

**“A spirit of comradeship in work”?  
Anglican women missionaries and ecclesiastical politics  
in 20th-century South Africa**

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*Abstract*

In the first half of the twentieth century, between one and two hundred British women at any one time were serving among South Africa's black population as paid Anglican missionaries. From 1913, they joined together in a Society of Women Missionaries, holding regular conferences until 1955 and producing an informative journal. These missionaries, often lifelong church employees and occasionally deaconesses, were the first women whom the church hierarchy accommodated as actual lay representatives in its previously all-male preserves of mission consultation and governance, 50 years before women could be elected to Provincial Synod. The *SWM Journal's* coverage of its dealings with the Provincial Missionary Conference and Board of Missions encompasses struggles over female inclusion, the inspiration derived from involvement, and key issues raised – especially evangelistic training for women and the hope of comradeship with men in shared missionary work. This period of white female mission leadership and modest official recognition merits greater acknowledgement in the history of both Anglican church government in South Africa and the development of female ministry, including ordination to the priesthood.

**Introduction: Mission, church representation and women's ministry**

Miss J Batcham, a British woman missionary at work in South Africa at the end of the 1930s, voiced great hopes for projected parallel male and female Anglican cultural investigations into African adolescent rites of passage:

One of the immediate results of the discussion on Father Amor's paper is a Resolution asking the S.W.M to form a Committee, and present a report to the next P.M.C. on initiation schools for girls, in co-operation with a Committee convened by Father Amor to investigate into initiation schools for

boys. This co-operation in work will be of great value, and create a spirit of comradeship in work which will double its value in the Mission Field.<sup>1</sup>

The abbreviations in Batcham’s comment merit explanation, for this article explores an aspect of the still little-known SWM (Society of Women Missionaries) and its constitutional relations with the PMC, or Provincial Missionary Conference, as well as the partner national body, the Provincial Board of Missions (PBM). It also probes how far women missionaries found cooperation with mission men managed indeed to “create a spirit of comradeship in work”, able to “double the value” of their spiritual achievements. Lurking behind these issues of representation and cooperation is the under-explored historical back-story of female ordination in South African Anglicanism, and the question of possible links between women missionaries of the past and women ministers or priests today.

By comparison with the personal encounter of black and white women of faith in the mission field, or the fervour and prayer of Mothers’ Union and Manyano members today (explored by Philippe Denis as part of his astonishingly prolific scholarship),<sup>2</sup> the politics of female representation in official church bodies may seem at first glance inherently dry and uninterestingly technical. Yet reflecting on the countrywide history of SWM at three watershed moments over the four decades of its existence<sup>3</sup> unexpectedly compelled further investigation of just this issue. For those interested in feminist mission history, the Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA), the Anglican Church, provides relatively rich sources. While the ecclesiastical hierarchy in the first half of the 20th century seemed entirely male, there were at any one time between one and two hundred British women working across the country as paid missionaries, whether attached to churches, schools or hospitals. (Religious sisterhoods are not part of this discussion, although they had a notable role too.)<sup>4</sup> Many of them had been recruited through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). This almost exclusively spinster Anglican workforce far outnumbered what Nonconformist churches could muster

<sup>1</sup> J. Batcham. “The Provincial Missionary Conference, Bloemfontein, 5<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> October, 1938,” *SWM Journal* [hereafter *SWMJ*] (April 1939): 10. The journal’s full run (1916-1955) is held at the University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers (hereafter Wits), Church of the Province of South Africa Archives (hereafter CPSA).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Philippe Denis. “African Traditional Religion and Christian Identity in a Group of Manyano Leaders,” *Missionalia* 32/2 (2004): 177-189, and “We also had to Live with Apartheid in our Homes.” *Stories of Women in Sobantu, South Africa*, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 30/1 (June 2004): 151-167.

<sup>3</sup> Deborah Gaitskell. “Gender, Power and Voice in South African Anglicanism: The Society of Women Missionaries’ *Journal*, 1913-1955,” *South African Historical Journal* 61, 2 (June 2009): 254-277. Some points made in that article will be reprised here, by way of context.

<sup>4</sup> Mandy Goedhals is beginning to explore the history of Anglican sisterhoods, which should prove invaluable.

or support financially for equivalent evangelistic labours among the black population (though such non-Anglicans consequently used the unpaid labour of missionary wives to a far greater extent). The pioneers among the Anglican women might well be lifelong church employees and sometimes deaconesses. It was these female missionaries who were the first women whom the hierarchy had to accommodate in its all-male consultative and decisionmaking preserves.

Yet there seems to be a black hole in historical remembrance, a regrettable amnesia about their existence. True, there is a literal generation gap between the winding down of *their* missionary influence by the later 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, and the growth among locally born Anglicans, both white and black, of an *indigenous* movement for the ordination of women. But even a splendid study on women in the church in South Africa<sup>5</sup> barely reflects on earlier patterns of female leadership, neither the degree of authority and recognition accorded to British missionaries before 1960, nor the contribution of individual African leaders (often clergy wives) within the collective black female response to Christianity. While abounding in vivid current testimony, alongside feminist biblical and theological analysis, the collection lacks much historical awareness, apart from a short section containing three items: a witty cartoon overview on women in the church (with no mention of missions), a brief exploration of some missionary teachers working in the Eastern Cape for the Female Education Society in the 1860s and 1870s, and an informative account of the immediate recent history of the Anglican female ordination attempt in South Africa.<sup>6</sup>

Russell and Draper spend a couple of initial paragraphs on “earlier [UK] attempts to provide a meaningful place for women within the structured ministry of the Church of England”, noting that “[r]eturning women missionaries, who had made a vital contribution to the church’s ministry there [ie abroad], sought a meaningful role at home also”.<sup>7</sup> They otherwise focus on local developments after 1960, making the pertinent observation:

One hundred years after the religious life and the Order of Deaconesses were restored to women, the debate moved within the space of fifteen years from a decision to accept women into the governing bodies of the churches to the decisions by some

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<sup>5</sup> Denise Ackerman, Jonathan A. Draper and Emma Mashinini, eds. *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Megan Walker and Gertrud Wittenberg, with Ann Macdonald, (illustrator). “A Short History of Women in the Church,” Margaret E. Donaldson. “The Invisible Factor - 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Feminist Evangelical Concern for Human Rights,” and Phoebe Swart-Russell and Jonathan Draper. “A Brief History of the Movement for the Ordination of Women in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA),” all in Ackerman et al.

<sup>7</sup> Swart-Russell and Draper, 221.

Anglican Provinces to ordain women as full deacons and then to ordain them to the priesthood and episcopate.<sup>8</sup>

For the fact remains that, after some setbacks, by 1993 it became possible for women in the Anglican Church in South Africa to be ordained as priests.

So, in trying to couple together these two historical phenomena which do not seem to have been much linked hitherto – the significant presence of Anglican women missionaries in the first half of the twentieth century and the coming of female ordination in the final decade – the politics of women’s representation and women’s ministry in South Africa raises at least two key questions. One is more historical or empirical: How were the unusually large number of paid, generally single, Anglican women missionaries recognised and incorporated into church consultation and leadership structures from the 1920s onwards (by notable contrast with the fate of other female believers)? The second is more theoretical or speculative: What link, if any, does this incorporation have with the ordination of women in South Africa from 1993?

But why even try to make this sort of link? This article takes its cue in part from Dana Robert’s argument that female ordination in the United States of America built on the mission movement. When the Methodist and Presbyterian churches there both voted in 1956 to ordain women, it was not surprising, she remarks, “that the first women ordained in both denominations had served as missionaries or evangelists, the major arena for women’s church service earlier in the century”.<sup>9</sup> Yet as the 1960s progressed, the “increasingly conservative” public image of such female evangelists, “both theologically and culturally”, meant that the issue of women’s rights in the church “became separated from support for women missionaries”.<sup>10</sup> Robert nevertheless sees in women’s mission approaches a frequent “messy” alliance between evangelism and “this-worldly” concerns, including the health and leadership of women in home and family, church, and society” which, “[b]y definition ... have prepared a context for the formal empowerment of women, even if ... they have studiously avoided becoming involved in ‘women’s rights’”.<sup>11</sup>

It would help to know more about what mission links, if any, animated the female ordination movement within the Anglican Church in Britain. Anecdotally, I have witnessed the connection between female mission service abroad and ordination back home in the life of a close friend in the Methodist Church. She trained black women teachers in Zimbabwe in the 1970s,

<sup>8</sup> Swart-Russell and Draper, 222.

<sup>9</sup> Dana Robert, “Introduction: Historical Themes and Current Issues,” in Dana L. Robert, ed. *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Robert, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Robert, 22.

returned to the United Kingdom already qualified as a local preacher, and then mentored both local and overseas “partners in mission”. A decade or more later, with her varied skills in danger of being underused spiritually and professionally, she went on to be ordained as a Methodist minister.

Perhaps, though, this focus on individuals is a misplaced quest, and another kind of link is more important or as important – that between women’s prior to *corporate* church and social activism and eventual female ordination. An oral presentation of Jane Simpson’s research on social and religious change in New Zealand from 1939-1959 began with a photograph of the ordination of Dr Penny Jameson as bishop of Dunedin in 1990, the first Anglican female diocesan in the world. Simpson suggested that *that* pioneering step was built on prior female mobilisation through two significant religious organisations, the League of Mothers and the Women’s Committee of the National Council of Churches.<sup>12</sup> Now, South Africa has a long history of strong female adherence to Christianity, especially among the black population, although women’s spiritual fervour in earlier days was frequently institutionally marginalised or channelled into gender-segregated (and, almost invariably, racially separated) female church groups.<sup>13</sup> Probably the way such *group* solidarity and leadership experience contributed to female ordination also needs exploring.

Indeed, a substantial team of overseas partners within the wider Anglican Communion, as part of broader consultation over female ordination, reported in 1987 that “[i]nformal ministry by women to families and neighbours” was one of the strengths of the Church of the Province, and was “especially found in the Mothers’ Union [MU], and the Anglican Women’s Fellowship [AWF], but also elsewhere”.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, at least three women priests served as AWF diocesan presidents by 2002 — for example while the MU and AWF both took part in a special gathering that year, “Anglican Women Breaking the Silence”, which closed with a celebration of the tenth anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood.<sup>15</sup> How-

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<sup>12</sup> Jane Simpson. “Women’s Life-Cycles and Social and Religious Change in the ‘social Laboratory of the World’: New Zealand, 1939-1959,” paper presented to Life Cycles Seminar, Institute of Historical Research, London University, 9 June 2009.

<sup>13</sup> The literature is richer on such Methodist associations, but on Anglican groups, see Deborah Gaitskell. “Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women’s Christianity in South Africa,” in C. Walker, ed. *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990) and “Crossing Boundaries and Building Bridges: The Anglican Women’s Fellowship of South Africa,” in Philippe Denis and Caroline Sappia, eds. *Femmes d’Afrique dans une Société en Mutation* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Academia Bruylant, 2004); Beverley Haddad. “The Mothers’ Union in South Africa: Untold Stories of Faith, Survival and Resistance,” in Isobel A. Phiri, Devarakshanam B. Govinden and Sarojini Nadar, eds. *Her-stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Swart-Russell and Draper, 231.

<sup>15</sup> Gaitskell (2004): 124-5 (fn. 25), 126-127.

ever, detailed consideration of such a corporate link is beyond the scope of this paper, with its specific historical focus on women missionaries.

### A snapshot of the SWM

To return to the Society of Women Missionaries, set up in 1913: over four decades, until 1955, its members held regular conferences and produced a journal carrying substantial reports of their work. Highlights from three watershed moments give a sense of their changing location within a gendered church setting. Their founding four-day gathering seemingly radiated competence, as the 32 assembled women presented 28 papers on wide-ranging aspects of their work, passed 17 resolutions about church organisation and urgent social reform, and adopted a nine-point constitution.<sup>16</sup> Yet they made much more than they did later of the importance of both episcopal blessing on their venture and episcopal instruction to the conference,<sup>17</sup> while the closing paragraph of their report showed excessive humility in its "deep sense of gratitude for the privilege" of meeting, discussing "these problems of our work as the handmaids of the Lord engaged in the lowlier Ministry of Women in the Church of Christ".<sup>18</sup>

It was particularly striking how, in what is regarded as the tail-end of the mission era of "women's work for women",<sup>19</sup> when SWM members were recruited explicitly to work with black women and girls in the churches in a gender-segregated way, they still could not guarantee that they would be allowed by the male clergy to do that very task. Indeed, the first resolution of the 1913 conference sought to "respectfully suggest" that where women missionaries *were* working "they should have the opportunity of assisting to prepare the women and girls for Baptism and Confirmation, in addition to the Instruction given by the Clergy and Catechists in those places where this is not done at present". For some SWM members, this preparatory religious teaching was "their chief work" while others "felt great difficulty in not being allowed to help".<sup>20</sup> Corporate association was meant to assure them of a suitable female spiritual teaching ministry across the province.

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<sup>16</sup> Wits, CPSA, Society of Women Missionaries. *Short Report of the First Conference of Women Missionaries of the Church of the Province of South Africa* [1913] (hereafter *SWM 1913 Report*).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 3, 5, 10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> "Women's work for women" has been seen as "one of the major Western mission theories of the late nineteenth century" by Dana Robert. *American Women in Mission: A Social History of their Thought and Practice* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), 137.

<sup>20</sup> *SWM 1913 Report*, 3-4.

Nearly a quarter century on, in 1937, early in their zenith,<sup>21</sup> SWM women were still looking to improve their own solidarity and mutual fellowship, while far from convinced that the men of the Anglican Church respected them and took them seriously as co-workers in the mission. Ida Marten, outgoing president, wanted them as a group, “welded together” by the SWM, to “be allowed to make their full contribution to the advance that should be made all along the line”, but feared such advance was “being held up through lack of co-operation and an under-rating of the value of Women’s Work in the Church”.<sup>22</sup>

In 1955, when only 24 members from six (of a possible 14) dioceses gathered at Grahamstown, SWM women expected to wind up their society. Instead, they had a “most inspiring and exciting” conference which discussed “a resurrection to renewed life and activity”,<sup>23</sup> whereby the SWM would feed into a new, more inclusive Association of Women Workers, open to all those working among whites and coloureds as well as black Africans.<sup>24</sup> This constituted a belated recognition of the oneness of mission within the multi-racial Anglican Church, for 1955 was the year the CPSA canons were amended to give black “missions” and white “parishes” the same status as equally “pastoral charges”.<sup>25</sup> The “mission” had become (part of) the church, so now mission itself might more truly be a shared responsibility of all the faithful.<sup>26</sup> But how exactly, over these four decades, did the SWM get drawn into the PMC and PBM?

### **The workings of female mission consultation within Anglican church democracy**

As Anglicans in South Africa constituted a “province” of the worldwide Anglican Communion, their *national* bodies were (perhaps somewhat confusingly) dubbed “provincial”. The CPSA’s law-making body was the Provincial Synod, but it only met once every five years for a week, so was “not really an effective *ruler* [original emphasis] of the Church”, actual executive authority resting with a synod of bishops meeting at least annual-

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<sup>21</sup> 40 members attended the 1937 conference, at a time when the journal was at its most substantial too. The highest attendance came in 1942, with 52 present. See Table 1 in Gaitskell (2009): 257.

<sup>22</sup> *SWMJ* 36 (April 1937): 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> Ethel Wallace. “The President’s Letter,” *SWM Journal* 69 (Nov. 1955): 2.

<sup>24</sup> See its records in Wits, CPSA, AB1107, Association of Women Workers, including (in continuance of *SWM*’s sequence) *AWW Journal*, 70 (December 1956). The fate of this organisation (which I have not yet researched) might provide a further crucial link to the rethinking of women’s role in South African Anglicanism after 1960, regarding both representation and possible ordination.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Hinchliff. *The Anglican Church in South Africa* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963), 249.

<sup>26</sup> As argued by Goedhals, 109, 122-123.

ly.<sup>27</sup> Each diocese had its own synod too, with clerical and lay representatives. The parallel “mission” structure for African Anglicans resulted in a network of consultative diocesan missionary conferences, represented in the advisory Provincial Missionary Conference (PMC), which met quinquennially. The Provincial Board of Missions (PBM) was set up in 1924 to act as the executive of the PMC and report to Provincial Synod.

The sustained combating of ecclesiastical sexism by Archbishop Carter of Cape Town deserves wider acknowledgement. In November 1913, in the wake of the SWM’s foundation, Carter suggested that women missionaries should be admitted to the PMC, especially as the church was training women more and more “in business work”. But this would require constitutional amendments, as only males were then legally entitled to serve on CPSA representative councils. He also stood up for the church franchise for women, considering it “altogether wrong” that only a communicant, defined as “a male person”, could vote for any such representatives.<sup>28</sup> A small victory in 1915 saw women included in the definition of a parishioner, and thus able to participate in vestry meetings (which had already been granted in England).<sup>29</sup> Although Carter told Provincial Synod in vain in 1919 that times had changed and so must the church, “to be in touch with the spirit of the age”, he was able to get female voting rights (though only in 1924) once he was armed with a 1920 Lambeth Conference resolution stating that “[w]omen should be admitted to the councils of the Church to which laymen are admitted and on equal terms”.<sup>30</sup> To sum up: a provincial synod resolution of 1924 stated that women could vote for (but not themselves serve as) lay representatives to the diocesan and provincial synods, and to elective assemblies for bishops, could sit in diocesan missionary conferences, and could act as sideswomen and churchwardens. Only in 1942 did the diocese of Johannesburg pass a motion in favour of admitting women as elected lay representatives to diocesan synods.<sup>31</sup> Not until 1970 were women were admitted as lay representatives for the first time to Provincial Synod.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hinchliff, 241-242.

<sup>28</sup> Louis Bank. “A Theological Assessment of the Socio-political Role of the CPSA (1904-1930) with Special Reference to the Influence of Archbishop William Marlborough Carter.” (University of Cape Town: MA, Religious Studies, 1995), 129 -131, quoting from *Church Chronicle* reports.

<sup>29</sup> Bank, 132.

<sup>30</sup> Bank, 133-135.

<sup>31</sup> Olga M. Suberg, *The Anglican Tradition in South Africa: A Historical Overview* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1999), 79.

<sup>32</sup> Mandy Goedhals, “From Paternalism to Partnership? The Church of the Province of South Africa and Mission 1848–1988,” in Frank England and Torquil Paterson, eds, *Bounty in Bondage: The Anglican Church in Southern Africa. Essays in Honour of Edward King, Dean of Cape Town* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), 94.

White female missionaries were thus the first women to be actual delegates to diocesan church bodies (not the synod in the 1920s and 30s, but the diocesan missionary conferences) and they were also the only women, before the 1970s, to participate in provincial bodies – again, not the synod but the PMC and subsequently the PBM. This seems an important part of the story of official female participation in church life in South Africa. But the (scant) coverage of both bodies in the existing literature omits the women almost entirely, in favour of a more politically slanted assessment.

Thus Goedhals largely appraises PMC resolutions in the segregation period for their shortcomings in social analysis and, despite occasional signs of “a keen awareness of injustice”, their characteristically liberal reliance on representations to government for gradual improvement to African conditions of life.<sup>33</sup> She quotes the scathing 1933 verdict by Osmund Victor of the Community of the Resurrection (CR), commissioned by the archbishop to review mission and (especially theological) educational work. He concluded that the PBM’s brief annual meetings had been a waste of time and money, while the conference itself, described as a “bloated Debating Society”, suffered from a “paucity of ideas”, had been “barren of practical results” and generally fallen into disrespect.<sup>34</sup> For Cochrane, this pivotal moment constituted “a painful confession of the passivity of the Church despite many noble words, by implication an admission of captivity to the status quo”.<sup>35</sup> After the report, Victor continued as permanent secretary of both the PMC and PBM, hoping for greater provincial reorganisation, coordination and centralisation of mission, as well as improved information, propaganda and liaison with the home base. But, comments his biographer, the “constructive provincial approach” of this visionary, energetic, “impulsive, often impatient, puckish little priest” was distrusted by bishops preoccupied with their own local difficulties and afraid of interference with diocesan autonomy and sovereignty. Thus much of what Victor had hoped for in more coherent future missionary ventures “remained a dead letter”.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, both the PMC and the PBM seem to have been stimulated into new life in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, in the wake of Victor’s critique; this is certainly when the missionary women report most enthusiastically about participation in their deliberations, and this was the era of the opening quote about the possibilities of male-female partnership in mission work. So, alongside the glacial advance of very modest female

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<sup>33</sup> Goedhals, 111-115, 128, having consulted seven PMC reports, 1892-1938.

<sup>34</sup> Goedhals, 115, quoting Osmund Victor, *With One Accord in South Africa* (Johannesburg: CR Press, 1933), 16-17.

<sup>35</sup> James Cochrane. *Servants of Power: The Role of English-speaking Churches in South Africa: 1903-1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 162.

<sup>36</sup> Doris Thompson. *Priest and Pioneer: A Memoir of Father Osmund Victor, C.R. of South Africa* (Westminster: The Faith Press, 1958), 54-59, 125.

(mission) representation within male-dominated church structures, what were some of the key outcomes of those male-female and black-white interactions in the PMC and the PBM over close on a 40-year period and what might be their significance? In intermittent reports in the SWM journal, at least three areas recurred: the actual mechanics of female incorporation (how and when women were included, and with what powers), the broader impact of involvement and attendance on the women members, with some warm accounts of interesting discussions and stimulating speakers, and the changing nature and fate of specific resolutions brought to these bodies by the SWM for discussion and decision, particularly regarding the equipping of women for mission. This trio of themes could be summed up alliteratively as inclusion, inspiration and issues, and each will be briefly considered in turn.

*Inclusion: incorporating women missionaries into ecclesiastical consultation and decisionmaking*

In the last year of the First World War, at a time when some British women back in the United Kingdom were getting the vote, Deaconess Alice Snow and Miss Stringer were chosen as SWM delegates to the Provincial Missionary Conference in Bloemfontein in September-October 1918. The first PMC had been held in 1887. Bishops, clergy and laity were all represented – but, for the first three decades, not women. “They received a most courteous welcome and it was moved that they be allowed to speak and vote.” However, the legal paperwork had not yet caught up with such a step. “The President, after referring to the Constitutions and Canons 1915, said it would be better for our delegates not to vote pending action by the Provincial Council.” That right was officially gained in 1919 after the ninth Provincial Synod passed the relevant Additions to Canons.<sup>37</sup> But the SWM resolution that women missionaries be invited to take part in the deliberations of other church councils bore no fruit at that point because the House of Laymen threw out the Archbishop’s proposal to delete the word “male” before “communicant”, which would cause a delay of five years before the issue could be considered again.<sup>38</sup>

Things were moving too at the diocesan level as regards the incorporation of missionary women. In the diocese of George, the bishop’s summoning of Deaconess Florence to attend synod was seen as according recognition to the Order of Deaconesses and she took her seat there in October 1921 for the first time.<sup>39</sup> In late 1923, it was reported that the SWM con-

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<sup>37</sup> *SWMJ* 8 (March 1921): 11. “The President and Secretary of the Conference of Women Missionaries or their substitutes shall be invited to attend this Conference, with the right to speak and vote.”

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*: 12.

<sup>39</sup> *SWMJ* 11 (Oct. 1922): 7.

ference resolution was to go to episcopal synod to bring before all dioceses the desirability of inviting women missionaries to attend their diocesan missionary conference, where they had not already done so, with power to speak and vote. In the Bloemfontein diocese, for example, the women had recently gone, albeit very briefly.<sup>40</sup> However, the issue resurfaced with a partly negative outcome at the next Provincial Missionary Conference, in November 1923. Both the SWM president and secretary were present for the considerable discussion about the desirability of women missionaries having the right to *vote* in diocesan missionary and “native” conferences, and eventually those words were withdrawn. “We do not know on what grounds the objection was based”, the women commented mildly, “and our first feeling was one of disappointment”.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, at the next Provincial Synod a year later (November 1924), when the resolution including women in the definition of “communicant” was due to come up once again, the Bishop of St John’s was expected to propose that women missionaries should be represented at diocesan missionary conferences with similar privileges as male representatives.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the right to attend such mission conferences was confirmed, such that women missionaries were getting to diocesan gatherings in the 1920s and having their eyes and ears opened to the parallel, larger-scale struggle for inclusion of the black priesthood. Thus for the 1929 annual diocesan missionary conference in Natal, a large number of “native” clergy and delegates and a smaller number of white representatives, including five women missionaries, met at St Chad’s training college for black African teachers near Ladysmith. The bishop presided, listening with interest via interpreters. “The prevailing note running through many of the motions”, reported the SWM, was “that they, the natives, wished to feel they were part and parcel of the Church, that the Church was their Church, [and] consequently that the higher offices [presumably including archdeaconries and bishoprics] should be open to them”.<sup>43</sup>

But it was not until a decade and a half after the Provincial Board of Missions had been established in 1924 that it was decided there should be a women’s representative on its executive. Ida Marten, retired Pretoria missionary and ex-SWM president (1932-1937), was chosen in early 1940, “grateful that S.W.M. ha[d] been fully recognised as representing the considered opinion of the women workers of the Province”. She was busy, in a replica of developments in England, trying to create a “Central Council of Women’s Work in the Church of the Province”, for which she was compiling a roll of full-time female church workers, whether SWM members or not.

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<sup>40</sup> *SWMJ* 13 (Nov. 1923): 8, 14.

<sup>41</sup> “Editorial.” *SWMJ* 14 (May 1924): 2.

<sup>42</sup> *SWMJ* 15 (Nov. 1924): 2.

<sup>43</sup> *SWMJ* 24 (Aug 1929): 4.

Miss Marten was anxious to present all questions relating to them to the provincial authorities “in a businesslike and well-considered way”. The PBM Committee, under the chairmanship of the Bishop of Kimberley and with Osmund Victor as secretary, hoped to meet in early April to consider the agenda for an October meeting in George before the episcopal synod and other provincial meetings.<sup>44</sup>

Though Miss Marten went to George in late 1940, the PBM did not meet in the end (perhaps because of the war or Victor’s relocation to what was then Southern Rhodesia as dean of Salisbury cathedral), so that nothing at all was done regarding the subjects referred to them. Still, Marten had some useful interviews and drew up a short memo for the Archbishop on the first year’s activities of the Women’s Central Council – which provides an enlightening snapshot of the spectrum of Anglican female mission involvement as the Second World War unfolded. She had enrolled 170 workers from every diocese except St Helena and excluding members of religious communities. Of the 170, there were 47 women in medical work, 43 in educational and 80 in evangelistic work of many types, including all forms of social service; 71 of the women had been in South Africa for more than 15 years and 10 had been born in South Africa or Rhodesia.<sup>45</sup>

Ida Marten was eager to reiterate to the next SWM conference the special new advance for the Society of representation on the PBM executive committee, underlining her “unique position, being the only woman and the only lay representative on the Council”. In addition to chair and secretary (by then Fr Amor), there were seven further clergy members, of whom two were black Africans.<sup>46</sup> Miss Marten continued to attend the full meeting of the PBM each year, she reported in 1944, and committee meetings were held twice a year. She had also gone to the three-day PMC held at the CR headquarters in Rosettenville in October 1943 as one of four SWM representatives (rather than their more usual duo of president and secretary), along with Frances Chilton and the gifted and high-profile Dorothy Maud, who had pioneered women’s mission “settlements” in black townships. The chief subjects discussed had been religious teaching in church schools (especially as the government was assuming more responsibility), the training of clergy and lay workers for missionary work, the proposed unification of “Native” marriage laws, and translation and religious literature – with only the first two topics being picked up in discussion at the SWM conference which followed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *SWMJ* 42 (April 1940): 3.

<sup>45</sup> “Notes from Miss Marten,” *SWMJ* 43 (Nov. 1940): 3.

<sup>46</sup> *SWMJ* 46 (April 1942): 4, 8.

<sup>47</sup> “Report by Miss Marten,” *SWMJ* 51 (Nov. 1944): 6-7. “A Few Notes on the Provincial Missionary Conference From A. Prescott,” *SWMJ* 49 (Nov. 1943): 4.

By 1955, the SWM's last official year of existence, the women missionaries' representative was one of 11 (rather than 10) members on the executive committee of the Provincial Board of Missions. However, the rather perfunctory note by retiring president Frances Chilton, outlining for members the kind of work done by the PBM,<sup>48</sup> suggests she was less excited than Ida Marten had been by any opportunities for a higher national female mission profile which this body presented. Perhaps the crisis for mission work generally which the Bantu Education Act had sparked off, combined with the alarming decline of the SWM's own ageing female membership, discouraged Miss Chilton from expressing the stronger hopes for women's leadership and meaningful involvement in decisionmaking characteristic of her energetic predecessor.

In considering inclusion, we return finally to the broader issue of female incorporation into synodical government. Appearing on the agenda for the SWM Bloemfontein conference of January 1942 was a resolution from Miss H Masson “[t]hat women be eligible for election as lay representatives in the Synods of the Church of the Province”.<sup>49</sup> The fate of this aspiration was instructive, illustrative of the positively glacial pace of change in ecclesiastical inclusivity in South African Anglicanism. The redoubtable Miss Marten was at the Provincial Synod of November 1945 in Cape Town. Almost the first item on the agenda was the question of the admission of women to diocesan and provincial synods, with the rest of the day spent almost entirely on it. The matter was introduced by the Bishop of Natal, who mentioned that the SWM had passed a resolution in its favour.

It was most interesting and illuminating (commented Miss Marten) to hear the various points of view: the objections ranged from the historical and canonical to the fear that it would tend to laziness on the part of Churchmen if women could go to Synods instead of them, or that women could not grapple with Church finance or legal matters! However, in the end the Laity, the Clergy and the Bishops all agreed that the word “male” should be deleted from the Canons so that it should read “Communicants” only, and so include women.

But she pointed out that the issue would have to come up again in five years time in Provincial Synod and could only then finally be passed. She explained its tortuous antecedents:

Ten years ago the proposal to admit women to Synods was defeated by the Laity, so the Clergy and Bishops did not vote on it. Five years ago the Laity passed it but the Clergy turned it down by a very small majority against, but it was suggested

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<sup>48</sup> *SWMJ* 69 (Nov. 1955): 9.

<sup>49</sup> *SWMJ* 45 (Oct. 1941): 4.

that the Diocesan Synods be asked to discuss it and report before this last Provincial Synod. Most of the Dioceses decided in its favour. In November, 1945, the Laity passed it unanimously and the Bishops and Clergy, voting separately, by a large majority. So perhaps there may be some women representatives in the Provincial Synod in 1955!<sup>50</sup>

She was right to say “perhaps”, since in fact, as mentioned earlier, such female representation in Provincial Synod did not eventuate until a quarter of a century later, in 1970. So it is worth remembering, once more, that the first women **missionaries** attended a provincial missionary conference over half a century prior to that, in 1918, which underlines the exceptional recognition accorded to them by virtue of their paid and long-term role. It has become a truism that missionary service opened up opportunities and responsibilities for Christian women which would not have been available in the more rigid home setting. This official incorporation into provincial mission consultation, long before anything comparable for the “ordinary” white woman in the pew, confirms the distinctive status of these Anglican women missionaries.

*Inspiration: women missionaries benefiting from provincial involvement*

A handful of very positive reports from later gatherings of the Provincial Missionary Conference enable one to glimpse the enlightenment and fellowship which corporate consultation brought the SWM representatives, even while much of each day was devoted to presenting and discussing various reports and motions. At Bloemfontein in 1938, for instance, the secretary, Miss J Batcham, found “[t]here was a delightful spirit of friendliness and fellowship and interest throughout the Conference”. It was she (as noted at the outset) who looked so hopefully on the request for parallel gendered reports on initiation. It was also important that the gathering was in touch with wider political issues affecting black African economic and social welfare – and the complaints which blacks were voicing. Thus, there was a presentation on the new areas of land “released” for African occupation under the 1936 Land Act, and they also heard a very fine report on Native Education by black school principal, Harry Madibane. He strongly deprecated the abuse being hurled at mission schools and wanted such education to remain under educationists, and not be transferred to the Native Administration Department.<sup>51</sup>

The October 1943 PMC exemplified the spirit of social reform abroad among liberals and Christians in wartime Johannesburg, when more pro-

<sup>50</sup> “Notes from Miss Marten,” *SWMJ* 54 (May 1946): 5.

<sup>51</sup> “The Provincial Missionary Conference, Bloemfontein, 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> October, 1938,” *SWMJ* 40 (April 1939): 8-11.

gressive possibilities for South Africa were being envisaged.<sup>52</sup> The women were fortunate to hear from the conference president, the occasionally mercurial but famously eloquent Bishop of Johannesburg, Geoffrey Clayton, a “brilliant” address on the message of the gospel and its relation to the “brotherhood of man”. Clayton stressed the difficulties blacks faced in education, as well as from the colour bar in industry, segregation policy and low wages. “He pleaded with us not to lower our ideals and to remember always that the brotherhood of man is a Christian thing”, noted Miss Prescott, standing in for the SWM secretary.

“Another most forceful speech on the opening day” came from Margaret Ballinger MP, who expatiated for an hour on the economic and moral problems for blacks in urban areas – housing, wages, education, opportunity. The journal report gives her talk the most space, with its urging of the need to acknowledge the size and significance of the urban black population. After Ballinger answered questions the next day on land rights and other matters, Amor got the conference to pass a resolution for reform on the lines which she suggested.<sup>53</sup> The PMC was not alone in lamenting the insecurity of urban African family life, but it was good for SWM members to hear a formidable female parliamentarian so ably underlining pressing black needs, whether for urban land purchase and more affordable house rents, or to reconstruct family life and prevent the splitting up of married couples “owing to the needs of work away from home”.<sup>54</sup>

Questions of African culture also featured, with a very good paper on **lobola** (though opinion was divided), and lots of most interesting discussion from Amor’s report on their research into trying to Christianise initiation schools, as there was often “much cruelty and social harm done”. Experiments with missionary substitutes had not yet proved successful, however. The Conference was delighted that the bishops pronounced the highest order of the Church open to all, irrespective of race or colour (which sounds like an African clergy concern about the possibility of black episcopacy – which did not in fact eventuate until the 1960s); it appealed to government for compulsory education for all African children in the next 15 years; and it favoured the abandonment of the term “native”, for which there was “a marked dislike”.<sup>55</sup>

The inspiration of province-wide church gatherings shines out once more in Ida Marten’s account of how fortunate she was to attend the opening service of Provincial Synod in Cape Town in November 1945. “[The

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<sup>52</sup> See Saul Dubow and Alan Jeeves, eds. *South Africa’s 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> “A Few Notes on the Provincial Missionary Conference. From A. Prescott,” *SWMJ* 49 (Nov. 1943): 4-7.

<sup>54</sup> “From Miss Marten,” *SWMJ*, 49 (Nov. 1943): 8.

<sup>55</sup> *SWMJ* 49 (Nov. 1943): 5-6.

beautiful sung Eucharist in the cathedral was] “very impressive in its dignity and ceremonial. It made one realise so vividly what a widespread and wonderfully varied Church we belong to; all races were represented and every form of activity in the Church of the Province.”<sup>56</sup>

Likewise, when Ethel Wallace, at work in the Transkei, went to the PMC for the first time in 1949, in Port Elizabeth, she pronounced it “a thrilling experience”. She had never seen so many bishops at close quarters — only three of the 12 diocesans were absent. They were kept pretty hard at it, she commented, with no time to do any shopping, and only able to greet the sisters of the local religious community by not attending the last meeting. Of the three categories of men present, the bishops, the smallest group, seemed to do the least speaking, though one or two had a good deal to say. The European and African clergy talked most (she observed) and, with one or two exceptions, spoke extremely well. The laity were mostly blacks, “some of whom were real orators”, but who always stressed the financial side of questions. She remarked on the splendid grasp of the faith by some black priests, especially one “who made a most lucid and heart-felt Apologia”, while another spoke very clearly against racialism in the church. Unfortunately, a section of members tried to pass a motion ending the conference but she felt it did “fill a need” and was “a very valuable event in our South African Church life”. Although the PMC had no power to legislate, yet she considered it would be a loss to give it up, as it was so good to ask questions, express views and get inspiration and encouragement.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, the Provincial Missionary Conference at its best could give women missionary leaders a greater sense of South African Anglicanism as a whole. They drew inspiration from the heartening splendour of its worship, the eloquence of its clergy, its attempts to combat racial and social injustice. However, despite Miss Batcham’s enthusiastic optimism in 1938, the *SWM Journal* gives little sense that the small number of female representatives at what were widely spaced gatherings could make much inroad by way of cooperative mission work at the provincial level. Yet it should not be forgotten that, “on the ground”, groups of women missionaries or religious sisters often worked in effective partnerships with male clergy or religious orders, a history of “comradeship in work” which merits further exploration.

*Issues: women missionaries bringing their own resolutions to provincial bodies*

Apart from regularly voicing concerns for greater female participation in the deliberations of the church, SWM representatives at provincial meetings

<sup>56</sup> “Notes from Miss Marten,” *SWMJ* 54 (May 1946): 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> E.M. Wallace, “The Provincial Missionary Conference, 1949,” *SWMJ* 62 (April 1950): 3-6.

focused most frequently on the question of female ecclesiastical training, a counterpart, perhaps, to the invariable male concern with more coherent theological education across the various dioceses. The only other prominent issue, early on, was women’s concern to strengthen Anglican work among Cape Town Muslims. In 1924, SWM was disappointed that the PMC did not think priests were needed to work among the Muslim men, but were happy to leave the responsibility to women missionaries.<sup>58</sup> By contrast, when Miss Attlee returned to the issue at the 1938 PMC, her paper was sympathetically discussed by several speakers, including the Bishop of Pretoria and Arch-deacon Christelow of Southern Rhodesia (today’s Zimbabwe), all realising the gravity of the situation. The women felt that the immediate need for more active work among Muslims generally (a cause close to their heart) had been well “ventilated” and, they hoped, would be deeply considered.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding female training and ministry, the recurrent major SWM issue, the women missionaries had a threefold agenda: improved equipping of African women Christians, better preparation of women coming out from Britain for mission work, and the need to encourage and train local white South African missionaries. This last question was interwoven (as it had been in an earlier period, independently of dealings with provincial bodies) with tortuous attempts at financing a suitable building to house such local training, a process which was more fraught the second time around, and ultimately proved abortive.

At the 1938 PMC, the SWM secretary, using notes from the proposer and the SWM 1937 conference discussion, presented their resolution on the need for training “Bantu women” as evangelists.<sup>60</sup> The Bishop of Zululand was supportive but sounded a note of caution – he urged them to “go on quietly training their leaders and to be careful in so doing not to infringe on native custom, more especially in the training of girls and young wives, who are expected to stay at home”. Two SSM Fathers (from the Society of the Sacred Mission, who worked on the Free State/Basutoland border), Amor and Knight, also spoke and the Bishop of George wanted coloured women included – which was done.

They had hoped (wrote Miss Batcham) that some of the “natives” present, especially the priests would speak for or against the resolution, as “we really wanted to hear their point of view”. A good number voted in favour of the resolutions, and in conversation with some of the priests from the former Transvaal province afterwards, they said they would welcome the help of the black women in dealing with young girls and MU work.

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<sup>58</sup> “Editorial,” *SWMJ* 14 (May 1924): 2.

<sup>59</sup> “The Provincial Missionary Conference, Bloemfontein, 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> October, 1938,” *SWMJ* 40 (April 1939): 9.

<sup>60</sup> See *SWMJ* 36 (April 1937): 25, for its adoption.

Apparently this training could best be given under the auspices of the Mothers’ Union which was acceptable to most “native” priests.<sup>61</sup>

Five years later, the black members of conference were a little more forthcoming on this issue. After the SWM reported to the 1943 PMC, black Africans asked two questions: Could wives of South African (Bantu) priests be SWM associates in the same way as the wives of European missionaries? And was anything being done to train African women as full-time evangelists?<sup>62</sup> (In fact, although a 1939 SWM resolution had suggested that any “non-European” women doing mission work full time should be invited to join the Society, Mina Soga, a prominent African educationist and church-woman involved in social upliftment, whom SWM had hoped to have as a speaker at that earlier conference, was the first – and possibly the only – black African to attend an SWM gathering, in 1947.)<sup>63</sup> HG Masson wrote eloquently in 1948 of black African women’s suitability to evangelism — they were better educated than the men, who already had colleges provided for them anyhow. The “mighty power” of the women was “running to waste at the present time”, she lamented.<sup>64</sup>

Again, in 1949, much was said at the PMC about the need for some kind of short course for wives of African clergy – perhaps on the lines of intensive one- to two-week vacation courses.<sup>65</sup> (These were well established at Lovedale Bible School for Nonconformist women, especially the Methodist Biblewomen).<sup>66</sup> However, although there were various local attempts at short-term religious training of black Anglican women over the years, systematic documentation or evaluation of such work seems to be lacking. The short-lived theological and practical course run in the late 1950s by Hannah Stanton at Tumelong in Lady Selborne, Pretoria, for a handful of African women, provides a rare example of such a training venture where the students are named, pictured and warmly commended for distinctive spiritual gifts.<sup>67</sup>

The issue of white women’s training and residential care took up far more space in the journal over the years than it can here. The putative Missionary Training Home in Cape Town had a brief existence in the couple

<sup>61</sup> *SWMJ* 40 (April 1939): 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> “From Miss Marten,” *SWMJ* 49 (Nov. 1943): 8.

<sup>63</sup> *SWMJ* 56 (Mar. 1947): 7, 14.

<sup>64</sup> “The Training of Women for Church Work,” *SWMJ* 59 (Nov. 1948), 4.

<sup>65</sup> “The Provincial Missionary Conference, 1949,” *SWMJ* 62 (April 1950): 6.

<sup>66</sup> Discussed in Deborah Gaitskell. “Hot Meetings and Hard Kraals: African Biblewomen in Transvaal Methodism, 1924-60,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* XXX, 3 (2000): 297-301. Reprinted in *Missionalia*, 31, 1 (2003): 97-102.

<sup>67</sup> See Hannah Stanton. *Go Well Stay Well: South Africa August 1956 to May 1960* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), Chapter VIII, and Deborah Gaitskell. “Apartheid, Mission, and Independent Africa: From Pretoria to Kampala with Hannah Stanton,” in Brian Stanley, ed. *Missions, Nationalism, and the End of Empire* (Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003).

of years as the First World War ended, but it then transmogrified into the Women’s Missionary Hostel in late 1921. It aimed to provide simple but comfortable accommodation for local women workers in the Malay Mission or coloured parishes, to receive up-country missionaries needing a change or holiday at the coast, to give hospitality to those arriving in Cape Town or leaving on furlough and, last but not least, to train and guide new recruits for church work “among white or native people”.<sup>68</sup> The Hostel persisted until the mid-1930s, but only a few ever came for training: the other functions of welcome, help and accommodation were more successfully accomplished. There was interesting discussion then and again later in the journal why white South African girls were not offering – was the fault the missionaries’ off-putting lifestyle and manner, or the inadequate publicity of the call, or colour prejudice, or parental misgivings?<sup>69</sup>

In late 1944 the SPG offered a grant to the Archbishop for a proposed training scheme for women missionaries in South Africa – but delayed action meant it was allocated elsewhere, though Ida Marten came under pressure from the Provincial Board of Missions in 1947 to produce a detailed plan nevertheless. The incoming president, Frances Chilton, subsequently presented a budget to the PBM but, after some discussion, decided it would be very difficult to finance the centre and the possibility of keeping it full of students was “very doubtful”. She commented ruefully: “Could I have been fairly confident that students would definitely be forthcoming and so justify the fight I would have pressed the matter, but very few concrete examples of people offering from this country seemed to be available and the matter hinged on this.”<sup>70</sup>

Again, soul searching followed about whether SWM and the church more broadly had really tried to bring home to young white South Africans what their missionary responsibilities were. ML Tracey suggested once more that appealing models and advocates were key: she and two friends experienced a call to the mission field through the SPG secretary for schools: “[S]he was of the Moberly family and she was young and pretty and attractive and well dressed, absorbed in her subject and utterly sincere. We all fell for her and she made a deep impression on us.”<sup>71</sup>

In fact, Johannesburg’s charismatic urban women missionaries seem to have evoked a similarly passionate response back in 1943, when 20 girls from the elite white schools of Roedean, Kingsmead, St Andrew’s and DSG Pretoria went to Kingsmead for four days’ study of social services for black Africans. Each day they did four to five hours’ research in black locations,

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<sup>68</sup> Deaconess Julia. “Women’s Missionary Hostel,” *SWMJ* 9 (Oct 1921): 1.

<sup>69</sup> See *SWMJ* 8 (March 1921): 6.

<sup>70</sup> F. Chilton. “Report of Meeting of the P.B.M. Cape Town, October 1947,” *SWMJ* 57 (Nov. 1947): 3.

<sup>71</sup> *SWMJ* 59 (Nov. 1948): 6.

entering the slum yards and seeing all they could. “They simply would not stop, they wore us out”, said one of the workers. “And later in the day after the Bishop of Johannesburg had lectured on the social implications of the Incarnation and answered rows of questions, we tried to get the girls to make merry or dance. But they insisted on asking more and more questions. One evening they enquired almost fiercely why they hadn’t been taught about these things before.”<sup>72</sup> So in the right circumstances and with the right people, connections could be made, eyes opened and new commitments forged to Christian-motivated change among young South African whites, especially in the ferment of the war years and the sense of social urgency current in progressive circles.

In 1949, the PBM was considering three different ways of fulfilling female training needs: SPG students would get their final preparation in South Africa; South African girls might go to Rhodes University (though that academic training was later deemed insufficiently devotional); and “non-European” women would be trained on missions or elsewhere. Confusingly, while the idea of an actual training centre was still making headway, though lack of finance blocked progress, Elsie Wolfe raised the question of “A Home for Retired Missionaries”,<sup>73</sup> a confirmation of the rather gloomy trajectory of the ageing, impoverished female mission workforce. Wolfe proceeded to fundraise for it, though in the end, after her death, when just over half the target had been reached by 1955, the plan had to be abandoned as unfeasible.<sup>74</sup> The training centre was likewise stillborn. A place on the Irene property of the Wantage Sisters was deemed too far from town and, reporting to the PBM, Chilton only had three names of women interested in training, none of them ideal – a 32 year old with asthma, and girls of only 17 and 18 with matric and typing or business training. “This went to show that our request for a College was hopeless [since] we had no students”, concluded the disappointed SWM president.<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

The *SWM Journal* has been used here to help gauge how far and with what effect missionary women were able to carve out, sustain and expand a space for female input into Anglican missionary thinking and practice in South Africa by the mid-1950s. A question about possible precursors to female ordination lurks in the background. The link between the missionary move-

<sup>72</sup> Schools and Missionary Work,” *SWMJ* 49 (Nov 1943): 10.

<sup>73</sup> Ida Marten. “Notes from the S.W.M. Representative on the Provincial Board of Missions Executive,” *SWMJ* 60 (May 1949): 4; E.M. Wolfe. “The Training Centre for Women Missionaries.” *Ibid.*: 5.

<sup>74</sup> “Home for Retired Missionaries in South Africa,” *SWMJ* 69 (Nov. 1955): 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> *SWMJ* 66 (April 1952): 8-10.

ment and ordination might seem obvious: Africans from the beginning of evangelisation experienced and approved the ministry of women.<sup>76</sup> This might come from the wives of priests or missionaries, from female teachers or mission nurses, from members and leaders of the Mothers’ Union and of religious sisterhoods, or from women missionaries teaching them the basics of the Christian faith in preparation for baptism and confirmation which the SWM was keen to affirm in 1913. But women’s mission leadership gained official corporate recognition via the PMC and PBM. SWM representatives had gender-specific requests about both their own training and participation in church decisionmaking and about better provision and missionary preparation for local white and black women. They faced setbacks as well as hopes for comradeship with missionary men in shared work.

The incorporation of missionary women into provincial missionary bodies between 1918 and 1955, it could be argued, indeed had the potential to “double the value” of working with mission men, as was hoped in the late 1930s, but SWM leaders could only partly fulfil that potential, even though they did manage to pierce the seemingly inviolable male domination of representative and decisionmaking structures. Because they were paid for their church work and might do it for life, which commanded respect, while their numbers included several deaconesses at a time when the Anglicans were upgrading their recognition of that venerable order, SWM women had to be acknowledged and included in missionary thinking across all the dioceses, however reluctantly by some. This contrasted strongly with the suburban white women of the parishes, for instance, who were largely limited to a parochial input into church life for decades. The women missionaries were working alongside white and black clergy across Southern Africa, helping to teach the faith to all African women and children. Their corporate organisation in SWM as a national representative body gave them an identifiable presence on the mission landscape and offered a way to apply modest pressure for greater recognition of female mission needs, especially regarding wider consultation and improved training.

Yet as this cohort of missionary women aged, and more and more of them returned to England in retirement, their impact on ecclesiastical democracy in South Africa perhaps waned accordingly. It presumably further eroded their power and influence that they did not manage to summon up a substantial response from local white South African women to the mission call, and made little progress with their aspiration of concerted training for African women. While the acceleration of attention towards women’s public role in South African Anglicanism after 1960 may have had little **direct** connection with these female missionary predecessors – and further research

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<sup>76</sup> This is the argument of Nancy Charton. “*Umfundisi Wethu*: Vignettes from St Matthew’s Mission, Keiskammahoeck, 1986,” in Ackerman et al., 338.

might throw more light on this question – the reality that the white male church hierarchy had to take account of significant female mission leadership over the previous half century surely needs to be factored into the history of both Anglican women’s broader ecclesiastical recognition and female ordination in South Africa.

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