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An historical overview of women in ministry within the Elim Pentecostal Church in the first half of the 20th Century.

The issue of the role of women in ministry is far from new. Within Pentecostal churches there have been a number of studies especially in America tracing the history of involvement of women in ministry. Within the UK however there has been much less research. This paper will be presenting an historical sketch of the role of women in ministry within the Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance (Elim) in the first half of the twentieth Century. Primary focus is made on the presentation of women in published material demonstrating the subtle changes over time that influenced the restriction of the ministry of women.

Methods: Archive search.

Keywords: Elim; women; ministry; ordination; history.

Introduction

In this paper, I analyse and sketch out the history of women in ministry within the Elim Pentecostal Church (Elim)¹ largely relying on documents in the various Elim archives. Although similar work, tracing the history of the role of women, has been done in other Pentecostal streams,² this paper is both unique to Elim and to Pentecostal movements in the UK. The findings largely affirm the global trend of women's reduced involvement at leadership level after initial times of revival. Currently Elim officially accepts women at all levels of leadership, although this is not always practiced (at local or national level). This paper provides an historical overview of the various debates, decisions and practices from Elim's beginning through to the end of the 1940's. The transitions and debates provide an

¹ Elim is an indigenous UK classical Pentecostal movement, founded in 1915.

² For instance in the USA: Qualls, *God Forgive Us for Being Women*; Alexander and Yong, *Philip's Daughters*. In South Africa: Nel, "Structural Violence in the Pentecostal Church." And in Australia: Grey, "Torn Stockings and Enculturation".

interesting story, and will hopefully be a useful education as Elim continues to consider the ongoing challenges of encouraging women in/into the ministry at both local and national level. I have approached this study in a (mostly) chronological way, demonstrating the changes to the positions and views regarding women over time. This paper starts with the publications and minutes of meetings of Elim's early years leading up to the first Conference of 1933. From then on, I trace the annual conferences in relation to women in ministry.

Elim's early years - Women as active evangelists³

On 3rd July 1915 at the second informal meeting of the Elim Evangelistic Band (EEB)

George Jeffreys informed the meeting that:

God had already answered our prayers and had given a definite call to Mr R.E Darragh and Miss Margaret Streight of Bangor Co Down to work in connection with the Band of Evangelists which we had claimed by Faith for the Pentecostal Movement in Ireland.⁴

Miss Streight's inclusion here was the first official recognition of the ministry of women, and described in the same terms as that of Mr Darragh, with the Pentecostal use of the word 'call'. These Evangelists were simply concerned about reaching Ireland with their Pentecostal passion and zeal and far less concerned about institution, hierarchy or governmental structure, such concerns were to come.

In following meetings, the minute book includes Miss Streight as a signatory, normally alongside three or four others. However, at the 'fifth informal meeting' at which they agreed to adopt the name 'Elim Evangelistic Band' (EEB) they also accepted Mr John Leech K.C.⁵ and Mr Thomas Hackett as advisory members of the 'Elim Evangelistic Band

³ Much of this first section relies upon the Minutes of the Elim Evangelistic Band.

⁴ 'Elim Evangelistic Band Minute Book'.

⁵ King's Council.

Council'. Under their advisement a governmental structure was put in place under which the Evangelists would operate. This top level of governance, along with the later Executive Presbytery, Executive Council, and National Leadership Team has, even today, yet to have a woman as part of that group.

In future meetings under the Presidency of Mr Leech, decisions were made in more structured and legal ways, with 'proposers' and 'seconders' to items for discussion. Miss Streight both proposes and seconds various items, her involvement in such decisions indicates an egalitarian position in those early days. In a significant move, on 6th January 1919, Miss Streight proposes that the Band 'acknowledge the authority of the Elim Pentecostal Alliance Council as the governing body of the Elim Evangelistic Band'. This council, comprised only of men, was proposed by a woman. It is not clear if, at this point, there was any deliberate intent for the council to include only men. It later became the Executive Presbytery which was soon to discuss the role of women, and that discussion shows that women were not expected to have the same governing role as men, as we will see.

The Elim Evangel – Women in print

As a source of information, the minutes of the EEB stop in 1921. Beyond that there are Executive and General Presbytery meetings which are a helpful in demonstrating the discussions and changes regarding women in ministry, to which I turn later. However, in 1919 a regular publication started, the Elim Evangel (or Evangel for short). In this section, I will particularly focus on the way that women are presented typographically in the publication. The changes over time will help illustrate the changes in attitude towards the women who faithfully served within Elim.

The first edition was released in December 1919 and included teaching, reports from the campaigns of the Evangelists, and other various correspondence. Near the beginning of

the booklet there is a list, both of the members of the council and separately the Evangelistic Band Workers. As mentioned earlier, the members of the council were all male, whereas the workers comprised 2 single women (Miss Streight and Miss Adams), 2 married women with their husbands, and 11 men (either unmarried or with no wives mentioned). Although all the names of the workers appeared en bloc, it is worth noting that the single women were mentioned last, preceded by the two married couples. This implies some form of order, and probably hierarchy, whether conscious or unconscious.⁶

With various changes in categories and presentation in subsequent editions, the next major significant change with the presentation of names at the beginning of the Evangel occurred in the February 1923 edition. The categories were re-worked, for the sake of this paper the major change was within the largest and most graphically central category of ‘Members Of The Elim Evangelistic Band In The Regular Work Of The Ministry’. This was the first time that there was an explicit demarcation of the men from the women; after the listing of men, a sub-category was introduced of ‘Sisters’. No similar gendered term (e.g. brothers) was used for the men.

In 1925 the Evangel was now printed twice a month, and introduced some minor changes including the presentation of names. But by November the section on names was dropped entirely, I can only assume this was on practical terms as numbers increased and the purpose of the Evangel was perhaps re-evaluated.

As minor or as subtle as this may seem, the slow changes to the way in which the names were presented in Elim’s official publication is somewhat telling. The women had nearly always been mentioned last (excepting the occasional position of the male missionary Mr Taylor). Later editions nearly always placed Miss Streight at the top of the list of women,

⁶ The Biblical precedent of name order, for instance with Priscilla and Aquila, is often cited as a non/hierarchical example.

followed by Miss Adams and others. It would seem that this likely reflects the order in which they joined. The positioning of the women at the end of the list was later highlighted with the introduction of the sub-category of 'Sisters' after the list of men. Whatever the original reasons for this, the layout makes it clear that women were separate from men. Not only were they not in the category of the 'Council', they were a sub-category at the bottom. This figurative positioning did not reflect the role that women played, as Evangelists or Missionaries, but may well have fed into the prevailing change in culture that led to women being removed further and further from the governmental structures of Elim.

Miss Streight married Robert Mercer (who had joined the EEB at their first meeting) on 17th September 1930 (*Elim Evangel*, 3 October 1930, 641). From then on there is far less mention of her ministry in the Evangel. However they are mentioned as ministering together in Greenock (*Elim Evangel*, 8 June 1934, 365), and later Mrs Mercer is reported to have given Tuesday night sermons in Bradford which were described as 'a great help to all' (*Elim Evangel*, 7 December 1934, 780). A number of women who started within Elim as single, like Miss Streight, later married, some became mothers, others co-workers, and over time were overshadowed, in name, by their husbands.⁷

Executive Presbytery – women and governance

Following the Elim Evangelistic Band informal meetings and the minutes of the early years (up until 1922), the introduction of Mr John Leech into the Council and the shaping of the governmental structure brought change. There is a formation of two groups that have interest to our discussion, one is called the Executive Presbytery (EP), the other the General

⁷ Miss Streight's example is evident through the changes of her inclusion in the Evangel, whereas other changes, to pay or status were written about by Des Cartwright in a private letter to an RTC student (in the Archives) in response to a letter dated December 2001.

Presbytery (GP). This section focuses on key discussions from these two Presbyteries as they relate to the views and changes of women in ministry.

The minutes of these meetings (from 1928 onwards) appear to indicate that the EP consists of what had been termed the Council, whereas the GP was inclusive of a wider group of ministers. In the minutes of the EP dated 7th January 1928 the ‘question of sisters on the general presbytery was discussed, and a sub committee consisting of Pastors W. Henderson, G. Kingston and C.B. Birch was appointed to consider the matter’.

On the 29th December the committee reported back to the Executive Presbytery regarding sisters on the GP:

It is recommended that all the sisters in the regular ministry be invited to the General Presbytery meetings on the same grounds as the brethren – to take part in the discussions but not to possess voting powers.⁸

This was clearly a major step for the restriction of women in Elim. They could minister, as Evangelists, Missionaries and even lead churches; yet although they were officially now allowed at the General Presbytery, they were unable to vote. Women’s voices could be heard, but their opinions carried no voting authority. Elim, it seems, was not being overly influenced by the widespread suffragette success of 1928.⁹

The next major decision for the EP to consider was whether women could be ordained. So far ordination had not been necessary for the majority of Elim’s work. George Jeffreys had been ordained in 1917 by his brother Stephen and ‘Reverend Moelfryn Morgan’

⁸ Executive Presbytery Meeting minute book, 29 December 1928.

⁹ Following the limited suffragette success of 1918, July 1928 saw an act of Parliament that gave the vote to all women over the age of 21.

thus avoiding ‘general conscription’,¹⁰ but ordination had not been widespread.¹¹ There is no strong sense of a theological position for ordination, although some rationale for ordination was given in the *Elim Evangel*, which reported that Principal George Jeffreys had said that “the formal ordination...was but the Church’s recognition of Christ’s call, or which they had already given full proof of ministry” (*Elim Evangel*, May 1929, 71). Despite such recognition, on the 27th March 1929 at the EP meeting:

It was resolved after due deliberation and a careful survey of all the circumstances that the Executive Presbytery defer the question of the ordination of sisters until a later date.¹²

Although this was now on the agenda, the postponement of any decision on this would become a common recurrence in Elim as the topic is re-introduced through the decades, as I demonstrate later. This discussion came at a key time for Elim, for a decision had been taken in December 1928 that no ‘later than Easter Monday, 1929, an ordination service be conducted at which shall be ordained all Foursquare Gospel Ministers approved for ordination by the Executive Presbytery’. This decision was made in the final all-male General Presbytery, and so perhaps the thinking was that those who had voted on this unanimous decision, had only been thinking of male ministers. The opportunity to ordain the women ministers was before them, but the EP on the Wednesday before the Easter Monday deferred the decision, ensuring that the first ordination service in Elim would be an all-male affair.

Having accepted the presence of ‘sisters’ at the GP, on 8th June 1929 three sisters were listed in attendance; 22 men were also listed. Similar to the listings in the *Elim Evangel*,

¹⁰ Cartwright, "From the Back Streets of Brixton to the Royal Albert Hall, British Pentecostalism 1907-1926", 10.

¹¹ There are references in the *Evangel* to individual ordination services, for instance of Robert Mercer (along with two deacons) by George Jeffreys (*Elim Evangel*, December 1920, 4).

¹² Executive Presbytery Meeting minute book, 27 March 1929.

the sisters are listed last. The minutes return to the topic of the ‘ordination of sisters’, by saying ‘The question of ordination of sisters (deferred from last meeting) was introduced by the chairman and the meeting was thrown open for the discussion of the subject.’

Unfortunately there are no further details given, we can only imagine how the three women felt in an environment filled with men who had previously decided to ordain men only. The topic remained open, for more than a year later (13th September 1930) it says:

After some discussion on the ordination of Sisters it was recommended that a committee be appointed to fully consider the matter and present reasons for and against if they were not unanimous in their findings, to prepare a majority and minority report. After due consideration of names...the following brothers and sisters should form the committee: Pastors Henderson, Corry, JJ Morgan, EC Boulton, J Lees and R Smith. Miss Kennedy, Mrs G. Kingston, and Miss Henderson.¹³ This was carried by majority.

Before I turn to the report and subsequent vote on the topic, I will first examine the correspondence of the committee.

Ordination of sisters committee – diverse theological views on women

It was only this year (2018) that the original correspondence between the committee members have come to light.¹⁴ Here I will give a brief analysis of those letters before returning to the outcome.

Although the committee had been ‘set up’ in September 1930 it appears that no one actually organised a time for them to meet in person, especially for those who lived outside of London. It is possible that Pastor W. Henderson whose name was the first on the list was

¹³ Miss Adelaide Henderson was the brother of Pastor W. Henderson, sometimes working alongside him. She was an early missionary to the Congo and later held the post of ‘Missionary Secretary’.

¹⁴ I am thankful to the General Superintendent in allowing me access to copies of these correspondence, of which he holds the originals.

meant to arrange such meetings, however not only was he incredibly busy as a Superintendent, he was also ‘the first Elim minister to be called home’ (*Elim Evangel*, 17 July 1931, 449). His death meant that he was replaced by Pastor Joseph Smith, both as Superintendent and as a member of this committee.

Pastor J. Lees, living in Plymouth, seemed particularly disappointed that there was no facility for a face to face discussion and did not want simply to write down his views ‘having in mind the importance of the matter under review’. This desire for interactive discussion and debate seems commendable, however he concludes by saying that he would be happy enough to leave any decision with the other members of the committee, either by writing, or for those who live near London to meet in committee. Pastor Hathaway who seems to be the EP’s point of reference for the committee does then respond to Pastor Lees in the November of 1931, less than three weeks from the next GP meeting. In view of the timings, he explains that there will be no committee meeting, and that a written response is the best option, with discussions then being had at the GP meeting. Pastor Lees replies quickly, reiterating that he does not want to ‘write upon the matter’ and he would never have agreed to being a part of the committee if he thought they would not meet.

Amongst the other correspondence there are letters from all except Pastors Morgan and Boulton, and Miss Henderson. Either the correspondence has been lost, or they were simply involved in verbal communication. Neither Pastor Boulton nor Miss Henderson were in attendance at the GP meeting that discussed the findings and voted upon the discussion.

There was a general range of views expressed in the correspondence. Common arguments were made both for and against women being ordained. The most positive response for the ordination of women came from the two women (Mrs Kingston and Miss Kennedy), whilst the men who penned their views (Pastors Corry, J. Smith and R. Smith) were all opposed.

Mrs Kingston responds to the request for arguments for and against by literally giving both sets of arguments. Her approach makes it hard to be sure what she actually thought of some of the arguments, however, she does use much underlining to emphasize certain points. The main issue seems to be, for her, whether or not a woman was being put ‘in charge of a local church’. She is however concerned that women should ‘only...in exceptional cases...be in charge of a church of mixed members’. But in those rare circumstances, Mrs Kingston would appear to want such a woman to be ‘ordained equally with men’. She later argues that men do not like women to be in authority over them, and states that this is the Biblical position. In this point she is making two separate assertions, the first sociological, the second Biblical (depending on your hermeneutics). The sociological comment would perhaps resonate more meaningfully in a patriarchal society where there is a male monarch, where Parliament was largely male,¹⁵ and where very few other churches would ordain women.

Miss Kennedy, at one instance, argues from early church history, saying “I understand from a record by an early historian that women were ordained by the laying on of hands until the church council of Laodicea forbade it in 360AD”. She does take a more primitivist approach to the discussion, looking for examples in Scripture and early Church practice. She also includes an explanation of the term ‘ordination’ as one who is elected or appointed. She then focuses on Phoebe as a deacon whom, she argues, must have been elected/appointed (hence ordained), and was viewed by Greeks, Romans and Barbarians ‘as a succourer, LEADER’ (emphasis in original).

Biblical and early church practice are important parts of this short correspondence, however the main focus is upon a person’s gift. Miss Kennedy refers to 1 Corinthians 12:11 as an inclusive verse with regards to gifts and ministry, arguing that God gives gifts to

¹⁵ There were 15 women MPS, out of a total 613 MP’s in 1931 (Cracknell, "The History and Geography of Women MPs since 1918 in Numbers – House of Commons Library”).

whomever according to His will. She ties this in with the current situation within Elim, arguing that women are being elected and appointed to the ‘oversight of churches’, and even if they do not publicly receive the ‘laying on of hands’ their ‘gift and ministry’ is recognized by the appointment.

Unlike Mrs Kingston’s sociological argument, Miss Kennedy does not want to be afraid of what people might think, she asks ‘Are we afraid of what prejudiced Brethren might say if we publicly ordain Sisters equally with men’. She takes the strongest positive position towards women in ministry, and then concludes her correspondence by saying ‘I don’t think it really matters so long as God given gifts are used for Him and the advancement of His Kingdom’. She takes a pragmatic approach that allows her to focus on the main point, God’s Kingdom, whether or not women will be ordained, even whilst arguing for equal ordination.

The men, likewise, took a mixture of pragmatic and Biblical approaches to explain why women should not be ordained into the ‘regular work of the ministry’. Joseph Smith (who had been brought in to replace W. Henderson) made four points, one of which suggested the whole discussion was unnecessary ‘seeing that we are not now accepting any more sisters into the regular work of the ministry.’ Exactly what he is referring to is not clear, considering there is no evidence that a decision had been made to no longer accept women. In 1934 there is a mention that women were not being accepted into the Elim Bible College (which had been open for more than a decade), but it is unclear if the two are the same issue.

In an almost directly opposed position to Miss Kennedy, Joseph Smith argues that he does not want to ‘prejudice our position with many sound men of God who hold very strong views on this subject’. There is clear evidence¹⁶ that he is referring to the acceptance of Pentecostals within the broader Evangelical church. Their position was generally opposed to

¹⁶ Cauty, "History of Elim". In which he describes the ‘danger’ of wishing to be ‘regarded as respectable and nice’.

women in ministry, and although Elim had started with women ministering boldly, the ordination of women would have been contrary to Evangelical practice, and such antagonism, in Smith's mind was to be avoided.

Smith also mentions that women were currently not allowed to officiate at a wedding or funeral service. Later Cartwright says that women could officiate 'if a suitable male substitute could not be found!'¹⁷ It appears, that at this time, such rules were a hindrance to the ordination of women. Smith's statement does not question the rules, but rather simply recognizes the rules and attempts to find the path of least resistance.

Smith's other argument is from the basis of Scripture. He argues that there is no Scripture in favour of the ordination of women. And if Elim ordains women then it would have no argument against such practices as infant baptism, 'Purgatory' and 'praying to dead saints'. He finds the argument from silence to be a persuasive argument **not** to ordain women.

Similar arguments are put forward by the other male correspondents, with the Dean of the Bible College Percy Corry also adding that there appears to be no need to ordain the sisters, because they have 'done their work in the past efficiently' without ordination. And R. Smith going into some detail about the word 'ordination' and concluding that women could be preachers and ministers of the Word, but not Elders or overseers.

Although partly sociological in their approach (men don't like women to be in authority over them), and partly Biblical (no Biblical evidence for ordination of women), the arguments were largely pragmatic (if it's not broken don't fix it). This more pragmatic focus differs from the future debates of the second half of the twentieth century.

The archived correspondence includes a rough draft of a report that summarizes the correspondence in preparation for the GP meeting. The report does not attempt to argue for

¹⁷ Cartwright, "Your Daughters Shall Prophesy. The Contribution of Women in Early Pentecostalism.", 7.

one position, rather simply presents a list of ‘for’ and ‘against’ from the correspondence. An important reference to the Elim practice with missionaries is also included (possibly from verbal correspondence from Miss Henderson who had been a missionary): ‘If missionaries are ordained to go to foreign lands, why not at home?’. This argument is used in subsequent debates and writings, being described at times as an ‘ludicrous’¹⁸ position and ‘anomalous’.¹⁹ One last and opposing argument is also made with reference to the commonly used Scripture of 1 Timothy 2:12 (‘I suffer not a woman to teach’), yet no mention was made to the case that women *were* teaching. It was surprising not to have found more uses of this Scripture in the correspondence, but it does have a brief mention in the report.

On 11th December 1931, the GP read and considered the report. There were 16 men and 5 women present (Miss Kennedy, Thompson, Hawes, Edwards, Mrs Kingston). The report was read and ‘after considerable discussion it was decided to take a ballot of four resolutions, given here with the results :

- (1) ‘That sisters be not ordained’ – 10 votes
- (2) ‘That they be ordained but with restrictions as to their ministry’ – 2 votes
- (3) ‘That they be ordained as Evangelists’ – 2 votes
- (4) ‘That they be ordained as fully accredited ministers, the same as brothers’ – 0 votes

Following the 1928 decision to not allow women to have the vote at the GP, we can assume that the five women here could contribute their opinions but not vote. That then leaves two men who must have abstained from the vote. No one in the meeting, who had a vote, voted in favour of full and equal ordination of women. The four who voted in favour of some

¹⁸ Cartwright, "The Role of Women in the Government of the Church".

¹⁹ This term was used in a draft copy of a report ‘Opportunity of Service for ladies’ for the Elim Conference of 1974, found in the archives (G. Canty).

ordination were out-numbered by the majority who voted against ordination of the sisters. In view of the feeling of the meeting, the following resolution was carried by a 'substantial majority': 'That this meeting is of the opinion that we should not proceed with the question of the ordination of sisters'.

Elim Conference²⁰ - Women and decision making

The 1930's – 1940's – how women were discussed and presented

The first Elim Ministerial Conference was held in the Bible College in London 18th–22nd September 1933. Regional conferences had previously been held, like the one in the Northern Division at Glossop in 1932. Following the first Conference Principal Jeffreys sent a letter out to all the churches, duplicated in the Evangel, giving a brief encouragement and report, in which he said :

At one time there was joyous laughter, for the liberty was the freedom of the Spirit, at another serious demeanour testified to the restraint of the Spirit in sanctified debate.
(Elim Evangel, 13 October 1933, 649)

This balance of Pentecostal fervour and restraint was added to the general sense of unity amongst the Ministers and 'workers'. That unity was also demonstrated in the manner in which the names of the attendees were presented in the Minutes of the conference where the names were simply listed in alphabetical order by surname, followed by initials and for a woman a 'Miss' or 'Mrs'. However at the next annual conference (17th–21st September 1934) the list was limited to 'Members of Conference', with a second section for 'Probationers under direct government'. No women are recorded in these lists, thus indicating, that, perhaps by default, women were not considered Members of Conference because they had not been

²⁰ The following is largely derived from the archived Minute books.

ordained. However we know that at least seven women were present and took part in a key vote regarding British Israelism.²¹ Out of the seven women, five were opposed to the teaching of British Israelism in Elim churches, and two were neutral. The voting results were separated into various categories including ‘Sisters in the ministry’.

It is likely that these seven ‘Sisters in the ministry’ had been Elim workers for more than six years. For, in the previous year’s Conference a decision was made to have a General Presbytery that included ‘all ministers’ and a Ministerial Presbytery that consisted of ‘all who had been in the work for 6 years’. It is unclear exactly how the ‘Sisters’ fitted into this structure, although they were still not allowed on the Executive Presbytery. The decision back in 1928 to allow women on the General Presbytery, but not to vote, seems not to have affected their vote in this Ministerial Presbytery. The government structure of Elim was still under considerable review, and further changes were going to be made. However at this point, in 1934, within the Ministerial Conference, despite not being Members, seven women did vote.

That evening the issue of women was discussed in two separate ways, firstly, ‘Women’s ministry’, secondly ‘Wives of ministers and the platform’. Under the first topic, it was asked why women were not now accepted into the Bible College,²² and the reply suggested that there were difficulties in putting women in charge of churches. Exactly what those difficulties were was not explained. (A report in 1974 suggests that it was the ‘the public of this country [who] were not ready to accept women as pastors’.²³) Interestingly the

²¹ This held that Britons were descended from the ‘lost’ 10 tribes of Israel and was a theological catalysts within Elim that led to the resignation of Principal Jeffreys.

²² Women had attended the Bible College from its early days. For instance, mention of Miss M. Bax in the Bible College is made in *Elim Evangel*, 1st August 1925, 171.

²³ Elim Conference Report, ‘Opportunity of Service for Ladies’.

discussion of women's ministry must have been quite broad for it eventually led them to pass a resolution that focused on tackling negative comments:

No slighting remarks should be made against women [sic] ministry either from the platform or in private conversation in our churches.

This seemingly positive statement indicates that there was a general undercurrent against women in ministry, as evidenced by the fact that women were not now accepted into the Bible College. There was clearly little provision for enforcing such a resolution, but the tenet itself was attempting to add something positive into a situation where women were facing ministry challenges.

The second topic explored confusion over the extent to which a wife of a minister could sit on the platform of a church during the service. It appears that a seat on the platform indicated authority within the church. Comments were made to clarify the times when a wife could sit on the platform, for instance, in-between leading hymns, but not whilst her husband preaches. However, others complained that some Sisters were allowed on the platform. The minutes do not make it clear whom these Sisters were. However, the brief paragraph does shed some light on the tensions that the Conference was facing as it considered church practice in a more institutional fashion, and as the institution of Elim developed, so the involvement of women was restricted in their positions of leadership, authority and visibility.

In the conference of 7th–11th September 1936, again a 'General and Ministerial Conference', the list of names was separated into four categories. Firstly the 'Members of the Ministerial Conference' where the names of the male ministers were given accompanied with an 'x' if their wife also attended. There were two categories under which women were named. The first was simply called 'Others Present'. This included most of the women. The other category 'Ministers, Probationers and Church Leaders not under direct Government'

included some women's names. It is clear that women, now generally labelled under 'others' were facing an identity crisis within the structure of Elim.

On the Wednesday afternoon there was a 'private session for brethren only' in which the topics of fornication and adultery were discussed. Following this there is a note that a discussion was held regarding the attendance of Sisters at the Conference; this relates specifically to the Ministerial Conference, rather than the General Conference (which was held the next day). It was agreed that no change should be made (women could still attend), however children would not be allowed. This 'brethren only' meeting provided the men with a safer environment in which they could discuss the position of women at the Conference. Rather than do this openly with the women present, they waited for a closed session, as if fornication and adultery were issues that did not concern women. Interestingly, even this year (2018) I was made aware of women ministers being asked to leave Regional ministerial meetings in which similar discussions were held. Having talked with one such female minister,²⁴ it appears, from her perspective that this must have been for the sake of the embarrassment that the men may feel, although she felt belittled and isolated by the request. What perhaps originated as a type of social gentlemanly protection for the *sensitivities* of women, still lingers with a misguided attempt at restricting women from issues that are general to both sexes.

In the 1937 Conference, the presentation of those attending was again changed. Rather than listing names, there was a simple list of numbers and categories. There were 8 members of the Executive Council, '76 other members of the Ministerial Conference, 31 Probationers, 33 sister Evangelists and wives of Ministers, and about eight others'. During that first Monday evening meeting, at which all were present, a discussion was held regarding

²⁴ For confidentiality reasons I am not giving details that can identify the meeting or the female minister(s) involved.

‘Work for Sisters in our Churches who feel called to the service of the Lord’, the meeting notes explain that there was ‘much discussion of this subject’, and apparently various proposals were suggested including allowing them to be ‘salaried Deaconesses’, however ‘eventually’ the following resolution was made: ‘RESOLVED that the subject of work for sisters in our churches be not pursued at the present time’.

At the conference of 1938, there is no separate mention of women, although in the General Conference the inclusion of about 80 ‘others’ is mentioned. In 1939 there is no separate mention of ‘sisters’ again. A proposal was put forward to allow ‘Minister’s wives and the ministering sisters’ to attend the conference, but the proposal was defeated. This indicates how the scope of women’s involvement is slowly eroded. Whilst the fact that the proposal was put forward continues to identify this issue as somewhat contentious.

Then in 1942 in the Representative Session,²⁵ a resolution was presented and withdrawn upon the condition that it would be on the next year’s agenda. The resolution was that ‘as a principle sisters whether married or unmarried who have been called to the ministry be eligible for acceptance as ministers’. This would have been an important change to the way that women were perceived. However, the matter was not placed on the following year’s agenda, and for specific reasons as I now explain.

On 22nd April 1943 correspondence was sent out to the Members of Conference regarding the Annual Conference. Due to the ‘present wartime restrictions’ a subsequent vote decided that there only be a ‘formal conference’ comprising of those who live nearby. At the formal conference, with only 14 ministers present, very little business was done, except the appointment of scrutineers, the appointment of ministers, and the authorization of the ordination of ministers. The issue of women ministers for future conferences was either forgotten or dropped. The pressures of the war, and the internal battles regarding the teaching

²⁵ Indicating another change to the government of Elim c. 1940.

of British Israelism and the position of Principal Jeffries overshadowed the women's journey forcing it into the background.

In 1945 at the Annual Conference, the minutes of the Ministerial Session record the admission of Ministers. Under this heading four women were accepted as part of the Elim Missionary Society. Some men were also mentioned here, two of which were then authorised to be ordained. Women were still not being ordained, although they were considered as ministers under the Elim Missionary Society.

Minor ongoing discussions were held with the 6th January 1948 Executive Presbytery resolving 'that discussion be held on the subject of sisters being invited to the next conference'. But no decision was made. Later that year, demonstrating further changes they decided that wives of missionaries would not have their credential renewed for 1949.

The decades of the 1930s–40s demonstrate a slow inexorable shift for the position of women in ministry within Elim. The list of names at Conference demonstrates this change, from a unified male and female list, to inclusion as 'others', to no further mention. Women were still accepted into ministry, sometimes this is listed explicitly through the Elim Missionary Council, other times it is not clear if they are missionaries or home ministers.

Conclusion

Subtle changes over time ensured that by the middle of the 20th Century women's involvement within Elim was mostly on the mission field. Those who had been involved in pioneering and ministering within the UK Elim movement had not been able to pave a way for other women to follow. The presentation of names, whether in the Elim Evangel or in the Conference minutes demonstrate the slow alteration of the perception of the role of women within Elim. The arguments used by the 'Ordination of Sisters Committee' focus on themes that remain common today, whilst also maintaining a rather pragmatic approach. Marriage

and war play their part in this story; but so do formalisation and institutionalization. Despite the evolution of restrictions on women in governing positions, the place of women as ministers, or the question of their ordination, continued to be discussed and raised. For Elim, these discussions would have to wait until the 1970's before they are again resumed.

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