, suggested:

'To this whole question, added importance and even urgency has been given by the striking advance in the position accorded to women in the social organisations and public services of our country...One cannot doubt that the Church will be more than ready to overhaul its machinery with the purpose of embodying that recognition in an outward, visible and adequate form.'

However, as in the United Free Church, worthy sentiments seemed to promise a good deal more than was eventually
delivered. At the 1919 Assembly, the deliverance on the War Commission resolved to appoint a new Committee on Church and Nation, and an amendment called for its agenda to include the question of the position of women in the Church's work and councils. In 1920, Dr John White, who was joint-convener of the new committee, published an article about the role of women within the Church, expressing the view, which he continued to promote throughout his life, that the extension and development of the Order of Deaconesses was the most suitable way to expand female ministry. 111

The interim report on the position of women, which was prepared for the 1920 General Assembly, bears White's hallmarks of extreme caution and pragmatism. It does not enter into any discussion about Scriptural or theological principles, but quotes quite extensively from the Church of England Report on the Ministry of Women (1919), and includes a cursory summary of the development of organised women's work within the Church of Scotland, and the recent changes within the United Free Church. It then records that in 1919 both the Foreign Mission Committee and the Committee on the Religious Instruction of Youth were given leave to appoint women as associate members, with the right to speak but not to vote. The one suggestion made was to formalise and extend the right of Standing Committees to co-opt a number of female members.
The Report betrays the characteristic official response to women as presenting a difficulty to the church, rather than being considered an intrinsic part of the church, by commenting that the proposal:

'Does little more than acknowledge that we have a problem to solve...It is a step that must lead to another sooner or later.[Women] will ask for a place in the Councils of the Church, and it is not easy to see how their demand can be withstood'.112

At the 1920 Assembly, there was no debate about the issue. Interventions were to do rather with legal restrictions which prevented women from acting as elders, or in management roles within quoad sacra parishes. It was agreed that the Assembly's General Committee should assess whether the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 had any bearing on the latter question.

The 1921 Report added nothing new, except to note, apparently with approval, a resolution adopted at the 1920 Lambeth Conference to give canonical recognition to the order of deaconesses 'as the one and only order of ministry for women which has the stamp of apostolic approval'.113

The Church and Nation Report complacently observed:

'The Church of Scotland has recognised the Order of Deaconesses as part of its regular organisation. Should any other question arise as to women's pastoral ministry, it will no doubt have to be dealt with by the extension and development of the Order of Deaconesses. Meantime the Committee have no recommendation to make with regard to the work at present being undertaken so successfully and extensively.' 114

Having ascertained that there were no legal restrictions,
it was firmly recommended that women should be eligible to serve on Assembly Committees. It was also reported that the Sex Disqualification Act did not remove the limitation of lay management functions to men, and that new legislation would be required to alter constitutions and enable women to serve and vote. A suggestion to this effect was made to the special committee which had been set up to review *quoad sacra* constitutions.

Once again, the Assembly engaged in no discussion of any fundamentals, although Rev W Main of Edinburgh observed the anomaly which had affected the UFC legislation, and which was bound to be a factor whenever 'the role of women' was perceived and treated as a problem or a special case, requiring 'the Church' (i.e. male office bearers) to make concessions or adjustments:

'He wanted equality of the sexes. If women could become members of standing committees, so should membership be open to men who were not elders. On the other hand, women should be eligible for eldership, and certain of them might after evidence of qualifications be admitted to pulpits'.

Rev James Francis of Cartsburn deserves recognition as the mover of the first attempt within Scottish presbyterianism to gain official parity for women. On behalf of his congregation, and in the interests of 'justice, equality and commonsense', he asked the 1921 Assembly to agree

'That the necessary steps be taken so to alter the laws, regulations and constitution of the Church that they might apply equally to women as to men'.

But his unprecedented action apparently did not warrant
serious consideration. Although the seconder claimed that 'it would be deplorable if the Church which has done so much for women would not open the door wide to them', the Joint Conveners of the Committee exercised a deft scissors movement to cut short any debate. Lord Sands commented that the proposal would mean a complete revolution in the Church [and whenever did the Established Church condone a revolution?], while Dr White, cautious as ever, declared that 'delay in this matter was the surest way'. Only a handful supported the overture.

So by 1922, the Church which, it had been confidently predicted, would be 'ready to overhaul its machinery' in order to give outward, visible and adequate recognition to the position and claims of women, had made provision for no more than 15% of Standing Committee membership to be co-opted women. The highest court had shown itself unwilling to discuss or contemplate any substantial change in either machinery or ideology.

Although the issue emerged and was dealt with in different ways within the two presbyterian denominations, the outcome in each was remarkably similar. Within both Churches, there were women who felt frustrated and alienated by the lack of opportunity and consultation, and they were supported by a small number of men who sought significant change. But their advocacy proved unable to effect anything but minor concessions, in spite of continued warnings that able
and faithful women would seek challenge and fulfilment elsewhere.

There was one more attempt to introduce reform before the Union of Churches in 1929. In the sneering tone which it pleased him to use whenever commenting on any aspect of women's rights, G D Reith, in his *Reminiscences of the United Free Church General Assemblies*, (1936) recalled the events of 1926:

'Elated by their partial success in the matter of the diaconate, some ardent feminists in the Church overtured the General Assembly, through four Presbyteries, anent the eligibility of women for ordination to ministry and eldership."119

It was not so much 'ardent feminism' which lay behind this move, but rather the presence of a few women in the Church's theological colleges. In 1926, Elizabeth Hewat (who had a notable pioneering career as missionary, church historian and activist) became the first to graduate BD from New College in Edinburgh. However, all women were registered as 'irregular students' - barred from the receipt of bursaries and prizes, and the opportunity to be trained and tested for licence and ordination. The concern was that, without such opportunity, such students would not be fully equipped for their vocation to serve the Church, abroad or at home. As Prof James Young Simpson remarked during the 1926 Assembly debate:

'They had in their College in Edinburgh that winter a young woman who had beaten all the men in her class. It was going to be extremely difficult to have to say to that young woman or other young women like her: "You have gone through your course in this admirable way, you are giving your life to service in the foreign field, and yet we cannot put you on the same level as the men.""120
The events of 1926 clearly illustrate the difficulties for a Church which was thrird, structurally and emotionally, to the ideology of separate spheres, but which had to deal with the consequences of creeping and piecemeal breaches in the barrier between men and women. Those who argued in favour of ordination were able to point to the de facto developments in the Church, which suggested that women were now able to fulfil the practical criteria for ministry. They could no longer be excluded from the education deemed appropriate for candidates, and in other fields had entered into professions. Missionaries, Church Sisters and others had proved their capability for the teaching, pastoral, leadership and administrative functions of Church office. A few had even ventured into pulpits. Proponents supported these developments as Spirit-led, and suggested that ordination would simply be due recognition and consecration of God-given gifts which could now be discerned in women. The supporters of the motion denied that Paul’s injunctions about women were authoritative for their own time and situation, for these specific rules were overridden by the universal dictum, that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28).121

However, conservatives disputed that interpretation, and used their own understanding of Scriptural material to bolster a paradigm of domination which would, by circular definition, continue to exclude women from the ministry:

'When such a phrase as "in Christ" was used, they were speaking sub specie aeternitatis... But this was a question
concerning God's moral government in this world... They got that from the only authority on the Church, the apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 11 he said "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God"... Every woman now present was wearing on her head a sign of authority — delegated power, delegated by whom?... He refused to believe that the Holy Ghost was going to go against his own productions.'

That assumption of super- and sub-ordination, divinely decreed for all time as the proper basis of relationship between men and women was surely used on this occasion, as so often before, to give dignity to objections which seem based on something suspiciously resembling unthinking custom or prejudice:

'The admission of women to the ministry would increase that scarcity [of candidates for the ministry], for it would discourage a certain class of men of virile type from entering the profession. (hear, hear)... The difficulty arose at once as to whether the woman-minister was to be single or married. Let them suppose a young woman settled down in the manse, and then married the local doctor or teacher or tradesman; did he become the head of the manse? Then, if she was to resign on marriage, what became of the ordination ad vitam aut ad culpam?'

'It would mean the introduction of a celibate order into the Church. A woman's supreme heritage was motherhood, and any movement away from that high heritage could not be justified even in the name of the Church. A great deal of modern feminism was pathological.'

It is easy to sympathise with the *UFC Record* reporter who commented, 'It is rather pitiful to have such a question treated as a mere problem of marriage, and debate as to who is to rule in the manse'. But I would suggest that these apparently superficial remarks indicate the deep roots of patriarchy in the Scottish presbyterian ethos which I discussed in chapter one. The primary concern of these men (and their many female supporters) was not
function, but status and symbol. The institutional Church had shown its willingness to accommodate and utilise the voluntary and paid labour of women in an ever widening range of capacities, and had no qualms about the practical celibacy of Church Sisters and female missionaries (who were still not permitted to retain their paid employment if they chose to marry, although it was quite acceptable to continue their work in an 'honorary' capacity). But the conservative majority would not countenance the idea of women in positions of public leadership and oversight as an alternative to submitting to a husband and domesticity. Still less could they envisage the possibility that a woman might seek to exercise the male prerogative of profession and marriage. According to the still potent doctrine of separate spheres, a women must either fulfil or sublimate her maternal vocation; she could not usurp male authority in home or Church.

The overture, as even its proposers admitted, was unlikely to get anywhere: the two Presbyterian churches had become increasingly preoccupied with the impending Union, and with racist anti-Catholic scaremongering, to the exclusion of major social and political concerns in the Church and in a nation riven by the Depression. The motion was withdrawn in favour of an amendment that the present time was not opportune for taking any steps.
As 1929 approached, then, the two main Presbyterian denominations had negotiated pressure to include women in decision-making and official bodies. Neither had shown the collective willingness required to contemplate or introduce the incorporation of women - on an equal basis - into existing structures of power. Both evidently preferred the relative safety of an expanding 'women's ministry', from which separate place small numbers of delegates and ambassadors might be invited to give the benefit of their much vaunted special feminine gifts and insights to 'the Church'.

In pre-Union negotiations, the Church of Scotland succeeded in persuading the United Free Church of the advantages of a unitary organisation, binding together all aspects of approved women's service in the Church. So the Woman's Guild became, in the United Church, the focus for home and foreign missionary work; for temperance activity; for historical commitments to the conversion of Jewish women, and educational work in the Highlands. The system of Presbyterial Councils and a geographically representative Central Council emphasised the parallelism of women and men in the Church: they were more or less separate, but decidedly unequal. By 1930, nearly 70,000 women belonged to the Guild, under whose auspices six Associations operated. Each was under the ultimate control of an Assembly Committee. There were twenty-eight Committees, and of a total membership of 1752, 160 were women. There is
little evidence that the extremely limited gender-neutral opportunities in Church employment and management were made available to women to any significant extent. It is not surprising that the point made plainly by the 1928 UFC Record correspondent whose letter is quoted at the beginning of this chapter, was alluded to (with the graciousness which men apparently so admired in women) by Mary Lamond, Woman's Guild President, at the 1929 Union Assembly:

'The women workers of the Church of Scotland thank the Assembly for recognition of their services...I would say they are quite worthy of any encouragement. Perhaps they are also worthy of a greater share in Church counsels than you have yet given them.' 126

The response of the newly united establishment to this suggestion was predictable. Dr P D Thomson of Leith warned:

'The Church must not allow itself to drift into action in this direction which might prove hurtful to existing honoured customs and institutions. Whatever may be done to enlarge the sphere of womanly service and influence must be done deliberately, and with open eyes.'127

There was particular cause for the Fathers and Brethren to prescribe caution, for the unthinkable was beginning to happen on their own doorstep. In May 1929, Vera Findlay of the Congregational Union became the first woman to have her ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament recognised by a Scottish denomination.128 And the small group of dissenters who refused incorporation into the 1929 Union, and became the continuing United Free Church were about to take a similar step. Their leader James Barr, who had already demonstrated his commitment to women's rights,
later wrote:

'I at least will always have it as a proud memory that, when our Church had to reorganise in 1929, we had among us men of vision, broad mind and fearless purpose, who brought forward far-reaching resolutions accepted by almost unanimous vote in two Assemblies, and so passed into the law of our Church:

1. The Assembly declare that, the Church having the right to the services of every member in the Church who is in full communion, such members may be called upon to serve on Committees of General Assembly, Synods, Presbyteries and Congregations, and may so serve.

2. Any member of the Church in full communion shall be eligible to hold any office within the Church.'

Further afield, the ordained ministry of women had become a live issue in most Protestant denominations. By 1927 there were around 100 women ministers in a number of congregational and Methodist churches in the USA. In England, Constance Mary Coltman was ordained by the Congregational Union in 1917. Maud Royden, an Anglican feminist, was called to the pastoral ministry at the City Temple in London, which caused a furore in Church of England circles. The Baptist Union, in theory, permitted the admission of women from 1918. The English Presbyterian Church accepted the principle of women ministers in 1921, although it was another 30 years before the first was ordained. In 1922 the Methodist Church convened a committee 'to consider the whole question of admission of women to the ordained ministry, to the work of Deaconesses, and kindred service'. And the Church of England, as already mentioned, had published an important report on the Ministry of Women in 1919.
The Scottish presbyterian denominations were somewhat less progressive than their nearest relations within the Reformed tradition (ie English and American presbyterians, Congregationalists and some Baptists). The Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church debates on ordination for women extended over a similar period to successful outcomes in 1968 and 1970. The Anglican Church, with its ecclesiology of episcopal succession, concern about catholic unity, and different conception of priesthood, ratified the ordination of female priests in 1992.

However, the most interesting feature of a comparative study of church responses to calls for women to be eligible for official ministry is the remarkable similarity of issues, arguments and consequences across the main British protestant churches.\[^{130}\] This suggests very strongly (as indeed the Scottish discussions I have surveyed acknowledged) that the matter was related to wider social trends. It is evident that all mainstream churches were forced to consider the official position of women during the first thirty years of the twentieth century. The period when the United Free Church of Scotland, and the Church of England, were deliberating and preparing reports, followed on immediately from the pre-First World War highpoint of the women's suffrage movement. The Church of Scotland and the Methodists first considered the issue during the 1920s, in the aftermath of the War, and the partial enfranchisement of women. This was a period when feminist
activists were regrouping and evaluating strategies in the light of their new political power. The churches, like political parties, had to assess the collective strength and organisation of women, and adjust their structures accordingly. As the 1920s progressed churchmen, like politicians, perhaps felt they had got the measure of women activists. The post-war wave of enthusiasm and confidence in the power of womanhood had subsided somewhat, and the concerns of women were dispersed in a wide range of social, political and employment activities. (see chap 5)

Smaller liberal churches had an ecclesiology and a freer relationship to the state, which made it less difficult (relatively speaking) to sanction the innovation of female ministers. It is interesting that the Congregational Union of Scotland, and the continuing United Free Church both did so just after the time when women gained full political enfranchisement in 1928. Larger denominations, especially those which had an official position as national churches, were more likely to reflect the attitudes of society at large. And by 1930, the political authorities were defensive and conservative across a spectrum of social and economic issues, although there had been some legislation which reflected the agenda of the women's movement.131

It was in the context of the powerful ideology of motherhood and family, that the Church of Scotland, the Methodists, and the Church of England considered the
ministry of women. As I have shown, the influence of that ideology was evident during the 1926 United Free Church debate. Although the subject remained a matter for periodical consideration after 1930, the momentum was lost until the 1960s, when the final decisions to permit female elders and ministers were taken in the context of a radical era which witnessed the rebirth of the women's movement.\textsuperscript{132}

The dust had barely begun to settle on the 1929 Union when, in 1931, the Marchioness of Aberdeen and five other prominent churchwomen appeared at the bar of the General Assembly on behalf of 335 petitioners. They requested that:

'The barriers which prevent women from ordination to ministry, eldership and diaconate be removed so that the principle of spiritual equality for which the Church stands be embodied in its constitution'.\textsuperscript{133}

But that is another story!
7. Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that in the struggle to achieve a more substantial position in the official life of the church, presbyterian women and their supporters might pursue any or all of three options. In conclusion, I want to consider the extent to which each was espoused, its strategic success, and the consequences (both practical and ideological) for women and the church.

1. The development, in theory and practice, of an essentially separate 'women's ministry

Notwithstanding some diehard conservatives who believed that Christian women had no role or function outside the home, this approach had achieved almost universal support by 1930. Upon its premises was based the whole gamut of officially sanctioned female work and service. Although financial backing was never adequate, and the small band of paid employees had many difficulties, these realities barely impinged on the consciousness of church members - men and women - who accepted that selfless devotion should be the primary distinguishing characteristic of women's ministry. Traditionalists acceded to it as a useful extension of the essentially auxiliary place of women in the Divine scheme of things, and encouraged the exploitation of those qualities of self-sacrifice and nurture conventionally associated with women. In theory, a distinctive female ministry did not undermine their adherence to the literal authority of Scripture or the
historical practice of the Church Universal. It conformed to their view that the roles of men and women were not interchangeable, and that ultimately it was the task of men to rule and of women to obey. I think I have indicated the limitations of this position throughout the thesis.

But I have also pointed to the paradoxical experience of many women who took up employment or service according to the principles of 'women's ministry'. They responded with enthusiasm and imagination to the challenges and interests of unknown territory, and discovered in themselves and in others that which the theory expressly denied: that their gifts and qualities were not confined within the boundaries of 'woman's sphere', but intruded into the erstwhile male arena of public affairs, organisation, preaching and leadership. In 1891 Elsie Inglis, the pioneer doctor, was living in Glasgow YWCA during her training. She wrote to her father:

'The amusing thing about women preaching is that they do it, but as it is not in churches, it is not supposed to be in opposition to St Paul. They are having lots of meetings downstairs; every single one of them is addressed by women. But of course they could not give the same address in a church and with men listening!'

By the time of church union, the official response to this development was to concede that women could indeed be competent in these ways, (and in mixed company!) but not that they should have the opportunity to demonstrate their competence on equal terms with men. Instead, they were offered a combination of tokenism and the vague prospect of
developments within the Order of Deaconesses. John White, the prominent post-union churchman, consistently advocated what might be described as a subordinate parallelism whereby women would be organised within a structure which mirrored the courts and offices of the church. Thus excluded from membership of the core structure, they would have no effective power or responsibility outwith that parallel organisation (and not always much within it). Their influence – even that of those few who became members of Assembly and presbytery committees – would be as representative women, not as capable individuals in their own right. The opportunity to transcend the sectional interests of gender had no part in this scheme of things.

Archive material makes it clear that White had no difficulty, on grounds of Scripture or history, with the principle of women holding church office. He would not contemplate practical equality because unity, custom, and the traditional pre-eminence of the male sex were favoured over the claims of justice. His well-worn slogans were repeated with the irritating familiarity of a scratched record. Any change in the position of women in the Church must be made:

'Without doing hurt to honoured features in its life and constitution, and without creating fresh cleavage in a Church whose wounds are so recently healed...Any recognition of the ministry of women must not be a part substitution of women for men...To admit women to the ministry and eldership would mean an equal number of men dispossessed from the ministry and eldership'.

Perhaps one of White's obiter dicta gives the clearest
insight into his attitude:

'We deprecate generally the wish of a section of that sex to compel womanhood to become a pale and inferior ditto of manhood, not helpmeet, but ineffective rival and outclassed competitor...The sexes were not put into the world to compete with one another, for in competition the weaker must always go to the wall, but to help one another by diversity of function.' 136

2. Equality of opportunity not limited or circumscribed by the ideology of separate spheres

Throughout the period 1830–1930, this position was held by a minority, and actively pursued by less. Its origins lay partly in the individualism which was at the heart of Reformed theology – the equality of each human soul before God. It also derived some force from the tradition of liberal feminism espoused by such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill – especially in the assertion of the ontological similarity of women and men. Those who pursued this line of argument claimed that, since there could be no distinctions drawn between moral and rational faculties according to gender, individuals ought to have the opportunity for education and occupation as befitted their gifts and potential. They sought amendments to the existing church structures which would allow people of merit and ability, regardless of gender, to occupy positions of responsibility and leadership. The perceived inadequacy of the church was not analysed in terms of its patriarchal or class structure, but as an absence of individual freedom.
However, to state the case in such simple terms does not do justice to the theoretical and practical ambiguities of the 'equal rights' movement within Scottish presbyterianism. For although the basic premise of the argument was that individual freedoms were being restricted, there was also the recognition that the denial of rights was on the ground that the person belonged to a group 'which comprehends half the human race', and that implied a structural inequality which had actually been accepted and strengthened by the classical Enlightenment theorists. As indicated in chapter one, they either explicitly endorsed, or simply accepted the assumption that sexual inequality was natural and ought to be preserved in civil society. Such a society was the creation of consenting men, who were abstracted from the private and domestic realm. In that realm, they retained domination over, and indeed legal possession of, their wives. The property basis of liberal theory was gradually eroded during the 19th century, but the idea that women were represented by the men of their family was tenacious. Married women had the least claim to the status of 'individual' - the contract they entered into imposed economic dependence and legal non-personhood in return for 'protection'. As Anne Phillips has written, 'It is no accident that women were for so long excluded from those who consent; it may indeed prove intrinsic to liberal democracy that it cannot acknowledge women as citizens in the fullest sense.'

I believe that there are strong undertones of a theoretical inability to accept women - especially married women - as
individuals with equal rights and opportunities, in the 1926 UFC debate about the incompatability of marriage and ministry for women.

There were other tensions in this uncomfortable liaison between Calvinist, liberal and feminist worldviews. Granted, the individual was equal before God, but that God required above all obedience to his will, as expressed in Scripture, which, on a simple reading, gave backing from both Old and New Testaments for the denial of certain civil and ecclesiastical rights to women. And few secular or religious proponents of equal opportunity refuted the argument (whether from Nature or Divine purpose) that women, as a group, had a special calling to the domestic sphere, which might compromise their status as individuals with other rights.

Nevertheless, the pursuit of natural justice for women did make some impact on the Church - not least because its absence was periodically blamed for the apathy, disenchantment and departure of women members. In 1843, it was the equal status of women as church members which was claimed as grounds for allowing them to vote in a call, against the traditional political and ecclesiastical practice of assuming that male heads of households spoke on behalf of their entourage. After that, even as the liberal Women's Movement of the Victorian era was gaining momentum, with the active involvement of churchwomen (see chap 5),
there was no equivalent movement within presbyterianism until the Great War years and after. Although there is some evidence of dissatisfaction among certain female activists who felt they were treated as second class members, most progressive women were absorbed in exploring the possibilities of separate development within the women's mission and service organisations which flourished from the 1880s. Personal experience of the limitations imposed by a peculiar women's ministry; involvement in the struggle for social and political equality; achievement in higher education; a growing knowledge and utilisation of critical hermeneutics in the study of Scripture - all of these factors contributed to the pressure which got the issue of women's rights onto the churches' agenda from 1914 and culminated in the 1931 petition. Most of the leading female advocates were also prominent in the suffrage movement - Lady Frances Balfour, Lady Aberdeen, Eunice Murray, Frances Simson et al. Frances Melville and Elizabeth Hewat believed they were called to the ministry and fulfilled the academic requirements for ordination. It is perhaps possible to distinguish two strands in the twentieth century equal opportunities movement - those who would have no truck with the notion of separate spheres; and those who did not oppose the view that women were endowed with special qualities, but believed that these could be exercised by women who had full access to the various levels of Church courts and ministry. Frances Melville was a forthright exponent of the the former
belief:

'Personally, I can never get an answer to the question - What is this inherent incapacity of women to serve the Church equally with men? My own answer is that it is prejudice, nurtured by custom, which prevents their claims from being met...I hold strongly that there should be no bar to women holding any office in the Church so long as they are fully qualified and have a desire to do so...[I simply want] that women as well as men should be given full power by the Church to employ their gifts in its service. We have seen the light. There has been of late a great advance in the body politic, and this is the last citadel remaining for women to take.' 139

Eunice Murray, who was a leading figure in the militant suffrage organisation, the Women's Freedom League, agreed that chauvinist obstruction was the main factor in denying women their rights:

'Are our ministers still under the influence of Mr John Knox, are they too conservative to march with the times, or are they too prejudiced to concede this act of justice to women? They do not care so much for advancing the cause of Christ...as they care to keep this one last profession for their own sex. This profession, which should have been the first, is the last to capitulate to the demand for sex equality.' 140

The other view, that women and men were innately (and importantly) different, is evident in the 1915 Report of the UFC Committee on Recognition of the Place of Women in the Church's Life and Work:

'The argument for increased co-operation does not rest on any minimising of the difference between the two sexes...But just because the differences are deep and real, it must conduce to the best and most efficient work, that the distinctive and complementary gifts of men and women should be made available for understanding the difficult and complex problems of our time.' 141

Although this Report declares its awareness of, and sympathy to, the claims of women for justice, its adherence
to fundamental distinctions of gender means that there is always a principle beyond individual human rights to which it can appeal to avoid serious consideration of full equality of opportunity. In spite of its enthusiasm for wider scope for women, the Report was unable to provide the impetus for anything very different from the tokenism of John White. Without the rigour required to reach a logical conclusion, the compromised justice position collapsed back into a 'separate spheres' solution.

Even among women who publicly advocated equal rights, there was a willingness (whether as a matter of tactics or conviction) to accept a truncated version. Although consideration of the 1931 petition and its aftermath is outwith the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to discover, in a 1932 memorandum, that Lady Aberdeen would have regarded the petition 'granted in essential points' if women elders and a development of deaconesses which would 'put them in the position of Assistants to ordained ministers' had been accepted. She even declared herself 'greatly attracted to Dr White's alternative scheme', which was a prototype (rejected by the church) of his parallelism. 142

From a rather different perspective, the tension between liberal individualism and the notion of female distinctiveness was also apparent in the position of those who believed that the characteristic attributes of women
were the very ones required to transform church and world and usher in a Golden Age. They emphasised their superior qualities as the means by which social and political as well as domestic and religious life could be infused with the values and morals which they had long been told were uniquely female. Especially in the aftermath of the Great War, and in the light of national and international crises, men as individuals, and more particularly their old, tired structures, were seen as practically exhausted and morally bankrupt. The Enlightenment confidence in abstract male rationality and conscience, they thought, had been shattered by evidence of tyranny, social ills and war. 'Female' qualities which had been belittled and privatised - intuition, co-operation, altruism, nurture - were proclaimed as essential for a sweeping cultural regeneration. Those who wanted to 'recast the mould' of society were, in their zeal, unlikely to be satisfied with the simple incorporation of individual women into essentially unchanged institutions of church and state. They were more likely to argue for, or at least to dream about new ways for the community of women and men in the church to live and witness in a changing world. 143

While it is possible to perceive real differences in the starting points and conclusions of those who had at least a foot on liberal ground, they were (not surprisingly) united in rejecting the absolute and literal authority of Scripture. Individual interpretations differed, but two
general principles are observable. First, that within the Bible, certain universal revelations and insights carry more weight, and can override, other more specific codes and injunctions. So the New Testament was favoured over the Old; Jesus’ attitude to women over Paul’s; Galatians 3:28 over I Corinthians 11. Second, that Christianity is foremost a religion of the Spirit, not of the letter. So the church might discern signs of the Holy Spirit renewing and reforming human relationships and institutions as history proceeded towards the perfection of God’s Kingdom on earth. It is interesting that these hermeneutical tools were applied so openly and enthusiastically on this issue; and that they were used both to affirm the reforming character of presbyterianism, and at the same time to counter the attitudes to women of the Reformation leaders. But perhaps it is appropriate that the one branch of presbyterianism to have introduced equality of opportunity by 1930 - the continuing United Free Church - formulated the required legislation in terms of individual rights and without any reference to gender. And Elizabeth Barr, who was the second woman to receive ordination in that Church (and became its Moderator in 1960), did not perceive her entry into the ministry in feminist or structural terms. The opportunity was made available, and as an individual she acted in obedience to God. A mould-breaker she may have been, but Barr was just as surely faithful to her liberal, evangelical presbyterian heritage:
'I respect the opinion of those who do not approve of women in the ministry. I have no doubt about myself. The UFC, in which I was brought up a member, opened the way in 1930 and Christ called me as surely as he called Saul of Tarsus. I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, and for all my failings, my sins, his grace has been sufficient for me, his strength made perfect in my weakness.'

3. Challenges to existing paradigms of office and ministry, and the development of alternative models

I think it would be true to say that it did not occur to the great majority of Scottish presbyterians, male and female, to challenge the paradigm of domination which shaped the official life of the church. In the Victorian era those who shocked the establishment by scorning age-old caveats to be silent and submissive, either rejected organised Christianity altogether (for example the utopian socialist feminists like Mrs Hamilton and Emma Martin). Or, like Jessie Macfarlane, Isabella Armstrong and other female preachers, they left the presbyterian church for sects like the Brethren which (for a time at least) encouraged their public ministry, but which did not seriously confront the national and parochial framework of presbyterianism. Their challenge to the dominant institutions of Christianity was moral and charismatic. Their intention was not to reform existing church structures, but individual believers.

Within the three main denominations, women who began to affirm their right to participate in public lay ministry, rarely analysed or criticised the presbyterian ethos.
itself, to which they were bound by tradition, affection, and the sense that it contained the potential for enabling a much more expansive role. They usually expressed great and undying loyalty to the church, although they were also sometimes bold enough to voice frustrations. As the organisations for women's ministry and service developed into the twentieth century there certainly developed de facto alternative models of ministry which were neither confined to the mythical separate spheres image, nor simply aped the already existing male structure. The personal accounts of missionaries, deaconesses, Church and Parish Sisters, evangelists and educators tell stories of creative and often liberating ministries practised by women in a variety of circumstances. But these were exercised alongside and subordinate to the authority of the male courts and ministries, which rarely demonstrated the imagination, humility or wisdom to appreciate that the way some women worked might have relevance for the whole church.

However, there were women of perception and intelligence who were able to view the establishment with a fresh and critical eye. They suggested that, for the church to be lively, faithful and responsive to the changing times, more was required than simply the presence of token women in unchanged structures and attitudes. And so a few voices - sceptical, passionate, visionary - disturbed the complacent consensus.
It is not surprising that some of the most penetrating challenges to the status quo came from women with foreign mission connections. They, after all, often had personal experience of high responsibility, more informal faith communities and the need for cultural sensitivity and adaptability. They were able to view Scottish presbyterianism with some detachment, and in comparison with Christian practice elsewhere. And they were among the first women to benefit from the rigour and excitement of higher education.

Perhaps Annie Small was the most radical in confronting ossified conventions and structures. Her biographer, Olive Wyon, notes the enduring influence of India on Small:

'She hated the spirit of dullness and stagnation. "So-and-so has sat down" she would say with an exasperated smile.'

The expression originated from a journey she made on a cart pulled by a pair of bullocks. They sat down in a deep muddy river bed and

'presented the perfect image of obstinate immovability...I never meet anyone who has 'sat down' -mentally, morally or spiritually...without seeing again that pair of bullocks. What is unfulfilled promise? What are our ruts and habits, our easy phraseologies, catchwords and maxims, our conservatism and reactionariness? What but the signs that vision and hope, the joy of new adventure and the purpose to carry it through, are failing: very soon we shall, quite firmly, SIT down...The diehards block the way!'

In the light of this attitude, it is not surprising that Small was discouraged when she returned to Scotland:

'I had, naturally enough, idealised Scotland, especially religious Scotland...I was disappointed and disillusioned in almost every direction. Scottish Church life seemed isolated from that of greater Christendom.'
She found churches cold and unwelcoming, riven by petty jealousies, with unappealing worship and an official disregard of women which bordered on contempt. In her life and work she showed a practical commitment to overcoming such failings, divisions and lack of fellowship with an integrated faith which heralded some of the insights of modern Christian feminism. In the Women's Missionary College community; in her visits and friendships across the sectarian divide in Ireland; in her love for Iona and the Celtic dimension of the Scots heritage; in her refusal to recognise a division between sacred and secular; in her scholarship, creativity and toleration, she consciously attempted to develop new models of Christian living which would be of relevance to men as well as women. She was well aware of the Reformation legacy for women, and began her contribution to a 1931 Life and Work symposium on the Ministry of Women with this bold assertion:

'It is a simple fact that there is no single word in the Gospels which would forbid the admission of women to the ministry of the Church. I suppose it is universally acknowledged that Paul, divided in his own mind between personal regard for women friends and traditional orientalism in matters of sex, decided in favour of the latter, and delayed by a millenium that natural evolution for which the Gospel had prepared the way.'

There can be no doubting Small's commitment to equal opportunity; and yet, at the conclusion of her article, she hints at an alternative which goes beyond the limits both of subordination and of official equality:
'Is the way of amendment the way of ordination to the ministry as presently constituted in the Church? Would women not tend further to conventionalise an already conventionalised system? Should we not serve Church and world better by becoming explorers, possibly discoverers, of lines of spiritual ministry which shall supplement rather than compete?...Yet we cannot doubt that in due time the Church must realise that true and perfect comradeship must inevitably express itself through true and perfect colleagueship.'

Annie Small looked beyond the struggle for formal equality of status, to the need for women to challenge the very stereotyped, hierarchical nature of institutional religion. Elizabeth Hewat received three degrees in theology at Edinburgh University (BD, PhD, DD), and on each occasion was the first woman so to do. Her academic record may have been exceptional, but she typified several churchwomen of her generation in that she simultaneously worked within the separate sphere of female organisations, campaigned for equal opportunities, and argued for new ways of working together. Like Small, she had missionary experience to refer to:

'What takes place in the East cannot but have reverberations in the West. In China, women speak freely in Churches, are trained in the same Theological Halls as men, and sit in the Manchurian equivalent of the General Assembly...When young Churches look at the practice of the home Church in this matter, may their reaction not be one of dismayed surprise that the customs of the West are so far at variance with what they have been taught is the Spirit of Christ?'

Hewat, like Small, believed that her presbyterian heritage was not irredeemably tied to the old models of authority and exclusion, and warned the church of the consequences if it refused to contemplate change:
'The ideal arrangement of the future would seem to lie along the lines of colleagueship, in which ordained men and women work together in one congregation - equal in status and education. The growing complexity of congregational work - not to mention the needs of those outside the church - are fast rendering one-man ministry in the city an impossibility. 

...Establish the basic principle, and one can trust to the light and leading of God's Spirit...If there are dangers and risks in moving ahead, there may be still greater risks in standing still and doing nothing.'\(^{151}\)

In assessing these three options for women in the struggle for recognition and responsibility, I hope it is clear that they co-existed and overlapped in individual opinion and official policy, especially from the turn of the century. But it was the development of a distinctive female ministry within an essentially unchanged paradigm of male authority which prevailed in official Scottish presbyterian polity up to and after 1930. Women who believed they had a vocation had no official channel of expression except the diaconate and women's organisations. Excluded from ordination, they were also barred from the ruling courts of the church.

By then, the church had probably lost the active involvement of a number of aware, radical and active women.\(^{152}\) There were several factors responsible for driving Helen Crawfurd of Glasgow out of Christianity - a process which was extremely painful for her as a minister's wife and church worker. But she was disgusted by some of the Old Testament stories of cruelty to women, and resented the New Testament demand that women should remain silent in church. However, her husband simply condemned her criticisms as blasphemy, and she had little support from
within her local Christian community for her developing feminist and socialist views. She found the purpose, challenge, respect and meaning which were increasingly absent in her experience of the church, in political and peace movements during and after the First World War.\textsuperscript{153}

The loss of momentum in the Women's Movement and the conservative backlash in the church in postwar years left proponents of women's ordination, and those who hoped and dreamed of alternative Christian communities, stranded on the margins of influence, in spite of their continuing leadership of women's work. Elizabeth McKerrow, who later became National President of the Woman's Guild, described the effect which the situation had on women:

'The barrier [to ordination] stops the natural flow of women's activities into the mainstream of the Church's life and makes it a lop-sided organisation. Women within the Church are over-organised. Mere committee work takes up too much time...They become women-members and guildswomen instead of Church members and Church women. We are apt to view ourselves as 'the women's organisations' and not sufficiently as an integral part of the Church.'\textsuperscript{154}

Frances Melville's gloomy prognosis - that the most able young women were leaving, while those who remained are becoming old, mentally as well as physically; dulled, quiescent, sitting in half-empty pews\textsuperscript{155} was based on her wide experience of the church, and especially of women in higher education. For she had lectured at Edinburgh University, been warden of University Hall in St Andrews, and from 1909-35 was Mistress of Queen Margaret College in Glasgow. Her warning had been too readily discounted or
ignored by a church which had (with some honourable exceptions) demonstrated its unwillingness seriously to address the challenge of the Women's Movement, far less its ability to 'direct and inspire' it.\textsuperscript{156}

By 1930, presbyterian women remained defined and confined by their gender to official subordination.