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The Testimony of Martha Simmonds, Quaker

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Abstract

Martha Simmonds (1624–1665) was an early Quaker whose spiritual journey involved preaching, travelling, becoming a devotee of James Naylor and participating in his re-enactment of Christ's entry into Jerusalem and its aftermath. This event has largely defined her place in history and little serious attention has been given to her writings This paper attempts to fill this lacuna by discussing spiritual writing within the context of her life and contemporary constructs of 'signs' and suffering, both on a personal scale and within the wider context of the collective persecution of the early Quakers. It aims to re-assess the Bristol 'sign' and the role she played in it, as part of a serious mission with deeply theological meanings. It also aims at a positive critique of Martha Simmonds, as one of the most representative, vocal and ambitious Quaker women whose voices have, until recently, been unheard.

Keywords

preaching, persecution, signs, women, text, travel

Introduction

In December 1656, a newspaper published in detail the account of the dramatic 'sign' performed by the Quaker leader, James Nayler and a small group of women. It goes on to describe the examination, the length of time Parliament spent debating his fate, and punishment meted out to him for what were judged to blasphemous utterances and actions. He was to be pilloried and have the letter 'B' branded on his forehead.[1] While he endured his fate, two women were with him, one at either side, reminiscent of the women at the Crucifixion. One of these was the Quaker, Hannah Stranger and the other Martha Simmonds. The incident, which has become known as 'the Bristol event' or sign, was the re-enactment of Christ's *adventus* into Jerusalem, an event I will return to later. Historians and literary critics have traditionally considered Martha Simmonds to be the 'ringleader' in this drama. In spite of the fact

that she was not alone in this event, her participation in it has defined her from the outset. Nayler himself seems to have established this interpretation of events, according to his colleague, George Whitehead, who described his downfall as satanically motivated and believed that:

> He [Nayler] came to be ensnared through the subtle Adversary's getting advantage upon him by means of some persons who too much gloried in him...so it came to pass, according as J.N. related to me...that a few forward, conceited, imaginary women, especially one Martha Simmonds, grew somewhat turbulent...that he came to be clouded in his judgement... The substance of the foregoing relation, how J.N. came to be ensnared and to such a loss, he himself gave me the account.[2]

The two earliest modern biographers of Nayler, Mabel Brailsford and E. Fougelklou, describe Martha Simmonds as 'the villain of this piece', coming into Nayler's life 'like a whirlwind...to cause havoc'.[3] Nayler's most recent biographer, Leo Damrosch, is more sympathetic and concedes that she 'was clearly not the madwoman Quaker writers chose to depict her as being'.[4] Among literary critics as well as biographers, Martha Simmonds has been read only in relation to Nayler's story and consequently her own texts have rarely been considered worthy of mention in their own right. Perhaps the most derogatory critic is Andrew W. Brink who, following the argument of Whitehead, argues that Milton saw in Martha Simmonds the model for Eve and compares Eve's supposed deception of Adam to Simmonds' part in Nayler's downfall. Brink continues to argue that Simmonds:

> would not leave him [Nayler] alone in London or in Bristol, following him...much as Satan tracked Eve until he [Satan] implanted the self-destructive idea of becoming a goddess.[5]

He refers to her as a 'possible witch', a 'Ranterish woman' (although in a footnote remarks that the records of seventeenth-century witchcraft make no reference to a Martha Simmonds). According to Greaves and Zaller she, 'engineered Nayler's so called messianic entry into Bristol'[6] and Margaret Drabble also mentions her only as an adjunct to Nayler and makes no mention of her own writings.[7] Kenneth Carroll, while attempting to render a sympathetic and unbiased account of the Simmonds and Nayler relationship, approaches the Bristol event entirely from Nayler's viewpoint and uses language which precludes any discussion of Simmonds as a political agent but stereotypes her into the same role of dangerous woman, and casts Nayler in the role of victim:

> Not even in Bristol was the ailing Nayler safe from Martha Simmonds, for she followed him there in order to bring him under her control.[8]

In effect, he totally depoliticises her as does the title of his essay, which refers to her as an 'enigma'. Most recently, Douglas Gwyn[9] has given a more sympathetic reading of her texts, but again, largely in reference to Nayler and to what has become known among historians as 'the Bristol event'. Martha Simmonds was undoubtedly influential in Nayler's ministry, as he was in hers, but if we look more closely at her life we see that her relationship with him was brief and a critical reading of her texts and

letters, and transcripts of her spoken words reveal an articulate and engaging woman with courage and energy.

Some fresh attention has been given to Martha Simmonds in the works of Rosemary Moore and Phyllis Mack[10] but the Quaker theologian, Christine Trevett, offers an alternative and refreshingly sympathetic account of Martha Simmonds, rightly observing that Nayler's male followers were equally active in the event and the correspondence found on James Nayler revealed that not only the women, but both Thomas Simmonds and John Stranger, husbands of the female protagonists, addressed Nayler in Christological language.[11] The American feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Reuther, is also sympathetic to the women in Nayler's history, but she and Trevett stand alone in their assessment of the female followers of James Nayler and even they offer no analysis of her writings.[12]

Reuther's thesis identifies two distinct categories of feminist writers in the mid-seventeenth century: the 'humanists' and the 'prophets'. Humanists, she argues, are those with access to a classical education, 'usually Anglicans' who did not question the status quo of English religious tradition, while the latter group are so called because of their dissenting religious views and their apocalyptic language.[13] This group of women is today among those described as 'hidden from history', and 'hidden in plain sight'.[14] Perhaps the reason for the continued hiddenness of the early Quaker women's writings is the failure of successive generations to question both the structure and nature of theological discourse, which has excluded women. Martha Simmonds has been among this hidden group of women for four centuries and I hope to present her as one of a group of Quaker women who were able to consolidate their mission through the utilisation of, and engagement with, the contemporary cultures of print, religious discourse and apocalyptic preaching which made them unique as a group, if not unprecedented.

'BY WORD, BY WRITING...' FAITH AND MINISTRY

> before ever I saw the Light of the Sun...I was rejected of men...and as concerning self, it had been good I had not been born; for I have not had pleasure in this world, but have stood as one alone... (Oh my beloved, ll.25-29).

These lines of Martha Simmonds, although written towards the end of her active ministry, are nevertheless a suitable starting point for a critique of her work and ministry, for in spite of her involvement with Nayler, she was fundamentally a solitary figure driven more by her personal conviction and conversion than any external factor.

George Fox encouraged the Friends to proclaim the gospel 'by word, by writing and by signs'[15] and Martha Simmons was one of the earliest Quakers to express her faith in these three ways. Born in Meare, Somerset, in 1623, she was the youngest child of the Vicar, George Calvert. Calvert died in 1628 and around 1630, Martha Calvert moved to London to the home of her brother, the bookseller and printer, Giles Calvert. By any reckoning, Martha Simmonds was a remarkable woman. She was active in the Quaker movement from her conversion in 1654, until her death in 1665.

In 1655 she married Thomas Simmonds, a Birmingham bookbinder. Thomas Simmonds had moved to London shortly before 1655 to work with Calvert and they were to become the most prolific Quaker publishers. Simmonds' premises at the Bull and Mouth would later become a focus of Quaker activity and one of the main outlets for Quaker publications, about which William Grigge warned that

> since Lambeth fair hath been down, there hath been a Market up, called Toleration, and such Commodities are to be sold at the sign of the Black-spread Eagle, near Paul's, by Giles Calvert, where you may be furnished with such writings, Books and Pamphlets, that shall deny God, Christ, Spirit, Word, Ordinances, Resurrection, Heaven, Hell, what not? Brethren I shall give you a sad view of some of those Wares, though I do not advise the buying of any of them, but beseech you to abhorre and detest them, Touch not, taste not, handle not, (for they shall all perish, and, and they that walk by them).[16]

Martha Simmonds' three texts would have been among those disseminated at the Sign of the Black Spread Eagle, written between 1655 and 1657/8. The precise dating of these texts is difficult as only one has an imprint. We are, however, able to conjecture that the first, a single sheet beginning with the words, *When the Lord Jesus came to Jerusalem*, was written early in 1655, indicated by one of two inscriptions on the Thomason tract copy. These inscriptions are assumed to be by George Thomason who collected the tracts, the first being an added title reading *In Admonition* and the second being an inscription at the bottom of the page '*April 25, 1655, given about by the Quakers*'. Although this is the shortest of her writings and less than 1000 words in length, it is nevertheless significant in terms of her overall literary output and, clearly, she herself regarded it as so, as indicated by the fact that it was later reprinted with her second text, *A Lamentation for the Lost Sheep of Israel. A Lamentation* is a pamphlet of 6 pages published on 16 October 1655. It was reprinted the following year. We have further evidence for the date of this text from the inscription on the Thomason tract: *20 October 1655*. The last work ascribed to Martha Simmonds is a multi-authored pamphlet in which she, Hannah Stranger,[17] James Nayler and William Tomlinson[18] seek to address the spiritual crisis of the age and to justify the sign re-enacted at Bristol. The pamphlet, which has no title page, is known as *O England thy time is come*, since these are the opening words of the short introduction by James Nayler. It contains three tracts by Martha Simmonds, one each by Hannah Stranger, William Tomlinson and Nayler, and concludes with lines of verse composed by Nayler. The first and longest tract in the pamphlet is by Martha Simmonds, *You Foolish Virgins*, a work of 3246 words. *How Excellent is Thy Waies* and *Oh My Beloved* are her two shorter pieces of 839 and 840 words, respectively. The absence of an imprint makes the dating of *O England* also difficult though there are sufficient, albeit elliptical, references to the Bristol event on 24 October 1656 for us to assume it to have been written after this date. The Thomason tract copy has a handwritten calculation on the cover, subtracting 1604 from 1659,[19] which possibly suggests that it was being circulated in 1659. It also contains a short piece presumably written by Nayler during his imprisonment: *A Morning-Song when I being in Prison in Westminster*. Nayler was taken before Magistrates on Saturday 25 October 1656[20] and was sentenced in November 1656. In December 1656 Martha Simmonds was in prison[21] and so we

could assume the text to have been published after that date although parts of it may have been written earlier. It was most likely to have been published by either Giles Calvert or Thomas Simmonds who had taken over most of the Quaker side of Giles Calvert's publications. Her first text, and her shortest, is worthy of discussion since it is the most representative of her ministry, most autobiographical and most directly related to her involvement with Nayler.

WHEN THE LORD JESUS CAME TO JERUSALEM

The most outstanding feature of Martha Simmonds' first composition is its similarity to the New Testament structure of the Matthean and Johannine texts. The Gospel of Matthew is shaped around a series of discourses or sermons preceded by short narrative episodes or vignettes, which provide the material for the sermon. The first of these deals with the Matthean ethic of the kingdom (chs. 5–7) followed by a discourse on the nature of mission within an eschatological context. This is followed by the discourse on the nature and coming of the kingdom in a series of 'kingdom parables'. They are particularly significant for two reasons: they occur in Matthew's Gospel immediately after Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the starting point of Martha Simmonds narrative, and before his arrest and Crucifixion.

The opening lines of *When the Lord Jesus* might seem chillingly prophetic when read in the light of later events and it is not too implausible to suggest that Martha had made a highly personal reading of Matthew 21, the biblical preface to the description of Christ's entry into Jerusalem:

> Tell ye the daughter of Si-on, 'Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass' (Matt. 21.5; John 12.15).

She incorporates her authorial voice immediately following the reference to Christ entering Jerusalem—she is an integral part of the drama. Jesus weeps and laments over Jerusalem but she cannot mourn over the people:

> When the Lord Jesus came to *Jerusalem*,[22] he beheld the City and wept over it, with this lamentation: *Oh that thou hast known in this day the things that belong to thy peace*! The same tendernesse is witnessed now in them which the Lordhath enlightened. I cannot but mourn over you, to see how you lye wallowing in your filth, and joyne hand in hand and smite with the fist of wickednesse (l. 1–7).

Two salient features emerge from the outset; the juxtaposition of images and themes from Old and New Testaments. This typological presentation of material is central to the text and presents the biblical story as a continuous narrative: Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden represent the beginning of time to the end of time (the second coming of Christ).

This is not the only way in which the subject of apocalypse is developed. A series of warnings with allusions to the eschatological gospels follow, placing the text in a specifically theological framework. The parables selected for these admonitions or warnings are those of Matthew 21 and 25 and it is worth looking at how these

chapters have been worked into the text as Martha uses them again and in greater detail in her two later works.

The first allusion is to the parable of the steward and talents, which is blended with the Genesis narrative of Adam and Eve. Whether this is a deliberate juxtaposition or an error on Simmonds' part, is arguable, for in the parable of the steward and the talents it is the master (God in the case of the Genesis narrative) but here it is the steward who returns. I would argue that it is a deliberate blending of Old and New Testaments, a typological reading in which the steward who returns (ll. 13-14) is God, in order to return the narrative to the Old Testament account of creation (Gen. 2.8). Adam's awareness of his nakedness here is being used as an analogy for the fallen state of England:

> there is a Talent to be improved in thee, how wilt thou give an accompt of it; the Steward is now come: in the coole of the day, then Adam heard the voyce of God, and then he saw his nakednese, and so mayest thou; If thou wilt turn in thy minde to the light of Christ in thee, the light will discover to thee thy fallen state, and how thou art turned out from the presence of God, and art in the gall of bitternesse, and the earth is cursed for thy sake... (ll.13-18).

We are then taken back to the New Testament through the introduction of another parable, that of the wedding feast (Matt. 22.11), which connects with the earlier parable by the final casting into darkness of the man who arrived without the cloak.

> when thou thinkest to sit downe with thy Lord; *Friend, how camest thou hither without a wedding-garment* then know what thy portion will be (ll. 26-27).

The faithful and unfaithful servants (Matt. 25.26), sheep and goats (25.33), the unforgiving servant and the wise employer culminate in the final separation of one from the other. The narrative moves between the Old and New Testaments to demonstrate a particular point about time. Time is crucial in all Simmonds' writings from the beginnings of time (Adam and Eve) to the end of time (the second coming of Christ). The purpose of this shift from Old to New Testament is made clear (l.35) when she says:

> Now Christ Jesus the second Adam, who is God, manifest in the flesh, condemning sinne in the flesh, if thou live in him in thee, and believe in hime in thee, then thou wilt witnesse his power to the cutting down of thy will... (ll. 35-37).

In other words, the Revelation of Christ in the New Testament is read as the fulfilment of the Old, and the final age; the Parousia is already here through the indwelling of Christ in every man and woman if they will only believe and submit to his will.

> If thou wilt turn in thy minde to the light of Christ in thee, the light will discover to thee thy fallen state, and how thou art turned out from the presence of God, and art in the gall of bit-ternesse, and the earth is cursed for thy sake: Now if thou wilt minde the light...which is the grace of God... (ll. 15-20).

The concept of Christ indwelling in all creatures is an expression of the fundamental Quaker doctrine of the 'inner light' by which true redemption is found. It was a phrase originally used by George Fox to describe his conversion and became a fundamental principle of Quaker belief and part of the theological battle in which they struggled to justify their beliefs, here emphasised by the words, 'the light of Christ in thee' (l. 16) and 'a measure of Christ' (l. 50). The light should not be confused with conscience or reason; but should be seen as an expression of the Quaker belief that life of Christ dwelt in all people, allowing human beings an immediate sense of God's presence, wisdom and will for them.

The final third of the text introduces themes of life, law, judgement and apocalypse beginning with the biblical narrative of the wandering prophets of the Old Testament:

> Now Death reigned from *Adam* till *Moses*,[23] and when *Moses* came, then was the Law given forth; and so *Moses* and the Prophets till *John*... (ll. 43-44).

It concludes with a reference to Christ 'who had no abiding place', an image to which she returns in her later text and possibly indicates something of her own experience. The text ends with a call to conversion, a call to 'take up the cross...despise the shame' (ll. 54-55) and ends on a brief apocalyptic note,

> for when the booke of conscience is opened, thou shalt witnesse thou hast been warned in thy life-time (ll. 59-60).

'...AND BY SIGNS': SIMMONDS AND JAMES NAYLER

Shortly after her conversion Martha seems to have been gripped by zeal for spiritual truth and began travelling and preaching, interrupting meetings. In *O England* Martha refers to her visit to Colchester where she was imprisoned on more than one occasion. One of these occasions was in December 1655, possibly on a visit to Parnell, who later wrote to William Dewsbury that:

> Our tender sister, Martha Simmondes is here in Bondes in the Towne prison; she was put in the last evening for speakeing to a priest; she hath beene in twice before this within a weeke but they had not power to keep her...[24]

Along with two other Quaker women, Hannah Stranger and Dorcas Erbury, she began travelling around London and further afield, interrupting meetings and questioning vociferously the authority of eminent Quaker leaders with openly confrontational behaviour: she would later say of this period of her life that she was 'moved to declare to the world'[25] and that she was often misjudged. She travelled around the south of England proclaiming her faith in word and signs: on one occasion she went partially naked with sackcloth and ashes on her head as a sign. The dominant male leaders, Francis Howgill and Edward Burroughs, were unsympathetic to Martha who turned to James Nayler for support.

> I did not know what I should do further and then I was moved of the Lord to go to James Nailer, and tell him I wanted Justice, and he being harsh to me, at length these words came to me to speak to him, which I did and struck him down; How are the

> mighty men fallen, I came to Jerusalem and behold a cry, and behold and oppression, which pierced him and struck him down with tears... But after three daies he came to me and confessed. I had been clear in service to the Lord.[26]

THE BRISTOL EVENT

Simmonds' attachment to Nayler began shortly after her conversion for he is known to have visited the Calvert premises in 1655. It is impossible to say for certain how Martha met Nayler but we know from correspondence between Alexander Parker and Margaret Fell that he visited Giles Calvert's house in 1655:

> Afterwards Ja[mes]N[ayler]and I passed down to Giles Calverts and we found him (Calvert) there.[27]

It is likely on one such occasion that Martha met him. She and her husband were at the core of the small coterie of followers that sprang up around Nayler, both men and women, who were drawn to what they saw as a Christ-like figure. By 1655, some of this group were beginning to vocalise a preference for Nayler over Fox and urged him to challenge the leadership. Nayler's success seemed to lie in his style of preaching, which one convert described as 'words exceedingly serviceable to me like arrows to my heart'.[28] His popularity was such that divisions in loyalty soon developed and something of a rift appeared between Fox and Nayler.

On 1 August 1656, Nayler set out to travel to Launceston with the intention of visiting Fox and perhaps repairing some of the damage done to the movement by their disagreements in London. Martha, who had been travelling through the south of England, returned to London and in September secured work as a nurse to the wife of Major General Desborough, Oliver Cromwell's brother-in-law.[29] Nayler did not arrive in Launceston but was arrested while passing through Exeter and word was sent to Martha. She began to negotiate for Nayler's release, to which Cromwell eventually agreed, and in October 1656 signed the warrant. Martha and Thomas Simmonds travelled almost straightaway to Exeter and on 20 October Nayler was released. Thomas returned directly to London and it seems he tried to persuade Martha to do likewise but to no avail. She remained with Nayler along with a group of his other followers: Timothy Wedlock,[30] Hannah Stranger and Dorcas Erbury, who accompanied Nayler to Glastonbury on foot via Wells. Historians have focused on the event in Bristol, perhaps because it is the most well-documented and the one for which he was punished, but what has rarely been given attention is the fact that they performed the same sign—a re-enactment of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem—at Glastonbury and Wells. George Witherley's[31] evidence during Nayler's examination also supports this:

> Nayler...had been not long released out of Exeter Gaol...and [Nayler, Simmonds, Dorcas Erbury, Timothy Wedlock, Hannah Stranger] were...intended for London; but must it seems come this way to play their pranks with us, [a]s well as in other places as they past through: For at Wells and Glastonbury his [ac]complices strewed their garments in the way of this Imposter Nailer.

From Wells and Glastonbury, the group travelled on to Bristol, through the small village of Bedminster, where they encountered Witherley, who testified that it was 'rainy and foul weather' and the party travelling bareheaded along the cartway were apparently oblivious to the mud and dirt in which they were walking. A marginal note to Witherley's evidence reads: 'it was exceeding wet weather, the Spouts on the Bridge (which is a narrow place) poured on his (Nayler's) barehead so that it ran out at his knees'. This seems to have aroused some anger in Witherley who reproached them saying that God did not require such a sign. In this way they finally arrived at the Ratcliffe Gate of Bristol on the Friday, 24 October 1656. Thomas Wedlock lead the party and two of the women, Martha Simmonds and Hannah Stranger, led Nayler's horse with the reins in their hands, one on each side singing 'holy, holy, holy' and spreading their clothing on the earth before him. Dorcas Erbury[32] followed the party and in this way they went to the High Cross of Bristol (the preaching cross) and from there to an inn called The White Hart in Broadstreet, the home of two other eminent Quakers, Dennis Hollister and Henry Row. By this time the city magistrates had been informed and all seven were sent to appear before them. They were duly arrested the same day and appeared before the Bristol magistrates on the following day. Nayler answered their questions shrewdly or remained silent to avoid incriminating himself. When asked why they went before him singing he replied by saying they were of an age to speak for themselves.[33] When asked whether or not his name was Jesus he gave no answer nor did he say anything at all about the name Jesus being applied to him. They were all very guarded in their replies, almost to the extent that their words could be considered rehearsed. In a sense this was true, as they had almost all been imprisoned and questioned on previous occasions. Martha was asked why she went before Nayler leading his horse and she replied by saying that she knew no James Nayler, for he had passed to a more pure estate, and the power of the Lord had impelled her to lead his horse. She said that he (Nayler) was buried in her; he had died to the carnal self: 'he has promised to come a second time: he will be reborn as the spiritual body of Christ'.[34] When Dorcas Erbury was asked how Nayler could be Jesus who was crucified on a cross, she replied: 'he is manifested in him'. Nowhere in the course of questioning could any one of the accused be found guilty of a belief, *per se*, in the divinity of Nayler. Hannah Stranger was perhaps the shrewdest and must have infuriated the examining magistrate by repeating, 'If you have anything against me' several times. Thomas Stranger acted similarly; he said little and refused to answer most of the questions put to him. He did, however, admit to the crucial piece of evidence, which finally convicted Nayler: a post-script to a letter written by his wife to Nayler. The party had been searched on arrest and a number of letters found on them. The letters had presumably been sent to Nayler during his term in prison but his reason for carrying them is obscure, for they were the incriminating evidence of his blasphemy. It has been argued that Nayler actually courted martyrdom,[35] in which case he purposely took the letters on his journey as they all address him in similar terms, but we can only surmise. A letter from one Jane Woodcock referred to him as 'the Prophet of the most high' and another letter, written by Martha to William Dewsbury, opens with the words, 'Oh let me for evermore be tied by the hands of Jesus'. While this was incriminating, the

crucial letter was from Hannah Stranger to Nayler, in which she addresses Nayler as, 'thou everlasting son of Righteousness and Prince of Peace', to which Thomas Stranger had added a postscript referring to Nayler as: 'no more James but Jesus'. Thomas Simmonds[36] also wrote to Martha while she was in Bristol jail and accused her of being the ringleader of the event: 'surely thou wast the chief leader in that action'.[37] This was used as evidence against Martha during her examination:

> This Martha Simmonds is a considerable person, For her Husband (who tis like knoweth her) tells her, *for she was the leader* in this action, and gives them a handsome frump for their foolery to do that work[38]

Martha could well have instigated the event, for a reading of her texts indicates that the *adventus* of Christ into Jerusalem, and its eschatological meaning, represented something to her which was deeply connected with her own personal conversion. This has to be balanced by Nayler's deeply Christological identification.[39] During her cross-examination in Bristol jail Martha was asked why she sang before James Nayler, and she replied by saying:

> I know not James Nayler. He was but now is past to a more pure estate, and the power of the Lord carried me to sing and lead his horse... [W]hen the new life shall be borne in *James Nailer,* then he will be *Jesus.*[40]

It is a difficult reply in which she struggles to express the complex belief in re-birth through conversion, the 'new life' equating with the indwelling presence of Jesus and thereby participating in the life of Jesus. In spite of her many references to Nayler she did not believe him be the re-incarnate Christ in a traditional Protestant theological sense, but believed that Christ was present in him through the 'new life'. The evidence implies that this was how Nayler saw himself, for in his examination he was asked categorically: 'Have any called thee by the name of Jesus?' to which he replied, 'not as unto the visible, but as Jesus, the Christ that is in me'.

Nayler was sent to Newgate prison where on the 25 October, the ending of this dramatic sign took place. According to Cole, a prison keeper, Nayler was visited by Martha Simmonds and Hannah Stranger. Before their departure, they knelt down before Nayler who placed his hands on their heads and made 'a groaning noise within himself.[41] As the women rose he clasped his hands on a cross and held it over their heads and then as they rose he spread his hands over their heads and they departed.

Nayler was accused of encouraging his entourage to regard him as Christ and charged with blasphemy in a trial at the Painted Chamber of Westminster, which lasted ten days and ended on 16 December. The House considered what his punishment should be, if not death, and so it was decided

> That on Thursday next, 18th December...he stand in the pillory, the New Palace Yard, with a paper of his offence and crime in his Breast. And then presently to be whipped by the Hangman, to the Old Exchange upon *Saturday* following, to be put in the Pillory for two hours, before the exchange; and then bored through the tongue with a hot iron, and stigmatised with the letter 'B' on his forehead...[42]

Like the two women who stood at the foot of the Cross, Martha Simmonds and Hannah Stranger stood on either side of Nayler throughout the administration of his

punishment thereby completing their apocalyptic re-enactment of the cross. They were also imprisoned but were released after a short time while Nayler remained in the dreadful conditions of the Bridewell Prison.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the tragic consequences for Nayler, who appears to have been spiritually crushed by his punishment, the women involved in the episode seem to have found it an empowering experience. Martha continued to interrupt meetings with even greater zeal. Richard Hubberthorne reported to Margaret Fell[43] that Martha enacted a Eucharist in which bread and wine were broken and distributed. She also read some words from Ezekiel, saying: 'that the Lord had sent that chapter to be read unto us'. She was surely referring to Ezek. 2.3-4:

> I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that that hath rebelled against me... For they are impudent children and stiff hearted. I do send thee unto them.

In 1660, Nayler, who never recovered from his ordeal, died in King's Repton on his way to visit George Fox. There is very little evidence for the later events of Martha's life and the accounts of her death are contradictory apart from agreement on the year of 1665. Zaller and Greaves record her death on as being en route to Maryland in 1665. Kenneth Carroll quotes records of her death: the burial records of the London and Middlesex Quarterly Meeting state that she died on 27 September 1665 and was buried the same day. Another source records her death at sea on 7 April 1665, again en route to Maryland[44]. Hannah Stranger emigrated to Maryland after the death of her husband. Giles Calvert died in August 1663 and Elizabeth Calvert took over the business until her death in 1674. The Quaker side of the work had already been handed over to Thomas Simmonds around 1656/7 but little else is known of him. The Bull and Mouth was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666, along with all its remaining records, and with that the names of Thomas and Martha Simmonds were confined to history.

NOTES

1. Mercurius Politicus, No. 340, 11–18 December 1656; see also Grigge, W., *The Quakers' Jesus, or The Unswaddling of the Child James Nailer, which Toleration had midwived into the World*, London, 1658, p. 40.
2. Whitehead, G., *A Collection of Sundry Books, Epistles and Papers, Written by James Nayler, Some of which were never before Printed, With an Impartial Relation of the Most Remarkable Transaction Relating to his Life*, London, 1716, pp. 6-7, quoted in full in Damrosch, L., *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, New York: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 118.
3. Brailsford, M.R., *A Quaker from Cromwell's Army: James Nayler*, London: The Swarthmore Press, 1927, p. 98; Fougelklou, E., *James Nayler, the Rebel Saint*, London: E. Benn, 1931, p. 161.
4. Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, p. 146.
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13. Reuther, R.R., 'Prophets and Humanists: Types of Religious Feminism in Stuart England', *Journal of Religion* 70 (1990), pp. 1-18.

14. Rowbotham, S., *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, London: Pluto Press, 1973.

15. Pennington, N. (ed.) *Journal of George Fox*, vol. 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911, p. 407.

16. Grigge, *The Quakers' Jesus*, p. 3.

17. Hannah Stranger was a colleague of Martha Simmonds and Nayler. She is described in the account of her examination as 'the wife of Thomas Stranger of London Combmaker' (see *The Grand Imposter Examined: or The Life, Tryal, and Examination of James Nayler, The Seduced and Seducing Quaker with the Manner of his Riding into Bristol*, printed for Henry Brome, London, 1656, p. 3).

18. William Tomlinson 'WT', 1653–1696, a Quaker from Wanstead in Essex; his other works are *Seven Particulars, containeth as followeth*, 1655, *A Bosom opened to the Jewes*, 1656, and *A Word of Reproof To the Priests or Ministers*, 1656, all published by Giles Calvert.

19. Possibly an attempt calculate the age of James Nayler, although most accounts of Nayler give his dates as 1619–1660.

20. Grigge, *The Quakers' Jesus*, p. 3.

21. Deacon, J., *An Exact History of the Life of James Nayler*, London: Printed for Edward Thomas, 1657, p. 49. The date of publication on the Thomason Tract has been altered from 1657 to 1656, which would appear to be correct, as there is no other evidence to support her imprisonment in 1657.

22. Luke 19.41.

23. Rom. 5.4.

24. H.J. Cadbury (ed.) *Letters to William Dewsbury and Others*, published as monograph 1948 and quoted in Carroll, 'Martha Simmonds'.

25. Rich, R., and Tomlinson, W., *A True Narrative of the Late Tryall, Sufferings and Examination of James Nayler*, 1657, p. 10.

26. Rich and Tomlinson, *A True Narrative*, pp. 10, 11.

27. Alexander Parker to Margaret Fell, 21 July 1655, *Swarthmore MSS* 1: 62, quoted in Edward Thomas, p. 150.

28. Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus*, p. 116.

29. Desborough was chosen by Cromwell to organise local government from 1655 until 1657.

30. The evidence of Timothy Wedlock of the County of Devon, quoted in Ralph Farmer, *Sathan Inthron'd in his Chair of Pestilence, or, Quakerism in its Exaltation*, London, 1666, p. 2.

31. George Witherly was one of the witnesses of the Bristol 'sign' who gave evidence at Bristol.

32. Dorcas Erbury was the widow of William Erbury (1604–1654), Vicar of Cardiff (1623–1638) until he was forced to resign by the Bishop of Cardiff. He became a Parliamentary army chaplain when he met James Nayler. Some time later he became an itinerant preacher until his death in 1654, after which Dorcas Erbury continued his ministry.

33. Rich and Tomlinson, *A True Narrative*, p. 15.

34. Rich and Tomlinson, *A True Narrative*, p. 15.
35. Spencer, C., 'James Nayler: Antinomian or Perfectionist', *Quaker Studies* 6 (2001), pp. 106-17.
36. The name of Thomas Simmonds is spelt variously as 'Symonds', 'Simmonds' and 'Symons', and the most frequently occurring form, 'Simmonds', is used throughout this paper.
37. Thomas Simmonds to Martha Simmonds, 1 November, 1656, reprinted in Rich and Tomlinson, *A True Narrative*, pp. 20, 21.
38. Rich and Tomlinson, *A True Narrative*, p. 22.
39. See Spencer, 'James Nayler'.
40. Examination of Martha Symonds, in Rich and Tomlinson, *A True Narrative*, p. 21.
41. The Evidence of Thomas Cole, in Rich and Tomlinson, *A True Narrative*, p. 25.
42. Grigge, *The Quakers' Jesus*, p. 40
43. Richard Hubberthorne to Margeret Fell, 10th February 1657, William Caton MSS, 3/118, 372-76, quoted in Mack, *Visionary Women*, p. 201.
44. *Swarthmore MSS*, 1, 45, quoted in Braithwaite, W.C., *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, ed. Cadbury, H.J., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 1961, p. 269.

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