

**‘As shee preachers hold forth Christ’: Writing and Speaking in
Sara Jones’s Challenge to Episcopacy, *The Relation of a
Gentlewoman* (1642)**

Abstract

When Sara Jones spoke in front of her separatist congregation in 1632, she was opening herself up to criticism for going against scriptural precedents: it was not divinely sanctioned that women should speak in church. Perhaps deriving confidence from having defended herself in front of the High Commission Court, led by William Laud, Jones supported women’s liberty to speak so that they could be edified and then contribute to justifying and upholding their congregation’s doctrines. This essay examines Jones’s developing arguments in *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* (1641) and *To Sions Lovers* (1644) and compares them with some accounts of women preaching within their separatist congregations. Women’s words were considered, by Jones, as a major weapon in the fight against the Laudian bishops of the established church, and she would write to prove not only their validity, but also their importance.

Keywords Sara Jones; gathered churches; separatist congregations; Court of High Commission; women preachers; women and the bible

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Challenge to Episcopacy, *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* (1642)**

Sara Jones’s *The Relation of a Gentlewoman long under the persecution of the Bishops; with some observations passed in the High Commission Court during her bondage* was “printed at the cost of S. J. for her owne use and her private friends” (A1). It consists of a relation of her and her London congregation’s sufferings under the Court of High Commission (“the persecution of the Bishops”), which appears to be intertwined with a kind of sermon. Jones introduces the *Relation* by writing:

I spake and writ this writing, being a sufferer with the fortie [congregation members]; we being blamed, and counted not able (through ignorance) to defend the way we walked in, I strained my self to declare my judgement thus farre, as time would permit me (A2^v).

Her spirit had apparently been “stirred” by the appearance of separatist preachers, including “M^r. Rowbarie and M^r. Simpson” on 29 November 1632 (A2), as well as the arrest, appearance, and imprisonment of herself and forty other members of her congregation for meeting at a conventicle in the house of Humphrey Barnett, a brewer.¹ Proving the bishops’ assertions about the congregation members’ ignorance wrong, Jones proceeds to speak in front of her fellow members in order to encourage them during the time of their persecution. After urging different members to continue in their faith by strengthening the bonds of their group, she directly addresses the whole congregation: “And to you, I say, dearly beloved brethren, that are gathered together in the name of the Lord, [...], that walke in the way and order of the Gospell” (B2^{r-v}).² She advises the “Elders” of her church, “to

you, I say, that are as guides to goe before others in all well-doing” (B3^{r-v}), and proceeds to advise pastors and teachers, deacons, “deaconesses,” and ordinary church members on the proper practice of those in each office. Remarkably, after this moment of powerful articulation, Jones then excuses her speaking, writing: “though I said unadvisedly sometime before, I say to you, which I desire may be passed by, yet I thinke I have the minde of the Lord, and that this cometh of him” (B6). The phrase “I say to you” (formulated in various ways by Jones) echoes Christ in the Gospels when his audience were to take away a particular point or message from his sermons and allegories, and hence is reminiscent also of the practices of contemporary preachers when giving sermons. What her small apology shows though is that using such formulae, and the position they invoked, was problematic for women in gathered congregations. However, that Jones was able to speak aloud to her congregation at all is remarkable, and her published works express a desire to allow more women liberty to speak in order to knit together the congregation. The discovery of Jones’s text as a rare example of a surviving female-authored sermon raises important questions for the study of women’s contribution to the rise of the gathered churches, and this is what this article will discuss.

The problems encountered by women speaking in the gathered churches have been an important part of scholarly discussions examining women’s activities in separatist congregations. Most recent contributors to this analysis, especially historians, have tended to assume that women had limited roles within their congregations, and were allowed to speak only on well-defined occasions (Crawford 117-84; Greaves; Laurence; Ludlow). This indeed seems to have been the intention of later congregations of the 1650s, at least from the information we

have. The 1658 Baptist records of the Abingdon Association, for instance, discuss and set down their approved rules on “how far women may speake in the church and how far not?” taking their reference, as all separatist congregations did, from 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:11 (White 185).³ Their answers outlined four occasions on which women could not speak where “their speaking shall shew a not acknowledging of the inferioritie of their sexe and so be an usurping authoritie over the man”: a woman could not “publikely teach in the church,” she “may not stand up as a ruler in the church,” she could not decide on “doctrines of cases in the church,” and she could not “speak in prayer as the mouth of the church” (185). Women were allowed only to confess their faith, express desire for baptism, as witnesses to others’ admissions, and to defend themselves against excommunication. Earlier, in 1653, John Rogers had written in *Ohel or Bethshemesh: A Tabernacle for the Sun*, which included a collection of men and women’s spiritual experiences, that “*women* are forbid to speak by way of *Teaching, or Ruling* in the *Church*, but they are not forbid to speak, when it is in obedience, and subjection to the *Church*” (294). He went on to instruct women to “be not too forward, and yet not too backward, but hold fast your liberty,” but next to this in the margin he reminds them, “be not too full of words” (476). That Rogers’s rules were less defined than the Baptist Association’s may well be because he was an Independent minister who controlled the membership of his own congregation, whereas the Baptists’ rules were more far-reaching and had to be applied to manifold cases by a variety of ministers.⁴

Women’s experiences from this period give few insights into the practice of their speaking in congregations, although there are more references than have previously been noted in the studies mentioned above. This indicates that the

recovery of such works is ongoing and there may be more explicit information yet to be discovered. A key example showing how the practice was enacted is Katherine Sutton's, whose conversion narrative depicts her reservations about baptism as well as the discovery of her "guift of singing," and interpreted a sickness of hers, occurring around 1658, as being imposed on her by the Lord, "because I did not declare to the Church with whom I walked; those things he had made known unto mee" (C2^v). Afterwards, she writes that she was

so moved in my spirit, that I could not tell how to keep in these things any longer, and therefore went to the Church to that end, but I then could not find him that I would have spoken of it unto, for him to declare unto the rest, so I returned, and did it not (C2^v).

Here, Sutton recalls the congregational practice of women conveying their opinions to delegated men (sometimes elders) so that they could lay them out in front of the church. A similar system is recorded by Anne Venn, whose *A Wise Virgins Lamp Burning* was published in 1658 out of papers her stepfather found after her death four years earlier. Her Independent congregation in Fulham seemed to require that ordinary members, perhaps women *and* men, write their difficulties, prayer intentions, and experiences of the Lord, on papers to be read and preached upon by the minister, in front of the church. The first time Venn did this, before she was admitted as a church member, she wrote that she craved "the prayers of his people in that meeting in the behalf of my troubled soul, and accordingly, (though with much repulse in my self) I wrote a paper" (D2). Such declared reluctance on the part of both women could be understood as part of the godly woman "image" that they and their publishers and prefatory writers wanted to create, but it does show some of the practices that were in place.

The congregational environments that enabled Sara Jones to speak in front of the members of her church, and that of the four different congregations that practiced during the 1650s, seem to be at odds. It does not seem likely that Jones's congregation was particularly lenient towards women speaking in the church compared with other contemporary churches, as she does not at any time excuse the act of speaking itself: her only excuse is that she strayed into speaking a sermon-like language. Directed, as her text seems to be, to both her congregation and the wider community of "saints" in order to strengthen and uphold them in the time of their persecutions, it would seem unlikely that she would alienate other, more conservative, gathered churches. A more likely explanation is that earlier congregations, in the 1630s and early 1640s, were more tolerant of women speaking to the group, and altered their stance as the congregations became more popular, and began to be criticized by opponents. One of the richest record books of the seventeenth-century Baptists, the church meeting in Broadmead, Bristol shows that a woman, Dorothy Hazzard, "separated from the world" in the early 1630s with some others "as a company of good people" to repeat sermon notes and "hear the best men preach." Edward Terrill, the church's recorder, wrote that

the world and wicked men vilified them, [...], as that they had women preachers among them, because there were many good women, that frequented their assembling, who, when they should upon occasion be speaking with the world about the things thereof, in their buying and selling, they would speak very heavenly (Underhill 11).

That women would speak of God in the public realm, outside the protection of the meeting-house, seems to have angered those who remained dedicated to the established church: Katherine Gillespie, in her *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century*, mentions an emerging "equation of religious toleration with

the awful spectacle of women preachers” because of “deeply entrenched prohibitions against the exercise of female religious authority” (Gillespie 11). Whether as a reaction to these criticisms of women preachers or because of a greater adherence to scripture, by the mid-1640s the Broadmead congregation were abiding by the practice of having a sister of the church speak through a brother if they had any doctrinal doubts (Underhill 33). A similar case was that of Susanna Parr, a member of Lewis Stucley’s separatist congregation which met in Exeter Cathedral. Her narrative charts how women’s participation and autonomy within the congregation changed after she and eight or nine men had founded it at Stucley’s advice. She writes that this new congregation first allowed women to speak on all occasions:

As for women speaking, it was usually practiced among us by the rest of my sex. And it is well known that the power was pretended at first to be in the body of the people, in the multitude, so that everyone had the liberty of assenting or dissenting, of arguing and debating any matter proposed, whether men or women (*Susanna’s Apologie* 76).

As the congregation was established, male officers were appointed to oversee the running of the church, and Parr was then told her speaking was “disrelish; unless a question was proposed and [she] was desired to give [her] answer unto it” (13). As membership grew, practices seem to have become more rigid and, as Jones’s work was published early in the growth of the gathered churches, she may have experienced more freedom to argue and debate “any matter proposed,” like Parr.

From accounts like this it might be assumed that the accusations that women preached to congregations were merely used to tarnish the reputation of the newly-formed separatist churches, but, for these accusations to have any weight, some women preachers must have gained certain notoriety. John

Collinges, a minister who published Mary Simpson's death-bed conversion narrative in 1649, was anxious that she was not accused of being a woman preacher by telling others her experiences on her death-bed. He wrote: "I meane not that she was a *Pulpit-preacher*, No, God had taught her to be wise to sobriety, [...], as *Priscilla & Aquila*, by privately instructing others in the wayes of God [Acts 18:26]" (*Faith & Experience* 15). The quickness of Collinges' denial that Simpson behaved in any way like a preacher, a male role, would seem to point to the attempts of other women to occupy this position. Rumors abounded of women preachers in accounts by heresiographers, although as Dorothy Ludlow writes, apart from the example of Anne Hutchinson "there is very little concrete evidence to support the numerous accounts of women preaching in private or public – accounts which are invariably emotional, hostile, inexact, banal, and polemical" (95). Ludlow outlines the hostile response of Thomas Edwards to the female preacher, Mrs Attaway, in his *Gangraena* of 1645, where he claims that her preaching was ineffective and that she subsequently ran off with another woman's husband (9?). At this time there were petitions presented to the House of Commons against groups of women preachers that were said to cause "great Rents and Divisions in divers and sundry Families in and about the City" (possibly through lascivious behavior as Edwards had hinted), and some women were questioned "in relation to the women Preachers who stand committed to custody."⁵ These sorts of accounts indicate that women were preaching, even if responses to the practice were mostly derogatory, but more "concrete" records, such as surviving printed female-authored accounts and sermons, are few.

The discovery of Sara Jones's address to her congregation, then, is further proof that some women were speaking in front of their congregations (in public),

and that such behavior was not always presented with accompanying condemnation. It is also an indication that women might have been given more power in earlier gathered churches before the mid-1640s, before practices became more prescribed. There is evidence for this in Jones's text: the second part, directed "To all the Scattered Saints," can be internally dated to between 1640 and 1642, whereas she explains that most of the first part dates from November 1632. In this second part, Jones seems more aware of criticisms she might face as a woman speaking, writing, and publishing, and takes more care to justify the reasons why she is doing so. She writes that she had

thought to have been silent, but beleiving the Lord will do well to *Sion*, I therefore speak, and for *Sions* sake I dare not hold my peace. Now though women may not speak in the Church, I beleieve they may speak for edification to the Church (C4^v).

Referring to 1 Corinthians 14 ("But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men for edification, and exhortation, and comfort"), Jones shows that if she speaks by way of prophesying, she may edify and comfort her church, despite other scriptural evidence that she should be silent.

Until recently, Jones's *The Relation of a Gentlewoman* has been left unexplored by researchers, in part perhaps because the only extant copy is held by the Alexander Turnbull Library in New Zealand, and the only way to access a copy in England is to view a microfilm reproduction in the Bodleian Library (it is not yet available on *Early English Books Online*). Jones's two later texts, *To Sions Virgins* (4 November 1644) and *To Sions Lovers* (6 November 1644), have been discussed in three recent studies of seventeenth-century women's political writings (Gillespie 9, 11, 33; Gray 22-24, 30; Mack 114).⁶ Another reason for Jones's first work's neglect might be that it is unclear, immediately, who the

persecuted gentlewoman was without researching the mysterious “S. J.” of the title page and signed at the end of the pamphlet. The Baptist historian, Stephen Wright, has gone some way to establishing, beyond all doubt, that this pamphlet was authored by the same Sara Jones who was a member of what is generally accepted to be the first separatist congregation in London, set up by Henry Jacob in 1616, and the same gentlewoman that appeared frequently in the Court of High Commission, maintained by Laud, then Bishop of London.⁷ Jones was the daughter of Sir Thomas Hayes, mayor of London from 1614-15 and livery man of the Draper’s Company, and the husband of Thomas Jones, a dyer. The couple had two children, Martha and Sara, and lived at Lambeth, London, during the 1630s and early 1640s, before moving to Tower Hill.⁸ After her imprisonment she writes that her *Relation* would have been much “enlarged” but she had limited time “in regard of the duties of my familie” (B9). She worked through the night by candlelight every night from “the 29. Novemb. 1632. to the third of December following,” as she “could not spend much time of the day” (B9). She was adamant that her writing would not impinge on her family duties, as her imprisonment had already done. Jones’s congregation, which in 1642 was under the ministry of Henry Jessey, had separated from the Anglican Church because of what they thought were unscriptural and false practices.⁹ Groups like these were under especial pressure in the 1630s while efforts were being made to take the established church back to the practices of its original reformation. The church had begun to restore symbols of its power which included ministers’ vestments, crosses, and ornate iconography that decorated the inside and outside of church buildings. Extra feast days were imposed, prayers and sermons became more prescribed, and any subject who did not regularly attend church was fined on pain

of excommunication. On the same day in November that Jones was released from her appearance in court, she writes that Dr Cornelius Burgess was fined for “not contributing toward the reparation of [St] Pauls” for which the “Prelates” were “pleading” (A2).¹⁰ The Cathedral was to be made “great” and the prelates were heard “oft repeating, that God was a great God, and would have a great House to dwell in” (A2); Jones subverts this by writing that God would “have a great House to dwell in,” but “not made with hands, but new creatures sanctified by the King of the Saints” (A3). Referring in the first section of her work “to all the Builders of Sion,” she shows how the building in which God dwells should be made up of believers’ bodies (or sanctified creatures): a more metaphorical church than the false, idolatrous buildings of the prelates that “prophane his Day with jangling steeple bells, or baptized [anointed] stairs” (B9). These observations are reminiscent of the better-known pamphlets of Katherine Chidley, who also perceived the greediness of the clergy in *The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ* (1641), where she observes that even “they that understand but little, doe see and know that that Government is vaine and Popish; and that is the reason (as I conceive) why so many refuse to conforme to it” (C4). As a result of this separation, Jones and her congregation were mercilessly persecuted by the church officers and were forced to appear in front of the Court of High Commission, both at St Paul’s and Lambeth Palace, several times. *The Relation* certainly seems to be a response to these imprisonments, fines, and appearances: it is a relation, or account, of the actions of tyrannical clergy of the 1630s against the separatists, and how Jones’s congregation remained true to their beliefs in the face of such persecution.

Jones's *Relation* depicts some of the sufferings that she and her congregation encountered in the early 1630s when they were imprisoned in the Gatehouse prison, which was specifically for prisoners of the Court of High Commission. She explains that she was

one of the fourtie prisoners that refused the oath *Ex Officio*. The same yeer I was carried from the High Commission to prison, with Constables, and Halberts, with Jaylors and Pursevants. 1632. [I was] being oft brought before the High Commission, sometimes to *Pauls*, sometimes to *Lambeth*, where much blasphemie or evill speaking, call good evill, and evill good [Psalms 109:5]; pleading for Idolatrie, for Hyrarchie, materiall Temples, and Altars, without which as was there said, there could be no true Religion (C4^v-C5).

As Jones tells us, she was often brought before the Court of High Commission which involved taking the “oath *Ex Officio*” where the person called to court was asked to swear on the Bible and so forced to tell the truth. Those called were not directly accused of any crime but were asked incriminating questions: W. T. Whitley, editor of the Jones's congregation's records, compares the practice to that of the Inquisition (218). Jones alludes to David's sufferings depicted in Psalms 109 where “the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened” (109:2) against the believer and they “fought against [him] without a cause” (109:3). Katherine Chidley, writing after the courts were abolished, believed, like Jones, that the courts were “void of Reason [...]; for if the *Parliament* should judge a man before they heare his cause, they would be like the Court at *Lambeth*, which were used to sit in the high Priests Hall, judging matters without due triall” (*The Justification* K3^v). To be tried without accusation and to be forced to take such an oath were ecclesiastical innovations that, for the congregation's members, had no basis in scriptural law. In the courts, Jones writes, the priests thought it was “no true Religion” unless worship took place in

beautiful temples with idolatrous altars and ornamentation: all those worshipping privately were to be rigorously questioned under an unscriptural oath. Jones and her congregation all refused to take such an oath because of their separatist principles which meant they could be imprisoned at the pleasure of the High Commissioners. The congregation's records document the particulars of their arrest:

1632. the 2^d Month (called Aprill) y^e 29th Day being y^e Lords Day, the Church was seized upon by Tomlinson, y^e Bps Pursevant, they ware mett in y^e House of Hump: Borne, Brewers Clark in Black: Fryers, [...]. About 42 ware all taken & their names given up (Whitley 214-5).

According to the same records, after the arrest some members were sent to the Clink prison, some to the "Bishop's Prison," and some to the Gatehouse, at Westminster. The pastor of the church, John Lathrop and a "Mr Jones," presumably Jones's husband, were added to the prisoners soon after. The records continue, that "in that time y^e Lord opened their mouths so to speak at y^e High Commission & Pauls & in private even y^e weake Women as their Subtill & malicious Adversarys ware not able to resist but ware asshamed" (Whitley 215-6). Here, the recorder gives thanks that the Lord was on the side of his congregation which enabled "even" weak women to speak out and expose the High Commissioners' practices. Jones certainly did speak out when examined by the High Commission, and she also spoke (and wrote) out in her text. She writes that she "spake and writ this writing [the *Relation*], being a sufferer with the fortie; we being blamed, and counted not able (through ignorance) to defend the way we walked in" (A2^v). Quite the opposite to the "ignorant" defendants Jones claims the Commissioners expected, she and her congregation argued convincingly for their right to abstain from unscriptural oath-taking. Luckily, the proceedings from the

Records of the High Commission have been preserved and the responses of the members are written in some detail. After others were questioned, Jones was asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury to swear the oath, but she replied implying that the bishops were not lawful, godly magistrates (Gardiner 285).¹¹

Jones and her congregation were recalled a week later on 8 May 1632 where the court continued to try to persuade the congregation to take the oath. Sara Jones was, this time, the first to be called to the book:

First. Sara Jones was asked, of what parish she was? She said she dwelleth at Lambeth. [BISHOP OF] LONDON. "Doe you come to the Church?" S. JONES. "None accuseth me to the contrary." LONDON. "Where were you upon Sunday was sennight [a week ago]?" S. JONES. "When I have done evill and my accuser come, I will answer." KING'S ADVOCATE. "I doe accuse you, take your oath and you shall knowe your accusation." S. JONES. "I am afraid to take Gods name in vaine, I knowe noe other worship then God hath appointed." LONDON. "This you are commanded to doe of God who saith you must obey your superiors." S. JONES. "That which is of God is according to Gods word, and the Lord will not hold him guiltlesse that taketh his name in vaine." (Gardiner 292)

Jones is adamant, both that she is guiltless of any crime, and also that she will not answer to any "accusers" apart from God himself. Her last answer turns the Commissioner's accusations around by showing that taking the Lord's name in vain, not according to his word, will prove them guilty. Another member, Elizabeth Milbourne, defended the congregation's practices by saying, "I doe not know any such thing as a Conventicle, we did meete to pray and talke of the word of God, which is according to the law of the land." To this the Archbishop of York, Richard Neile, replied: "God wilbe served publiquely, not in your private house" (Gardiner 295). Jones answers accusations like these in her *Relation* by vindicating her congregation's practices: something she was prevented from doing in front of the High Commission. Reversing binary oppositions, showing that the Court called "good evill, and evill good," she produces a powerful response to the

priests' words. Just as a gilded church building could be hiding evil with ornamentation, so could the words of the prelates be gilding evil and unscriptural teachings.

Even when the defendants were sent back to prison, where some unlucky members remained for up to eighteen months, they evidently still managed to produce texts that edified and strengthened their readers. Some years after the arrests, the congregation's records showed that the saints were "so farr from being scared from the Ways of God that even then many ware in Prison added to y^e Church," and a list of new members follows (Whitley 216). The record-writer's intention seems to have been to show the congregation cheerfully suffering, upheld by the Lord. In the face of persecution, they remained a united people whom nothing could destroy: "not one of those that ware taken did recant or turne back from the truth, [...] all ware y^e more strengthened thereby" (216). It was also an opportunity to record how the Lord had upheld the congregation in its sufferings: "It's good to record & bring to remembrance our Straights & y^e Lords Enlargements, Experience works Hope & Hope maketh not asshamed because y^e Love of God is shed abroad in our hearts" (222). Remembering and reflecting on the Lord's dealings with the congregation strengthened their belief that they were part of the elect and that their congregation was part of God's kingdom on Earth. The records work as a kind of conversion narrative for the people of God, showing when, and in what way, they received God's "enlargements." Remarkably, some writings that were produced during their imprisonment are summarized in the records including a "chronicle" of God's dealings with the congregation, written by Sara Jones:

The Answers of M^{rs} Jones & Some others in y^l time of their Sufferings are not yet Extent for y^e Comfort and Encouragement of others against taking that Oath *ex officio* against false Accusers.

Their Petitions to his Maj^{ty}.

Sarah Jones her Grievances given in & read openly at ye Commission Court.

Her Cronicle of Gods remarkable Judgments & dealings that Year &c wonderfull are the Lords works its meet he should have all y^e Praise (217-8).

Looking at these titles, we can see that the priorities of Jones and her congregation seem to have been to encourage others who were arrested to refuse to take the unscriptural *oath ex officio*, and strengthen them in their sufferings. The answers which were “Not yet Extent” may refer to Jones’s notes not existing at that time, in “extended” form, for public consumption, which tallies with Jones’s account of her “notes” being stolen in 1640, before they had been enlarged and written out in full (217).¹² In the second section of her *Relation*, likely to have been written just before publication in 1642, Jones explains that she only published her work in order to preserve her “notes” and thoughts from harm. She writes, in defense of *The Relation*:

I was much moved to utter my thoughts by my penne, then having some of my notes by me did not find, for 1640. our houses were searched, I know not for what, but little they had, but some of my writings they keep from me; wherefore lest such times may be again, I would willingly keep my poore labours from the spoil, and desire to scatter these few lines among the scattered Saints in every Parish (C5).

In order to save her “poore labours” from being stolen and wasted, she desired to publish her work so that there were too many copies “scattered” amongst the saints for the authorities to keep track of them all. In a later work, *To Sions Lovers* (1644), she wrote likewise: “I printed a few for my own use, because I would not loose my thoughts, & for such as shal councell me for the best; for without councell the thoughts perish” (A2^v). Significantly, the *Calendar of State Papers*

Domestic records that on 18 September there was a warrant issued “to search the houses, &c. of [...] Jones, a dyer, [...] of London” or “any other person whatever suspected of having Popish or seditious books, which are to be brought away.”¹³ Another member of Jones’s congregation also came in for textual persecution and confiscation. In 1643, Elizabeth Eaton petitioned Parliament to obtain compensation for the death of her husband, Samuel, in Newgate Prison, and, as well as being “assaulted by Flamsted, a pursuivant to Sir John Lamb, being then with child, which caused her to miscarry,” “John Ragg also took divers books out of her house, which were never returned.”¹⁴ That Elizabeth Eaton would mention the loss of “divers books” from her home, as well as accounting the imprisonment of her husband, is important when trying to understand the motives of separatist congregations under persecution. Due to strict press censorship before 1641, few subversive books or pamphlets were published that were contrary to the state’s intentions. For this reason, there are few, if any, extant works justifying separatist doctrine before this date. However, if some were published anonymously or passed around in manuscript, it is quite conceivable that they were confiscated and destroyed by officers of Laud and the High Commission; this was certainly the case with some of Jones’s written work and that of Lady Eleanor Davies.¹⁵ Given that Jones and her congregation were continually persecuted and arrested, having their houses subject to searching and spoiling, it is small surprise that she was so preoccupied with retaining and recording both the trials of the church in what was (to her and her congregation) the first days of the reformation in religious worship, but also to vindicate her church from accusations of lawlessness and scandal.¹⁶

Jones's *Relation* works not only to refute the teachings and practices of the established church, but also to encourage a more godly version of speaking and writing, further spreading her gathered church's message using the irrefutable "language of Canaan." Using sermon-like language including biblical allusion, she encourages every believer to fulfill their station as part of the congregation. She asks, in the first section of her work:

You that have the art of inditing, set your hand to writing, especially if you can write Court hand; put it into presse, publish it abroad, that the builders may come into worke. You that have the tongue of the learned, speake a word in season, helpe the weary [Isaiah 50:4]; you that be rich, honour the Lord with your substance, and give not your golden earrings to make the Calfe [Exodus 32]; you that are poore and receive the Gospel, helpe with your prayers, and beare the stones & mortar, that the building may goe forward; you that are Plaisterers, daube not with untempred mortar [Ezekial 13], make the wall firme, that the Foxes may not scrape it downe [Nehemiah 4:3]; for our God is a great God, and he will have a great house to dwell in (B1^{r-v}).

All that have "the art" of sermonizing or uttering are told that they are to write it down, especially if they can write quickly "in Court hand." This should be published and scattered so that the "builders of Sion" would be encouraged and "come into worke" to build the Lord's house. To Jones, it mattered little if the believers were rich or poor, learned or unlearned, or male or female: all could contribute towards the Lord's "great house." Addressing the whole congregation, she writes: "ye deare friends of Christ, as the weaker vessel bear with my foolishnesse a little; though we were first in the transgression, let us not be the last to race [raze] out the name of Antichrist: *Jehovah* will give women cause of joy" (B12^v-C1). Jones acknowledges that women "were first in the transgression," recorded in the book of Genesis, but that this should (and would) not prevent them from strengthening their congregation by "razing" out all opposition. Earlier she is more explicit, directing her advice and encouragements to women more directly:

You Daughters of *Sarah*,¹⁷ be not afraid of any terrour, you shall be saved in all your travels, though you never beare children, if you continue in faith with holinesse and sobrietie; and though you were the first in transgression, be not the last in bringing in your King, trust to the might of the Lion of the tribe of *Judah* [Genesis 49], and feare not the wrath of man, though it be as the roaring of a Lion (A11^v).

Jones compares the “travels” of childbirth with the saints’ suffering under “the wrath of man.” Although some women might “never beare children” literally, this does not mean that they cannot bring forth the Christ child by living in “holinesse and sobrietie,” reflecting what Gillespie has observed in other sectarian writings, including Jones’s *To Sions Lovers*. She writes that “sectarians themselves *propagated* and *celebrated* the idea that the gathered churches were institutional and holy products of a maternal agency expressly lacking in ‘elderships’” (Gillespie 39). In Jones’s texts, as in other “sectarian” works, child labor becomes a metaphor for bringing forth joy, an unwavering belief in Christ, by the struggling of all the members of the congregation. After the passage above, Jones then shifts focus to addressing the whole of her congregation when she writes “you that are in paine, *as* a travelling woman, to bring forth to the King of Saints, helpe those women that labour with you in the Gospell, which receive the truthes you teach, and build up with you by an holy conversation, and so winne others” (A12, my italics). She seems here to refer to those holding offices within the congregation who have a responsibility towards “those women that labour” with them in following scripture: if the “women” (used here as a collective term for both men and women) “build up” a “holy conversation,” they will win others to their cause. Back to solely addressing women, Jones writes, “walke not with stretched out necks, and wandring eyes;¹⁸ Live by faith, and walke humbly with your King, which was borne of your flesh” (A12). Further to “holy conversation”

the women of the congregation should not be either proud or wanton in their ways, but should be humble and do the work of the Lord. Jones's advice, while conventionally asking women to watch their behavior, significantly asks that they should not only speak to one another, but speak to those in office for the strengthening of the congregation as a whole.¹⁹

The latter section of Jones's work, written in 1642, is significantly more concerned with promoting the role of women in uniting the "Scattered Saints" than the first, and becomes more violent and apocalyptic in the scriptures to which she alludes. For example, when discussing her lack of "schoole learning" she writes, "I thinke when the Viall is powred forth upon the ayre [Revelation 16:17], that humane breath shall not be so much prided in," before she remedies this with writing: "but I submit to better judgement" (C7). When the seventh, and last, angel of Revelation 16 would pour out God's wrath on the earth, Jones thought there would be no need to worry about whether a speaker was learned or unlearned, male or female. Writing this half of her *Relation* on the eve of the First Civil War, Jones, as Catharine Gray writes, "emphasizes her debt to armed political conflict, highlighting real war and ideological warfare as the condition of authorship" (Gray 22). Gray also records that these circumstances gave women "unprecedented opportunities" for "participation in public culture" (22), particularly in religious controversies which seem to have been a site for women to take part in this "ideological warfare." The time had come when learning and sex were less regarded: it was a time of conflict, a time where women could participate and influence their contemporaries. As Tereasa Feroli argues in her *Political Speaking Justified*, "although the sects were not official government organs, their members came to play a prominent role in the period's politics":

women prophets speaking to their congregations had power to “influence the course of political events” (Feroli 20). Although Jones held back initially, “submitting to better judgement,” later in the *Relation* she addresses her reader/audience: “you shall [...] have the witness of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophetic, speake one by one [1 Corinthians 14:31], for *Sions* sake be not silent” (C10^v). Recognizing that women prophets could influence their congregations in rising up to ideological warfare, Jones encourages all believers to speak to one another within the nurturing congregation. As a result, she wrote that “all may learn, and all may be comforted” (14:31). This is an extremely logical response: if the women were perceived as weak and misguided, surely all attempts should be made to rectify this. She writes: “let not the weakness of the female sect weaken any hand from helping the Lord against the mightie, but let the strong helpe the weake, and let that which is halting be healed” (C9^{r-v}). That Jones spent more time justifying why women should be able to speak in church, and corrected if they did not understand doctrines and scriptures in the same way as the congregation as a whole, might have been because of the increasing strictures on women’s conduct within the gathered churches. It is clear that Jones respects that those who speak in front of the congregation must be sufficiently learned in scripture and doctrine. She writes, “I do not despise learning, but wish rather to have it” (C6^v), which would enable her to use this knowledge to help the gathered saints, hoping to “prevaile with some to agree in the name of Christ, to walk in his wayes” (C6^v). It is only the absence of learned men, or their reluctance to speak out, that had caused Jones to speak and publish. Similar sentiments can be found in the pamphlet *A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers*, which includes the rumored opinion of female preachers that “there was a deficiency of good men” (A2).

Jones implies in her own work that certain godly men were not fulfilling their pastoral roles, which was an accusation most likely directed at the current minister of her congregation, Henry Jessey. Although never openly critical of her minister by name, Jones later disagreed with the congregation's adopting of the doctrine of anti-paedobaptism in *To Sions Virgins* in 1644. At the time of publishing her *Relation*, she seems to have thought his efforts inadequate, and she does not include him on the title page as the congregation's minister.²⁰

In *To Sions Lovers* (published two days later than *To Sions Virgins*, in 1644), Jones also addresses the importance of women writing and speaking within their congregations. Gillespie briefly discusses this text, showing that Jones writes

optimistically of a world in which [...] an empowered "Congregation" consisted of a "body" of "Shee preachers to whom the command is given, to whom the promise is made [Psalms 68:11-12], goe Preach and Baptize, observe and doe all I command you, and I will be with you to the end of the world [Matthew 28:19-20]" (*To Sions Lovers* B2^v qtd in Gillespie 33).

Although there is certainly an implication that Jones thought women should be allowed to preach within their congregations, she is also feminizing the congregation by showing that they would play the role of the "shee preachers" referred to in the Geneva Bible. Unlike her *Relation*, *To Sions Lovers* has margins filled with scriptural references and, beside each reference to "shee preachers" (A4; B2^v), she has "Psalms 68:11-12." While in the King James Bible the reference reads: "The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it" (68:11), the Geneva version has "The Lord gave matter to the women to tell of the great armie."²¹ In the quotation above, Jones shows that whenever the Bible refers to a "company," or group of disciples, it could include women as well as men; so when she refers Christ telling the disciples to "goe

Preach and Baptize” in Matthew 28:19 she uses the term “shee preachers” in place of “disciple.” Earlier in her work, under the heading of “Comfort to Gods People,” Jones shows her readers how the Saints

shall have a two edged sword in their hands [Psalms 149:6], they shall be terrible as an Army with banners [Song of Solomon 6:4]; great are the Armies, many were the publishers all the Congregations of the Saints; as shee preachers hold forth Christ, publish the Gospel (A4).

Here, Jones shows again that the congregations of saints can be styled as “shee preachers” who can speak, publish, and hence “tell” of the great company acting as a godly army. Earlier, in *The Relation*, Jones had believed that God wanted her to help to form and strengthen the great army of saints gathered in congregations set apart from the established church. She pleaded that

some worthy *Baruch* would goe forth with valiant *Deborah*, and set the Armies of Jehovah in order, even the fellowships of the Saints, [...], such well ordered Armies the friends of Christ, I beleeve will doe more service, than the scattered Armies out of order, knowing not who are friends, nor who are enemies (C9^v).

“Telling of the great armie,” Jones pleads that a worthy male leader (Baruch) would join her (valiant Deborah) in the task of leading and strengthening the saints. In the book of Judges, Baruch, a military leader, and the prophetess Deborah, defeated the armies led by Sisera whom, a page later, Jones styles as the persecuting bishops. Sisera was tricked by Jael, a woman who “smote [a] nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground” (Judges 4:21). While not going so far as to suggest she would play the part of Jael, Jones urges her fellow believers to band “themselves together with spirituall weapons, and drive that Antichristian beast into some *Jaels* Tent” (C10). Gillespie points out that Katherine Chidley’s *Justification*, written later in 1641, also uses this violent biblical story on its title

page to provoke similar comparisons in the minds of its readers (Gillespie 82-3). Also, in his study, *Women and the Pamphlet Culture of Revolutionary England*, Marcus Nevitt shows that this story “records a period of Israelite history where local congregational rule was replacing more absolutist forms of civil government” (Nevitt 33).²² He refers to 17:6 where it is written that there “was king in Israel, but every man did which was right in his own eyes.” Not only was Jones showing that her congregation as an army could overthrow “absolutist civil government,” but she as a prophetess could “tell of this great armie” and work for the encouragement of the “Scattered Saints.”

Jones’s *Relation* is remarkable for many reasons: it is one of very few self-written accounts of the separatists under persecution in the 1630s; it is a rare example of a woman speaking (or perhaps preaching – the line is fine) in front of her congregation; but it is also skillfully written. Jones uses biblical language which is inextricably intertwined with her own, and this forms what she calls the “language of Canaan” (C6^v). She writes:

I have not time to search the book, chapter, and verse: I desire to speak to such as are acquainted with holy Writ, I hope I shall speak the language of Canaan and they that understand it will conster [construe] all to the best (C6).

Jones desires to use the community language of Canaan to encourage others in their faith and to learn how to speak in the same way, whether they are male or female. Spreading this language, whether by word of mouth or by publishing, would help to drown out the clergy’s polluted words, and would surely influence the political conflicts to come. She urges the congregation to “speak oft one to another, as they that fear the Lord; for Sions sake keep not silence, shine forth” (B9^v). Jones used the biblical trope “I say to you” as part of this shared language,

but realized that she as a woman needed to excuse herself for so doing. Her 1632 exposition in front of the congregation in the first section of *The Relation*, the second section written between 1640-2, and her last text, *To Sions Lovers*, show her developing an argument as to why women should be able to play an active part in strengthening their congregations through words: learning and teaching. The discovery of Jones's first extant text shows that the reassessment of women's roles within their gathered churches was ongoing, but her work is extremely valuable in its discussion of the education of women in congregational practice and doctrine. All congregation members speaking aloud to each other, and the publishing of these words abroad, could be, according to Jones, a major weapon in the fight against episcopacy.

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Notes

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- ¹ Stephen Wright identifies these men as Henry Roborough, lecturer at St Leonard's Eastcheap, and John Simson, rector of St Olave, Hart Street. See Wright 3.
- ² "Brethren" here refers to both "brothers" (men) and "sisters" (women) of the congregation in this case, and was a common expression. It would not, however, be used to describe a group solely made up "sisters": Jones is not speaking at a women-only meeting.
- ³ 1 Corinthians 14:34: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law"; 1 Timothy 2:11: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection."
- ⁴ Rogers is usually cited as being quite generous in his allowance of women speaking, but he seems to have had similar ideas to other congregations.
- ⁵ See *Journal of the House of Commons*, 15 January 1646, pp. 407-8; Friday 23 January 1645/6, *A Diary, or an Exact Journall* A2^v.
- ⁶ Although Mack references her quotations to *This is Lights Appearance in the Truth* (1650), they are from *To Sions Lovers* (A2 and B2). The attribution of *Lights Appearance* to Jones is questionable. Wright writes that if it is by the same Sara Jones, "she had acquired Quaker views earlier than

any other known Londoner” (9). Gray, having not read Wright, also attributes this text to a Quaker writer (209 n. 5).

⁷ Using information from *The Relation*, Stephen Wright has pieced together a family tree. Sara Jones née Hayes, born c. 1580, was the daughter of Sir Thomas Hayes (d. 1617) who was a livery man of the Drapers Company and was knighted on 26 July 1603. He was Sheriff of London (1604-5), Mayor of London (1614-15) and married twice, the second time to Sara’s mother, Martha. They appear to have had several daughters other than Sara. Sara married Thomas Jones, a dyer, on 15 December 1606: “Mr Thomas Jones and Mrs Saray Hayes” (Bannerman 79). Wright records that the couple had two children: Martha Jones who married a Thomas Hallowses of London, and Sara Jones (named after their grandmother and mother respectively) (4). A later text, *To Sions Virgins* (1644), records that she was “an Antient member” of the congregation, indicating that she could well have been over sixty years old (A1). Her occasional use of the Geneva Bible translation, published earlier, might also corroborate this. See Wright; Gillespie 9-11, 33, 39.

⁸ Although Jones is recorded as living at Lambeth during the 1630s, she and her husband were living at Tower Hill by 1647. See Jessey and Wight, *The Exceeding Riches of Grace* 9.

⁹ Sara Jones belonged to what is generally acknowledged to be the first separatist church in London. It was gathered in 1616 by Henry Jacob and was followed by John Lathrop and, later, Henry Jessey. See Tolmie and Nuttall.

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- ¹⁰ For Cornelius Burgess (d. 1665), see Wright 3.
- ¹¹ The records can be found in Bodleian, Rawlinson MS.A.128 but are reprinted in Gardiner 278-80, 281-6, 292-5. Those questioning the congregation were William Laud (Bishop of London), George Abbot (Archbishop of Canterbury), Richard Neile (Archbishop of York), Edward Sackville Earl of Dorset, and the King's Advocate. See Wright 1.
- ¹² It is interesting to note that the "Answers" of Jones and others were "not yet Extent" for the benefit and encouragement of others, a phrase that both transcribers of the manuscript records seem to have misread. Burrage was doubtful as to whether "the Answers of Mrs Jones" existed at the time that the manuscript was written (c. 1641), deciding that the sentence reads, "are not yet Extant," ie., not yet in existence (298). Whitley, writing later, edits the phrase to "are even yet Extent," keeping the sense, "continued or prolonged at length" (*OED*, sense 2a), but assumes that the writings were available extended for others. See Gray 72 for an exploration of these "Answers," but without knowledge of *The Relation*.
- ¹³ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* (hereafter *CSPD*), 18 September 1640-1, p. 73.
- ¹⁴ *CSPD*, "undated 1643," 1641-3, p. 518. The congregation was also arrested with similar consequences on 22 August 1641 where they received similar violent treatment: "L. Mayor Sr John Wright came Violently on them, beat, thrust, pinched & kicked such men or Women as fled not his handling, among others Mrs Berry who miscarried & dyed the same week & her Child" (Whitley 224).

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- ¹⁵ “Sarah Jones” appears under a fine for “Lady Eleanor Davies alias Douglas” on 1 July 1634 for “publishing certain fanatical pamphlets” of 3,000 l (“Acts of the Court of High Commission,” *CSPD*, 1634-5, p. 176). It is highly likely that they would have known each other. Lady Eleanor was accompanied by her husband to Amsterdam in 1633 and arranged to have her prophecies printed there to avoid censorship. Laud had her printed books publicly burned and she was arrested, fined, and imprisoned in the Gatehouse until 1635. See Cope, *Handmaid of the Holy Spirit* 66. Cope also shows that she had not paid her £3,000 fine by February 1640 (74).
- ¹⁶ Sara Jones also appeared in front of the High Commission in 1634. On 12 June, “Sarah Jones, wife of Thomas Jones of Water Lambeth, Surrey” was brought before the Commission for “refusing to take oath to answer articles, she was committed to the Gatehouse, but afterwards discharged upon bond for her appearance” (“Acts of the Court of High Commission,” *CSPD*, 1634-5, p. 112). By 1 July she was fined, although the amount and the crime is left blank (“Acts of the Court of High Commission,” *CSPD*, 1634-5, p. 176). The last entry for her, until her arrest in 1640, is 16 October where there is an act: “Sarah Jones: To appear next court day” (“Acts of the Court of High Commission,” *CSPD*, 1634-5, p. 267). Jones had also been imprisoned earlier in the year on 21 April 1640 when she was arrested, with others in her congregation, at a Mrs Wilson’s at Tower Hill while they were fasting for the Parliament (Whitley 223-4).
- ¹⁷ Sarah was Abraham’s wife and called by God to be “the mother of nations” (Genesis 17:16). Jones considered her congregation, in covenant together, to

be the children of Sarah and Abraham. She wrote in the *Relation* that “we are of the free woman [Sarah], and not of the bond woman [Hagar]. [...], as the first-born sonne, and not as a Mosaicall servant” (C4).

¹⁸ Jones uses Isaiah 3:16 from the Geneva translation here.

¹⁹ As Gray observes, Jones “inverts the common male poetic practice of appropriating maternity as a figure of authorship” (30). In *To Sions Lovers* she writes: “I presume to father this naked child without scholastic phrases, or school learning to dress it and garnish it” (A2). For Jones, gendered roles involved with publishing and controlling a congregation are reversed.

²⁰ For an exploration of why Jones did not include Henry Jessey’s name on the title page of *To Sions Virgins* see Wright 8.

²¹ Jones may have been more familiar with the Geneva version as she was of an older generation of dissenters, although she uses a mixture of both bibles in her work.

²² As other scholars have observed, women like Jones contributed effectively to the struggle against church and crown (Feroli; Hinds; Holstun; Mack).

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