

Elizabeth Bouldin, *Women Prophets and Radical Protestantism in the British Atlantic World, 1640–1730*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015. £64.99/\$99.99, ISBN 9781107095519 (Hardback), pp. vii + 211.

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Elizabeth Bouldin has written a lively, accessible and clear account of an often overlooked aspect of seventeenth-century religious history. Scholars interested in female visionary experience in England are often drawn to medieval figures such as Christina of Markyate, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, the Reformation visionary Elizabeth Barton, or modern figures such as Joanna Southcott. The major strength of Bouldin's monograph is the way it illuminates the messages of lesser-known visionary women: Baptists such as Sarah Wight, Katherine Sutton and Elizabeth Poole, the Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary, Quaker women Elizabeth Fletcher and Margaret Brewster, and the Philadelphian prophetesses Jane Lead and Ann Bathurst. In doing so, Bouldin thoughtfully provides these radical Protestant women with the very things they struggled to attain during their own lifetimes: an audience and a voice.

The study extends Bouldin's work on radical religious networks that transcend national boundaries. Building on her important article published in *Church History* in 2014 on transnational and transconfessional religious exchanges between radical Protestant groups, the present volume advances similar research aims on a much larger scale. Arguing for the 'porosity of borders' (p. 3), we are reminded in the introduction that early modern prophets were not restricted by national boundaries, but rather actively sought out fellow visionaries and reformers who shared their concerns, wherever they might be, thereby creating networks of dissent in which 'female prophets often held central roles' (p. 11).

The overarching theme of the book is the relationship between gender and prophecy. Bouldin constructs three broad attitudes women adopted towards the role of gender: those such as the Quakers who minimized it, the Behmenists who saw a distinct role for women, and those such as the French Prophets who used gendered language in group prophetic performances when suitable. These three categories serve to bring structure and coherence to the chapters of the book overall, which explore these three groups in turn. Bouldin concludes by arguing that constructs of gender and gender norms were so influential that 'gender functioned as a category of religious prophecy' (p. 186).

Chapter 1 explores the various constructs of election and 'chosenness' used by visionary women during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum. Bouldin addresses a complex issue with clarity here, exploring how female prophets accepted or rejected the concept of predestination and varied in their understanding of who comprised the 'elect'. Similar attention is paid to covenant theology, millenarianism and the doctrine of remnant, all of which are explained in an accessible way. Underpinning this discussion is a thoughtful analysis of how the Book of Revelation served as a source text for female visionaries, including those such as Ann Bathurst who believed themselves to be the figurative or literal representation of the woman clothed with the sun described in Revelation 12 (p. 22). Special attention is given to the Particular Baptist Sarah Wight, whose prophecies came after a period of intense fasting described as 'hovering between life and death' (p. 33). Her concern over her own status as one of the elect drove her visions, dreams and theology in a similar way to another Particular Baptist, Katherine Sutton. Sutton's spiritual gifts included prayer and singing, while her prophecies frequently warned of the danger to England's status as the

'Lord's people' and the imminent wrath the English would face should they not repent (p. 39). The Fifth Monarchist Mary Cary serves to conclude the chapter and provides ample evidence for the 'astounding command of the Bible' (p. 44) some female prophets had.

Chapter 2 shifts the focus to Quaker women and their communal understanding of collective election. Here Bouldin argues that early Quakerism did not limit the role of women in prophesying as members were not 'limited by gender or social station' (p. 53). The Holy Spirit did not discriminate among its vessels, Quakers argued, so neither should Quakerism. Unlike the Fifth Monarchists, Quakers focused on an 'immediate, spiritual coming of Christ into the hearts of his followers' (p. 56), rather than a physical reign on Earth. Bouldin explores a number of examples of Quaker women prophesying, including those who, in the style of the Old Testament prophets, personally delivered their warnings to Charles II. Quaker election focused on their understanding of their community as a remnant of true believers, which strengthened their resolve in times of persecution. By the late seventeenth century Quakerism became more regulated; women were separated into their own meetings and the more public-orientated language of the 'elect' gave way to exhortation and instruction directed at those already within their ranks.

Chapter 3 explores the role of prophecy among the Philadelphians. Drawing on the language of Revelation 12, they followed Jacob Boehme's belief in a female aspect of the divine, often known as Divine Wisdom or Sophia. Rather than focusing on the well-known prophetess Jane Lead, Bouldin thankfully devotes her attention to Lead's lesser-known counterpart, Ann Bathurst. Through a detailed analysis of Bathurst's manuscripts, we see an account of prophesying which stressed a specific role for women, including the use of gendered language and imagery. This was not a form of religious experience that sought to transcend the self, but rather one which sought to achieve a higher spiritual state within an earthly, and specifically female, body. As a result, 'the physical body became the locus of Bathurst's spiritual experience' (p. 101). Unlike the early Quakers who were keen to obliterate gender differences, Bathurst 'gendered her body' (p. 102) and proposed a specific gendered role for herself as one of God's elect. Unlike the Quakers, the Philadelphians often discussed the concept of individual, rather than communal, election. Like the Quakers however, they also believed that the second coming of Christ would occur in the soul first, a fact curiously absent from Bouldin's analysis. There are still more questions to be asked concerning the overlap of Quakerism and Behmenism, especially as the number of Quakers visiting Philadelphian meetings might suggest something of an aversion by some in their ranks to the move towards regulation undertaken within Quakerism around the same time. Nevertheless, Bouldin's serious consideration of Bathurst's theology is both new and refreshing.

The Philadelphians also play a central role in Chapter 4, which explores the problem of prophetic authority. Much of the chapter is concerned with the interaction between the Philadelphians and the French Prophets, a group of millenarian exiles in London. After the fall of the Philadelphian Society in 1704 many joined the ranks of the Prophets. Unlike the Philadelphians, the French Prophets had a flair for the dramatic; prophesying in public, blessing groups of people, and crying out about the inevitable end of days. Travelling from town to town, groups of Prophets would deliver specific warnings in each new city. Both men and women in the group gave expositions on scriptural passages while under the influence of prophetic inspiration. They stressed that God spoke through anyone, including the young, which included children as young as eleven participating in their public performances. While women enjoyed freedom in this group, it was the men who dominated its ministerial functions. Prophecy became the vehicle through which women could participate in the salvific activities of the group, but brought with it inherent dangers. Women enacted

apocalyptic events portrayed in the Bible, including impersonating the negative characteristics of figures such as the Whore of Babylon, and often assumed very dramatic and central roles in group performances. As a result, between 1708 and 1712 all those cast out and labelled as false prophets were women (p. 127). Conflict eventually arose between the Philadelphians and the French Prophets over the nature of how prophecies were delivered. The Prophets practiced a very bodily and physical form of prophesying, while the Philadelphians were more inclined to written declarations. Their legitimacy depended on whether they could convince their opponents that their bodily or internal experiences were genuine.

The final chapter of the study focuses on how those claiming prophetic authority sought out likeminded individuals in other denominations and countries. As a result, women could become 'participants in religious networks that crossed sectarian lines' (p. 155). What drove these networks was a shared desire for reform in anticipation for the coming millennium. Bouldin rightly rejects the tendency in the existing historiography to focus on millennialism as a phenomenon of the English Civil Wars, and instead argues that it continued to be a factor in individuals' responses to societal crises long afterwards. Although these groups identified and communicated with each other through this shared interest, other doctrinal disputes swiftly ended alliances. Sadly, Bouldin does not elaborate more on the connections between the Philadelphians and continental groups of Pietists and Quietists, especially the letters exchanged between Francis Lee and Pierre Poiret preserved in Dr William's Library, London. This would have allowed more connection to be made between the male followers of Jane Lead in England and the male followers of Antoinette Bourignon elsewhere. Despite this, the chapter is an excellent exploration of several unexpected connections formed between dissenting groups, and the burgeoning role of print culture in forming prophetic authority.

Bouldin set out to explore how three approaches to female prophetic authority existed among prophetic groups in early modern England: those who minimized gender, those who emphasized a distinctive female role, and those who were empowered through the public imitation of striking female biblical figures. Through five stimulating chapters she has more than achieved that aim. After considering the work as a whole it is possible that a fourth category could have been constructed however: how men constructed female prophetic authority. Those working on hagiographical writing from the medieval period to the present day will be familiar with the importance of this dimension in the representation of Catholic female saints, nuns, and lay women. The examples of Baptist and Fifth Monarchist women parallel Catholic women, in that it appears that some prophets situated themselves (or were situated by their male editors or biographers) within expected gender norms: meek female holiness, physical weakness and domestic servitude (pp. 28, 33, 34). Accusations against Jane Lead that 'the prophecy of a female prophet was not her own' (p. 139), but rather that of male followers, suggests that we need to think further about whether the authority these women claimed through prophecy was still filtered through a patriarchal medium. It is a mark of quality when a work makes a reader think critically and deeply about such issues.

This monograph will be of interest to anyone engaged in research into the female prophetic voice, radical and dissenting religious networks, the role of the body in religious worship, radical groups such as the Quakers and Philadelphians, and the continuing engagement with millenarianism in the early eighteenth century. Clear and informative, it will undoubtedly prove to be of use to both the seasoned researcher and eager undergraduate. Bouldin should be praised for producing a work that is both well researched and well written.