

4. Prophetic Discourse and the Voice of Protest: The Vindication of Anne Wentworth

C. E. Whiting, in his *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution (1660-1688)*, introduces two Baptist women who have left narratives of their persecutions during the 1670's. He remarks that one, Agnes Beaumont of Bunyan's congregation, seems to have been innocent — as he puts it, 'a thoroughly good woman ... [while] A rather different case was that of Anne Wentworth.'¹ Anne Wentworth, it would seem, is not so 'good': Whiting's summary of her case is worth citing fully to discern wherein Anne's 'goodness' is found wanting:

She had been a Baptist but had left that sect, and suffered much at the hands of her former associates in consequence. She had also been ill-treated by her husband, and she had left him. She published a vindication of herself, in which she announced her willingness to return to him on condition that she should not be interfered with in her worship. Apparently she claimed a prophetic spirit, and she related how on the fifth day of the tenth month 1677 the Lord had awakened her in the night and made her sing unto Him a triumphant victorious song over her enemies. She appealed to the congregations of Anabaptists and their pastors, and asked if it was right of them to defame a neighbour in alehouses and coffeeshouses; and she complained that she had been so defamed and abused for the past twenty four years, and had been proclaimed a heathen by the church. 'Let them prove her guilty of the things of which they accused her before the next Lord's New Year's Day, or trouble should come upon them [and the whole nation] from the Lord, and she would be able to rejoice when they had cause to mourn.'²

It would seem that Wentworth's 'difference' is her most unwomanly independence and her threat of revenge on her persecutors. Her religious vocation has not only inspired her rebellion at home, but has empowered her fearlessness and spite in the face of social ostracism.

Whiting's mention of Beaumont and Wentworth is an incidental observation in his text meant to illustrate only the impact of dissenting doctrine on domestic arrangements; the 'religious divisions of the time brought strife into families, and malice and uncharitableness amongst