Gender and the Puritan Mission to the Native People of New England, 1620–1750  Jason Eden

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I came upon the delightful account of the Wise Women of Waban as I was researching my chapter on “Equality and Native Americans in North America” in the recent book I had the delight to edit with our CBE president, Dr. Mimi Haddad, and my wife, the Rev. Dr. Aída Besançon Spencer, Global Voices on Biblical Equality: Women and Men Serving Together in the Church.

My appearance favors my mother’s side of the family—she was second-generation Greek and Czech—so that I often joked, when we were side by side meeting people, that “he who had seen me had seen the mother.” However, my father and sister were decidedly blessed with the “Algonkin” Leni-Lenape heritage on his side of the family, both of them favored with the striking features of the eastern coastal Amerindians: high cheekbones, a perceptible hook in the upper nose, olive skin, jet black hair, and deep brown eyes. As well, my father had a peripatetic temperament. One could drop him in the woods at any spot, and he could not only live off the land, but unerringly find his way home. He would leave in November, roam around his favorite farms and forests hunting first small game and then large game through December, and then come home with his buck on his car fender, butcher it the back yard, and give a welcome and generous portion to the pastor and the poor, a do-it-yourself approach perhaps rarer in “safe-serve” consciousness.

John Eliot, indefatigable champion of the gospel, had failed to interest England in his suggestion to replace the British monarchy with a theocracy, its civil law with a theonomy, built on Jethro’s advice to Moses in Exodus 18. His book, The Christian Commonwealth: or, The Civil Policy of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ, languished without publication until 1659 and the complete collapse of Oliver Cromwell’s commonwealth. But, when Eliot’s idea was suggested to the newly converted Praying Indians of Massachusetts, they embraced it, changing their whole government, including the remarkably humble stepping down of their rallying chief, Waban (for whom this area within the present city of Newton is still named), in favor of the older and profoundly respected Totherswamp[e]. But, as Eliot’s fellow missionaries watched the transformation take place, they were startled to see the women of the tribe throwing themselves into the reformulation with as much evil snake, a subsequent flood destroying humanity, and deliverance of the few by riding on a turtle until the waters subsided.

But it was while I was researching the Algonquians farther north, in fact, in the region where I now live, that I learned of the remarkable women and men of the Christian Praying Indians.

Totherswamp[e]. But, as Eliot’s fellow missionaries watched the transformation take place, they were startled to see the women of the tribe throwing themselves into the reformulation with as much...
vigor as the men. In fact, they became very uncomfortable when the women began to apply the gospel with such gusto that even the wife of the new highest chief Totherswamp[e] asked pointedly “whether a husband should do well to pray with his wife, and yet continue in his passions and be angry with his wife.” Another wife asked, “Do I pray when my husband prays, if I speak nothing as he doth, yet if I like what he says, and my heart goes with it?” The missionary Thomas Shepherd remarked he had “heard few Christians when they look toward God, make more searching questions than these Indians.”

So zealous were the women that they accused their sachem’s wife of “worldly conversation” on a Sabbath. But, the sachem’s wife argued so compellingly that the fault was not her speech in private, but the preacher’s for overemphasizing this topic on a Sabbath, that, “by common consent,” the entire assemblage decided to refer the matter to Eliot himself. The missionaries tried to put a curb on all this “unfit” participation by women, as Shepherd reported:

Perceiving divers of the Indian women well affected, and considering that their soules might stand in need of answer to their scruples as well as the mens, and yet because we knew how unfit it was for women so much as to ask questions publicly immediately by themselves, wee did therefore desire them to propound any questions they would be resolved about by first acquainting either their Husbands or the Interpreter privately therewith; whereupon we heard two questions orderly propounded. The attempt at suppressing the women was not only misguided, but ultimately a complete failure. Three hundred years later, the Praying Indians, based in Natick, not far from Waban, are now led by a female sachem and a female clan mother.

As in the case of the Praying Indians, the powerful witness of Christian Native American women and men has continued throughout the centuries since the time of exemplary men like the brilliant and devout military strategist Enrique, who preserved the Taino nation in the early 1500s from complete annihilation by the conquistadores, right through to today’s powerful women like the Reverend Cheryl Bear-Barnetson, who is interviewed in this issue.

Our tribute to God’s work among the five hundred nations includes an equal look at ministry by women in the surrounding pioneer areas. We begin with Saint Cloud State University professor Jason Eden’s study of the question of gender and missions in early New England. Longwood University professor Kristen Dayle Welch next examines the work of early Pentecostal Holiness preaching women, an account which Highrock Evangelical Covenant Church’s Michelle Sanchez completes for us. Hilary Davis follows with an insightful interview with the Rev. Bear-Barnetson, who is shown on our cover. Hilary has served with Mending Wings Ministries on the Yakama Reservation in Wapato, Washington. Physician Shirley Barron offers a review of Lynn Cohick’s *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, and former University of the Nations Bible teacher and present Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary graduate student Jennifer Creamer reviews T. Scott Womble’s *Beyond Reasonable Doubt: Ninety Five Theses Which Dispute the Church’s Conviction Against Women*. We then enjoy another sensitive poem from our Cherokee poet, Teresa Two Feathers Flowers, whose book of poetic reflections, *How to Have an Attitude of Gratitude on the Night Shift*, is being published by Indianapolis’s New Century Publishing.

History is filled with awe-inspiring examples from the lives of the human host of witnesses who have preceded us and now commune with our Lord face to face. As we meet them in these pages, may the Lord empower us with a similar godly boldness, which was the prayer of the disciples in Acts 4:29, so that someday, if the Lord tarries, as the ancients used to say, our deeds too will inspire those who come after us to champion the radical cause truly worth defending—the advancement of the rule of the great, sovereign, loving God who empowers all the saints to help heal and reconcile the world.

Blessings,

Notes


The Puritans are not known for their egalitarianism. Indeed, the word “Puritan” instead conjures up images of witch-burning, fun-draining, Quaker-persecuting authoritarians who restricted women to a life of dreary housework and perpetual childrearing. There is some truth to this stereotype. Certainly, the typical Puritan minister viewed women as subordinate beings who needed to keep quiet in church and be submissive to their husbands. As Benjamin Wadsworth noted in a sermon titled *The Well-Ordered Family*, “The husband is called the head of the woman. It belongs to the head to rule and govern.”1 The cases of Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer—strong-willed women who suffered banishment or execution for defying the established order—lend further credence to our stereotypes about the Puritans.2

On the other hand, historians have carefully documented how much of our vision of seventeenth-century New England Puritans incorrectly associates them with nineteenth-century Victorian-era norms and values. The Puritans were relatively open and flexible when it came to sex, for example. Although adultery was a serious crime, church records reveal that fornication was quite common in New England churches and grace was readily extended to those who repented of this sin. Ministers talked openly about sex in their sermons, and husbands and wives celebrated the pleasures of their sexual union in private letters. Furthermore, Puritans drank alcohol often, and in relatively large quantities, and were at least ambivalent, and sometimes downright permissive, when it came to the issue of tobacco smoking.3 Given the fact that the Puritans differed from Victorian norms in these areas, is it possible that the English Puritans of America’s colonial period were actually more egalitarian than our stereotypes about them might presume?

My analysis of records related to Puritan missionary work would suggest that the answer to the above question is “yes.” At least in regard to Christianized Indians, Puritans in New England were open to the idea of women taking an active role in church ministry. Furthermore, interacting with Indians seems to have forced missionaries to rethink some of their basic assumptions about God’s intentions for Christian men and women. Admittedly, there were limitations to this. The Puritans expected that only men would hold formal positions of authority in Native American churches, and they encouraged Indian communities to implement English gender norms in other ways as well. Yet, in spite of this, it is clear that the supposedly stodgy and patriarchal Puritans were, in certain respects, more egalitarian than many evangelicals in today’s world.

**Precontact English and Indian gender norms**

Before investigating developments in gender norms in early New England, it is worthwhile to examine attitudes toward men and women among English colonists and Indians before they met one another. Clearly, as is the case with all societies, expectations regarding men and women were extremely complex, and there was some variation in opinions among both Indians and the English. Therefore, the following descriptions are generalizations rather than absolute statements about the attitudes of each and every Native American or English colonist.

Although several different tribes, including the Wampanoags, Nipmucks, Narragansetts, and Pequots, lived in New England in 1600, scholars agree that, for the most part, their gender norms were fundamentally similar. Men and women had specific roles and duties in society, and economic functions, in particular, were segregated by gender. Indians in New England tended to view agricultural work, home construction, and clothing manufacturing as women’s work. For men, hunting, fishing, and making tools were appropriate occupations. Native American women shared childrearing responsibilities with grandparents and other relatives. Overall, sexual relationships among Indians were characterized by a degree of autonomy, with divorce being fairly easy for both men and women to obtain.4

Gender not only affected work roles in Native American society, but also shaped spiritual and religious activity. Native Americans in New England felt that women possessed great powers, for through birth they seemingly bestowed the gift of life. Indians valued numerous feminine spiritual figures whom they credited with bestowing life upon humans, plants, and animals. Native Americans accepted women’s dreams as supernaturally inspired, and Europeans accused them of practicing witchcraft, a heresy commonly affiliated with women. This suggests that women played important spiritual roles in Native American society, even if those roles were not always explicitly recorded by European observers. Overall, Indian men and women recognized that each gender was physically and spiritually different, but both genders possessed important specific powers and responsibilities.5

In terms of actual practices, Native American women could actively participate in and lead religious activities, including rituals involving male participants. Indians celebrated, feasted, and played games during their ceremonies. During such occasions, they also composed spiritual songs, sang out loud, and sometimes smoked tobacco, which symbolized thanks or prayers rising to heaven and encouraged hallucinations and forms of spiritual revelation.6

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Gender mattered a great deal to the English of the seventeenth century as well, but their sex and gender norms were different from those of New England Indians. Farming was men's work, and it was expected that men would be the leaders of their households. Men in English society also wielded formal religious and political authority, with few exceptions. Mothers, rather than grandparents or fathers, were primarily responsible for childrearing, and Puritans closely regulated the behavior of women in other spheres of society as well. In addition to childrearing, women processed food, made clothing, assisted other women with childbirth, and sometimes administered medical remedies.

In terms of marriage and sex, the English had clear expectations. Women were to obey their husbands and love them, while also having the right to expect a measure of love and respect in return. Men, for their part, were supposed to take care of their wives and provide for their material needs. Divorce was nearly impossible to obtain, especially for women, and only in the most extreme and clear cases of spousal abuse could a wife leave her husband.

Gender shaped English religious life in numerous ways. To the Puritans, there was no doubt that the God of the Bible was male. The King James Bible's referral to God as Father was to be taken literally, and the fact that Jesus was a male reinforced this belief. Furthermore, one of the ways Puritans distanced themselves from Catholics was by deemphasizing Mary and other feminine figures, doing away with nuns and other female spiritual offices, and ignoring or deemphasizing positive female biblical figures and allegories. To New England Puritans, the most relevant female images from the Bible were Eve, Bathsheba, Delilah, and other seductive or fallen women. Partially for this reason, but also because of how they interpreted 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and other verses in the epistles, only men could lead or speak openly in church settings and at religious gatherings.

**Puritan missionary work, 1620–1740**

Before considering an analysis of gender norms as they relate to English missionaries, it is necessary to relate some basic background information about the missionary enterprises themselves. The Puritans organized their churches upon a congregational system in which each church community was designed to be a self-sustaining, autonomous unit. Individual churches were supposed to select and pay their own ministers, and they only infrequently consulted other congregations regarding doctrinal matters or ecclesiastical conflicts. This approach did little to address the needs of neighboring Indians, since, unlike Catholics or even other Protestant denominations, the Puritans lacked a bureaucratic structure to allocate funds to missionary efforts or systematically recruit and train missionaries to evangelize Native people. Furthermore, the Puritans hoped and expected that the Indians would eagerly pursue and embrace Christianity on their own, without any need for active proselytization.

After several decades of fruitlessly waiting for Indians to show up on their church doorsteps, the Puritans in New England realized that, if any conversions were to occur, the Puritans would have to take a more active role in reaching out to neighboring Indians. Consequently, a few individuals began missionary work during the mid-1600s. The most famous of the missionaries was John Eliot, but others, including Richard Bourne, members of the Mayhew family, members of the Cotton family, and William Le- verich, also began preaching to Indians. Eventually, an organization known as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel was set up to collect donations, coordinate work, and start a seminary to train young Indian men for ministerial careers.

The core strategy employed by the Puritans involved the establishment of "Praying Towns" in which Christian Indians would live apart from both English colonists and other Indians. The idea was to create protected enclaves in which Christian Indians could learn not only about God, the Bible, and the creeds, but also how to live out their daily lives as the English did. The missionaries wanted the Indians to farm, dress, and act like the English, and this included following English gender norms. In order for the Indians to become good Christians, so the thinking went, they had to become "civilized."

As scholars have recognized, the English colonists barely achieved even limited success in accomplishing their objectives. Missionaries often expressed frustration and experienced emotional depression as a result of numerous setbacks. Many English, especially in the wake of resentments caused by the wars of the 1600s, opposed the Christianization of Indians, seeing it as a waste of time and resources. Death by disease and disruption caused by war also wreaked havoc in the Praying Towns. Furthermore, not only did many Indians resist Christianization, especially during the 1600s, but, even as more and more Indians became Christianized by the 1700s, they held on to many of their traditions. As we shall see, much of this persistence related to the roles of men and women in Indian churches.

**Gender in Indian churches**

The missionaries partially succeeded in convincing the Indians to follow English gender norms. For example, Indian men, not women, held official positions of leadership in the churches. Only young Indian men attended the seminary at Harvard designed to train new ministers. Christian Indians at least claimed to serve the Puritans' male God and, according to English sources, expressed a willingness to abandon their former traditions.

Although certain gender norms were changing in New England Indian communities, evidence also shows that some traditional Indian ideas about men's and women's proper roles did not change. It is abundantly clear that Indian gender norms were not, and never became, the same as those of their English neighbors. This included ideas about who could and could not speak at religious gatherings and the degree to which women might hold spiritual authority in and outside the home.

Available records indicate that, at religious meetings in Christian Indian communities, both men and women spoke openly and asked questions. John Cotton, Jr., a missionary who worked on Martha's Vineyard and near Plymouth during the mid-1600s, recorded some of these questions in his journal. Sometimes, curios-
ity seems to have motivated these inquiries, while, in other cases, Indians seem to have been challenging certain Puritan teachings.

A careful analysis of questions posed by American Indians reveals their curiosity regarding the place of women within Scripture. On March 20, 1666, William Lay asked Cotton "who was the Queen of the south, and what generation it was that she should condemn, and whether only the bad ones in that generation?" This question referred to Matthew 12:42, a passage in which Jesus contrasted the stubborn religious leaders of his day with the Queen of Sheba, who willingly listened to Solomon’s wisdom. On March 5, 1667, Kottoosuck asked about Revelation 17:6, which says, "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus, and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration." In one case, an Indian man named Towan dared to ask "why was [Christ] a man?" Such questions indicate that Indians did not quickly forget their traditional value of female icons and spiritual figures. They, unlike their English counterparts, did not simply accept the normative nature of maleness, nor did they see the centrality of male spiritual figures as normative. Whether or not their inquiries altered Cotton’s views of gender remains a mystery, as he never recorded his answers to the Indians’ questions. If he did answer the Indians’ questions adequately, he almost certainly would have had to look up passages that challenged his assumptions regarding the patriarchal nature of Christianity.

In addition to questioning Cotton regarding female imagery and characters from the Bible, in one instance, Indians inquired about a practical issue related to gender. This occurred when Towan asked Cotton, "Why does not God command as much in his word concerning widows as widowers?" Apparently, Towan had discovered that several selections from the Bible focused upon the plight of widows and orphans and the need to extend charity to them, but few passages mentioned widowers. The English had little concern for widowers, since men could presumably secure their own material needs. For Indians, women provided key economic resources to households, and losing a wife or mother could pose significant challenges to husbands and children. In this case, verses found in the King James Bible, from Towan’s perspective at least, failed to address an important need within Indian communities. It is fascinating to speculate whether or not, in response to this difficult question, John Cotton, Jr., emphasized the general Christian principle of extending charity to all those in need, male or female. Or, perhaps more likely, he fell back upon English gender norms and assumed that widowers, whether English or Indian, were naturally capable of taking care of themselves and their families without female aid.

Like Cotton, Experience Mayhew, a missionary who worked on Martha’s Vineyard during the early 1700s, recorded cases of outspoken Indian women. According to Mayhew’s accounts of his services in both Massachusetts and Connecticut in the early 1700s, neither English preachers nor Indian men scrutinized or suppressed the opinions women voiced at religious meetings. Although they typically held no official positions of leadership, Indian women taught adults of both genders. Mayhew made many references to such women. Abiah Paonoit "was very observable for her Forwardness to entertain religious Discourses, and her ability to manage them to the edification of those with whom she conversed." Momchquannum instructed others, especially "young Men and Women, whom she frequently admonished for their Faults, and excited to their Duty." For many English Puritans (and many current evangelicals), it was improper for women to speak so openly or to instruct men, but in Christian Indian communities, the active participation of women was apparently the norm.

Throughout the 1600s and 1700s, Christian Indian women not only served as spiritual leaders, but also as prophets, healers, and visionaries. Such individuals often administered both natural and supernatural remedies to the sick. Although Mayhew did not specifically indicate how Indian healers practiced their arts, it seems reasonable to conclude that they applied a combination of natural and spiritual remedies, perhaps combining Christian and traditional rituals together. As healers, they likely worked on the margins of heterodoxy, operating close to the realm of magic and wonders. This spiritual world was familiar to both Indians and ordinary English colonists, even as educated ministers and elites expressed doubts and suspicions about such supernatural activity.

In one dramatic instance, Mayhew recorded that the ghost of Elizabeth Pattompan spoke to her father from the grave. She warned him to seek Christ and to write down the words she had uttered just before her death. She also prophesied that he would soon lose all of his material goods and land. The man consulted relatives and friends who advised him to fulfill his daughter’s wishes. Soon afterward, the man lost his property, as his daughter’s spirit had predicted, and he subsequently obeyed her command to live soberly and seek God. Such instances reflect the persistence of certain Wampanoag traditions, most notably the degree of respect given to women and to dreams. Christian Indians combined these traditional values with biblical theology to create a new and dynamic form of spirituality.

In other cases, Mayhew described miraculous healings that occurred in Christian Indian communities. Japheth Hannit’s mother, who had lost five infants to death, despaired of losing Japheth, her sixth child, in a similar manner. She went out into a field to weep, “but while she was there musing on the insufficiency of human help, she found it powerfully suggested to her mind” that there was one God in the universe who could preserve her son’s life. She responded to the vision by seeking Christ, and her son lived. Abiah Paonoit, when ill, went outside at night and “was very suddenly refreshed with a light shining upon and about her.” Mayhew reported that God responded miraculously to the prayers of Christian Indian women in several other instances as well.

Many Christian Indian men, even after coming under the influence of English gender norms, demonstrated egalitarian leanings. They attentively listened to women at meetings and cer-
emonies without criticizing or prosecuting them in the way that English men criticized and prosecuted English women. Mayhew said that some women advised their husbands. In one instance, Elizabeth Uhquat spoke “to her Husband giving him the best counsel she could [sic].”35 Men also respected the healing abilities of women and sought out women for healing and prayer when in need. As the story of Elizabeth Pattompan and those of other women suggest, men listened to and obeyed female prophets and storytellers as viable spiritual authorities. Although Christianization influenced gender roles among New England Indians, as other scholars have noted, clearly, Indian men did not adhere to exactly the same patriarchal values that English Puritans did.36 Such accounts lead one to ponder how Indians might have interpreted the Bible in regard to gender without the guidance of Puritans.

Flexible Puritans? The struggle to translate Christianity

It is clear that many Christian Indians in colonial Massachusetts were relatively egalitarian, at least when compared to their English neighbors. But what about the missionaries themselves? What did they think of gender issues after interacting with Indians? Although the evidence suggests that they never became full supporters of equality, it is clear that contact with Indians pushed them to think in new ways about both gender and Christianity.

When Josiah Cotton, son of John Cotton, Jr., decided to become a missionary in the early 1700s, it is unlikely that he thought much about gender and how it might affect the composition of his sermons. But, as the image below illustrates, interacting with Indians required Cotton to wrestle with a variety of issues in new and, from his perspective, unusual ways. Instead of beginning this particular sermon with a statement of doctrine or a moral lesson, as was normally the custom for a Puritan minister, Cotton spent a whole paragraph explaining to his Indian audience how the biblical phrase “sons of men” referred not just to males, but to all humankind. The issue of gendered language caused trouble for Cotton later in the sermon as well. Midway through the document, he wrote the phrase, “Men’s hearts are fully set in them to do evil from atheism.”37 In his text, he crossed out the word “men’s,” but rewrote it, apparently because he was unable to come up with a better, more inclusive term. These sections of his sermon indicate that contact with Indians forced missionaries such as Cotton to confront, and perhaps rethink, some of their assumptions regarding gender and language.

Like Cotton, Experience Mayhew also pondered gender issues as a result of his encounters with New England Indians. When he documented accounts of vocal and dynamic Christian Indian women receiving visions or demonstrating miraculous powers, Mayhew never condemned the women or men for excessive mysticism or superstition. Instead, he simply wrote, “I shall leave these strange occurrences to the thoughts of others, without spending my own judgment on them.” Such statements reflect the tension Mayhew felt when negotiating new theological boundaries in the presence of Christian Indians.38

While missionaries struggled with whether or not it was theologically sound for Indian women to receive visions or prophecy, there is no evidence to suggest that they ever intervened or tried to stop such activities. That is, on a practical level, the mis-
sionaries were more open to egalitarianism among Indians. They never incarcerated or punished Indian women for teaching or prophesying, as would be the norm when dealing with English women who engaged in such activities. If anything, missionaries, by answering questions posed by Indian women and publicizing their mystical experiences, affirmed the active role women played in Christian Indian communities. Mayhew, when mentioning a pious woman named Hannah Nohnosoo, said, “I have myself divers times heard her talk very religiously.”39 Even though many of these instances might not be considered preaching, at least in a Puritan sense, even listening to a woman’s opinions at a religious meeting stretched the missionaries’ understanding of proper gender roles.

Explanations for egalitarianism in early American missions

Even after prolonged contact with English missionaries, Christian Indians maintained many of their traditions, particularly pertaining to women’s roles as healers, prophets, and teachers. As scholars have found among a variety of Indian tribes, gender norms remained remarkably persistent, even in the wake of dramatic changes in other areas of life.40

The persistence of traditional gender norms explains many of the Christian Indians’ views regarding the roles of men and women. It should also be said, however, that, as studious Christians, the Indians found some support for their views in the Bible. Even in non-egalitarian translations, such as the King James, Indians discovered stories about powerful female figures and images, particularly in the books of Matthew and Revelation. They studied diligently, found passages related to gender, and asked honest and thought-provoking questions. They wondered about theoretical and mystical elements of Christianity, but also wanted to understand what the Bible said about the treatment of widows and widowers. The fact that their inquiries predated the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s by some three hundred years indicates that interest in what the Bible has to say about gender is not specific to any limited time, place, or historical context. It is a reflection of the universal importance of proper relationships between the genders and of widespread curiosity about what the Bible teaches regarding men and women. In this case, profound interest and piety, rather than a particular political agenda, motivated the questions of Christian Indians in colonial New England.

As for the missionaries, the reasons for their relatively egalitarian stance are less clear. Their tolerance of egalitarianism does not seem to have been rooted in ignorance or benign neglect of Scripture. Clearly, based upon their life histories, these men invested significant amounts of time and energy in their work as missionaries.41 It is not as if they did not care about Indian behavior or beliefs. They also certainly were aware of the egalitarianism in Indian communities, as some of them even publicized the stories in written works. Perhaps the root of their flexibility lay in the many adversities they encountered: resistance from both English colonists and Indians themselves, high rates of mortality in Indian communities, disruption from warfare, language barriers, among others. It seems reasonable to assume that they “picked their battles” when it came to cultural variations and focused upon communicating what they saw as the essential tenets and doctrines of Christianity. Everything else was peripheral. Apparently, the missionaries recognized that it was possible for devout, Bible-based Christianity and egalitarian gender relationships to go hand in hand. Requiring Indians to adhere strictly to English gender norms would do more harm than good to the spread of the gospel, so the missionaries decided to allow for some flexibility. In doing so, they established a legacy of being “relative egalitarians” in regard to missionary work. As other authors have noted, this heritage persisted among American evangelicals throughout the 1800s and 1900s as well.42

Notes

in the Shape of a Woman; Thickstun, Fictions of the Feminine; Ulrich, Good Wives.


20. Travers, "Notes and Documents," 77.

21. Cotton's journal suggests that he took Indian questions seriously. He studied Scriptures in response to Indian questions, in one instance preaching from Matt. 4:10 a month after an Indian named Joseph asked about the passage. Travers, "Notes and Documents," 80–81.

22. Travers, "Notes and Documents," 80. In many cases, such gendered language may be more a product of English translators rather than a reflection of the original intent of ancient authors. Recently, some biblical scholars and linguists have challenged translations of certain passages, including 1 Tim. 2, which, according to English translations, apparently restrict the role of women in churches and prevent them from holding leadership positions. In other cases, gender-neutral pronouns in Greek and Hebrew were translated as generic "he" or "him" in older English translations such as the King James and Geneva Bibles used by Puritans and Indians in southeastern Massachusetts. See Joe E. Trull and Audra E. Trull, eds., Putting Women in Their Place: Moving Beyond Gender Stereotypes in Church and Home (Macon, Ga.: Smyth and Helwys, 2003); Catherine and Richard Kroeger, I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in Light of Ancient Evidence (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992).


25. Bragdon, Native People, 169–83; Salisbury, Manitou and Providence, 30–49; Taylor, American Colonies, 188–92.


27. Mayhew, Indian Converts, 159.


29. Although women held informal power and were influential in shaping ecclesiastical life in colonial Massachusetts, it is clear that they were not supposed to preach or speak openly in Puritan congregations. Ulrich, Good Wives, 219–35; Marilyn Westerkaemp, "Anne Hutchinson, Sectarian Mysticism, and the Puritan Order," Church History 59 (Dec. 1990): 482–96; David Hall, ed., The Antinomian Controversy, 1636–1658: A Documentary History (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968).


32. Bragdon, Native People, 177–78, 190–91; Mayhew, Indian Converts, 238–42.

33. Mayhew, Indian Converts, 45.

34. Mayhew, Indian Converts, 160.

35. Mayhew, Indian Converts, 201.


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Introduction
As a scholar of rhetoric and as a Pentecostal Christian, I notice that, although rhetoric and religion embody quite different theoretical perspectives, rhetoric, religion, and gender collide when we examine who is given the authority to speak and who is believed within the church.

It is truly remarkable that the women preachers in the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) have been permitted to speak authoritatively in their role as truth-speakers from as early as the late nineteenth century through the present day. Even more remarkable is the fact that women preachers were able to claim and exercise the right to preach even before 1907 in what was known as Indian Territory (now known as Oklahoma). They did so by a claim to authority through their call to preach, through the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and through their charisma. These claims to authority were supported by those who came to hear them speak and left educated, converted, filled with the Spirit, forever changed. Additionally, the truth of their callings was verified and validated by those working alongside them who occupied positions of leadership as well as those in the pews of the church. These were people who shared a similar epistemology—that is, a similar way of knowing, understanding, and interacting with the world that was distinctly “Pentecostal,” not only as it was defined on Azusa Street between 1906 and 1908, but also as it was enthusiastically and charismatically practiced in the late 1800s. Therefore, power for women in the IPHC is individual, spiritual, and communal. Most importantly, it is still exercised by women in the IPHC today, though not without challenges at times.

Women preaching in Indian Territory
Sometime around 1920, Dan York completed memoirs for himself and his wife, Dollie. Both were born in the 1870s or 1880s. Dan writes that, when he was young, his father chose to “come west” from Tupelo, Mississippi, to Paul’s Valley in Indian Territory by “stage.” From there, they went to Purdy and lived in a “half dugout” between 1891 and 1892. When they could not find work, they decided to venture out to Texas, but were caught by a blizzard at Tar Springs, Oklahoma. Providentially, they found shelter with a man who had just built a small cabin, and, although it had only one room and no roof, they were grateful to be out of a storm which lasted ten days. Dan wrote that he and his family “had to hunt game for our eats.” When it came time to go, they floated their oxen and wagon across the nearby river on blocks of ice and went on their way. Indeed, through Dan’s young eyes, Oklahoma’s unsettled territory was daunting and often dangerous, but also open and untouched. A sense of adventure must have permeated the air.

In the second chapter of his book, Dan described the conversion he experienced before making the trip to Indian Territory in 1891. In 1889, Dan walked three miles to a Methodist church in his “homemade suit” and no shoes. There, he made his commitment to Christ at the altar, his uncle John York’s hand on his head. Shortly before the move to Indian Territory, he was told he “could not keep his religion out there.” Such a warning was understandable to those who were familiar with the place. As Nazarene Pentecostal preacher and self-proclaimed historian C. B. Jernigan wrote in his history of the Holiness movement, around 1897 Indian Territory was “owned, but unallotted by the Indians,” leased mostly to “cattle men,” as well as owned by farmers living in its rich valleys. Residents lived in dugouts and log cabins, just as Dan described: “The inhabitants were Indians, cowboys, and many desperate characters who had gone there to escape the law in other states.” The soon-to-be-converts “spent their Sundays in drinking ‘chock,’ a native beer manufactured by the Choc-taw Indians, and in gambling and carousing in general.” It took a “preach or burn” spirit to reach these people and a “pioneer spirit” that had little to do with settling the land and everything to do with spreading charismatic Pentecostalism.

Dollie York was equal to the task. While in Texas, she and Dan faced threats of imprisonment and were even attacked by a dog at one meeting. Dan wrote that the people “whipped, sandbagged, poured slop water on us, egged, blew beer foam in our faces, threw snakes on us, and threw rocks and pieces of fence posts at me while I was preaching.” Wanderers to the core—as most early Pentecostal preachers were—they went back to Indian Territory in 1903. In 1907, two of their comrades received the baptism of the Holy Spirit in a service led by the man who would be bishop of the IPHC for decades, Rev. J. H. King. When their friends returned, Dan and Dollie began seeking the experience based on their testimonies.

Dollie and Dan cleared their land, built brush arbors, cleared briars and underbrush for camp meetings, dug wells, and set up tables and chairs. Dollie led music using her tambourine and often preached as well. Dan recalled one day when she preached and “65 fell at the altar, screaming and crying for God to have mercy on them.” Dan made no secret of the fact that he and Dollie shared the work and reward of their ministry for decades.

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He used the famous Proverbs 31 chapter to describe her, writing, “Thank God for a wife like this one. She has stood by me now for 58 years.” He recalled her prayers and her strength and gave her full credit for their shared successes as ministers throughout the telling of their shared story. Dollie’s authority to preach came through the baptism in the Holy Spirit and her charisma in the pulpit, but also through the vision she and her husband shared. The way they viewed the world and preached Pentecost lent her the type of authority held by those who viewed power in these terms, as Dan wrote from the Hill Top Church in Calvin, Oklahoma, on July 24, 1920:

“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” Acts 1:8. What is this power for? To dance, shout and talk in tongues? No, it will do that, too, but say, that is the last part of it all. . . . [This power will] often lead you to some heart-prayer to God, it gives you unction from heaven and the throne; power to pray, to sing, testify, preach or exhort, and [to the] broken, censored soul, in the darkened, neglected home, or in the streets. There we find them by the thousands, friendless and forsaken, a cast-out in this world, and a cast-out at judgment, if we or someone else do not go.11

One of the most famous woman preachers in the International Pentecostal Holiness Church denomination was Agnes N. Ozman LaBerge. Born in 1870 in Wisconsin, Agnes begins her autobiography by describing herself as “evangelist” and “missionary.”12 As such, she became a wanderer, much like the Yorks, traveling from place to place to preach and convert. It is possible that part of the authority used by early Pentecostal preachers was derived from the fact that they were often strangers among the people they hoped to convert. Thus, past failings and weaknesses in their character were unknown to their audiences, giving the illusion of a purity no human can attain, or at least not for very long. In her story, Agnes mentions going to Minnesota for Bible school, to New York City for another Bible school, to New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri—the list goes on and on. At Bethel College in Topeka, Kansas, she prayed for about three weeks for the baptism of the Holy Spirit and received it on New Year’s Day, 1901.13 She soon traveled to Houston, Texas, and heard the soon-to-be-famous William Seymour preaching. She wrote that he was given money to go to Los Angeles, California, and this is where he began the famous three-year revival on Bonnie Brey Street that would attract religious leaders from all over the United States, changing the character of Pentecostalism.

Agnes was traveling as an evangelist when she met her husband, Philemon, in Oklahoma City. Courting Agnes meant he needed to pack his bags, of course. He soon had to follow her to McAlester, Oklahoma, and join her in her prison ministry there, then follow her to Wilberton, California, where they “decided to walk and work together in life and in the future.”14 LaBerge established her authority not only through her reputation as a successful evangelist, but also because of her education and the extensive quoting of Scripture in her autobiography. She sought to establish herself as one educated in the “right” doctrines and supporting Scriptures. She provided testimonies of those who had put doctrines, such as divine healing, into practice and benefited from doing so. In fact, her autobiography was primarily intended as an argument for doctrines. She managed to squeeze in some specifics of her life and travels in between, but spent pages and pages between those details seeking to provide evidence for her beliefs and records of her spiritual successes, usually supported by the number of converts, those divinely healed, and those claiming to have experienced sanctification for the first time.

As a preacher ordained by the IPHC in Oklahoma, the very first person of the twentieth century to experience both baptism and tongues at the same time, and as an indirect influence on William Seymour, Agnes N. O. LaBerge was an exemplar. Unfettered by social restrictions, by fears, by her husband, or by the daughter they had while in Perry, Oklahoma, Agnes eagerly followed her call wherever it would take her. Her husband preached also, but she maintained center stage in her story, establishing her credibility through her extensive knowledge of doctrine and Scripture and through her success at winning converts. Most histories of Pentecostalism, which include hundreds of denominations, begin with the story of her Holy Spirit baptism, crediting her with starting the fire Seymour would turn into a blaze.

We are of this place

Early Pentecostal preacher Dan York noted that, when he and his wife leased a farm in Wolf in the Indian Territory in 1904, they lived “among the Seminole Indians,” but that the Indians “would not meet us in the road; they did not want us in their country.”15 However, two of the IPHC preachers I studied did gain the authority to speak in Oklahoma through mention of their blood ties to the Native Americans living there. Perhaps enough time had passed between the nuna dat suhn’yi (Trail of Tears), suffered by the Five Civilized Tribes between the 1830s and 1850s, and 1978 when Grace Hope Curtis published her autobiography and 1982, the year of the diamond jubilee celebrating seventy-five years of Oklahoma’s statehood, when my grandfather Robert L. Rex published his.16 Pride in Okla Humma, Choctaw for “Home of the Red Man,” rose like a soaring eagle that year, much as it did during the many 2007 centennial celebrations held throughout the state.

The relationship between Native Americans and whites cannot easily be reduced to a simple tale of hate and subjugation. C. B. Jernigan, in “Pioneering in Oklahoma,” describes a camp meeting held at the Ponca Indian Agency in 1910, where thirty were converted, “praying in the Ponca language and weeping with broken hearts over their sins.”17 At the close of the meeting, the evangelist, Rev. Martin, called the elders of the tribe together to ask if they wanted the Nazarene mission to continue among them. Jernigan wrote:
White Eagle, the last chief of his tribe, who was known among them as their silver-tongued orator, arose and spoke through an interpreter. He said, "When I was a baby they took me to a priest who sprinkled water on my head, and told my mother that I was a Christian, but it did not touch my heart. Same bad heart. The government takes our children and make them learn from book. Heap smart when they leave school, but still they have a bad heart. They go to the Methodist mission; learn to sing good; learn to smart man talk; still same bad Indian. They go to Nazarene meeting; get on their knees, cry and pray to God till face shines; they go home, read a Bible, pray. No more eat Mescal bean; no more drink whisky. No more smoke pipe. No more steal. Come on Nazarenes."  

Pentecostalism changed Oklahomans in unusual ways. For example, my grandfather, a Pentecostal evangelist and later general director of evangelism as well as director of world missions for the IPHC, wrote that his great-grandmother was "a full blood Cherokee Indian born in 1812," who probably came over on the Trail of Tears and married a white man in 1841.  

Grace says her parents thought of her as "the greatest little 'papoose' in the whole territory." She grew up in the wide-open spaces of Oklahoma and wrote that she "seldom saw anyone outside of our family." Yet, the gap between her and the state's rightful inhabitants is clear by the lived experiences of these Oklahomans challenge any sort of stereotype of the relationship between Native Americans and whites. Grace felt comfortable and confident in her native state, describing its Native American inhabitants without a trace of racial prejudice and perhaps feeling a degree of identification with them because of her family history. Authority was assumed by claiming Native American bloodlines. It was validated by the work she did as well. In another intriguing tie to Native Americans, Grace describes a call by God to minister to an "Indian village" by Kaw City. The pastor there tried to talk her out of coming, fearing for her safety because the "Indians would get drunk" and had "run off" others who had tried to preach there. She went in the middle of an icy winter to preach in a schoolhouse in the woods. She wrote, "We would have to turn on the lights, build a fire in the big old wood stove, then in a matter of minutes the house would be full of Indians." She saw them as a "neglected people" and described the joyful singing at the meeting. Only once did a drunken man come in, but she prayed, and he sat quietly through the service. Only one girl was converted, but Grace saw her as a seed, not as evidence of her failure there. She wrote, "When we ceased the meeting, everyone in the house—little, big, old and young, came up to shake my hand or hug my neck. I don't think there was a dry eye in the building. It makes my tears flow after all these years to think of it."  

We are united

Authority is given not just by the baptism in the Holy Spirit, as all of the preachers experienced it, and not just through the charisma evidenced by the number of their converts and the influence on other believers such as Seymour, but also through the community of believers, including church leaders and congregations at the time. Of course, the best opportunity to experience being part of the community at large was during "camp meetin' time." No one describes the excitement of that better than Margaret Muse Oden, daughter of Dan Muse, a bishop for the IPHC in the mid-twentieth century. She wrote:

The annual conference session was always preceded by ten days of spiritual fellowship where people from all over the conference met, pitched a tent and, from sunrise until long after sunset, there was a service of some kind in progress. Perhaps this was good psychology—sing, pray, and preach for ten days and they were either so well filled with brotherly love or so completely exhausted that by the time conference convened, the discussions were apt to be less "heated," the problems settled with less wrangling and obstinate opinions.

Camp meeting! From conference superintendent [bishop] on down . . . they were busy for days ahead of time. There were many "dignified" jobs, such as cutting weeds, hauling tents, driving stakes, anchoring poles for the main tent, securing kitchen management . . . These good people came to worship
the Lord and did so sincerely as best they knew how. Tents lined up until it resembled a city brought to life at night. There were squalling babies, kind old grandpas and a host of representatives of the generation between. Straw carpeted the floor of each tent, clothes hung along the center pole, cots or old iron beds filled each side; for some, a makeshift stove for cooking meals; others patronized the dining hall; all made good business for the hamburger and soda pop stand.

It was an occasion for which we planned and counted the days, anxiously hurrying time along for the pleasant meeting of good friends and the privilege of serving God in fellowship.26

Indeed, self-centered bids for domination were shelved during this time of unity, harmony, and spiritual renewal. Authority between men and women was shared, and the leaders who emerged usually turned out to be the most humble.

Authority is built through recognition, as histories and stories indicate that the women preachers of the IPHC felt a part of the leadership of the church, just as Campbell's history recorded the actions of the Yorks and Agnes Ozman LaBerge, the Yorks' story mentions leaders such as J. H. King and others, and LaBerge's story mentions Seymour among the leaders of the time. Current histories of the Pentecostal movement all mention LaBerge, indicating how a woman influenced an entire religious movement innocently enough through seeking and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is also typical to find the same story, but from different points of view, in other autobiographies and interviews with women preachers I conducted in 2004.

Most importantly, the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit lent the most credibility, and, by extension, authority, to a Pentecostal preacher. Stories of Spirit baptism are part of all of the autobiographies of Pentecostal preachers of the IPHC, both male and female. While at Bethel Bible College, Agnes Ozman LaBerge wrote that she “became hungry for the baptism of the Holy Ghost” for “about three weeks.”29 She said that she “wanted the promise of the Father more than even I did food or to sleep,” and, on New Year’s Eve, she asked that “hands be laid on me” and prayers for her baptism offered. As a result, she “began to talk in tongues and had great joy and was filled with glory.” Her experience drew the attention of local reporters, and some of her fellow students experienced the same thing.30

Dan York described how he and his wife Dolly “got their Pentecost” in 1908 after two members of their “band” or group went to hear Joseph King preach in Lamont, Oklahoma, the year before.31 One night, Dan York received his baptism while playing the organ and “a few minutes later,” he writes, his wife received hers. Grace Hope Curtis said she “shouted all over the church” at one point, and then later described how her second husband “became Pentecostal.”32

Another early Pentecostal preacher and preacher’s wife was Lucy Hargis. She “received the Holy Spirit baptism July 16, 1922, about midnight and when I came up speaking in tongues, the girls and manager where I worked were all there and they knew then I was one of them that we all had talked about.”33 She explained, “The religion was so new until the people climbed the seats to see the demonstration of the Holy Spirit and people speaking in tongues.”34 Her husband received his “Pentecost” later that same year. Working alongside each other as preachers in Oklahoma, stories of Lucy’s and her husband’s ministry also appear in Robert L. Rex’s autobiography. Clearly part of the community of believers in Oklahoma, the Hargises shared in the core experience that defined the denomination.

Lennie Rex, my grandmother and Robert L. Rex’s wife, wrote that it took her two years of praying before she was sanctified.35 After that, she was baptized in the Holy Spirit at a revival. Her mother later told her that “hundreds gathered [for] they had never saw [sic] anyone receive the Holy Spirit.” She reported, “[J]ust as suddenly as the Lord sent His great power and slayed me under, soaked me through and through with His power, wonderful power, and the Lord spoke to me ‘Now you can speak.’”36 Finally, I interviewed the daughter of Ruth Moore, a woman preacher who worked alongside the others mentioned already. Wanda Baker said that two women converted under her mother’s ministry stayed up with her mother all night praying. At the beginning of a sunrise camp meeting service, her mother was “filled with the Holy Spirit.”37
Because of this shared experience, many men approved of women’s authority to minister. In fact, further validation of Ruth Moore’s ministry is seen by my grandfather’s support of her at a moment of crisis in one service. Her daughter recalled:

She never had a problem with recognition or with needing a role in the church. She did have some challenges because not everybody accepted women preachers. I remember a problem one time when they were building the church on Central and we were worshipping in a tent. They erected the tent right on the ground and it was a cold winter. The wind went through it although we had an old stove in the middle for heat. We had a revival with Brother Rex in the tent. Well, there was a Church of Christ group who decided to challenge the fact that mother was a preacher because they didn’t think she should be. They came and, of course, mother opened the service as the pastor of the church and they came right down on the front row and sat down. The good thing is that Brother Rex was right there ready for them and he just talked to them and took care of the situation. We felt like the Lord worked that out because she didn’t have a confrontation with them. Brother Rex knew just what to say.38

The convergence of rhetoric, religion, and women preachers of the IPHC in Oklahoma provides a solid challenge to long-held hierarchal beliefs and a way for those of us still living and working today to push the denomination forward.

Conclusion

The Azusa Street Centennial took place in April of 2006 in Los Angeles, California, and I had the privilege of attending. Thousands of Pentecostal Christian leaders and church members from all over the world came to worship God in vibrant evening services and to hear the newest scholarship concerning the revival begun by African American preacher William Seymour in a rundown building on Azusa Street in 1906. I attended a service led by well-known Pentecostal preacher Paula White, who preached in Aimee Semple McPherson’s Angelus Temple. I felt odd sitting in a building I had only seen in pictures, but I was also elated to see that an international focus was still a major theme of Pentecostalism today. The service began with a procession of people carrying flags from nations throughout the world, emphasizing that Pentecostals worldwide today number more than two hundred million, according to Vinson Synan, who was often quoted in the historical video we watched at the service.39

The worship service focused on the veneration of the Lord through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The experience of greater spiritual power gained through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which drew people to Azusa Street in the early 1900s, is still a vital part of Pentecostalism today. White spoke against racial and gender-based prejudices and challenged listeners with the question, “What were you born to do?” “To exist is a waste of days,” she said. “Some people say the most important dates are the day you were born and the day you die. But the most important dates are the day you were born and the day you figure out why.” Her inspiring sermon left me with a message I still hold dear: “Challenge it and it will change.”

For those women preachers struggling to establish authority within their denominations, I encourage you to continue to challenge the gender-based prejudice of those who would seek to limit the use of your gifts. Finding unity in a community of believers is empowering, and I am proud to be a part of the IPHC today, although support of women as preachers and leaders has not always been unequivocally given. Without challenging the paradigms erected by society and mimicked in the church, we can never make progress. Still, it is worth rethinking how women’s oppression has been challenged throughout history and learning how community and humility are effective instruments of change. Authority within the hearts of Christians must be Spirit-based, not defined by the social constructs in which we live. So, seek Christ and pray that you may successfully challenge the gender-based prejudices that limit the callings of women, and that you may bring about changes that create unity and nourishing types of authority that lead not to domination, but to growth.

Notes

2. York, Life Events, 2.
3. York, Life Events, 8.
7. York, Life Events, 8.
8. York, Life Events, 10.
15. York, Life Events, 6.
31. York, Life Events, 8.
32. Curtis, Pioneer Woman for Christ, 15, 32.
34. Hargis, letter, 8–9.
36. Welch, Oklahoma Preachers, Pioneers, and Pentecostals, 277–79.
37. Welch, Oklahoma Preachers, Pioneers, and Pentecostals, 237.

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while many American denominations were still silencing the public voices of women in the churches, the founder of the Church of the Nazarene purportedly exclaimed: “Some of our best ‘men’ are women!” Since its founding in 1908, the Church of the Nazarene—like several other major Holiness denominations—has ordained women to all offices of ministry in the church. In this regard, the Holiness tradition stands out in an extraordinary fashion from most other major Christian traditions in America at that time. In the words of sociologist Bryan Wilson, “The Holiness Movement in its varied forms brought women to the fore, perhaps more than any previous development in Christianity.”

Before 1920, there were nineteen American denominations that officially granted clergy rights to women. A full eight of those (42 percent) were from the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition; this is especially noteworthy when compared to the next most prominent tradition, the Baptists. Three Baptist denominations (16 percent) ordained women before 1920. Of the denominations of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition, five were newly founded. It is striking to note that the Salvation Army (1870), the Church of God (Anderson) (1881), the Pentecostal Holiness Church (1895), the Pilgrim Holiness Church (1897), and the Church of the Nazarene (1908) all ordained women since their inception at a time when women’s ordination was still an exceptionally rare occurrence.

But why were these denominations so different? What was it about the Holiness tradition that led to their unusually early acceptance of the ordained ministry of women? The answers to these questions are complex and cannot be determined with full precision. Nonetheless, some strong conjectures can be made. Through examining the histories of these denominations as well as the memoirs of the women ministers who served within them, we can distinguish one important feature of the Holiness tradition which may have led to its unusually early acceptance of women’s ordination: its strong emphasis on the present and transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, I propose that at least three implications of this Holy Spirit emphasis helped to facilitate the acceptance of women’s ministry and women’s ordination: (1) a preference for leadership based on “prophetic authority” versus “priestly authority,” (2) an encouragement for all people, including women, to give public testimony at church gatherings, and (3) the development of flexible and entrepreneurial denominational structures. It is likely that all of these factors positively affected the opportunities for and the eventual acceptance of the ordained ministry of women.

In this article, I will first track the birth of the Holiness movement out of Methodism and out of the theology of Phoebe Palmer and highlight how their views of the Holy Spirit laid the groundwork for the eventual Holiness acceptance of women’s ordination. Second, I will illustrate the growing importance of the Holy Spirit in the Holiness tradition over time. Finally, I will examine all three of the aforementioned implications of that Holy Spirit emphasis by looking primarily at two of the largest Holiness denominations to emerge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the Church of God (Anderson) and the Church of the Nazarene.

The blossoming of the Holiness movement from the soils of Methodism

The Holiness movement emerged in the nineteenth century as a renewal movement within the Methodist tradition. Holiness advocates considered John Wesley (1703–1791) to be their main spiritual forefather. During his lifetime, Wesley was committed to a renewal work within the Church of England, which eventually came to be identified as Methodism.

As Wesley developed this theology over the years, he would become famous for his firm conviction that Christians must experience the “double cure”—not only justification, but also sanctification, which results in the Christian’s ability to love God and others with “perfect love.” Wesley called his doctrine of sanctification “Christian perfection,” and, from 1739 to 1777, he issued a publication on the doctrine entitled A Plain Account of Christian Perfection.

Within Wesley’s Methodism, women were employed for ministry purposes in unprecedented ways. This would later encourage the corresponding prominence of women in the Holiness movement. Yet, Wesley’s own views about women in ministry evolved over time. His mother, Susanna, likely had a formative influence on him, as he once attributed to her the title of a “preacher of righteousness.” Still, Wesley’s own views were initially quite conservative. In a 1748 letter to Thomas Whitehead, he expressed disgust for the Quaker practice of permitting women to “preach to a church assembly.” However, in 1754, Wesley made an important qualification to this rule. When interpreting Paul’s injunction that women be silent in the churches in a commentary on 1 Corinthians, Wesley remarked that women should indeed be prohibited from speaking publicly “unless they are under an extraordinary impulse of the Spirit.” Here Wesley had identified a significant “loophole” for the ministry of women—the call and gifting of the Holy Spirit. This foreshadowed the prominence that the Holy Spirit received in later Holiness arguments for women’s ministry. Over the years, Wes-
ley became increasingly supportive of women's ministry in his growing evangelistic movement, eventually encouraging them to preach widely as he observed the fruitfulness of their ministry.  

Although Wesley never did advocate the full, official ordination of women in the church, the Methodist movement still played a pivotal role in pioneering new opportunities for women.

All renewal movements eventually need to be renewed themselves. By the 1850s and 1860s, many perceived this to be the case for the Methodist church. Certain people within the church longed to bring back the spiritual vitality of Wesley's days. As they turned to his writings for guidance, many honed in on Wesley's doctrine of Christian holiness (which he called "perfection"), which had lost prominence within the Methodist movement. Their resulting efforts to revive Wesley's doctrines on the importance of sanctification and to bring renewal to the Methodist church came to be known as the Holiness movement, and Wesley's A Plain Account became their manifesto.

However, although Wesley was often acknowledged as the greatest authority within the Holiness tradition, many of the peculiar characteristics of the Holiness movement must be attributed to Phoebe Palmer (1807–1874), who has often been called the "mother" of the Holiness tradition. In the words of Charles Edwin Jones, "The confidant of powerful men in the church, [Palmer] permanently modified American Methodist teaching on perfection through them. . . . Mrs. Palmer's ideas were to pervade all future Methodist debate concerning holiness." Palmer spread her ideas through publications, speaking engagements, her famous Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness, and through National Holiness Camp Meetings.

It is clear that Palmer, as a woman leader, exhibited tremendous influence in shaping the entire Holiness movement. This, no doubt, molded popular perceptions of what ministries were proper for women. Palmer never explicitly discussed the official ordination of women in the church. However, she did vigorously argue for women's right to preach the gospel and to testify publicly about their religious experience at a time when many still urged complete silence of women. Palmer profoundly shaped common Holiness views on women in her book Promise of the Father (1859). In this four-hundred-page tome, she passionately laid out an argument for women's preaching based on the "promise of the Father"—that is, the Holy Spirit—which was equally endued upon men and women alike at Pentecost.

As the Holiness movement grew, so too did the intensity of the conflicts between Holiness proponents and the Methodist churches. Hard-line Methodists opposed to the Holiness movement found it "too extreme, too emotional, to fit into the new formalism of urban and suburban Methodist respectability." As a result, many Holiness advocates eventually broke away from the Methodist ranks to found new denominations. In fact, it is estimated that there were at least twenty-five holiness sects founded between 1893 and 1907 alone, although others were also founded after that time.

Background on women in the Church of God and the Church of the Nazarene

Although at first the Holiness movement did not intend to break from its Methodist roots, by the early 1880s, the conflict had intensified, and certain people advocated separation. They were called the "come-outers."

The Church of God (Anderson)

One of the more prominent "come-outers" was Daniel Sidney Warner (1842–1895). Warner became the primary founder of what would become the Church of God (Anderson) denomination. Initially, Warner had been a member of the Church of God of North America (General Eldership). However, he eventually became embroiled in a conflict with them over the issue of sanctification. As a result, Warner and several members of the church broke away and eventually established a new group in 1881 which was in favor of Holiness ideas. The new movement was simply called the "Church of God"—though, at the time, Warner did not consider himself to be founding a new denomination as he had previously become adamantly opposed to sectarianism and denominationalism.

One outstanding feature of the Church of God was that women played a prominent role in the movement from the very beginning. For example, in the movement's news magazine, called The Gospel Trumpet, there were reports from at least eighty-eight women heavily involved in evangelistic outreach between 1891 and 1892. In the year 1895, the Church of God movement was comprised of 353 congregations, 50 of which were pastored by women (14 percent of all congregations). By 1925, that percentage had more than doubled, with 220 out of 685 congregations being pastored by women (32 percent of all congregations).

The Church of the Nazarene

The Church of the Nazarene was founded in 1908 by Phineas Bresee (1838–1915). Bresee was born to Methodist parents in New York. He was eventually ordained as a Methodist minister and moved to California. There, Bresee attended a revival in 1884 conducted by two leaders of the National Holiness Association. As a result of a powerful and mystical experience that he had there, he soon became an ardent believer and promoter of Holiness doctrines. However, similar to Warner, Bresee soon came into conflict with the Methodist establishment that he served. After some time, Bresee finally split with the Methodists to found the Church of the Nazarene, a new Holiness church focused on the poor.

The Church of the Nazarene as a denomination was born through a variety of mergers of smaller Holiness organizations. In 1907 and 1908, the merger of three movements—the Church of the Nazarene, the Association of Pentecostal Churches of America, and the Holiness Church of Christ—birthed the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, a national organization with 10,414 members and 228 congregations. The word "Pentecostal" was eventually dropped from the denomination's title in 1919 to prevent confusion with the growing tongues movement.
It is clear that the denomination supported women in all aspects of ordained ministry. Three out of the four groups that merged into the Church of the Nazarene in 1907–1908 had already been in favor of ordaining women. The New Testament Churches of Christ (NTCC) is an especially remarkable example. The NTCC was an association of churches co-led by Mary Lee Cagle (1864–1955), an evangelist, pastor, and church planter. When the NTCC composed its “Government and Doctrines” statement in 1903, a line was inserted which simply said, “We believe that women have the same right to preach the gospel as men have.” The NTCC then merged with another group in 1904 to become the Holiness Church of Christ. When the Holiness Church of Christ finally merged to form the Church of the Nazarene in 1908, women comprised 13 percent of the ordained ministers in the Church of the Nazarene, “a statistic due in large measure to Mary and her sister evangelists.”

The Holy Spirit in the Holiness tradition

The emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit was not always strong in the Holiness tradition, but it increased over time, as the movement shifted from emphasizing “perfection.” This increasing emphasis on the Holy Spirit would be important, since one of the primary Holiness arguments used to allow women access to the pulpit was the argument from Pentecost. These women were fulfilling the words that God spoke through Joel and Peter: “In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your...daughters will prophesy” (Acts 2:17 TNIV).

This argument was especially popularized by Phoebe Palmer’s aforementioned book, The Promise of the Father. The inside front cover of Palmer’s original book had a picture of the scene from Pentecost with a prophesying woman featured prominently in the middle of the page. Palmer queried:

> If the Spirit of prophecy fell upon God’s daughters, alike as upon his sons in that day, and they spake [sic] in the midst of that assembled multitude, as the Spirit gave utterance, on what authority do the angels of the churches restrain the use of that gift now?

The Church of God (Anderson) and the Church of the Nazarene both reflected this similar emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit in their midst. For the Church of God, “The original Pentecost experience and the church which lived close to that period were looked upon as models of the pure church.” Additionally, Warner and his colleagues initially “sought to forsake denominational hierarchies and formal creeds, trusting solely in the Holy Spirit as their overseer and the Bible as their statement of belief.” Within the Church of the Nazarene, Bresee insisted that “the great dispensational truth is that Jesus Christ baptizes believers with the Holy Spirit, sanctifying and empowering them.”

This emphasis on the Holy Spirit contributed to three important factors within the Holiness movement which created a favorable environment for women’s ordination: (1) a preference for leadership based on “prophetic authority,” (2) an encouragement for all people to give public testimony at church gatherings, and (3) the development of flexible and entrepreneurial denominational structures.

Institutions that value prophetic authority are usually more accepting of women’s ministry, since it is the Holy Spirit who does the choosing, and human ordination is simply an affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s choice.

Prophetic vs. priestly authority

The Holiness emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit led them to value “prophetic authority” over “priestly authority” within their movement. Susan Stanley observes that a Christian religious movement that chooses its leaders based on the authority of the Holy Spirit is characterized by “prophetic authority,” while a movement that “vests authority in ecclesiastical office” is characterized by “priestly authority.” She uses these terms to explain why Holiness proponents so readily placed women in positions of authority—it was because their very conception of the source of that authority was different. A woman’s ability to be granted priestly authority in most major religious traditions has always been difficult, since priestly authority is typically based on tradition, personal connections, and educational or other natural qualifications. On the other hand, institutions that value prophetic authority are usually more accepting of women’s ministry, since it is the Holy Spirit who does the choosing, and human ordination is simply an affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s choice.

G. L. Cole, a leader in the Church of God, wrote an article in 1905 justifying the ministry of women, entitled “The Labor of Women in the Gospel,” in the Gospel Trumpet. The first Bible verse that he quotes to support women is Joel 2:28–29. He called the day of Pentecost the ushering in of a new “Holy Spirit” dispensation. A key component of his argument is Ephesians 4:11–13, which says that God gave some to be “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.” He treats these offices as gifts that only God has the power to bestow: “Through the distribution of these gifts officers are constituted in the church. Without these gifts neither men nor women are fit for office in the church. God made no discrimination of sex on Pentecost: all alike were baptized with the Holy Ghost.” He concludes his positive argument for women leaders in the church with this definitive statement:

> What office may women hold in the church? Answer: Any office wherein God sets them by virtue of the gifts he bestows upon them, and they may hold no office for which they have no corresponding gift from God. The same is true with men.

Other later leaders reasoned along similar lines. For example, F. G. Smith shared this view in a letter to a “sister in Christ” in August 1920:

> Again, I call your attention to the organization of the church by the Holy Spirit. A man is an evangelist because he has the gift of evangelizing. It is not because he is a man, but because he has that particular gift. The gift itself is the proof of his calling. If a woman has divine gifts fitting her for a particular work in...
the church, that is the proof, and the only proof needed, that that is her place. Any other basis of qualification than divine gifts is superficial and arbitrary and ignores the divine plan of organization and government in the church.31

Early leaders in the Church of the Nazarene used similar reasoning about prophetic authority. Fannie McDowell Hunter, an evangelist in the NTCC, wrote a treatise entitled Women Preachers in which she contrasted priestly authority and prophetic authority. She argued that the fact that women were not admitted to the Old Testament priesthood should in no way hinder them from exercising authority in the church, since the source of authority in the church is now prophetic authority. Quoting a “Rev. Anna Star,” she argued that priestly authority is irrelevant since “the priest was typical of Christ in his humanity” and “the office of priest was done away with in Christ.”32 Indeed, “women may have been debarred from the priesthood, but not from exercising the higher office of prophet” which is especially prominent in the post-Pentecost age.33 She also quotes Ephesians 4:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 to demonstrate that prophets are “an established order of ministers in the church of Christ” and can be considered preachers.34

Thus, in the Church of God and in the Church of the Nazarene, we observe the common Holiness conception that authority within the church was to be determined by the Holy Spirit (prophetic authority). This allowed women to rise to significant positions of leadership, overcoming traditional authority patterns (priestly authority).

Public testimony

Rebecca Laird notes that “a common requirement for membership in a holiness group was giving testimony to sanctification…” and that “this . . . led to an emphasis on spiritual egalitarianism or the ‘priesthood of all believers.’”35 Phoebe Palmer was instrumental in shaping the Holiness practice of giving public testimony to sanctification, which was one of the core elements of her theology. She even warned those who refused to testify to their sanctification that they might in fact be in danger of losing it, basing her admonition in part on Romans 10:9–10.36 As a result, within the Holiness movement, both men and women were encouraged to speak publicly before mixed audiences on a regular basis.

In addition to this, we have seen that one of the most commonly used arguments for the ministry of women was the argument from Pentecost—that the Holy Spirit now empowers all women to prophesy. This link between Holy Spirit empowerment and prophecy inevitably led Holiness proponents to encourage and to support women’s preaching. Of course, to do this, they had to equate prophecy with preaching and other forms of public speaking in the church successfully. In doing so, they most frequently quoted two Bible texts. The first was Revelation 19:10: “For the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy” (TNIV). This verse implied that, since women had now been endowed with the prophetic gifts, they must testify publicly about Jesus Christ. Any such testimony qualifies as the “Spirit of prophecy.”37 The other Scripture was 1 Corinthians 14:3, which G. L. Cole (Church of God) explained in the Gospel Trumpet:

Paul defines the term “prophecy” by saying, “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” 1 Cor. 14:3. In this chapter prophecy is numbered with the gifts of the Spirit. The same thought is brought out in the following texts: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation.”38

Here, Cole demonstrates that, since women have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to prophesy at Pentecost, they must use that gift of prophecy in order to be fully obedient to the word of God. Likewise, with regard to the Church of the Nazarene, Mary Lee Cagle defines the ministry of prophecy in this way:

Now, if we can find the meaning of the word “prophecy” it will help us some . . . Read 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.” I throw out the challenge: is not that what every Bible preacher does? (see v. 12) (1) He teaches the people what God says; (2) he exhorts the people to obey God; (3) he comforts the people with promises of God. . . . No matter what men have to say about women preaching, God said, “She shall.” And when God says, “She shall,”: by the grace of God “She will.”39

Therefore, these examples demonstrate that the link between the Holy Spirit and prophecy in the Holiness movement also worked in women’s favor, since they were consequentially given numerous opportunities to speak publicly at mixed Christian gatherings.

Flexible and entrepreneurial organizational structures

According to 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (TNIV). Holiness leaders recognized that a certain measure of freedom and flexibility would be required within their denominational structures if the Holy Spirit was to do his most powerful work.

We have already noted that Warner, the founder of the Church of God, was opposed to denominationalism. He believed that the Holy Spirit desired to rid the church of “all rubbish of creeds, traditions, and inventions of sectism [sic] which the dark ages of the past have heaped upon her…”40 As a result, the Church of God’s initial organization was marked by “simple . . . democratic structures” that were especially appealing to “people who were increasingly fearful of . . . complex ecclesiasticism.”41 Warner’s church was not marked by onerous hierarchies and regulations, but was instead submitted to “the guidance and instruction of the sanctifying Spirit, free of denominational and sectarian trammels, as he pictured them. . . .”42 Stanley has argued that this early anti-institutional atmosphere within the Church of God facilitated the ministry of women, since it provided them with more freedoms to exercise their gifts and even to pioneer new ministries.43
The Church of the Nazarene was not adamantly opposed to denominationalism in the same way that the Church of God was; however, it was similar in that it, too, valued organizational flexibility and freedom. Phineas Bresee was initially a minister within the Methodist church, which has an episcopal form of government. He started to resent this structure when he first began to have conflicts with the denomination over his advocacy of Holiness doctrines. In order to quench Bresee's efforts, his bishop transferred Bresee to undesirable congregations on more than one occasion. Bresee eventually responded by leaving the Methodist church to found the Church of the Nazarene. When he did so, he elected to put into place a congregational form of government where churches would be free to choose their own leaders. Rebecca Laird notes the positive impact that this had on women's ministry:

This congregational form of government opened the way for women to lead in the early days of the denomination. Women like Lucy Knott and Maye McReynolds worked tirelessly alongside Bresee and other lay people to build satellite mission congregations throughout the city of Los Angeles. As the women were well-known to those who attended the mission services, it is not surprising that they naturally came to serve the group as pastors.

In her study of the first generation of ordained women in the Church of the Nazarene, Laird also observes that one common theme between them was that “most served as pastors or leaders of organizations that they had founded... Each woman helped create the social structure in which she ministered,” sensing a freedom in the Holy Spirit to do so.

Conclusion
Throughout the church's history, there have been numerous examples demonstrating that traditions that emphasize the present and transforming ministry of the Holy Spirit tend to lead to egalitarian patterns of social relations in gender, race, and class. With regard to women's equality, the Holiness tradition is one case study of this. The Holiness tradition was rooted in the heritage of John Wesley and Phoebe Palmer, who both justified forms of women's preaching on the basis of the extraordinary empowerment of the Holy Spirit. As the Holiness movement grew, so too did the emphasis on the importance of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, Holiness denominations were founded with characteristics ideal for the flourishing of women's leadership—including prophetic authority patterns, an emphasis on public testimony, and flexible denominational structures.

In a world where human social structures are often broken and oppressive—even in the church—the study of women in the early Holiness movement provides hope for the future. It also provides us with a sobering reminder of how the church can only achieve the Galatians 3:28 community—that is, a community of equality in race, gender, and class—through the blessing and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Notes
4. Quoted in Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987), 237. During her husband's long absences, Susanna Wesley would have informal religious services in her home with sometimes as many as two hundred in attendance.
5. Quoted in Tucker and Liefeld, Daughters of the Church, 240.
7. Tucker and Liefeld, Daughters of the Church, 240.
8. Tucker and Liefeld, Daughters of the Church, 241–42.
17. Jones, Perfectionist Persuasion, 121.
18. “The fourth group, the Pentecostal Mission, stalled in joining them for seven years and the ordination of women was one of the main ideological differences. It is important to add, however, that the firm stance against ordaining women held by J. O. McClurkan, the founder of the Pentecostal Mission, did not keep them from serving as evangelists, missionaries, and teachers. However, McClurkan’s position did not prevail after his death, and his wife, Frances Rye McClurkan, was ordained six years later.” Rebecca Laird, Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene: The First Generation (Kansans City, Mo.: Nazarene Publishing House, 1993), 12.
19. Laird, Ordained Women, 111.
23. Phoebe Palmer, Promise of the Father; or, a Neglected Spirituality of the Last Days (Boston, Mass.: Henry V. Degen, 1859), 22.
28. For this reason, Christian movements that have traditionally valued prophetic authority based on the Holy Spirit have tended to be more welcoming toward women’s ministry, including the Quaker, Wesleyan, Holiness, and especially the Pentecostal movement. For more on the concept of prophetic vs. priestly authority in the Pentecostal tradition, see Charles H. Barfoot and Gerald T. Sheppard, “Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion: The Changing Role of Women Clergy in Classical Pentecostal Churches,” Review of Religious Research 22, no. 1 (Sept. 1980): 2–17.
34. Hunter, Women Preachers, 12.
37. See, for example, Cole, “The Labor of Women in the Gospel.”
41. Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, 217.
42. Dieter, The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century, 217.
44. Laird, Ordained Women, 43.
45. Laird, Ordained Women, 141. Italics mine.
46. This is also true of periods of revival. For more of this, see especially Susan Hyatt, In the Spirit We’re Equal: The Spirit, the Bible, and Women—A Revival Perspective (Dallas, Tex.: Hyatt Press, 1998).

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**Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn—for he has done it.**

—Psalm 22:30–31

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I had the pleasure of worshipping with the Bear-Barnetson family at the annual Wiconi International Family Camp and Pow Wow in Turner, Oregon, in 2008 and 2009, and found myself amazed at the beauty and freedom Cheryl and others expressed as women and as followers of the Jesus Way. Cheryl is Bear Clan, at the annual Wiconi International Family Camp and Pow Wow in Turner, Oregon, in 2008 and 2009, and found myself amazed at the beauty and freedom Cheryl and others expressed as women and as followers of the Jesus Way. Cheryl is Bear Clan, from Nadleh Whut'en First Nation within the Carrier Nation of British Columbia. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree from Pacific Life Bible College, Surrey, B.C.; an M.Div. from Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.; and a Doctor of Ministry from The King's College and Seminary in Van Nuys, California. Cheryl and her husband, Randy, travel full time with their three teenage sons, Paul (17), Randall (15), and Justice (14), who also have their own band. Cheryl and her husband, Randy, travel full time with their three teenage sons, Paul (17), Randall (15), and Justice (14), who also have their own band.

CBB: Because my non-Native husband has worked in First Nations ministry for more than thirty years, he is always well received. As ministers, we are well received because we don't pull any punches. We tell the truth, such as the Residential Schools, [and the fact that] my reaction as a Native person is anger, [but] as a Christian I react with great sadness that the truth of Jesus was often misrepresented.

HD: Often misrepresented?
CBB: There were sincere Christians in Canadian history who desired to bring Jesus in a good way. We are grateful to have received the gospel.

CBB: When we retell the Great Story of Jesus using cultural clothing, instruments, and musical/singing style, we are always received graciously. Some positive responses include, “You talk the way we talk,” “I think I’m going to go back to church,” and “You tell a hard message using story, so we can receive it.”

HD: That’s wonderful. Before you say more about that, I’d like to ask some questions about your faith journey. How long have you been a follower of Jesus?
CBB: Since I was eight years old.

HD: How did you come to faith?
CBB: My parents sent me to Bible Camp to get rid of me for a week. When Mom picked me up, I stood up in the back seat, leaned on the front seat, and said, “I accepted Jesus into my heart!” She said, “That’s nice, sit down,” and drove home.

HD: Where was home?
CBB: I am from Nadleh Whut’en First Nation, which is in the Carrier Nation. I grew up very close to the reserve. It has always been home to me and still is.

HD: Who were the women and men of faith who influenced you as a child?
HILARY DAVIS, originally from Massachusetts, earned a B.A. in Philosophy from Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington. She worked on the Yakama Indian Reservation for two years, serving at-risk youth through the work of Mending Wings Ministries, one of the largest contextualized Native youth ministries in the United States. Hilary and her coworkers have used Cheryl’s songs “New Warriors” and “Yeshua” to worship Creator with youth during Mending Wings Bible studies and youth group. Hilary currently resides in Austin, Texas.
CBB: All the Christian women in my nation are very strong in every way possible. I am a very strong woman today, but will still shrink in their presence! The most influential person in my life was my mom, Susan Schaefer. She always wanted to bring the gospel to our people and took me with her whenever she did. She also worked in an inner-city ministry, where later I pastored, on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver for years. Although she struggles with rheumatoid arthritis, she is still the strongest person I know. C. S. Lewis was a very strong influence on me. Bishop O’Grady, a local Catholic priest whom my mom was very close to, was very influential.

HD: On your Web site, advertising your album The Good Road, you write about your songs “The Residential School Song” and “Cheslatta” [the name of your grandfather’s village], saying, “Both of these songs were very hard to write; it took me a couple years, and it was a healing process.” Can you spell that out for us a bit more?

CBB: I’ve got good news and bad news for you. What do you want to hear first? We usually say, “Gimme the bad news.” That’s what First Nations heard as well. When the good news of the gospel was brought to our people, it was often used as a weapon of assimilation. The government partnered with the church to form the Residential Schools. They believed the best way to assimilate our people was to legislate the removal of Native children from our homes. This tore the very fabric of our society. Today, Native people equate the church with assimilation. [They say,] “If you let your children go to church, the church will make them into white people.” We will never be able to measure the effect the Residential Schools have had on our people.

HD: And the good news?

CBB: One Native person asked me, “How can you be a Christian after what they did to our people?” I was stunned with the depth of this question, and knew I could not shrug off this answer. I prayed in the seconds I had, and God brought my mind back to Jesus. I answered, “Jesus predates our contact with Europeans; he was a man who was born into a specific culture, spoke their language, and participated in ceremonies.” The Native person said, “I’ve never heard that before.” I was grateful to be used by God to move this Native person a little closer to the cross. The gospel story is one of beauty and love. Creator loved this world so much that he sent his one and only son, so that all who believe in him would not die, but have eternal life. Beautiful. Creator not only started everything and exists far off, but actually loves me.

HD: What inspired you to become a musician?

CBB: My mom sang to me when I was little, as did my Uncle Norman. Later in life, there were many Native singers at the local inner-city ministry where my mom volunteered. I had always loved singing, and my mom always said I sang like a bird. (It may have been an old crow, but she was always encouraging!) I was inspired to sing using First Nations drum and chant by the band Broken Walls, led by Jonathan Maracle, a Tyendinaga Territory Mohawk. I was also inspired by the Native people on the Downtown Eastside whose struggles with addiction and poverty changed my life. God showed me so many things. Many people believe the Downtown Eastside to be one of the spiritually “darkest” places, but, for me, it was a place of great healing.

HD: Can you describe that healing a little bit?

CBB: We always go to places and hope that God will use us to change the world, and sometimes it happens. The process, however, always includes God’s side benefits. He uses our situations to minister to us, to change and heal us. Many times, we never realize there are areas of our lives that need a little attention until God shines a light on our hearts. Within my heart, God healed my identity. I had always loved being from Nadleh, and being Native was very important to me, but I did not know what that meant in the church. Being Native and being Christian always seemed like opposites. While at Street Church, I began a journey of healing—[realizing] that God created me as a Nadleh Whut’en, and that is who I can be, not only in life, but also in church. I didn’t need to lead a double life anymore, but could actually be Native and Christian at the same time. Also, the people at Street Church, in the midst of their brokenness, are a really strong community. We often overlook this when we see the craziness of the street, but it’s really more like a small town.

HD: What has your experience of being Native in other Christian churches been like?

CBB: I have always loved our First Nations culture, our dances, songs, and stories. However, I never saw anything Native in churches. The first time I saw anything cultural was a team from the south islands. They were amazing, but we never did anything Native for a few years after that either. It wasn’t until I was about twenty-two that I wore a button blanket for an international night at our church, Kingsway Foursquare Church. Because we never had anything cultural in churches while I was growing up, I wasn’t sure how this church would react. The pastors, Barry and Carol McGaffin, were very happy to see my Native button blanket, and it touched my heart deeply. Soon after, we started wearing our traditional blankets in church and taking First Nations dance teams all over the place.

HD: You’ve been involved in ministry of some kind since your youth. We could do an interview about each one of your leadership positions! How is it that you came to feel empowered as a woman in ministry?

CBB: During my time at Pacific Life Bible College [PLBC], I learned about the life and ministry of Aimee Semple McPherson [founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel]. She was an inspiration to me and had many, many firsts. I have been very fortunate in Four-
square Canada, because the philosophy generally is, “Why would we hold back more than 50 percent of church members from ministry?” There has always been a good representation of women on the national board and in all areas of leadership in Foursquare. Also, at all the schools I attended, PLBC, Regent College, and The King’s Seminary, there were many strong, smart, inspirational women professors. I’ve really been blessed.

HD: On your Facebook page, you have the quotation, “It is the mothers, not the warriors, who create a people and guide their destiny.” What does this quotation mean to you?

CBB: First Nations women are strong; we are called the life-givers. We have the power to influence our children to become strong Christians, thoughtful and good people. We have the power to inspire our children to greatness. Every society needs warriors, but the mothers carry a greater power.

HD: Do you feel a freedom to minister as a First Nations woman in a way you think the rest of the body of Christ could learn from?

CBB: Yes, absolutely I feel a freedom to minister as a First Nations woman. Yes, I believe the rest of the body of Christ could learn a lot from First Nations, not only respecting women in leadership. It is an overgeneralization to say that we do not have any trouble within our nations regarding gender relations; however, there are many, many women in leadership in our communities.

HD: What is another area in which the rest of the church can learn from First Nations culture?

CBB: First Nations people are also overlooked for leadership in large Christian institutions, not because we are inferior, but simply because we have different values. Native people will not promote themselves as is normal in Canadian society, but wait to be recognized. Good things don’t always come to those who wait. Rather, First Nations are looked at as having no initiative or leadership incentive. This is far from the truth; our people are wonderful leaders. Once, when visiting a First Nations community, someone said, “Our chief and two hereditary chiefs are here.” I smiled, walked to the back row of the church where several people were sitting, and said, “The chiefs are always sitting in the back row, so you must be the chiefs!” I was right, and they all laughed. It is our culture to honor the chiefs and ask them to come up and say some good words; they knew they did not need to push themselves forward. That is our way, but, sadly, we are overlooked in most church leadership settings simply because of different values.

HD: That is a beautiful example of what your culture has to teach us about the humility of Christ, I think. Are there any other messages you would like to send to the non-Native members of the church?

CBB: I would like to say that our Native people are beautiful. We have a difficult history and many things to overcome, but we are more than survivors: We are still warriors. Our ways and our culture are most often misunderstood by Christians, which is too bad, since most non-Native Christians are never asked if their culture is evil. Also, the church in Canada can learn many things from First Nations people.

HD: In closing, how can the readers pray for or learn more about your ministry?

CBB: We are currently involved with evangelism—retelling the Great Story of Jesus to our First Nations people. Please pray for our family, that God will continue to open doors for ministry and help us also in the day-to-day stuff. If anyone is interested in a Cheryl Bear CD, they can go to www.cdbaby.com (search Cheryl Bear) and have a listen. All songs are also available on iTunes.

I will conclude this interview with a testimony from Christina Dawson, a pastor and friend of Cheryl’s:

“Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel” (Prov. 27:9). This makes me think of Cheryl Bear and the way she taught about becoming an Indian Christian—that we can worship the Lord with the way he created us, with our regalia, with our songs, and with our dances. We were created for his glory, for his purpose. The Lord gave us these gifts so that we may honor him; without Jesus, we are nothing. Before I became a Christian, I didn’t care about making regalia or learning songs or dances and all of that. In fact, I didn’t like being Indian, because Indians were dumb, lazy, ugly, drunk, dirty, and good for nothing. But Jesus has changed my life, and I am proud of the way he created me and of all the gifts he has given me. Cheryl Bear has influenced me by being a good teacher, a good support, a good example of how a Christian Indian looks, and, most of all, a good sister and friend. This is an awesome fragrance unto the Lord!

Notes

1. Established in the nineteenth century, Residential Schools funded by the Canadian government and run by churches were intended to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream Canadian society and teach them Christianity. Students lived apart from their families and were not allowed to speak Native languages or practice Native customs. Abuse and substandard living conditions were common at the schools, which were gradually shut down between 1969 and 1996. A similar system of boarding schools was established in the United States; the effects of familial separation and cultural shaming from this era continue to be felt in families on American reservations today.


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Lynn Cohick’s extraordinarily detailed book shows us an accurate reconstruction of women's ways of life in the Greco-Roman world of the first century A.D. The book seems to be aimed toward academics and other well-informed readers.

The author wants to show the reader the differences between prescriptions for women’s life and behavior (often by biased writers of philosophy, theology, or satire) versus descriptions of women’s lives as seen in letters, inscriptions, business documents, and such. The former information is often uncritically accepted by contemporary persons without considering the motives of the ancient writers. The latter seems more likely to be fairly unbiased.

Cohick wishes to tell the story of average women, their life passages, opportunities, limits, joys, and sorrows. She investigates women as daughters, as mothers, as wives, as slaves, as businesspeople, as benefactors, both Jewish and Gentile, as well as those who became Christians.

One prominent point the author makes is that Roman women in general were much freer than Greek women of previous centuries. We have been told about the extreme backwardness and seclusion of Greek matrons, and we have often extrapolated this to the first-century world. Not so! Roman women were not sequestered: They owned property; they could engage in business; they had some religious rites and customs that excluded men; they could be patrons and benefactors of their own clients. Of course, slavery was everywhere present in the Greco-Roman world, so slave women were also numerous. Slave women were often used in the sex trade or were taken as concubines by free men. Still, many slaves obtained their freedom and often prospered afterward, women as well as men. Regardless of their work or position in society, “women drew social status from their character, not their work. Unlike men, who derived their social esteem from their work, women gained social prestige from their virtues . . . being a faithful wife and mother, working diligently, and caring for the home” (241).

The chapters on marriage and wives have copious quotations from Roman, Greek, and Jewish authors on how marriage is “supposed” to be and what married women are “supposed” to do. The concepts of honor and shame were pervasive. These concepts made it necessary for women in general to be faithful, virtuous, and chaste in a sense not required of men. The New Testament writers were careful to state that Christianity taught the importance of these ideals, and that Christian women complied with them. Oddly, in the first-century Roman Empire, the vast majority of marriages contracted were non-licit, since only Roman citizens could enter into licit marriages. In addition, in most licit marriages, the control of the bride did not pass to the husband. This usually meant that she could retain property and other assets apart from her husband’s authority. For non-citizens, a man and woman needed only agree about their intention to marry; there were no legal documents unless a dowry contract was involved, and there were no religious rites required. If either spouse wished to end the marriage, he or she simply expressed the wish to do so, and the marriage ended. Again, there were no documents. What of children? Generally, it was expected that children would be born, but it was uncommon that marriages were ended because of lack of children. Many Roman marriages, licit and non-licit, seemed to be based on companionship and affection more than on need for heirs.

Jewish marriage was rather different, as we can see from references in the New Testament. The author discusses at some length several New Testament women and wives, particularly the Samaritan woman (John 4). She suggests that we have a skewed view of this woman’s history. The likelihood is that the woman had been widowed once or twice and may have been dismissed by one or more husbands for something like infertility or lengthy bleeding problems (compare the woman who had bled for twelve years who touched Jesus’ garment) and was perhaps a concubine or secondary “wife” of a man who would not enter a licit marriage. The author also analyzes the relationship of Priscilla and Aquila and suggests that perhaps the reason Priscilla is named first is that she was sui iuris, that is, responsible for her own legal affairs.

The long chapter on religious activities is very interesting. In Roman religion, the vestal virgins were of high status, and the cult of the Bona Dea (good goddess) was important. Women were the priestesses in this and other cults. Women were also significant in Dionysian worship and Isis cults. In spite of what we have been led to believe, there were many women among the Essenes. Many Roman and Greek women were attracted to Judaism and became God-fearers or proselytes. They did this without regard for the
beliefs of their spouse or family. Many of these women seem to have come to Christian conversion from contact with Judaism—Lydia might be such a one.

Another area that Cohick discusses at length is the ancient role of patron or benefactor. I was familiar with this concept from my Latin studies, but I admit I did not know that there were many women patrons. Jesus refers to this role in Luke 22:25, “. . . those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors.” A female or male patron accepted “clients,” was available to them regularly, usually helped them with money and other benefits, and could call on them for favors. Perhaps the most powerful patron was the Empress Livia (wife of Augustus). Of New Testament characters, we have Phoebe, described as a patron or benefactor of Paul and many others (Rom. 16:1–2). In other documents and inscriptions, we know of a number of women, both Gentile and Jewish, who were known as patrons. The patron was usually a wealthy individual with some degree of power or authority in her or his sphere. Cohick’s emphasis on this role for women is important, helping us understand how the women of the first century lived.

There is a great amount of detailed information about first-century women in this book, all well-organized, including quite a few pictures. The details are for the purpose of showing as much as possible about the everyday life of women from birth to death. The book requires considerably close attention in reading, and thus is not a quick or “easy read.” But, the vast amount of material definitely gives the reader the flavor of women’s lives in ways I have hardly seen elsewhere.

There are some annoying misprints and errors, such as misspelling the Gracchi brothers’ name (135). There was mention of a “Demicus” (sic) Brutus several times, finally disentangled as “Decimus” (103, 124). He was not the “lead conspirator” against Julius Caesar, as stated; that was Marcus Brutus, his cousin.

The author is very evenhanded in interpretations of women’s activities. When discussing Christian women, she shows all possible meanings of the terms used, such as diakonos (deacon or minister). She has good discussions of a number of New Testament women: Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Joanna, Junia, etc. She points out that Joanna, wife of Chuza, and Mary Magdalene should both be considered to be patrons in the usual first-century sense. The book is scholarly and absolutely free of any polemic that I can detect.

With little or no bias, this book gives the reader a good picture of the first-century world and the women who lived there. When we go to the New Testament documents and put them in the actual first-century context, attempting not to read into them what is not there, Cohick’s book is very helpful, as we discover many women contemporaneous with Lydia, Priscilla, Junia, Phoebe, and others. The details we have about these non-biblical women can help us flesh out the lives of Joanna, Mary, Euodia, and the rest. We should know as much about this background material as we can, and Cohick’s book is a major resource for us.
Building on the premise that the verdict against women in ministry has been reached prematurely, T. Scott Womble asks for a retrial. By taking the role of a defense attorney, the author makes it his aim to lay out a comprehensive argument in favor of women serving in positions of ministry in the church. Womble’s desire is for leaders of local churches to have an opportunity to hear the defense that is often overlooked. This should lead to further study as well as healthy discussion rather than “heated arguments that cause wounds which lead to church splits” (20). The aim of the book is to present theological and biblical arguments in such a way that the reader would be convinced, as in a court of law, “beyond a reasonable doubt” (22), of the validity of the egalitarian perspective.

Womble is professor of biblical studies at Saint Louis Christian College. He served as a full-time minister prior to his academic career and continues to preach in churches on a regular basis. Although an egalitarian, Womble serves in a denomination that has yet to release women fully to use their gifts.

The text is structured around an extended courtroom metaphor that includes the intentional numbering of theses—as the book’s title suggests, echoing Martin Luther. After establishing the parties involved and the facts of the case in section 1, Womble presents his opening statement. In the second section, the hermeneutical and theological foundations for the rest of the book are laid. With the thought that many of the differences of opinion within the body of Christ today originate from differing interpretations of biblical texts, Womble carefully begins his discussion in earnest with an overview of “sound interpretive method” (27–28). Although he then moves on to discuss points related to sound theology, the outline of his basic hermeneutical method does provide an important platform upon which he builds later in the book. In the third section, the author begins cross-examination. Laid out on the table are the kinds of things that women hear today, such as, “they are equal in worth only” (thesis 11, p. 75ff). The cross-examination continues by exploring common excuses for ignoring the issue and gains momentum with an exposé of the inconsistencies of the patriarchal view. For instance, some churches that allow men to preach may also allow women to do the same, yet the terminology is different: She is merely “speaking” or “sharing her thoughts” (98). Other churches may prohibit a woman from teaching their own congregation, yet proudly support female missionaries who teach men on the foreign field (103).

The presentation of biblical evidence in favor of the egalitarian view is found in sections 4 and 5. Key texts in both the Old and New Testaments are examined. Womble’s defense comes to a conclusion in the last two sections, in which practical issues are explored, and a verdict is made. Thesis 95 provides a rousing grand finale with a parade of women who served in ministry throughout history.

While each thesis provides a solid argument, Beyond Reasonable Doubt shines the brightest when it comes to the treatment of the biblical text. Womble provides thoughtful discussion on passages that have been at the heart of the gender debate, including Genesis 1–3, Galatians 3:28, 1 Timothy 2:9–15, 1 Corinthians 11:3–16, and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. His insights are fresh and engaging, reflecting both strength in contextual exegesis and an ability to communicate clearly to a broad audience. His excellent observations on the biblical text should provoke the reader naturally to deeper thought and study. In this regard, I believe Womble reaches his objective.

After reading more than two hundred pages defending the egalitarian perspective, I was initially surprised to see repeated references to the “husband’s leadership role in marriage” in chapter 12. At first, it seemed inconsistent with thesis 56, which states that “‘head’ does not mean ‘authority’” in 1 Corinthians 11:3. Yet, Womble goes on to explain that, in the full context of the passage at hand (Eph. 5:22–24), the way in which a husband is to lead is in sacrifice for his wife as Christ sacrificed himself for the church. In this way, the term “leadership” is redefined and brought under the umbrella of “mutual submission” (244).

Beyond Reasonable Doubt is a valuable resource for the church. The book can be read as a whole or used as a reference for particular passages or topics. Its presentation of the case for egalitarianism is a bold, well-researched defense covering a wide range of aspects of the gender debate that provides an excellent overview of the discussion about women.

JENNIFER CREAMER, a graduate student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has taught with the School of Biblical Studies program at the University of the Nations on three continents.

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God of ages has called me to the Second Mile, 
To walk with my sisters through the Valley. 
I pray for the strength and the good courage to continue the walk. 
To be there in the darkness, to be there in the light, 
The Second Mile is to be there.

Where has the little girl gone? 
The one who hides among the shadows of my mind. 
Where has the little girl gone? 
The one who hides her tears in secret— 
Where has the little girl gone? 
The one who hides her fears beneath her heart— 
Where has the little girl gone? 
The one who slips in and out of life— 
Where has the little girl gone?

Into the snowy winter morning light, 
You awaken my heart with a song of love. 
In the springtime, your butterflies surround me with your love. 
In the summer, I soar on your clouds of joy. 
In the autumn, your colors fall on me.
Christians for Biblical Equality

Christians for Biblical Equality is an organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of believers of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scripture as reflected in Galatians 3:28.

CBE recognizes that injustice is an abuse of power, taking from others what God has given them: their dignity, their freedom, their resources, and even their very lives. CBE also recognizes that prohibiting individuals from exercising their God-given gifts to further his kingdom constitutes injustice in a form that impoverishes the body of Christ and its ministry in the world at large. CBE accepts the call to be part of God’s mission in opposing injustice as required in Scriptures such as Micah 6:8.

Mission Statement

CBE affirms and promotes the biblical truth that all believers—without regard to gender, ethnicity or class—must exercise their God-given gifts with equal authority and equal responsibility in church, home, and world.

Core Values

We believe the Bible teaches:
- Believers are called to mutual submission, love, and service.
- God distributes spiritual gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity, or class.
- Believers must develop and exercise their God-given gifts in church, home, and world.
- Believers have equal authority and equal responsibility to exercise their gifts without regard to gender, ethnicity, or class and without the limits of culturally defined roles.
- Restricting believers from exercising their gifts—on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, or class—resists the work of the Spirit of God and is unjust.
- Believers must promote righteousness and oppose injustice in all its forms.

Envisioned Future

Christians for Biblical Equality envisions a future where all believers are freed to exercise their gifts for God’s glory and purposes, with the full support of their Christian communities.

Statement of Faith

We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice.

We believe in the unity and trinity of God, eternally existing as three equal persons.

We believe in the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.

We believe in the sinfulness of all persons. One result of sin is shattered relationships with God, others, and self.

We believe that eternal salvation and restored relationships are possible through faith in Jesus Christ who died for us, rose from the dead, and is coming again. This salvation is offered to all people.

We believe in the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation, and in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers.

We believe in the equality and essential dignity of men and women of all ethnicities, ages, and classes. We recognize that all persons are made in the image of God and are to reflect that image in the community of believers, in the home, and in society.

We believe that men and women are to diligently develop and use their God-given gifts for the good of the home, church, and society.

We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful heterosexual marriage as God’s design.

We believe that, as mandated by the Bible, men and women are to oppose injustice.

CBE Membership

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Joe E. Lunceford

Looking carefully at the stories of women in the Bible, both named and unnamed, Lunceford demonstrates that biblical women are not submissive to males.

Who’s Tempering With the Trinity?
An Assessment of the Subordination Debate
Millard J. Erickson

Erickson seeks to provide a lucid and judicious answer to the question: Is Jesus eternally subordinate to the Father, or is Jesus equal with the Father? How a Christian views the Trinity has implications for understanding not only God but also family roles and relationships.

How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership
Compelling Stories from Prominent Evangelicals
Alan F. Johnson, ed.

Well-known Evangelical leaders share their surprising journeys from a more or less restrictive view to an open inclusive view that recognizes a full shared partnership of leadership in the home and in the ministries of the church based on gifts, not gender.

Man and Woman, One in Christ
An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters
Philip B. Payne

Payne explores the influences on Paul, his practice as a church leader, and his teaching to various Christian communities. Payne shows how Paul’s theology, instructions, and practice consistently affirm the equal standing of men and women, with profound implications for the church today.