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An exploration of the role of Christian women in the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain c.1970-1990

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Contents:

Introduction:

'We asked for bread and you gave us stones'.[1]

In 1978 Una Kroll stood up in front of the General Synod of the Church of England and quoted Jesus' words to decry the announcement that the motion to admit women into the priesthood had failed. After six years of campaigning to elevate the status of women in the Church of England, Kroll's anger and frustration was undeniable. It was another sixteen years until the first women were ordained in the Church of England.

This dissertation seeks to explore the activism of Christian women during the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain. Sue Bruley described the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) as 'a powerful, exciting and vibrant social movement of women that burst into action across the western world in the late 1960s and 1970s'.[2] The WLM was nurtured by a context of post-war social democracy and the rise of the New Left, which had contributed to the emergence of a number of social movements in the 1950s and 1960s.[3] Also known as 'second wave feminism', it is defined as the second epoch of feminist campaigning, following the 'first wave' which largely focussed on the enfranchisement of women at the turn of the twentieth century.[4] This second wave expanded the reach of feminism, seeking to eradicate sexism in

[1] U.Kroll, Interview with M.Jolly (Manchester, 13 March 2012). Sisterhood and After Project: British Library C464/10

[2] S.Bruley, 'Consciousness-Raising in Clapham: Women's Liberation as 'Lived Experience' in South London in the 1970s', *Women's History Review*, Vol.22 (2013), p.717

[3] J.Rees, 'All the Rage: Revolutionary Feminism in England, 1977-1983' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Western Australia, 2007), p.68

[4] N.Hewitt, 'Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor', *Feminist Studies,* Vol.38 (2012), p.665

all areas of society and challenging the attitudes and cultural structures upon which the subordination of women was based.[5]

Literature:

In comparison to the parallel movement in the United States, the WLM in Britain has been the subject of limited historical analysis. The earliest histories were compiled by feminists involved in the movement, as demonstrated in the work of Shelia Rowbotham, Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell.[6] A notable exception is David Bouchier's work which traced the emergence of the WLM in the UK and USA.[7] However, as Eve Setch identified, this early historiography had a narrow focus in presenting a narrative which 'confirms popular stereotypes of feminists'.[8] A particular limitation in this early historiography was its focus on white, middle-class and heterosexual campaigners, thereby excluding the contributions of women outside of this 'mainstream' movement.

More recently, historians have sought to nuance the history of the WLM by focussing on the experiences of different groups of activists. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of 'intersectionality' is essential in understanding how separate categories, such as race and gender, relate to each other and shape one's experience.[9] This concept of 'intersectionality' has greatly deepened

[5] S.Bruley, L.Forster, 'Historicising the Women's Liberation Movement', *Women's History Review*, Vol.25 (2016), p.697
[6] A.Coote, B.Campbell, *Sweet Freedom: The Struggle for Women's Liberation*, (Oxford: Basil and Blackwell, 1987); S.Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us: Feminism in Action Since the 1960s* (London: Thorsons, 1989)
[7] D.Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (London: Macmillan Press, 1983)
[8] E.Setch, 'The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969-1979', *Twentieth Century British History,* Vol.13 (2002), p.172
[9] K.Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine', *University of Chicago Legal Forum,* Vol.1 (1989), p.140

our current historiographical knowledge of the WLM, as historians have increasingly addressed the experiences of those excluded from this 'mainstream' narrative. Natalie Thomlinson analysed the history of black women, highlighting their rich and unique activism.[10] To offer a broader lens on the impact of class, George Stevenson studied the experiences of working-class women within the movement.[11] Shelia Jeffreys adopted a similar approach to Stevenson, focussing instead on the involvement of lesbian women.[12] All of these histories have challenged the extent to which the WLM should be characterised as a singular movement. Instead, they have shown that multiple actors contributed to what Dawn Llewellyn reimagines as a 'configuration of intersecting movements and concerns'.[13]

However, despite this increased emphasis on the centrality of intersectionality, the exploration of religion has been fundamentally ignored within WLM historiography. Christian women have been predominately mentioned within these histories as oppositional figures to the liberation movement.[14] An exception to this pattern, is the seminal work of Jenny Daggers who remains the sole historian to analyse the Christian women's movement in Britain.[15] Daggers is at the vanguard of this research in establishing the Christian women's movement as 'a neglected phase of British 'second-wave' feminism'.[16] Despite the publication of this

[10] N.Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement in England, 1968-1993* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)
[11] G.Stevenson, *The Women's Liberation Movement and the Politics of Class in Britain* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019)
[12] S.Jeffreys, *The Lesbian Revolution: Lesbian Feminists in the UK 1970-1990* (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2018)
[13] D.Llewellyn, *Reading, Feminism, and Spirituality: Troubling the Waves* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.ix
[14] See for example, A.Farmer, 'Feminists, Abortion and Sexuality in Britain: An Historical Perspective', *An Irish Quarterly Review,* Vol.90 (2001), p.139
[15] J.Daggers, *The British Christian Women's Movement: A Rehabilitation of Eve* (Liverpool: Hope University College, 2002)
[16] Daggers, *The British Christian Women's Movement*, p.xiii

research in 2002, no historians have sought to develop this area of academia. Therefore, this dissertation will make an innovative contribution to the literature by utilising the case study of Christian women to address this considerable gap in the existing literature regarding the role of religious women within the WLM.

The current lack of consideration of the role of religion in this area is indicative of the broader marginalisation of religion in mainstream western historical study. Ursula King refers to this disregarded intersection as a 'double blindness', as religious histories diminish the importance of gender and gender histories diminish the importance of religion.[17] Sociologists have called for a 'post-secular' turn in gender history, meaning a consideration of the intersection of religion and gender.[18] This dissertation thus applies the 'post-secular' turn in historical study, by exploring the involvement of Christian women in the WLM.

Methodology:

This dissertation aims to offer a voice to these silenced religious activists and to critically engage with how gender and religion have intersected with feminism. Specifically, it will focus on Christian women's engagement with the WLM in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s. While many have argued that the WLM was most active during the 1970s, this dissertation draws on the work of Eve Setch and her argument that activism continued throughout the 1980s.[19]

[17] U.King, T.Beattie, *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), p.1
[18] K.Smiet, 'Post/secular truths: Sojourner Truth and the intersections of gender, race and religion', *European Journal of Women's Studies,*Vol.22 (2014), p.7
[19] E.Setch, 'The Women's Liberation Movement in Britain, 1969-79: Organisation, Creativity and Debate' (Doctoral Thesis, University of London Royal Holloway, 2000), p.8

In this study, the term 'Christian women's movement' will be used to refer to the disparate and often disconnected efforts of Christian women to challenge the sexism they faced in the 1970s and 1980s. It is not possible in a study of this length to capture the experience of all these Christian women during this period. Yet it provides a useful term to refer to those Christian women who were involved in feminist activism in this period. 'Feminist activism' will simply be understood as the advocacy for the equal status of women. Nevertheless, this study focuses on the most prominent ecumenical, Catholic and Anglican groups involved in the campaign for women's rights in the 1970s to 1980s, to offer detailed exploration of the experiences of these women. The phrase 'mainstream WLM' will be used as a shorthand to refer to prominent aspects of the WLM as widely discussed in existing historiography.[20]

The source base for this dissertation mainly originates from archival research at the Women's Library (London School of Economics), Feminist Archive South (Bristol University) and the British Library archive. By considering the religious content of these archives, which have previously been overlooked, this dissertation further develops Daggers' pioneering work which instead used sources from the John Rylands University Library.[21] These archives contain a variety of printed papers, newsletters, interviews, and speeches from a number of key Christian groups. Reclaiming the lost voices of Christian women diversifies and enriches our memory of activists involved in the WLM. As feminist newsletters have formed the basis of much feminist research, this dissertation likewise stresses their indisputable value in capturing the activism and values of these groups.[22] Coupling this analysis of Christian

[20] Coote, *Sweet Freedom;* Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us*
[21] Daggers, *The British Christian Women's Movement,* p.xiii
[22] A.Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2017), p.3

newsletters with an exploration of the mainstream WLM newsletter *Spare Rib*, facilitates an exploration of the interactions between these two movements. Elizabeth Bird argues that it is important to recognise that archival sources 'are accessible to us because they have been selected to be preserved in the archive'.[23] This is particularly pertinent in relation to analysing Christian sources which are less accessible than mainstream WLM sources. These archives contain sources from only a selective number of Christian feminist organisations, limiting our overall knowledge of the entire Christian women's movement. To subvert this limitation, this dissertation will adopt a qualitative analysis of the sources from prominent Christian groups at our disposal.

To supplement these sources, memoirs and academic texts produced during this period by Christian women will also analysed. Thomlinson criticised published texts for offering a limited voice, which was largely that of white middle-class women who were educated enough to publish their ideas.[24] While this limitation must be engaged with critically, these sources are nonetheless invaluable in this research in redressing the imbalance of archival sources available for this topic. Likewise, these sources offer in-depth exploration of many of the topics only briefly discussed within newsletters.

Although these sources expand the history of the intersection of religion and gender, other intersections are overlooked in this exploration. As a reflection of the people within the sub-group analysed here, these sources primarily offer the voices of white, middle-class and

[23] E.Bird, 'Women's Studies and the Women's Movement in Britain: Origins and Evolution, 1970-2000', *Women's History Review*, Vol.12 (2006), p.282
[24] Thomlinson, Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement, p.27

heterosexual women. However, to disregard Christian sources on this basis would further perpetuate the secularist bias prevalent in the existing literature.

Dissertation structure:

This dissertation argues that Christian women offered a diverse and unique contribution to the WLM. While Christian women agreed with and contributed to the overarching aims of the WLM, they also focussed on causes and used methods that were outside the scope of the mainstream WLM. The existence of this separate feminist movement with distinct aims and tactics causes us to further challenge a monolithic configuration of the women's movement.

Chapter one will explore the origins of the Christian women's movement to determine how Christian women experienced a shift in consciousness. This chapter disrupts innately secular assumptions regarding the process of consciousness-raising (CR) in the WLM. Establishing the undeniable importance of CR within the Christian women's movement diversifies our history of this form of feminist activism. In exploring this, the distinctive value of forming separate Christian CR groups will be established. Christian CR groups supported women who felt doubly isolated in reconciling their faith and feminism. Likewise, Christian newsletters also facilitated this expression of a unique Christian feminist consciousness. To critically engage with the use of CR in the Christian women's movement issues of exclusivity will also be addressed.

Chapter two further demonstrates the uniqueness of the Christian women's movement, by establishing how Christian women used theology to deconstruct patriarchal structures within Christian churches. While secular feminists largely viewed religion as irredeemably patriarchal, Christian feminists did not see Christian churches as exempt from the reforming agenda of the second wave. They engaged in this distinctive form of activism in an entirely unique way by utilising biblical texts to support their fight for equality. Furthermore, to deconstruct these ideas of sexism they also critiqued the maleness of God. This incomparable approach to deconstructing sexism within their churches broadens the parameters of the feminist activism recognised within the women's movement.

Chapter three will further highlight the distinctiveness of Christian women's activism by analysing the case study of the Anglican campaign for the ordination of women. As a campaign motivated by the desire to establish equality, its connectedness to the overarching aims of the WLM is undeniable. However, while recognising parallelisms between this campaign and the broader WLM, the pursuance of this cause solely by Christian women further shows how Christian feminists pursued different goals to secular feminists. The distinctive motivations and tactics used reveals the creativity and adaptability of Christian campaigners in challenging sexism in their own sphere. Exploring this unique campaign further establishes the necessity to view the WLM as a series of distinct movements as opposed to a single women's movement.

Evidentially, these three areas on one level demonstrate the connectedness of the Christian women's movement to the mainstream WLM. Christian women experienced sexism,

deconstructed the ideas upon which this inequality was predicated and challenged their subordination. However, their feminist activism was distinctive, as they pursued equality in unique spheres while using different tactics. This dissertation seeks to present the women's movement as more complex and diverse than has previously been understood.

Chapter 1: Charting the origins of Christian Feminism

Coote and Campbell described the emergence of the WLM in Britain as a 'reaction to the fetishized femininity of the previous decade'.[25] From the late 1960s, women began to address what Betty Freidan labelled in 1963 as a 'problem that has no name', referring to a feeling of widespread dissatisfaction amongst women.[26] A process known as 'consciousness-raising' (CR), a novel aspect of the second wave, occurred as women met in small groups, sharing their previously internalised feelings with each other.[27] The similarities of their 'personal' problems enabled a recognition that women were being treated unfairly. Sue Bruley challenged existing WLM historiography, stating 'Despite the fundamental importance of CR to the WLM, insufficient attention has been paid to the process of CR'.[28] Although Bruley's personal involvement in CR groups in the 1970s enriches her research, it also introduces a bias into this work as evident in her focus solely on secular CR groups. By contrast, Jenny Daggers argued 'Christian feminist consciousness was continuous with feminist consciousness within the women's groups' of the WLM.[29] While Daggers focusses on the similarities of Christian consciousness to the broader WLM, this chapter will also establish how Christian consciousness was distinctive. To democratise the history of CR further, this chapter utilises the newsletters of key Christian feminist organisations, alongside memoirs to capture the undiscovered experiences of these religious women. Although there are testimonial silences present within these texts, due to the innately private nature of this process, this chapter will

[25] Coote, *Sweet Freedom,* p.3
[26] B.Freidan, *The Feminist Mystique* (Toronto: George J. McLeod Limited, 1963), p.15
[27] C.Christ, J.Plaskow, *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1979), p.6
[28] Bruley, 'Consciousness-Raising in Clapham', p.719
[29] J.Daggers, 'The Emergence of Feminist Theology from Christian Feminism in Britain', *European Society of Women in Theological Research,* Vol.17 (1999), p.139

utilise the sources which are available to represent the overlooked experience of Christian women.

This chapter argues that Christian women evidentially did engage in a process of CR, yet in a way that was distinct to their Christian context. To situate Christian women in the history of CR, the shift in consciousness which occurred in the 1970s for many Christian women will be established. Following this, the formation of Christian CR groups will be identified, highlighting the extent to which Christian women equally engaged in this aspect of liberation. The formation of separate Christian groups had a distinctive benefit in combatting the dual exclusion they experienced from both their Christian churches and mainstream WLM. Likewise, Christian feminist newsletters were also spaces of CR, as they further supported Christian women reconciling their faith and feminism. After establishing the distinctive use of CR for Christian women, the value of this process will be qualified by demonstrating its inherent lack of inclusivity. Overall, it will be shown that Christian women engaged with CR, albeit in way which mirrored their particular context.

Firstly, it must be identified that in the 1970s Christian women experienced a shift in consciousness as they identified their mistreatment on account of their gender. Callum Brown argues that when the WLM emerged 'British women secularised the construction of their identity, and the churches started to lose them'.[30] However, the existence of Christian women who were awakened to sexism but remained within their churches complicates this

[30] C.Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2009), p.181

secularisation narrative. In 1975 Una Kroll, a pioneering figure in the Christian women's movement as the leader of the ecumenical Christian Parity Group (CPG), published *Flesh of My Flesh,* a critical study of sexism in British society. Kroll's account detailed this shift in consciousness, mirroring the experience of many women in Britain in the 1970s, as she 'begun to notice how women were treated in society as well as in the Church, of which I was a member'.[31] The presumption that Christian women were unaware of the inequality they faced, by contrast to more 'progressive' secular feminists, is ardently challenged in this account. Kroll described this as a 'terrifying stage in the liberation struggle' in instilling her with a 'need for freedom to become fully herself'.[32] Writing in 1975, Kroll's account offers invaluable and vulnerable insight into her feelings in the midst of this 'terrifying stage'. While it is important not to overgeneralise Kroll's account as representative of the experiences of all Christian women, it provides a counternarrative to Brown's argument that this cultural revolution provoked a total rejection of religion. Instead there were religious women, as epitomised in Kroll's account, who were as much a part of this cultural revolution as secular women.

Building on this newfound consciousness, Christian women formed CR groups which unequivocally reflects the engagement of religious women in this initial stage of the WLM. Sarah Browne supports Brown's argument by agreeing that women 'left the Church because of their feminist activism'.[33] This argument entirely obscures the experiences of Christian women who remained in their churches and actively engaged in feminist activity. Mirroring

[31] U.Kroll, *Flesh of My Flesh* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), p.78
[32] Kroll, *Flesh of My Flesh*, p.79
[33] N.Christie, M.Gauvreau, *The Sixties and Beyond: Dechristianization in North America and Western Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), p.85

the broader WLM, across the 1970s Christian women formed a number of feminist organisations. One of these groups was the aforementioned CPG that was formed in 1972. The advertisement section of the CPG newsletter frequently promoted different groups Christian women could join. For example, in 1977, the CPG newsletter advertised the 'Bethanie Meeting' as a meeting of 'six of us' who would 'share a meal and talk and pray together'.[34] The public nature of this source limits the extent to which it offers detailed information regarding the personal topics discussed within this groups. However, it is nonetheless valuable in revealing how Christian CR groups functioned. Despite, being called a 'Meeting', it detailed the usual format of a CR group, as a small number of women met together to 'share a meal and talk'. The distinct difference was the practice of 'praying' together, demonstrating how the format diverged to suit the separate motivations of Christian women. The description of the group as a 'Meeting' as opposed to a 'consciousness-raising group', determines that although Christian activists adopted similar practices to the broader WLM, there was nonetheless a desire to avoid direct association with this form of activism. Therefore, the formation of Christian CR groups further diversifies our knowledge of the use of this form of feminist activism.

To elaborate on this point, the formation of separate Christian CR groups had a distinct value in supporting Christian women who felt doubly isolated in reconciling their faith and newfound feminism. The formation of separate Christian CR groups supported their expression of an unique consciousness, thus nuancing Daggers' argument that Christian

[34] U.Kroll, 'News of People', *Christian Parity Group Newsletter,* (May, 1977), p.4. London School of Economics (hereafter LSE): Women's Library, 7CMS/04/05 (Box 6)

consciousness mirrored the broader women's movement.[35] Shelia Rowbotham identified the value of CR groups being that women who had previously 'puzzled in isolation about their lack of purpose…began to wonder together and felt less peculiar'.[36] This was especially pertinent for Christian women, who felt 'peculiar' when identifying as Christian feminists. On the one hand, Christian women felt out of place within their churches which did not largely support the WLM. This is evidenced in an anonymous letter published in the *Christian Feminist Newsletter,* the newsletter of the Christian Feminist (CF) group founded in 1981, which detailed 'I am becoming a 'closet' feminist, feeling more and more uncomfortable with the situation within the Church as regards woman's rights'.[37] Writing the letter anonymously depicts the author's hesitancy to be identified as a Christian feminist, further representing the isolation she likely felt. Although the limited information provided in this letter makes it difficult to assess whether she would have been a member of a CR group, it can be inferred that this feeling of 'becoming a 'closet' feminist' would have been challenged by meeting regularly with other Christian feminists. Moreover, Christian women also felt dislocated from the mainstream WLM. A letter published in *Spare Rib*, wrote 'I found that I could not understand how a true feminist… and Christian can even want to join a patriarchal hierarchy'.[38] The perception that remaining within the Christian church was oxymoronic to the goals of the WLM would likely have excluded Christians from joining mainstream secular CR groups. Therefore, for Christian women, separate Christian CR groups were of vital importance in combatting the dual isolation they felt as Christian feminists.

[35] Daggers, 'The Emergence of Feminist Theology', p.139
[36] Rowbotham, *The Past is Before Us*, p.5
[37] Anonymous, 'Letters', *Christian Feminist Newsletter*, No.30 (1986), p.2. LSE: Women's Library SC/9 (Box 3)
[38] J.Nichol, 'Letters', *Spare Rib,* No.84 (1979), p.21 <https://data.journalarchives.jisc.ac.uk/media_open/pdf/generated/spareribP.523_344_Issue72/PDF/P.523_344_Issue72_9999.pdf> [Accessed 7/10/19]

Furthermore, Christian newsletters also provided an alternative means by which Christian feminists could reconcile their unique identity, reinforcing the distinctive character of CR in the Christian women's movement. Florence Binard established the value of feminist newsletters in supporting CR efforts by 'reaching out to women who' felt excluded from WLM groups.[39] Given the dual isolation faced by Christian women, it is apparent that Christian newsletters were thus invaluable in supporting their idiosyncrasy. This is particularly apparent in numerous letters published in the newsletter of the Roman Catholic Feminists (RCF), an organisation founded in 1977 by Jackie Fields. For example, the RCF newsletter published a letter by a woman named Deborah who wrote that:

> 'RCF seems to be just what I've been looking for- how wonderful to be in any kind of contact with other women who feel the same way I do about Roman Catholicism and their feminism. I no longer feel the same sense of isolation as I did previously'.[40]

For Deborah, reading the RCF newsletter served as a form of CR as she discovered other women expressing similar feelings to herself and as a result her 'sense of isolation' was disrupted. The existence of denominational specific groups such as RCF shows how within the Christian women's movement some Christian women nuanced their identity further within their own denomination. The value of feminist newsletters rested in their multivocality. On

[39] F.Binard, 'The British Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s: Redefining the Personal and the Political', *French Journal of British Studies,* (2017), p.27

[40] Deborah, 'Letters', *Roman Catholic Feminists Newsletter,* Nol.21 (July 1982), p.4. LSE: Women's Library S/8 (Box 3)

one level, they contained the voices of numerous Christian contributors within the articles produced. This was further enhanced with the publication of letters which offered what Natalie Thomlinson terms the perspective of the 'wider feminist community'.[41] The lack of recorded statistics on the readership of these newsletters poses a challenge in quantifying how many Christian women actually engaged with this process of CR. However, letters such as Deborah's have qualitative value in capturing the importance of these newsletters as spaces supporting CR. Therefore, building on Binard's broad emphasis on feminist newsletters, Christian newsletters had a distinctive value in supporting the individual identity of Christian feminists.

However, it is important to qualify the inclusivity of this process of Christian CR. As explored by Mora Llyod, a limitation of second wave feminism was the assumption 'that all women share something' unifying them with one collective experience.[42] Christian CR groups were formed on the experience of being excluded from a definition of womanhood which was predominately secular. However, establishing a collective identity as Christian feminists in itself failed to recognise the innate exclusivity of this supposed collectivism. These Christian groups largely focussed on the experiences of white, middle-class and heterosexual women. A request in the *Christian Feminist Newsletter* in 1985, for articles written by 'working class women about race, culture, disability', shows that they were not oblivious to their clear bias.[43] However, during the 1970s and 1980s Christian CR groups and newsletters lacked diversity. An anonymous letter published in the *Christian Feminist Newsletter* written by 'one of THEM'

[41] Thomlinson, Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement, p.27
[42] M.Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power & Politics* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), p.13
[43] *Christian Feminist Newsletter,* No.25 (Easter 1985), p.4. LSE: Women's Library SC/9 (Box 3)

stated ‘One recent irritation (which is now a major source of nausea) is the assumption that all readers are white, middle class, affluent’.[44] By self-titling as ‘one of THEM’ she captured the othering experience of lower class ethnic minorities within these communities, emphasised by the use of capital letters. As mirrored in the critiques of CR in the mainstream WLM, it is important to qualify who benefitted from Christian CR.

Therefore, while the emergence of the Christian women’s movement in many ways mirrored that of the broader women’s movement, consciousness-raising in particular functioned differently within the Christian women’s movement. Christian women were awakened to the inequality of the world around them. In response they met in small groups to explore these ideas further. The formation of separate Christian CR groups had a unique value in disrupting the isolation they had previously felt surrounding their faith and feminism. Likewise, newsletters offered another outlet in which to support the expression of this unique identity. However, it is important to qualify how inclusive a process this was in Christian circles. This chapter has reflected that from the outset the Christian women’s movement both mirrored the mainstream secular WLM and differed in order to suit its individual context. In recognising the formation of a distinctive Christian feminist consciousness, it is unsurprising therefore that Christian women sought to eradicate sexism in an entirely unique way. Therefore, the following chapter will explore how Christian women sought to challenge the constructions of the patriarchy which they encountered within Christian churches.

[44] Anonymous, ‘Letters’, *Christian Feminist Newsletter,* (Summer 1984), p.2. LSE: Women’s Library SC/9 (Box 3)

Chapter 2: Deconstructing Patriarchal Structures within Christian churches

Second wave feminists understood that liberating women required exposing and dismantling patriarchal structures within society, meaning the ideas upon which the inferior status of women was constructed.[45] Suzanne Staggenborg and Vera Taylor have called for a 'collective identity approach to feminism' by recognising that the cultural context of different groups of feminists shapes their activism.[46] This chapter adopts a 'collective identity approach', by exploring the unique way in which Christian feminists analysed and exposed the ideas which enabled their subordination within Christian churches. The birth of 'feminist theology', the practice of reassessing biblical passages and traditions from a feminist viewpoint, in the US during the 1960s provided an avenue through which Christian women could challenge the sexism they faced.[47] Daggers remains the sole historian to recognise the importance of feminist theology as a tool for Christian women to elevate the 'status of women in the Church'.[48] As Daggers' research specifically focusses on how Christian feminists engaged with the theology of Eve, there remains a plethora of alternative aspects of theology to consider in this chapter. To build our awareness of this unique form of feminist activism, a number of Christian newsletters and academic texts published by Christian activists will be analysed to detail how Christian women engaged in deconstructing ideas of sexism within their churches. Although this intellectual debate was largely limited to those educated enough to consider these issues, they nevertheless offer invaluable insight into the theological reconfigurations

[45] S.Crook, 'The women's liberation movement, activism and therapy at the grassroots, 1968–1985', *Women's History Review*, Vol.27 (2018), p.1152
[46] S.Staggenborg, V.Taylor, 'Whatever Happened to The Women's Movement?', *Mobilization: An International Quarterly,* Vol.10 (1989), p.44
[47] A.Rafferty, 'Feminist Theology Now', *Feminist Theology*, Vol.20 (2012), p.191
[48] S.Parsons, *Challenging Women's Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith* (Hampshire: Aldershot, 2000), p.53

were which occurring during this period. Utilising these Christian sources demonstrates the unique way in which Christian women sought to elevate the status of women within their churches.

This chapter argues that feminist theology was a unique form of feminist activism used within the Christian women's movement to deconstruct the ideas and beliefs promoting the inferiority of women within Christian churches. The use of the Bible as a tool to establish the inferiority of women was a challenge which Christian feminists sought to address. While secular feminists rejected the Bible as patriarchal, Christian women instead sought to reinterpret these biblical texts. Christian women deconstructed the patriarchy by using theology to defend their bid for equality in the present. Moreover, Christian women explored the overlooked biblical tradition of strong female leaders to support their campaign to elevate the status of women in the present. This deconstruction of sexism within Christian churches also required analysing the maleness of God as another construct upon which women were made to feel inferior to men. Therefore, this chapter further nuances the history of the WLM, by demonstrating the unique way in which Christian women rejected teachings which denied them full personhood. This distinctive form of activism further broadens the scope of what should be included within the women's movement.

In seeking to deconstruct ideas of sexism within Christian churches, Christian women were confronted with biblical passages which directly promoted their subjugation. Kristin Aune argued that 'During the rise of second-wave feminism from the 1960s, most secular feminists

rejected traditional religiosity as irredeemably patriarchal'.[49] Articles in *Spare Rib* validate Aune's assertion, such as Catherine Hall writing that 'The church's view of women was heavily influenced by St. Paul and saw women as… both inferior and evil'.[50] Hall thus argued that the 'inferior' status of the women within the Church was connected to Paul's biblical teachings on women, such as 1 Corinthians 14:34 which stated 'Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission'.[51] However, using secular sources to analyse how feminists responded to the Bible fails to consider how Christian feminists viewed these texts. This portrays the limitation of utilising secular sources to produce a solely secular bias. The Student Christian Movement (SCM), founded in 1972, published a newsletter called *Movement*. In 1976 Mary Condren, an Irish Theologian, wrote an article in *Movement* about the emergence of feminist theology in which she stated:

> 'Women recognise that the historical usage of the image of Jesus and the Bible to keep them in subjection, forever puts these sources into question in terms of their own liberation'.[52]

Condren established that Christian women were not oblivious to the historical use of the Bible to 'keep them in subjection' within their churches. Beyond recognising that the Bible had been used to subjugate women in Christian churches, Condren asserted that sexism in the

[49] K.Aune, *Women and Religion in the West: Challenging Secularization* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), p.7
[50] C.Hall, 'The History of the Housewife, *Spare Rib,* No.26 (August 1975), p.10 <https://data.journalarchives.jisc.ac.uk/media_open/pdf/generated/sparerib/P.523_344_Issue26/PDF/P.523_344_Issue26_9999.pdf> [Accessed 24/9/19]
[51] I Corinthians 14.34*, New International Version*
[52] M.Condren, 'For the Banished Children of Eve: An Introduction to Feminist Theology', *Movement,* No.24 (1976), p.23. University of Bristol: Feminist Archive South, DM2123/2/Religion World Views 2

Bible caused these newly liberated Christian women to 'question' these 'sources' entirely. Similarly, Elaine Storkey published an academic exploration of Christian feminism, in which she established that the Bible had been used to create a patriarchal hierarchy in Christian churches whereby 'Men preach, women listen. Men pray, women say 'Amen'.[53] Therefore, these Christian women demonstrated the problematic nature of the Bible being used to prescribe the inferior status of women within their churches. While secular feminists could easily disregard the Bible on this basis, Christian women did not want to reject their deeply held faith. As Christian women view the Bible as the ultimate source of authority, they faced a unique challenge in reconciling their desire for freedom with the inferior position of women in Christian churches, as based in scripture.

Christian women countered the use of the Bible to promote the inferior status of women by instead using theology to strengthen the argument for the equality of women in the present. While secular feminists largely rejected the Bible, Christian feminists instead sought to utilise biblical passages to argue for the equality of women. One of the main ways this was done was by establishing Jesus' countercultural treatment of women as equals. For example, this was explored by Jackie Fields, the founder of the RCF, who published an article in the *Catholic Herald* in which she challenged that 'the present day situation may be "traditional", but it is not Jesus-based'.[54] She cited the relationship of Jesus with Martha and Mary, establishing that 'He freely discusses religion with them, a unique opportunity as women were not allowed to learn the Torah'.[55] Fields deconstructed the defense of the inferior status of women

[53] E.Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism?* (London: SPCK, 1985), p.361
[54] J.Fields, 'Jesus had right attitude to women', *Catholic Herald*, (16 March 1978). LSE: Women's Library SC/8 (Box 3)
[55] Fields, 'Jesus had right attitude to women'

biblically, by instead establishing how Jesus consistently treated women equally. As Jesus is viewed to be perfect in his behaviour, this emphasis on his equal treatment of women posed a serious intellectual challenge to the construction of patriarchy within Christian churches. By publishing this article in the *Catholic Herald*, a mainstream Roman Catholic newsletter, Fields very vocally criticised the existence of sexist attitudes within the Church. This shows the creativity of Christian feminists to deconstruct sexism in their own context with their unique form of activism.

Furthermore, Christian women also used theology to further validate their desire to be treated equally in the present, by reclaiming overlooked biblical passages emphasising the autonomy of women as leaders. Catherine Hall identified that feminist historians sought to 'fill out the enormous gaps in our historical knowledge which were a direct result of the male domination of historical work'.[56] Christian women similarly sought to redress this balance within theology, another male dominated intellectual field. This was best represented in the publication of Susan Dowell and Linda Hurcombe's book *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve* in 1981, which was the 'first major British contribution to the growing field of feminist theological enquiry'.[57] This book was published by the SCM, showing the connectedness of these theological explorations to the feminist organisations in the movement. Dowell and Hurcombe argued that 'We see the need for the unique history of women's experience to be incorporated and recognized within' churches.[58] Thus, they identified the overlooked focus on the agency of women within theology. Chapter two of the book, titled 'Daughters of Eve',

[56] C.Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations of Feminism and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.5

[57] S.Dowell, L.Hurcombe, *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve: Faith and Feminism* (London, SCM Press Ltd, 1981), p.xiiii

[58] Dowell, *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve*, p.65

described 'Women like Esther and Ruth' who were 'significant in their own right' as 'They play a healing role in the tribal stories of patriliny and military power'.[59] On the one hand, establishing a tradition of autonomous women would have been deeply important for these newly liberated Christian women. Showing that their religion supported their bid for autonomy was essential. On a broader level, contextualising the publication of this book in 1981 provides another layer to the value of this application of feminist theology. During the 1970s and 1980s, Christian women campaigned for the ordination of women in the Church of England, which will be analysed in the following chapter. Establishing the biblical precedent of women as leaders would have been essential in challenging the idea that women were not capable of leading. Therefore, while secular feminist academics sought to reclaim the lost history of women, Christian feminist academics reclaimed the forgotten history of women in the Bible to elevate the status of women within Christian churches.

Moreover, another aspect of the construction of the patriarchy which Christian campaigners challenged was the maleness of God. Deborah Cameron argued that 'reclaiming women's language is indeed crucial for women's liberation' which can be validated when considering the Christian women's movement.[60] In 1973 Mary Daly, an American theologian who played an important role in the birth of feminist theology in the US, published *Beyond God,* a philosophical exploration of the patriarchy within religion. Daly called for feminists to move 'Beyond God' as 'it is impossible to remove male/masculine imagery' from God.[61] However, for Christian feminists who did not want to reject their deeply held religious beliefs or submit

[59] Dowell, *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve*, p.21
[60] D.Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p.3
[61] M.Daly, *Beyond God The Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1973), p.xxiv

to a patriarchal male God, a consideration of the masculinity of God was necessary. Storkey established that hermeneutically the Hebrew word for God was gender neutral, meaning the association of God as male was a 'conceptualisation…done through language'. [62] This construction was addressed in an article published in the *Roman Catholic Feminists Newsletter* criticising the 1980 edition of the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, an organisation which provided English translations of liturgy to be used in the Catholic Church.[63] In this article Jackie Fields wrote:

'We feel that this is an imbalance of paternal imagery… not everyone can conceptualise a loving father, and a variety of God-images will help more people to relate to God more deeply'[64]

This reveals the deeply personal nature of this debate, as the maleness of God made it difficult for women 'to relate to God more deeply'. Fields demonstrated that it was not that all Christian feminists wanted to refer to God as a 'woman' or 'mother'. Instead, providing a 'variety' of ways to describe God would help those Christian feminists who struggled to relate to an exclusively male God. Therefore, while Daly called for feminists to reject an unchangeably patriarchal God, Christian feminists instead sought to challenge and deconstruct these ideas. How Christian women related to God was of immense importance, again showing how the values of different feminist campaigners varied immensely. In

[62] Storkey, *What's Right With Feminism?*, p.49
[63] P.McGoldrick, 'Inclusive Language in the Liturgy', *The Furrow,* Vol.38 (1987), p.471
[64] J.Fields, 'Comments on ICEL Green Book, Eucharist Papers, 1980', *Roman Catholic Feminists Newsletter* (20 August 1981), p.2. LSE: Women's Library SC/8 (Box 3)

considering this exploration, it is important to recognise Mary McClintock Fulkerson's criticism that 'feminist theologies associated with second wave feminism are dominated by white women—those who have had the privilege of higher education'.[65] While recognising the privilege of those who engaged in these theological discussions, it is nonetheless important to consider how Christian feminists challenged the maleness of God to enhance the inclusivity of theology within Christian churches.

To summarise, Christian women used theology in order to eradicate sexism within their church context. Christian feminists faced a challenge with the use of biblical passages to enforce the inferior status of women within Christian churches. While secular feminists rejected the Church as irrepressibly patriarchal, as defended scripturally, Christian women sought to reform it. Christian activists deconstructed the inferior status of women in the Christian churches, by highlighting scripture which supported their liberation. Moreover, reclaiming the overlooked tradition of female leaders was of direct value in supporting the campaign for the ordination of women, occurring in this period. Furthermore, the maleness of God was challenged, to further seek to promote a theology which was inclusive to Christian feminists who did not want to submit to a patriarchal God. Christian feminists tenaciously confronted the ideas which promoted their inferiority, seeking to radically reform their churches. While this chapter explored the use of theology to challenge sexism, future research could also establish how sexuality was analysed within theology. Thus, Christian women engaged in the deconstruction of sexism in an entirely distinctive way to secular feminists. Building on this, the following chapter will utilise the case study of the Anglican

[65] M.McClintock Fulkerson, *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2010), p.211

campaign for the ordination of women in order to further explore how Christian women challenged physical barriers to their equality.

Chapter 3: The Campaign for the Ordination of Women

'I think women coming forward now [for ordination] they have no idea what we went through…it is a shame if the whole story in history and struggle is lost.'[66]

When reflecting on the momentous day in 1994 when she was the first ever woman to be ordained in the Church of England, Angela Bernes-Wilson raised an important point regarding the forgotten history of the campaign for the ordination of women during the 1970s and 1980s. Coote and Campbell asserted that the WLM cannot 'be understood without its campaigns'.[67] Equally, the Christian women's movement cannot be understood without the campaign for the ordination of women. However, this has not been recognised within WLM historiography, as evident in Elizabeth Meehan's study of WLM workplace campaigns.[68] By contrast, Daggers highlighted the importance of the Anglican campaign as the 'lynchpin' of the Christian women's movement, focussing on the theological justifications of this campaign.[69] This chapter will further develop Daggers' work, instead concentrating on the motivations and tactics Christian women utilised in campaigning for equality. Although Catholic women and women from other protestant denominations were involved, this case study focusses on the Anglican campaign as it had the largest momentum during this period. Christian newsletters capture the experiences of the activists during this movement, whereas memoirs and oral interviews further enhance our knowledge by offering retrospective

[66] 'My fight to become a woman priest in Church of England', *BBC News,* (12 March 2014) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/magazine-26529128/my-fight-to-become-a-woman-priest-in-church-of-england> [Accessed 3/2/20]
[67] Coote, *Sweet Freedom,* p.32
[68] E.Meehan, *Women's Rights at Work: Campaigns and Policy in Britain and the United States* (London: Macmillan, 1985)
[69] Daggers, *The British Christian Women's Movement*, p.83

reflections. Viewing these sources critically reveals a clear agenda of Christian campaigners to distance their activism from direct association with the radicalism of the WLM. Nonetheless, this chapter further presents the indisputable value in providing a voice to Christian women which has been obscured in WLM historiography.

This chapter argues that the campaign for the ordination of women further demonstrates the unique activism of Christian women, again provoking a consideration of the forms of activism considered within the women's movement. The connectedness of this campaign with the overarching goal of the WLM to establish equality in all areas of society will be established. Yet, the pursuance of this campaign solely by Christian women distinguishes it from other mainstream WLM campaigns. Likewise, Christian women were also deeply motivated by their religious beliefs, thus differentiating the motivations of these religious campaigners. In considering the tactics adopted, the use of marches again related their activism to the mainstream WLM. Within this, the language utilised to describe these marches showed a hesitancy of these campaigners to have their activism viewed as radical. Moreover, the use of prayer vigils further complicates the history of the forms of activism utilised within the women's movement. The campaign for the ordination of women overall further demonstrates the distinctive activism of the Christian women's movement, complicating the history of the women's movement which has previously excluded this campaign.

The campaign for the ordination of women was fundamentally driven by a desire to establish equality within their churches, situating it within the history of the broader women's movement. Bouchier identified the passage of the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, outlawing

the unequal treatment of women across a number of areas of society including employment, as a major turning point in the WLM.[70] However, the Church was exempted which meant that Christian women were not protected by this legislation, and the extent to which it can be viewed as a turning point for all women must be challenged. Although other protestant denominations had admitted women into the priesthood throughout the twentieth century, the Church of England (CoE) had rejected this proposal. Thus, Christian women faced an obvious injustice which needed to be redressed. In 1978 the General Synod voted to deny the admittance of women into the priesthood. As a result of this failed vote, in 1978 a number of Christian campaigners issued a declaration on this topic in which they stated:

> 'In this situation, a continued refusal to train and select women for ordination constitutes an obvious injustice… We do not think that the Church can campaign credibly for human rights … while it maintains at its heart this particular form of discrimination against women'.[71]

Daggers assertion that 'To speak of justice for women was to risk dismissal on grounds that the case was argued on (inappropriate) secular grounds' can be challenged by this extract.[72] The use of words such as 'injustice' and 'discrimination' demonstrates how these Christian activists undeniably framed their campaign in the language of justice. This clearly shows that Christians also wanted to achieve equality in their sphere, that of the Church. The

[70] Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge*, p.119
[71] D.Collins, M.Webster, et al., Letter to sign an enclosed declaration, p.1 (September 1978), p.1. LSE: Women's Library 6/MOW/1/1 (Box TH791)
[72] Daggers, *The British Christian Women's Movement*, p.xviii

campaigners asked the recipients of the declaration to sign it in agreement and in 1978 Diana Collins sent the 800 signatures they had received to the General Synod.[73] On the basis of this support, a number of pre-existing Christian organisations united to form the Movement for the Ordination of Women (MOW) in 1978, which was of central importance in driving this campaign until its eventual success in 1994. Ignoring this campaign within the history of the WLM is an undeniable error which must be redressed as these campaigners directly challenged the unequal status of women within the Anglican Church.

As much as this drive for equality situates this campaign within the broader history of the WLM, it should be noted that Christian campaigners were alone in pursuing this cause. In 1978 Una Kroll wrote in the *Christian Action Journal* , the journal of the ecumenical Christian Action Group, that 'Even those who are deeply concerned about the oppression of women in all societies… tend to regard the role of women in the Church as a marginal issue'.[74] This evidentially differentiates the motivations of Christian and secular campaigners. As explored in the previous chapter, women beyond the Church regarded the 'role of women in the Church as a marginal issue', based on the belief that seeking equality in an 'irredeemably' patriarchal institution was self-defeating. Similarly, as a large proportion of WLM historiography has been written by feminists themselves involved in the WLM, it is unsurprising that this campaign, excluded by contemporary feminists, has also been ignored historically. However, for Christian women establishing equality in the CoE, an institution they were a part of, was of prime importance. These divergent values ensured that Christian

[73] D.Collins, 'Declaration in Support of the Ordination of Women', (1 November 1978), p.3. LSE: Women's Library, 6/MOW/1/1 (Box TH791)
[74] U.Kroll, 'Much Ado About Nothing', *Christian Action Journal,* (Spring 1978). LSE: Women's Library, 7CMS/04/05 (Box 6)

women pursued alone the unequal treatment of women in Christian churches. The existence of this distinctly Christian campaign challenges a conceptualisation of a singular women's movement, demonstrating the separate causes pursued in this distinct movement.

A key differentiation between the motivations of Christian women and the broader WLM, was that Christian women's religious beliefs also shaped their pursuit of this campaign. While the parallelisms of this campaign with the broader liberation movement have been established, further complication must be added to this argument. Christian women were not only motivated by a desire for equality but also by their personal faith and relationship with God. Leela Fernandes contends that ignoring the significance of religious beliefs to those who hold them 'misses the meanings' of these beliefs.[75] In 2012, Una Kroll was interviewed as part of the 'Sisterhood and After Project'. She reflected:

> 'By 1978…I was a spokesperson for a small group of women who had begun to say that they thought that they might be ordained. When I started in 1970 no one bar myself and Mary Linda Evans would ever admit to feel called to be priests. I did feel so called.'[76]

Thus, Kroll established that another motivation for these campaigners was either the personal belief that God had 'called' them to the priesthood, or supporting those who held that sense of calling. Zoe Strimpel praised the 'Sisterhood and After' oral history project for offering

[75] L.Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice: Non-violence, Social Justice and the Possibilities of a Spiritualized Feminism* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2003), p.10
[76] Kroll, Interview with Jolly

'unprecedented first-person insight into the emotions' of the movement.[77] This articulation of emotion is present in Kroll's account as she captured the hesitancy of many women to 'ever admit to feel called to be priests' based on the idea that 'it sounded so arrogant and so unladylike'.[78] This passage demonstrates that across the 1970s Christian women increasingly felt confident to voice that they felt called by God to become priests. Thus, while Christian women pursued this campaign based on ideas of equality, they also were motivated by their religious beliefs which as Fernandes established was of central importance to them. This captures how exploring the intersection of faith and feminism offers a more nuanced understanding of the motivations of feminist campaigners.

Shifting from motivations to exploring the tactics adopted, the use of marches within the campaign further related the activism of Christian campaigners to the broader women's movement. In her analysis of the activism of Roman Catholic feminists in America, Mary Katzenstein characterised their activism as 'unobtrusive mobilization', implying a certain passivity in their activism.[79] However, comparing Katzenstein's assessment to religious campaigners in Britain undermines the applicability of this argument. Christian campaigners utilised marches to publicly demonstrate their support for this campaign. This mirrored the broader WLM which had adopted marches as a central feature beginning in 1971 with a march held on International Women's Day.[80] An example of a Christian women's movement

[77] Z.Strimpel, 'Heterosexual Love in the British Women's Liberation Movement: Reflections from the Sisterhood and After archive', *Women's History Review,* Vol.25 (2016), p.906
[78] Kroll, Interview with Jolly
[79] M.Katzenstein, 'Feminism within American Institutions: Unobtrusive Mobilization in the 1980s', *Signs,* Vol.16 (1990), p.35
[80] S.Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (London: Penguin Group, 1997), p.401

march was recalled in an article in *Chrysalis*, the newsletter of MOW, in 1988 titled 'St Paul's Day- MOW comes to London' which stated 'We came from all over the place, many with banners or tops fashioned out of the MOW tea-towels'.[81] They coordinated a public protest on the streets of London, as a visible protest in the build-up to the 1989 Synod vote. They were vocal and united; a far cry from mobilising 'unobtrusively'.

However, the language utilised to describe this march reveals that in the minds of the campaigners it was not viewed as radical in terms of forms of protest. Descriptors such as 'joyful, happy, friendly, uplifting' shows how the MOW sought to reduce the threatening nature of this protest.[82] This approach situates their activism as an example of 'respectability politics', a form of political campaigning whereby a minority group promotes their community's values over those of the mainstream.[83] Margaret Webster, the executive secretary of the MOW, reflected in her memoir about this campaign that ''Words like 'shrill', 'strident' and 'aggressive' were frequently on people's lips when MOW was starting up'.[84] Therefore, describing the protest in positive terms sought to avoid many of the negative perceptions of feminist activism within the Church. Distancing themselves from the 'radicalism' of the mainstream WLM was necessary to amass broad support for their campaign. Marches were utilised to publicly reflect the support present for the campaign for

[81] 'St Paul's Day- MOW comes to London', *Chrysalis,* (October 1988), p.4. LSE: Women's Library 6/MOW/11/2 (Box TH750)
[82] 'St Paul's Day', p.4.
[83] E.Miller, J.Towns, '"The Protestant Contention": Religious Freedom, Respectability Politics, and W.A.Criswell in 1960', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs,* Vol.22 (2019), p.36
[84] M.Webster, *A New Strength, A New Song: The Journey to Women's Priesthood* (Rhode Island: Mowbray, 1994), p.105

the ordination of women, yet these were framed in positive terms to limit the extent to which these Christian campaigners seemed threatening.

Building on this, the use of prayer vigils demonstrates a distinctively Christian form of protest which was adopted. In her analysis of contemporary religious feminist movements, Ursula King asserted that 'women are also religious innovators. They develop strategies of resistance for coping with their own situation of oppression'.[85] This can be directly applied to those campaigning for ordination, as their activism was clearly shaped by their religious values. For example, Webster detailed the frequent use of prayer vigils by the MOW.[86] On the one hand, as with marches, these were valuable in demonstrating the public support which was present for the campaign. However, it would be remiss to view these solely in strategic terms, as they revealed the deeply held spiritual beliefs of these women. Webster recalled the 'first all-night vigil I took part in was in Southwark Cathedral before the Michaelmas ordination in 1980' and that 'No one who took part in it will forget that time of deep recollection and prayer'.[87] Building on the spiritual justification for their campaign, it is unsurprising that their faith was also central in their activism. Thus, Christian women were indeed 'religious innovators' in utilising prayer as an invaluable weapon for their activism, broadening our awareness of the diversity of tactics religious women used to oppose their subordination.

To summarise, the Anglican campaign for the ordination of women provides a useful case study through which to explore the distinct activism of Christian women. This was a central

[85] U.King, *Religion and Gender* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell LTD, 1995), p.16
[86] Webster, *A New Strength,* p.58
[87] Webster, *A New Strength,* p.58

campaign in the Christian women's movement and must also be recognised within a broader understanding of women's movement historiography. These campaigners sought equality on the basis that the inferior position of women within Christian churches was fundamentally unjust. However, it is important to observe that Christian women alone pursued this cause, challenging a monolithic understanding of the women's movement. To further nuance these aims, another motivation was the belief that they had been called by God to the priesthood. To meet these aims Christian women used marches as a way to demonstrate public support, further aligning their activism with the broader WLM. Yet, analysing the language used to describe these marches reveals a desire to distance their activism from the perceived radicalism of the WLM. The use of prayer vigils reemphasises the influence of their religious beliefs on their approaches to activism. This campaign, unique to the Christian women's movement, further challenges the history of the WLM as a singular and unified movement.

Conclusion:

This dissertation has explored the distinctive contribution of Christian women in the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s. The exclusion of Christian women from traditional histories of the WLM presented a clear opportunity to further complicate this history. The ideas and actions of these Christian women both paralleled and differed from the mainstream WLM, providing further evidence of the ongoing complication of history of the WLM as increasing consideration is given to the diversity of the women engaged in this broad and multi-various 'movement'.

Chapter one explored the distinct way in which Christian feminists engaged with consciousness-raising. The awakening of Christian women to sexism and the formation of consciousness-groups emphatically challenges advocates of 'secularisation' theory in British history. Christian women formed separate Christian consciousness-raising groups, which were of immense value in combatting the dual isolation they experienced as Christian feminists. The exploration of this unique identity as Christian feminists demonstrated how consciousness-raising operated differently within this distinct movement of the WLM. Overall, this chapter highlighted the importance of consciousness-raising within the Christian women's movement, whilst also revealing the distinctive value of CR for Christian feminists.

Chapter two further highlighted the distinctive way in which the Christian women's movement challenged the patriarchal structures present within Christian churches. Christian women adopted an entirely novel form of feminist activism through the application of feminist theology. By using theology to defend their bid for autonomy in the present, they

subverted the use of the Bible from a tool of subordination to one of liberation. The reconciliation of these biblical texts was both innately personal and had broader political implications in the campaign for the ordination of women. Questioning the maleness of God again showed how tenaciously these feminists deconstructed the sexism they faced within their churches. Christians engaged in deconstructing the patriarchy in their own context, that of Christian churches, utilising their own methods. This further challenges the construction of a singular women's movement by instead representing the diversity of this parallel movement.

Finally, chapter three utilised the case study of the Anglican campaign for the ordination of women to show how Christian women also campaigned against structural inequality in the CoE. This was a campaign rooted in the desire to achieve equality, yet it was solely pursued by Christian campaigners. This shows that different groups of feminists within the WLM sought to pursue different goals. The faith of these activists impacted both their motivations and tactics, demonstrating how values shape activism. The campaign for the ordination of women demonstrated the tenacity and creativity by which Christian women fought to improve the status of women within the Anglican Church.

By combining independent archival research with the analysis of published texts by Christian women, this dissertation has made an innovative contribution to the overlooked history of the Christian women's movement. The richness of the archival sources available on this topic supports the possibility for future research to expand this area of study further. Exploring the history of denominations not mentioned within this study could serve to broaden our

understanding of the Christian women's movement. Within this, adopting a more intersectional approach, such as considering race and sexuality, would be invaluable in understanding the diversity of the Christian women's movement. Similarly, exploring the activism of feminists from other faith groups could develop the intersection of religion and feminism further.

Christian women campaigned tirelessly and creatively on multiple fronts to challenge the sexism they faced. Recognising this diverse expression of feminist activism shows that our history of the WLM is richer when we consider the various feminisms which combined to form a broader women's movement. To do justice to the tenacity and creativity in which Christian women challenged the sexism they faced in the 1970s and 1980s these efforts must be recognised.

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