

# Double Image



Men Women and God

## rediscovering heart

### *It's All There!*

This is a cry I often make when I hear people lamenting how rare it is for voices to be genuinely listened to within a congregation. Bring any five human beings together and we are in the midst of huge riches - "it's all there". Yet how often voices are bypassed and much power for change seeps away.

Thankfully there are always some who sense deep down that their voice does matter. Phyllis Thompson (p5) "... they can't tell me what to think." George Fox (p7) who followed the inner yearning and Anna who 'waited without hope'. (p6) Take a moment to stay with that poem and hear your own voice within. Jenny Baker's article (p3) points out that, "... most of the women in the Bible acted outside of the expectations of their culture in order to follow the vision that God had inspired in them."

The concept of 'Men, Women and God' continues to be a challenge to our twenty first century way of being church. How do we hear all the voices - including God's? This particular issue offers more clues.

I'm delighted that Julia Murphy has agreed to be our next Double Image editor. Julia's email includes the word 'poet' so that offers great hope! There'll be an interview with Julia next time.

Every blessing and go with your voice!

Sue Howard

**The quest to making sense of Mars and Venus is often attempted - and some have claimed the key. Amid recent trends to define our genders, Jenny Baker offers insight on the 'difference' debate and challenges us to complement, not compete.**

It's a question almost as old as time itself. What is the difference between men and women? And there is no shortage of people ready to give an answer, from scientists to theologians, from counsellors to comedians. While campaigns for equality in the 60s and 70s stressed the equivalence of men and women, in recent years there has been a swing back to exploring and trying to define the differences between the sexes. Much of that has been profoundly helpful, leading to better communication and increased understanding between men and women. But is it all good? Or is there a danger that rigid definitions of difference, particularly ones with a Christian veneer, can actually perpetuate stereotypes, stifle diversity and drive us further apart?

How exactly are men and women distinct? John Gray popularised the difference debate with his 90s classic *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*, his argument being that men and women are so different that they might as well have come from parallel planets. He focuses on the psychology of

men and women, how they think and behave, and explores communication between husbands and wives - ideas that have been translated to other areas of life in his many subsequent books. Many people have found a resonance in his explanations that expose the assumptions that we make about each other and have led to greater clarity for both men and women in expressing their needs. Critics point out that 'Dr' Gray's PhD was acquired at Columbia Pacific University, a correspondence school that has since been forced to close, and argue that he perpetuates stereotypes and justifies immature behaviour in both men and women.

A more recent addition to the debate is *The Essential Difference* by Simon Baron-Cohen, a Cambridge professor who is also the director of the Autism Research Centre. He argues that the female brain is predominantly hardwired for empathy, while the male brain is hardwired for understanding and building systems. Expressed crudely, these differences will be demonstrated in women getting together to chat

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while men play with their gadgets and put their CDs into alphabetical order. He argues that these differences are due to biological and social factors, both nature and nurture, with babies performing to type from a very young age. His description of the different tactics that teenage boys and girls use to establish dominance in a group will be recognisable to many youth workers. Boys tend to use physical force and overt intimidation to establish their place in the pecking order; girls tend to be more subtle and indirect, using bitchiness and manipulation with great skill to the same end. His book will carry more weight with many because of its scientific basis, but his conclusion that autism is a form of the extreme male brain is an easy target for parody and misunderstanding.

Of course Christians have also written on the subject. In their books, *Wild at Heart* for men and *Captivating* for women which seem to draw heavily on Gray's work, John and Stasi Eldredge argue that essentially men and women hunger after different roles in fairy tales. Every man wants a battle to fight, an adventure to live and a beauty to rescue. Every woman wants to be romanced, to play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure and to unveil beauty. These differences are not cultural, according to the Eldredges, they are the way that God created us. They encourage both men and women to recognise the wounds that life has dealt them, and to be honest about the way they have responded and the effect that has had on their souls. These are very popular books;

*Nowhere does the Bible define what it means to be masculine or feminine. What it does give us is descriptions of men and women relating to each other within the cultures in which they live*

many people find a resonance with what they are saying and their wisdom has helped people find deeper relationships with themselves, with God and with each other.

More recently, there has been a lot of discussion about the decline in the numbers of men attending church, particularly in the States, which leads to assertions of what true masculinity and femininity entails. According to some writers, the biggest threat currently facing the church of Jesus Christ is women. In his book *Why men hate going to church* David Murrow asserts that 'you cannot have a thriving church without a core of men who are true followers of Christ. If the men are dead, the church is dead.'

There is wisdom in Murrow's book, and there is no doubting his passion, but there are also sweeping generalisations that dishonour both men and women. He says that the church has become feminised in spite of being led by men for centuries because male church leaders are usually effeminate and not 'real men'. He paints a world where men are so insecure that they are threatened by any hints of women taking initiative or being innovative. His suggestion that pastors should send the women out of church early so that he can give extra teaching to the men that they then pass onto their wives would be funny if it wasn't meant seriously. And his strategy for church growth of targeting the needs of men because you'll get the women coming along anyway is dismissive of the identity of half the human race and extremely short-sighted.

So what are we to make of the 'difference' debate? It seems to me that there is a real need to discern true wisdom for the 21<sup>st</sup> century from a call to return to mythical traditional roles in the guise of biblical authority. Here are my suggestions

for moving toward a better understanding and appreciation of each other.

### **We need to celebrate the diversity of men and women**

When I look at the men and women with whom I live, work, relate and worship I see as much difference between some of the women as between the women and the men. What heartens me about Baron Cohen's book is that he is careful to talk about the diversity that is found within genders. He doesn't claim that all women are wonderfully empathetic, just that on average females spontaneously empathise to a greater degree than do males. Some men can be very good at empathising but that doesn't make them effeminate. He says, 'Looking for sex differences is not the same as stereotyping. The search for sex differences enables us to discover how social and biological influences act on the two sexes in different ways but it does not tell us about individuals... Stereotyping in contrast judges individuals according to a set of assumptions about a group and is pernicious.'

Sadly that balance and generosity seems to be missing from many Christian books on the subject. Instead of diversity, we are dealt the absolutes that evangelical Christians are so fond of which detract from the genuine insights of the writers. From *Wild at Heart*: 'Like it or not, there is something fierce in the heart of every man.' From *Captivating*: 'Every little girl... is asking one fundamental question... Little girls want to know, Am I lovely?' If people don't fit these narrow definitions of what it means at heart to be masculine and feminine it is because they are damaged and in denial. If you're a woman who doesn't like twirly skirts, you just can't win. As I read these books, while agreeing with much of what they are saying, I have this horrible sense of being

stified, and stuffed into a padded box with frilly hearts on the outside.

The heart cry of Murrow and others who want the church to be more masculine is for authenticity, and it desperately needs to be heard. Reacting against the stereotype of wimpy Christian men, they want a place where they can be real before God instead of being squashed into pretending to be what they are not. I want to shout at this point, 'Me too!' The trouble is that in stating their case so loudly, they require other men to conform to their personality type and women to confine themselves to a diminished role. Murrow rails against passivity in the church as a major turn-off for men, but then requires women to become even more passive for his solutions to be put into practice.

Nowhere does the Bible define what it means to be masculine or feminine. What it does give us is descriptions of men and women relating to each other within the cultures in which they live, often in ways that do not reflect the nature of God. Many of the pitfalls in Christian writing on difference between genders are a result of mistaking cultural differences for God-given qualities.

And rather than fulfilling the neat stereotypes, there is the same complexity to characters in the Bible that I see in my friends. David was the 'warrior king' who came to the public's attention when he killed a giant, and whose last words to his son Solomon was to ask him to get revenge on David's enemy, to 'bring his grey head down to the grave in blood'. But he was also a musician whose harp playing brought Saul relief from an evil spirit and whose poetry and songs are still sung today. Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple in a passionate rage and challenged the religious leaders

with strong words that caused offence. He willingly faced a horrific death, suffering brutal pain without complaint. But he also welcomed little children, in contrast to his disciples, said that the meek will inherit the earth and instructed people to turn the other cheek rather than fighting back.

And most of the women in the Bible acted outside of the expectations of their culture in order to follow the vision that God had inspired in them. That needs a lot more unpacking than there is room for here, but think of Esther risking her life to speak up for her people, Mary sitting at Jesus' feet to learn instead of helping her sister in the kitchen, Moses' mother and Shiprah and Puah the midwives disobeying Pharaoh and lying in order to protect the next generation, the 'sinful woman' who anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and so on. These women were not well behaved, compliant or tame. They were responding to what God had called them to be, discovering the truth that being good, being sweet and being nice does not cause life to sing.

Discussions of difference can be key in helping men and women to relate to each other better and to co-operate more, but the danger is that we use stereotypes as an instruction manual for how to behave rather than taking the time to listen and to learn, to interact with the uniqueness of the real people with whom we live and work.

**We need to recognise that Church is not a great place for many women to be either**

The feminisation of the church debate implies that women love church because it's just how they want it to be. But Murrow himself admits that younger adults of both genders are missing from church. The type of church that he describes may suit older women or

*These women were not well behaved, compliant or tame. They were discovering the truth that being good, being sweet, being nice does not cause life to sing.*

some of those whose primary concern is bringing up children because it provides a place to serve and a safe social network that values children, but it's not somewhere I would thrive. I look at my teenage sons' female friends who are Christians - intelligent, feisty, determined young women - and I wonder what role they will play in the body of Christ in the future. Where are the female role models who will inspire them? Has the church anything more to offer them than teaching Sunday School or being backing singers in the worship band?

In recent months, I've been talking with youth workers about women in youth ministry. I first became a youth worker nearly 20 years ago now, when there were few women in positions of leadership and responsibility within the church or in youth organisations. Looking around at the current youth ministry scene, it feels that little has changed. Men and women are pretty evenly represented as students on youth ministry courses but beyond that the picture is not very encouraging. Issues of concern include a female youth worker who is not allowed to attend leadership meetings where decisions are made about the youth work purely because she is a woman; meetings of youth workers where women don't make any verbal contribution because of the group dynamics and the unwitting dominance of the men; lots of women doing innovative, committed youth work but very few women in positions of leadership within organisations or in teaching roles where they are able to shape the future direction of youth ministry.

Is the answer to church decline to make church more masculine? I think the situation is different in the UK for a start, but when I look at the church I see both women and men who long for authentic expressions of Christian faith where *they are challenged to take risks, where they are able to use their gifts and where they are empowered to engage with the world around them, regardless of their gender. As well as the needs of men being met, there is a need for women to be encouraged and equipped to reach the full potential that God has for them. We need to fight for a place where both happen, not sacrifice one in fulfilment of the other.*

#### **We need to offer each other an invitation to growth**

From the creation accounts, we try to tease out what God originally intended for men and women. After God created Adam, he saw the first thing in his creation that was not good, the fact that Adam was on his own. And so he created woman, a counterpart to Adam, to work with him to fulfil the cultural mandate. Together they are to accomplish what neither of them would be able to do on their own. Genesis 1 and 2 offer us a vision of complementarity, partnership and a difference between the genders that means they complete each other when they walk in relationship with God.

But after creation comes the fall, and the consequences of Eve's and Adam's disobedience ripple out across the whole of creation. A relationship of equals is marred by competition, a scrabbling for domination and control and a separation of the tasks of humanity. As God describes the effects of their actions, we hear that the impact of the fall for Eve will predominantly be played out in terms of relationships

and family life; for Adam the consequences are seen in work and the environment. The mandate intended to be worked out in partnership is divided as a result of the fall.

But that is not where we are called to live as followers of Christ. We are to seek first the kingdom of God, to establish God's reign in every part of our lives, including relationships between men and women. Instead of settling for the gender status quo, we need to fight for the complementarity and partnership that God offered us as gifts, but that we so quickly threw back in God's face.

*All of us need to be honest about where we hide behind roles in a bid for security or hold onto them as a means of power and control. Neither does us credit.*

And that can be a real challenge. I'm part of Grace, an alternative worship community in west London. A few years ago we realised that, in spite of having an egalitarian theology, we had got stuck in very traditional roles. The men had all the gadgets for use in worship; the women ran the café after the service. We acknowledged that these were our comfort zones and where our skills currently lay, but that it was not necessarily a healthy place to remain. We've deliberately tried to learn new skills, to encourage each other to participate in all types of activities and to strive for balance in the roles we play within the community. There's a difference between being called to and gifted for a particular role or position, and sticking with roles through laziness or comfort. All of us need to be honest about where we hide behind roles in a bid for security or hold onto them as a means of power and control. Neither does us credit.

There's obviously a lot we can learn from studies of gender, but I don't think we will ever be able to adequately define what it means to be masculine or feminine. Like the very nature of God, there will always be an element of holy mystery about what makes each of us tick. But I do think we need to keep working at relating to each other across the divide of our gender. Rather than retreating to safe stereotypes of what it means to be a man or a woman, the invitation we have to offer each other is to become more whole and more fully alive. That will be different for each of us, but my understanding of Genesis is that we all have something to offer to people of the opposite gender that calls them to a fuller expression of the image of God. Some of that will be along traditional gender divides - so those women who cling to safety have much to learn from the men who value adventure and risk; those men who withdraw to their gadgets have much to learn from those women with a flair for empathy. But equally there will be less predictable outcomes; for example, I have learned a lot about relating to people - a traditionally female area of expertise - from a couple of my male friends.

There will always be a need for single-gender groups for friendship and ministry. But God said that it was not good for man to be alone. Something holy and strong happens when men and women make the effort to live, work and play together rather than in competition with each other. I want to commit myself afresh to making that effort - I hope you'll join me.

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**Jenny Baker is a writer and regular contributor to Youthwork magazine.**

*Reprinted by kind permission of 'Youthwork'*

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## “They can tell me what to wear and what to do but they can’t tell me what to think”

### In conversation with Phyllis Thompson.

I found this a particularly moving moment in my interview with Phyllis Thompson. When I spoke to her Phyllis had been recently appointed to the new role of Education Director of the New Testament Church of God. It’s because of Phyllis that I am part of MWG. It was she who originally asked me if I would be interested in joining the Planning Group. So Phyllis opened a door for me to meet some more amazing people. Phyllis is a leader who opens doors for others.

I vividly remember witnessing just how many doors Phyllis had opened when I was invited to the Reading Evening at Enfield College Basic Education Unit at the time when she was the Programme Director. Hear for yourself - first Yasmin:

*“For a very long time I felt a sense of failure for not having completed my secondary education. When my youngest child started nursery, I decided to do something in order to get rid of this dreadful feeling, as it was gradually killing my self-confidence. That’s when I phoned the ABE office, booked an interview with Phyllis Thompson and enrolled for the Wordpower Level 3 course.*

*The course has been very stimulating and enlightening. — I have gained greater confidence in myself, my writing and my communication skills in general.*

*Phyllis is a great role model for the students just by observing the way she uses her words is enough to make you want to further your study. — You are certain to leave her class with a feeling of pride.”*

now Seaford:

*“When I became a Christian in 1993, I realised that I needed to learn to read and understand the bible. As a member of the church it is my duty to read from the bible to the entire church. I did not feel confident and I told myself that I have to do something about my reading. — I understand more now, learning makes you wise. When you learn you broaden your knowledge and horizons. — Since coming to classes my view on life has improved. —.*

*I feel much happier in myself now. My reading has improved a great deal. I can stand up in church and read aloud with no fear now. Other people have confidence in me. This makes me feel relaxed and secure in myself. I would recommend the classes to everyone who needs the help.”*

Tears came to my eyes that night as story after story revealed how the basic skills of reading and writing, which so many of us take for granted, can transform lives so profoundly. The hands that held the keys were both skilled and compassionate. Education like everything else of value issues from the heart.

Compassion had led Phyllis into adult education rather than her original intention of working with primary age children. It was while she was working with the Zebra Project in London that she first met an adult woman who could not read. This was a revelation to her. Being Phyllis she started to help this woman to learn and others soon heard that here was an empathetic teacher. One became a group and then several groups around the city. Phyllis set off on a

trail to find if others were doing this and how she might learn too.

That trail led on to a variety of roles within Adult Education, work with the British Council and the discovery of global and development education. Immediately prior to starting her new role Phyllis was Deputy Director of the NGO Development Education Association.

Along the way Phyllis was delighted to discover the work of Paulo Friere and heard him echo some of her own emerging philosophy. In his book *Pedagogy of the Opressed* (written before inclusive language was the norm!) he says:

*“To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. — Dialogue is the encounter between men — in order to name the world. Hence dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not want this naming - between those who deny other men the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them.”*

Friere called this denial of others to find and speak their word a ‘dehumanising aggression.’ He deplored what he described as the ‘banking’ style of education where one group simply seeks to ‘deposit’ their set of ideas and knowledge into another group.

*“Many political and educational plans have failed because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their action) the men-in-a-situation towards whom their programme was ostensibly directed.”*

Yasmin and Seaford's stories illuminate how liberating a genuine educational dialogue can be.

Let's go back to Phyllis' own teenage mantra, as she called it, "You can tell me what to wear, you can tell me what to do but you can't tell me what to think." Phyllis was 15 at the time and part of the New Testament Church of God in Birmingham where her father was Pastor and later Bishop. She felt disconnected from much of what the young people were being taught.

There was clarity about what was prohibited but little as to what was a positive contribution to the world. She listened to her inner knowing. A few years later she was struck by a comment of one of her tutors, "Your God is too small, Phyllis."

As Phyllis has listened to 'the still small voice' within not only has her world opened up but that inner journey has demonstrated itself in new worlds for others. Thank you Phyllis!

*Sue Howard*

## ANNA ASHER

*Luke 2 v.36 - 38*

At first she wandered blindly  
Through cool olive groves  
Crushing the yellow sorrel  
And the vivid glossed anemones.  
Gripping the rough and twisted ancientness  
Of trunk and branch  
With grazed fingers  
In the fierce compulsion  
Of her cries and questions.

Their quiet oblivion  
Mocked her barren widowhood  
With pendant fruit  
Promising secret oil.

Then her grief  
Subsumed in a Temple's desecration,  
A nation's occupation.  
Foreign feet and forces  
Trampled street and horses of conquest.  
A kingdom torn  
From the House of David.  
Fire and terror,  
Sword blade at the broken door.  
She never spoke of what she saw or bore  
In all those years.

Time passed. She learned  
To listen.  
To see beyond the sky's translucency.  
To feel within herself  
The huge regeneration of the seasons.

A rumour of redemption,  
A breath that touched her from between the stars  
Carried in sharp winds from cold mountains  
And the scouring heat of deserts  
Caught in the branches of the timeless trees.

Her unaccustomed tongue began to speak.  
Prophetic words became a secret glee  
An unseen pregnancy of hope  
Carried for years of expectation.  
The steady metre of her heart  
Strengthened with age.

A new Temple drew her daily,  
But not its grandeur,  
Or the repeated rhythms  
Of the lit lamps, the ordered loaves,  
The bloodied sacrifices.  
Excluded from the inner courts  
Each day she paced the cool  
And measured colonnades,  
Wondering how these rooms,  
Courts within courts,  
Could enclose the limitless God?  
How restrain the whirlwind of His Presence?  
Contain the lightning of His Power?

Prophetic wonder  
Took her beyond the clear exactitude  
Of Law  
Until she saw  
(Shaking with laughter crazed as Sarah's)  
The magnitude of God would only  
Rest in little room -  
Small as the homing of the womb.  
And all the majestic courts of worship  
Shrank to that end,  
That concentration, that contraction.

Waiting for that intersection  
Of God and time and place,  
The years ran from her  
Like a laughing child.

One day, Time itself stood apart.  
She saw, as if so long ago, herself,  
But not herself,  
A young wife, an earnest husband,  
And a six week son,  
Whose gazing eyes  
Absorbed and calmed her years of waiting.

The Temple's core of courts  
Gave up its secret to her.  
Gave entry to the very holiest place.  
In her embrace  
A life-long moment as He laid His head:  
His mercy seat, her withered arms  
And youthful, fragrant heart.

*Janet Killeen (2007)*

## George Fox

Jean Hatton  
 Pub Monarch  
 ISBN 978 1 85424-753-7

Jean Hatton's gift is her ability to introduce us to the full humanity of her chosen historical hero. Her text arouses both our curiosity and our empathy. She accomplished this in her previous book *Betsy*, the story of the female hero Elizabeth Fry. Elizabeth might have been a natural heroine; George Fox is more of a dilemma.

In choosing to pursue the real George Fox Jean has bitten off one of the least digestible bits of English history. Yet she makes the complexity of the seventeenth century eminently readable and even comprehensible. It is a period that can offer much to those of us who inhabit twenty first century Britain.

I was able to accompany Jean for a few days as she followed in George's footsteps in her attempt to find the 'real George'. We had the benefit of four wheels, George would have been more familiar with four legs. His sheer physical stamina was astounding, particularly as he was no stranger to being physically manhandled as he was thrown out of churches, and in the case of York Minster, hurled down the steps. A look at the photographs in this book show how extensive were his travels and how loud his voice - speaking to over 3,000 on the Cumbrian fells on a Sunday afternoon picnic in 1652.

A small review such as this can in no way do justice to this extraordinary volume. From an array of possible themes I've chosen to highlight some of the women in George's life, as that might be of special interest to those of us in MWG.

We first meet George as a child with an emotionally distant father and a very significant mother who

read the scriptures to him. Father was a respected Puritan church warden in Fenny Drayton in Leicestershire. George was probably as much a mystery to his parents as he was to himself in those early years. So how was it that a rather awkward adolescent became the fury and the delight of thousands? As with many revolutionary and mystic figures it began with an inner search and pursuit of God's acceptance. A very difficult search at a time of fierce and competing Puritan theologies.

In Coventry in 1646 he describes one of his first 'openings':  
*"—it was opened in me that God who made the world did not dwell in temples made with hands...but in people's hearts..." and that "being bred in Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ."*

The latter possibly reflecting a particularly sore point for George, who for some unaccountable reason was not sent to the local grammar school for an education.

It was in Nottinghamshire that George at last reached the end of his search and felt the love of God for himself. The profound depth and complexity of this crisis is exquisitely rendered by Jean:

*"— it was as if a fortress in his mind began to crumble. When finally it collapsed, pathways once hidden were suddenly revealed, leading down into depths previously denied and inward towards layers of possibility."*

Such a mystical experience opened him up to seeing God as the indwelling light in all people, even women! *"I met with a sort of people that held women have no souls," he said, "adding in light manner, no more than a goose." Unhesitatingly, he corrected them. "Mary said," he told them, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."*

Elizabeth Horton, a middle aged farmer's wife, was one who early on saw George's potential and was, 'the first of his following that he mentioned in his Journal by name.' Years later Elizabeth, then in her seventies, was one of two women in the group who hazardously sailed to America as part of George's preaching tour.

After George's vision on Pendle Hill, it was 'an ale wife woman' who listened to him and urged him to write things down and promised to copy the paper and spread it around the countryside.

But without doubt the most important woman in George's life, and in the story of Quakers as a whole, was Margaret Fell, wife of Judge Thomas Fell, and later in 1669 of George himself although they spent precious little time together as man and wife. A highly articulate and deeply religious woman, Margaret seems to have quickly become convinced that this physical giant of a man who knocked on the door of Swarthmoor Hall was indeed bringing the truth of God into her home.

In church that Sunday she asked that George be given permission to speak and found herself standing on a chair declaring how they had all misread the scriptures. Once open to the Light within Margaret was dauntless in her own ministry of teaching and organising the fledgling movement; speaking to the King himself and spending three years in Lancaster prison.

Margaret has been described as the most theologically articulate of all the women preachers of the Civil War and later seventeenth century England. Her published writings include *Womens Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures, all such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus* (1666). This classic text collects all the Biblical evidence for the

equality of women before God.. Margaret writes

*"But all this opposing and gainsaying of Womens Speaking, hath arisen out of the Bottomless Pit, and Spirit of Darkness that hath spoken for these many hundred years together in this night of Apostasy, —."*

Margaret's influence convinced others that George should lead the movement rather than James Naylor, who had a enthusiastic following in Bristol and the South West. James had been a early devotee of George and had left his home to be another itinerant preacher after hearing the voice of God at his plough. Jean paints a graphic picture of the time when James was clearly exhausted and near to break down in Exeter prison and word got around that he had raised Dorcas Erbury, a fellow captive, from the dead:

'This caused great outcry and another devotee, Martha Simmonds, encouraged some of the other female prisoners to sing 'Holy holy holy' and prostrate themselves at James' feet. James, for his part, had begun a fast 'fortifying himself with nothing but an occasional pint of white wine.'

George, having just left prison himself, hurried to see what was happening. What horrified him was seeing James and his male comrades praying with hats on -

something George did not allow. As in so many great movements male rivalry cut deep. Had James had a different 'opening' from himself? When James greeted his hero in delight George only offered his boot to be kissed; not one of his finer moments.

For James there was horrendous suffering to follow including having his tongue branded through with a red hot iron for blasphemy. Here is the intensity of the seventeenth century; a deep passion for God and for the liberation of the common people and an extraordinary blindness to the horrors of violence and a cheap contempt for fellow humans. Such contradictions are within all of us. Negotiating that narrow path is part of the story of this remarkable biography. In that respect it offers clues and indeed hope for our own time.

In a gentler moment of George's journey, Jean offers this delightful human picture of a very complex couple:

On Friday 25 June 1675, 23 years after he first hammered on Swarthmoor's front door, George Fox dismounted in its stable yard. Walking into the parlour where he had once preached to Margaret and her children — he sat down in a chair by an open window — aware of nothing more than the birds in the garden, the scent of

roses and the distant smell of the sea." Margaret was clearly delighted to have him home telling her daughters, *"And thou shouldst buy us a cask of wine, of what sort thou judgest father likes best."*

This is an important biography. Do take time to read it and reflect on its deep insights into our current story of religion and spirituality and their political expression.

Sue Howard

PS For those interested I was told several years ago that there is a modern edition of Margaret Fell's *Womens Speaking Justified* Pythia Press, 96 Mansfield Road, London NW3 2HX (1989 priced at £1.95). I do not know if it is still available. (S.H.)



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Bank \_\_\_\_\_

Branch \_\_\_\_\_

Branch Address \_\_\_\_\_

Account No. \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay on 2 January 2009 to Lloyds Bank, Baker Street, London, (30-90-39) the sum of £\_\_\_\_\_ for credit to the account of Men Women and God, a/c 0867301 and make similar annual payments until cancelled.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name (BLOCK CAPITALS) \_\_\_\_\_

Please send subscriptions, gifts and correspondence to: MWG, 8 Ellis Avenue, Onslow Village, Guildford, Surrey GU2 7SR