

Jessie Penn-Lewis's Cross Theology: Gender Relations in the New Covenant

MIMI HADDAD

"We must turn to the finished work of our Redeemer . . ." ¹

Introduction

Considered the most influential woman affiliated with the Welsh Revivals (1904–05) and earlier the Keswick Conventions (1875–1910),² Jessie Penn-Lewis (1861–1927) distinguished herself as a writer, speaker, and advocate of women's public ministry. A crucicentrist³ of the highest order, Penn-Lewis's egalitarian theology grew out of her understanding of Christ's completed work on Calvary. For Penn-Lewis, the cross provides not only forgiveness for sin (redemption), but also victory over sin and prejudice (sanctification). Crucicentrists like Penn-Lewis celebrated the social consequences of Calvary that included unity and reconciliation, not only between men and women, but also among individuals once hostile to one another. Thus, Penn-Lewis's soteriology (what she understood about the work of Christ) shaped her egalitarian ecclesiology (what she understood about the work of the church). She promoted this view through her writings and leadership initially within the early Keswick Conventions and ultimately within evangelical circles around the world.

Penn-Lewis's cross theology⁴

David Bebbington, a noted historian, identified four theological priorities that characterized early evangelicals. These include (1) conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed, (2) activism, the expression of the gospel through effort, (3) biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible, that all spiritual truth is found on its pages, and (4) crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.⁵ A commitment to conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism was integral to the life and service of Penn-Lewis. Yet, among the early evangelicals, few were more passionate about the cross than she. Towering was her ability to articulate the benefits of Calvary as it builds not only an egalitarian ecclesiology but also unity among Christians.

Unity among Christians

Calvary, for Penn-Lewis, is a place of blessing and reconciliation. Those who have died with Christ on Calvary are grafted into Christ's body where hostilities that had formerly divided, excluded, and oppressed individuals are subdued through Christ's sanctifying power. Oppression and separation because of ethnicity, class, and gender are part of the old creation and cease to overpower souls as they share in Christ's risen life. According to Penn-Lewis:

The "old creation," in its form of "Jew and Gentile," must die to make way for a new creation "after the image of Him" that created him; where . . . there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye are one in Christ Jesus. In the face of these words

we cannot wonder that the Cross is a stumbling-block, and its message likened to a sword or knife, for it cuts deep into the very core of the pride of the old creation. God's cure . . . is not a superficial one. . . . Nothing but the Cross will bring about the unity He desires.⁶

Calvary, as a place of unity, also equips each member of Christ's body to participate equally in service to God, and this provision is part of the newness of life that Christ imparts to the church. Harmony among Christians of every denomination and from every continent gained momentum during the Keswick revivals, an interdenominational movement.⁷ Unity among Christians was therefore viewed as a sign of their victory over sin.⁸ Penn-Lewis wrote:

Christ upon the Cross of Calvary broke down the middle wall of partition between man and man, as well as between man and God. He died that in Him there might be a new creation, one new man, "perfected into one." All divisions caused by sin cease in Him.⁹

Gender reconciliation was integral to Penn-Lewis's cross theology. Because of this, she challenged the assumptions that associated women with Eve's failures rather than with Christ's triumph on Calvary. Thus, to bid "a redeemed woman always to enter His presence with a reminder of Eve's fall upon her head"¹⁰ dishonored the work of Christ, Penn-Lewis warned. Women, like men, stand

in God's presence under her Federal Head—The Last Adam, the Lord from heaven. And stand also towards her fellow members of Christ's Body in the carrying out of the will of the Head in testimony and service for God.¹¹

Women's equal inauguration into Christ's body represents one of the great accomplishments of Calvary, even while many Christians fail to perceive the fullest power available through the cross. According to Penn-Lewis, the forces of evil not only conceal the fullest message of the cross, but also work to conceal the words of Paul as they relate to the new order and the emancipation of women.

Christ's completed work on Calvary therefore challenges not only Satan's work to obscure women's fullest baptismal opportunities in the New Covenant, but, according to Penn-Lewis, the cross also opposes the noetic effects of the fall¹²—that is, our fallen inclination to rationalize sin, prejudice, and the abuse of power. Because of the cross, Christians can receive spiritual per-

MIMI HADDAD (Ph.D., University of Durham) is President of Christians for Biblical Equality. She is a founding member of the Evangelicals and Gender Study Group at the Evangelical Theological Society and is an Adjunct Professor at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, Ill.



ception to interpret the Scriptures consistently in revealing not only the fallen nature of all people, but also Christ's capacity to renew every soul.

The Magna Charta of Woman

In defense of women's public ministry, Penn-Lewis wrote *The Magna Charta of Woman*, a book she believed was God-inspired. Convinced that God had given her a "specific commission to proclaim the message of the Cross,"¹³ Penn-Lewis saw that, while doors opened to her message, there was often one objection: that she was a woman. She wrote:

There was no quarrel with the message, there was no denial of the Divine seal, there was no getting away from the evidence of the results. But none of these did away with the fact that I was a woman. . . . [W]hilst God opened doors for me in some quarters, others were fast closed to the message I bore purely and only because I was a woman. . . . I knew only too well what the letter of the Scripture said, in just three passages of the Apostle Paul's writings, but I was certain . . . if we only knew the exact original meaning of those passages, they were bound to be in harmony with the working of the Holy Spirit in the 19th century.¹⁴

Penn-Lewis's *The Magna Charta of Woman* was a summary of Katharine Bushnell's¹⁵ systematic approach to gender and Scripture—*God's Word to Women*—a series of one hundred Bible studies on "woman's place in the divine economy."¹⁶ While popularizing Bushnell's work, Penn-Lewis raised several of her own concerns, chief among them her desire to reconcile Paul's passages with her belief that Christ's completed work on Calvary emancipates women. The day has come, asserted Penn-Lewis, for women to do their own exegetical work,¹⁷ interpreting Scripture themselves to gain new confidence in the God revealed in the Bible. Women need to know that Paul did not relegate women to "perpetual subordination on account of Eve's deception."¹⁸ Such a notion has clouded women's "sense of the justice of God and their apprehension of the fullness of the gospel message."¹⁹

Because women can learn the ancient languages as well as methods of biblical interpretation, they should discern for themselves whether or not Scripture prohibits women's teaching, as is often claimed. Penn-Lewis wrote:

In days past it was impossible for women to grasp the means of solving these problems that face Christian women—why the Holy Spirit should seem to move in one direction, and the Bible point the other way, but that day has passed. Our colleges and universities are open to women. They can study Greek and Hebrew, and with essential help, as well as men. And now, they should surmount these mental and spiritual perplexities.²⁰

Until women discover that their emancipation is in "harmony with that Word of God . . . they will hold back from fulfilling the purpose of God for them in these closing days of the Age."²¹ Christian women, therefore, require a Scriptural basis in order to serve, with conviction, as preachers and teachers. Thus, Penn-Lewis provided a biblical basis for women's ministry by assessing

the passages that appear to limit their public service as preachers and teachers.

1 Corinthians 11:4–16, 14:34–35

Leaning upon the erudite Bushnell, who affirmed the Scripture as "the infallible Word of God,"²² Penn-Lewis explored Bushnell's assessment of 1 Corinthians 11:4–16 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, concluding that Paul's command that women keep silent in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 conflicts with his earlier command in 1 Corinthians 11:5. How could Paul ask women to keep silent in chapter 14 when three chapters earlier he instructs women on propriety of dress when speaking? According to Bushnell, Paul was quoting "what the 'Judaizers' in the Corinthian church were saying."²³ The term "Judaizers" refers to those who attempted to impose Jewish law and culture on Jewish converts to Christianity. In an attempt to restore Jewish law among Jewish converts in church at Corinth, these Judaizers pressured the church by appealing to the oral law that forbids women to speak in the presence of men.²⁴ By rehearsing the oral law in 1 Corinthians 14:35, Paul exposed their attempt to undermine women's freedom in Christ, which he had affirmed in 1 Corinthians 11:2ff.²⁵ In 2 Corinthians 10:12 and in Galatians 2:4, we find further evidence that the church in Corinth was disturbed by Judaizers or intruders who sought to limit the liberty that Jewish converts enjoyed.

Because there is no Old Testament law requiring the silence of women in public, and since Paul never appealed to Jewish law as binding upon the church, Penn-Lewis concluded that Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:34

"it is not permitted" and "as also saith the law" must refer to some "rule" outside of Scripture. . . . Paul never appealed to the "law" for the guidance of the Church of Christ, but, on the contrary, declared that believers were "dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4), that they might serve in newness of spirit and not the oldness of the letter (v. 6).²⁶

If Paul were "consistent in word and practice,"²⁷ why would he cite a law that constrains women's public speech while also suggesting that a woman's veil serves as a sign of her authority? Turning to Bushnell's study of ancient head coverings and hair length (from the *tallith* Jewish men wore on their heads as a "condemnation for sin"²⁸ to women's ancient hairstyles), it becomes clear that 1 Corinthians 11:4–16 opposed the Jewish inference that to cover one's head was to acknowledge one's "guilt or condemnation."²⁹ Accordingly, Paul forbids Christian "men to veil (since there is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus)."³⁰ However, because it was improper for women to appear in public unveiled, Paul affirms women's spiritual authority even when veiled. Unwilling to command women to wear a veil, Paul stated that "contrary to the teaching of the Jews, there is no disgrace associated with a woman's unveiled head, for it is a 'glory' to her."³¹ A woman's hair is her veil and she "need not be ashamed of uncovering it, whatever the 'Judaizers' might say."³² Thus, Paul is not requiring women to cover their heads, though, if they do, he recognizes their authority even when veiled.

1 Timothy 2:11–15: The Magna Charta of Woman

Far from silencing women or excluding them from service alongside men, Penn-Lewis viewed 1 Timothy 2:11–15 as God's "Magna Charta of Woman," because here Paul remembers God's promise to Eve: that through her seed the Savior will be born (Gen. 3:15), and the Savior will overcome sin and oppression in his body, the church. Therefore, the "Magna Charta of Woman" is an exhortation "from God to women"³³ that Mary's son, foretold in Genesis 3, will conquer sin and prejudice. God intended to use a woman to give birth to Christ who in turn would crush evil. While Eve was deceived by the serpent (whereas Adam was "a deliberate sinner"³⁴), the female gender will not remain for all time "under the shadow of Eve's 'deception.'"³⁵ Let women learn that their victory over sin and deception will come through the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, the second chapter of 1 Timothy foretells women's final victory through the Savior. A woman gave birth to the Messiah, who, in turn, redeems women and men. Once redeemed, Christians must work to oppose "the effects of the Fall,"³⁶ resisting prejudice throughout the life of the church.

Paul not only commends women for their integral role in the birth of the Savior, but the "Magna Charta of Woman" (1 Tim. 2:11–15) also exposes the longstanding tradition of excluding women from biblical scholarship. In opposition to Jewish tradition, Paul instructed the church at Ephesus to allow women to become students of Scripture (1 Timothy 2:11a). Satan, according to Penn-Lewis, has always opposed the scholarship of women in order to advance evil through their ignorance. She wrote:

Ah, here we have the key to Satan's endeavor to fasten upon all women down the ages the results of his work in Eden. "The woman must not learn," said the Jews in Paul's time, and "the woman must not learn," said many of the theologians of the Christian Church, influenced by Judaism. "She was thoroughly deceived once" whispered the serpent, who, alas, has since extended his operations and thoroughly deceived the whole inhabited earth (Rev. 12:9). . . . Had the woman been encouraged to "learn" as the Apostle advised Timothy, might not her greater spiritual capacity have resulted in an accession of spiritual force to the church?³⁷

Rather than elevating women through education that they might learn of their full inheritance in Christ, Penn-Lewis observed that the church has advanced women's theological ignorance. Yet, if women had become Bible scholars as Paul had advised (in 1 Tim. 2:11a), their learning would have made them far less vulnerable to deception by evil. With sadness, she noted that "the truths of God which they should have learned have been kept from them."³⁸ Therefore, *The Magna Charta of Woman* implored women to become Bible scholars as a means of discerning and redressing their oppression through sexist interpretations of the Bible.

Genesis 3:13–19

In her challenge to biased interpretations of Genesis, Penn-Lewis opposed the notion that Genesis mandates the subordination of women because Eve was the first to eat of the forbidden fruit.

Penn-Lewis suggested that women were not cursed as a punishment for Eve's sin. Rather, according to Bushnell, Genesis teaches that the only creature cursed was the serpent.³⁹ Quoting Bushnell, Penn-Lewis wrote:

The teaching that God punished Christian women for the sin of Eve, is a wicked and cruel superstition, and unworthy the intelligence of Christians, . . . it has laid a blighting hand upon woman's self-respect, self-confidence and spiritual activity, from which causes the entire church of Jesus Christ suffers moral and spiritual loss.⁴⁰

According to *The Magna Charta of Woman*, Eve was not cursed, but counted as a worthy opponent to Satan, as God placed enmity or separation between women and Satan. For this reason, Eve becomes the prototypical Christian: one who is set apart from evil, the "first type and representative of all the separated ones who constitute the church of God."⁴¹ Moreover, Eve is also called the mother of the living, because through the "seed of the woman"⁴² the world receives the Savior.

Ephesians 5:21–24

By opposing sin and domination, Christ builds mutual love and submission among the members of Christ's church—a harmony that Paul describes throughout Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians 5:21 illustrates the mutual submission of all Christians, that "Christian grace of yielding one's preferences . . . rather than asserting one's rights."⁴³ Comparing the term "submission" used by Paul in Ephesians 5:21 to passages where the same term is also used (in places such as 1 Pet. 5:5, 1 Cor. 16:16, Col. 3:18, and Titus 2:5),⁴⁴ Penn-Lewis concluded that the Apostle wants all Christians to exhibit mutual deference and cooperation, which Penn-Lewis observes as Paul's social and moral principle. Sadly, however, not only do we fail to notice Paul's call for mutual submission, but some translations have also rendered *hypotassō*, the Greek term for submission—which connotes a voluntary act—as "to obey," "to rule over," or "to have domination over."⁴⁵ This misinterpretation of Paul does violence to his original intent that Christians defer to one another. Penn-Lewis wrote:

In Ephesians 5:21, R.V., we read "subjecting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ." Here we have an admonition written to all Christians irrespective of sex. Again in 1 Peter 5:5 A.V., "all of you be subject one to another . . ."; and in 1 Cor. 16:16 the Apostle urges the Roman Christians to be in "subjection" unto everyone that "helpeth in the work" (some of these being women as shown by Rom 16:3 and 12). . . . In Col. 3:18 and Titus 2:5 we have again "subjection" enjoined upon wives, as is "fitting in the Lord"—in each case the Greek word being the same as rendered "subjection one to another." Again this shows that the meaning of New Testament "subjection" is not the "rule" of Gen. 3:16, which Eve fell under because of her own turning to Adam and not by the preordination of God.⁴⁶

Scripture does not require men to rule over women. Rather, the Bible teaches mutual submission, which is a "grace of the Spirit."⁴⁷

It is a courtesy and a way of life between the “sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, who always say the one to the other, ‘You first—I gladly go ‘next after.’”⁴⁸

If men no longer rule over women, what does it mean for a husband to be the head of his wife? In considering the relationship of Christ as head of the church, Penn-Lewis insisted that Paul, in Ephesians 2:6, suggested that, as head of the church, Christ extends co-regency to all members of his body. Hence, Christ shares his rule of all things with the church, a co-regency that men and women also share. Is this not a picture of mutuality? asked Penn-Lewis. Headship therefore implies shared authority.⁴⁹ Penn-Lewis wrote:

True “headship” is won by self-sacrificing love, even as Christ won His Church—not by rule or domination but by laying down His life for her. Reverence is gained by love; it can never be demanded as right, nor created in the one who is to give it in any other way than by being “a head” in manifesting the character of Christ.⁵⁰

Gender bias and Bible translation

Influenced by their cultures, which devalued women, Bible translators throughout history have imported a bias against women into their translations of Greek and Hebrew words. One example concerns the translation of the term *diakonos*, a word that appears thirty times in the New Testament and is translated as “minister” when referring to a male. However, when used in connection with Phoebe in Romans 16:1, *diakonos* is translated “servant.”⁵¹ “*Diakonos*’ is an ecclesiastical office and thus the translators are inconsistent or biased when they single out Phoebe as a ‘servant.’”⁵² Paul writes, “I commend unto you Phoebe, our sister, who is *diakonos* of the church which is at Cenchrea.”⁵³ Thus, for Paul, *diakonos* is a gender-inclusive term suggesting the co-regency, or shared authority, of women and men, both of whom serve as coworkers, deacons, and ministers of the gospel.

Bushnell’s grasp of New Testament Greek enabled her to observe the biblical support for women’s leadership throughout the New Testament, a leadership that Bible translators have obscured, complained Penn-Lewis. For example, Bushnell realized that Phoebe was also called a *prostatis*, a word Paul used to connote champion, leader, chief protector, or even patron! The verb form of *prostatis* means “to rule,” as noted in “1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12, and 5:17.”⁵⁴ As a *prostatis*, Phoebe held the same relationship “to the Church at Cenchrea that Paul says, ‘church officials’ should hold to their children and household.”⁵⁵

Like Phoebe, Priscilla was also a leader in the early church. A capable teacher, Priscilla instructed the learned Apollos, “a man ‘mighty in the Scriptures.’”⁵⁶ Paul honored Priscilla’s leadership in a number of ways. First, Paul called Priscilla his fellow laborer, or *synergos*, a term he reserved for “evangelists and teachers.”⁵⁷ Second, Paul mentioned Priscilla before her husband in four of the six references to the couple, indicating that she was the more prominent of the two. Penn-Lewis called attention to the bold way in which Paul speaks of the leadership of women like Pris-

cilla who instruct men like Apollos, which is all the more significant because it occurred during a time when Paul had allegedly relegated women to a position of silence in the presence of men. Penn-Lewis reprimanded the church for overlooking the historical prominence of Priscilla and emphasizing the silence of women instead.⁵⁸

Additional evidence of women’s leadership

Penn-Lewis also touched upon key biblical, historical, and archaeological evidence pointing to the leadership of women in the early church. Citing Philip’s four prophesying daughters mentioned in Acts 2:9, as well as the female apostle Junia in Romans 16:7, Penn-Lewis also quoted scholars like fourth-century church historian Eusebius, church father John Chrysostom, Orthodox patriarch Theophylact, church father Irenaeus, Latin Vulgate translator Jerome, and early Christian apologist Tertullian—all of whom refer to women who had preached, taught, prophesied, and held “Apostolic orders”⁵⁹ along with men in the early church.⁶⁰ Lastly, Penn-Lewis pointed to Catacomb artwork showing women “presiding at the Lord’s Supper.”⁶¹ Giving this evidence serious consideration, it demonstrates, she concluded, that women evangelists and missionaries may indeed work alongside men, as they did in the early church, taking the Christian faith to destinations around the world—just as Penn-Lewis had.

In Penn-Lewis’s view, women’s leadership, though sanctioned by Paul, was challenged by religious legalists after his death. Sadly, rabbinical teachings shaped Bible translation, and, as a result, “the status of Christian women in the church changed.”⁶² While alive, Paul successfully combated the Judaizers in their efforts to deny Christians their freedom in Christ. In the end, however, Judaizers insisted upon restricting women’s service in the church. In this way, they “fasten circumcision”⁶³ upon Christians, in a manner of speaking, and the result is “robbing the church of the active ministry of women.”⁶⁴

The church as the body of Christ

Concerned primarily for the mission of the church, Penn-Lewis suggested that limits on women render the church incapable of fulfilling its purpose on earth. If a member of Christ’s body “cannot fulfill its office, how can the Body reach full growth, and ‘make increase with the increase of God?’”⁶⁵ Gender bias, therefore, injures every member of the church, she insisted, for, “if a member of the Body, in which Paul says there cannot be ‘male or female,’ fails to carry out the will of the ‘Head,’ it checks the life of the entire Body and the manifestation of the Spirit through all its members.”⁶⁶

Penn-Lewis distinguished between the church as a formal institution with rules and laws of governance⁶⁷ and the church as a living organism comprised of individuals joined to Christ and, therefore, connected to one another. It is the function of the Holy Spirit to govern the latter according to the desires of Christ, the head of the church, while human laws dating back to the Judaizers govern the former.⁶⁸ Women need to understand that, when they preach, they are submitting to the leadership of the Holy

Spirit as well as to Christ, the head of the body. Such women are asserting their authority from a “spiritual position in the Body of Christ, as a new creation in Him.”⁶⁹ By doing so, women exhibit their spiritual authority—that is, on “what footing they stand as they speak.”⁷⁰ The highest law is the law of the Spirit, “which governs members of the Body according to the will of the Head.”⁷¹ The body of Christ reaches full maturity only as each member is “free to obey the Spirit,”⁷² and only in that freedom is “the Body of Christ”⁷³ able to “increase with the increase of God.”⁷⁴

Because of Calvary, women share spiritual authority with men as equal members of Christ’s body. By opposing sin, and, thus, the enmity among ethnic groups, social classes, and between men and women, the cross creates a new race comprised of diverse though fully equal members. She claimed that

on the Cross, where the old Adam was slain, the Jew and the Gentile—as Jew and Gentile—died, the one with his ordinances and the other without, so that out of both might be created a new creation, neither Jew nor Gentile, but Christ. For only through the Cross and the slaying of the old Adam is the “New Man”—the Body of Christ—created; and there is no way into the membership of the Body but by way of the Cross.⁷⁵

Through Calvary, the failings of the “old Adam” are overcome, and the soul is united to the “New Man”—the spiritual body of Christ where there are no divisions based on ethnicity or gender. Thus, women identified with Christ on Calvary stand with equal dignity and status, and serve with equal authority alongside men. She wrote:

Has man or woman any right within the veil except on the ground of the atoning blood? Is it honoring the blood of Christ to believe that God bids a redeemed woman always enter His presence with a reminder of Eve’s “fall” upon her head, or is she to point to the atoning blood and to the Cross of Calvary where the old creation life was slain and stand in God’s presence under her new Federal Head—the Last Adam, the Lord from heaven? And stand also towards her fellow members of Christ’s Body in the carrying out of the will of the Head in testimony and service for God.⁷⁶

Through the cross, women are equal members of Christ’s body as they cooperate with Christ, their Head. It is not, nor was it ever, God’s intention to silence women, for each member of Christ’s body is a “channel of the Spirit,”⁷⁷ argued Penn-Lewis. The movement of God’s Spirit throughout church history has always involved women prophesying, as on the day of Pentecost. Joel’s prophecy⁷⁸ has been fulfilled through an army of women who in obedience to God use their gifts in service to Christ.

To silence women whom God has gifted and given opportunity to preach is to silence the Holy Spirit. Any group, sect, race, or sex that “attempts a monopoly of the Spirit’s voice and power, will find that the Holy Spirit will flee far from it.”⁷⁹ God is emancipating women, and it will be “woe to the world”⁸⁰ and a great loss to the church if women are not likewise emancipated by their

fellow believers. Should women learn of their power through Christ, “their triumphant Head,”⁸¹ and likewise discover Satan’s “utter defeat at Calvary,”⁸² what assurance of faith, what maturity for the church, and what momentum in evangelism that would mean, suggested Penn-Lewis.

Conclusion

Jessie Penn-Lewis pioneered new territory for women’s service through very practical means—by popularizing Katharine Bushnell’s extensive biblical scholarship. By rendering Bushnell’s academic work accessible to popular audiences, Penn-Lewis offered to the broadest spectrum of the church a comprehensible biblical basis for the equality of men and women in ministry. While *The Magna Charta of Woman* explored Paul’s passages on women, like all of her work, it advanced a cross-centered theology. This, she believed, established the fundamental unity between men and women through Christ—the basis of spiritual power that alone redresses sin and the consequences of sin, including the oppression of women.

As a crucicentrist, Penn-Lewis insisted that only Calvary can oppose weakness and sin while uniting souls into the spiritual body of Christ where there is mutuality and co-regency between men and women. Thus, Penn-Lewis’s cross theology not only identified women with the victories of Christ, but it also offered a corrective to the biased viewpoint, perpetuated by the church, that identified women with Eve’s sin (Gen. 3:16) rather than with the power of the cross. Penn-Lewis sought to reveal women’s equality both as a biblical and a spiritual reality.

For centuries, the church has undermined the purpose of Calvary by subordinating women and by denying them their rightful place as equals within churches, on mission fields, and in any corner of Christ’s new covenant community. Penn-Lewis claimed that, if the church will not embrace the fruits of Calvary, including the unity and mutuality between men and women and all people, many will question the validity of the Christian faith. Penn-Lewis was compelled to ask: If Christ has won the victory over sin, what does this mean for women? One cannot overlook the personal reasons Penn-Lewis had for writing *The Magna Charta of Woman*, a book she vowed to write in defense of her own international ministry. Her cross theology consistently challenged male hegemony within the church by offering women an egalitarian hermeneutic with which to reexamine Paul’s passages that appear to silence women. She also recognized the need to offer women an intimate identification with Christ (rather than Eve). She thus summoned women to pursue their inward call to ministry with the awareness that all intellectual and spiritual opposition to their service has been conquered at Calvary.

Finally, Penn-Lewis challenged women to engage in biblical scholarship. By doing so, women will discover for themselves that the biblical record is not preferential to men, nor does it oppose women’s inward call to serve alongside men as women have done faithfully throughout the history of the church. Rather, the biblical record is in harmony with their inward calls of service to Christ.

Notes

1. Jessie Penn-Lewis, *Life out of Death* (Fort Washington, Penn.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1991), 9.

2. Convened in the Lake District of England, the Keswick Conventions were weeklong annual events offering a variety of sermons and sessions that explored the biblical call to personal and corporate holiness. Drawing largely from the Anglican church, the Keswick Conventions were interdenominational, attracting participants from all over the world. Some of the most prominent evangelicals of the day spoke from the main platform at Keswick.

3. Crucicentrism was a prominent feature of 1800–1900s evangelicals who placed the cross at the center of their preaching and writing. Among the most prominent crucicentrists of her day, Penn-Lewis espoused a soteriology that gave rise to an egalitarian ecclesiology. See David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1989).

4. Brynmor Pierce Jones was the first scholar to use the phrase “cross theology” to describe the crucicentrism of Jessie Penn-Lewis. See *The Trials and Triumphs of Mrs. Penn-Lewis* (North Brunswick, N.J.: Bridge Logos Publishers, 1997).

5. Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 19.

6. Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Climax of the Risen Life* (Bournemouth: The Overcomer Book Room, 1946), 37.

7. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 159.

8. Donald Dayton, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 89.

9. Jessie Penn-Lewis, *Thy Hidden Ones: Union with Christ as Traced in the Song of Songs* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1899), 30.

10. Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 99.

11. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 99–100.

12. From the Greek word for “mind,” theologians speak of the noetic effects of the fall to mean that fallen individuals are inclined to rationalize their sin. Apart from the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, sinners do not readily discern the manner in which sin impacts their ability to think and behave in holy ways.

13. Mary Gerrard, *Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis: A Memoir* (London: The Overcomer Book Room, 1930), 266.

14. Gerrard, *Mrs. Jessie Penn-Lewis: A Memoir*, 266–67.

15. Katharine Bushnell (1856–1946) was a physician, missionary, and colleague of the Christian activist Josephine Butler (1828–1906). Butler dedicated her life to opposing the exploitation of women, particularly in India. Bushnell promised the dying Butler she would use her formidable grasp of the biblical languages to assess the scriptural teaching on gender. From Genesis to Revelation, Bushnell’s detailed exegesis of the Hebrew and Greek texts provided a consistent biblical egalitarian theology. Moreover, she offered historical and biblical background to assess those passages better that are frequently interpreted as subordinating women to male authority. Bushnell’s book, *God’s Word to Women* (Piedmont, Calif.: published via reprint, ed. Ray Munson, North Collins, N.Y.: 1976), is available through www.equalitydepot.com.

16. *God’s Word to Women* was first published in 1926 in the United States. Bushnell, working in the original languages, compiled nearly four hundred pages of careful biblical scholarship in assessing Scripture’s support of women’s equality in the church and the home.

17. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 16.

18. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 16.

19. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 16.

20. Bushnell, *God’s Word to Women*, qtd. in Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 10.

21. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 15–16.

22. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 14.

23. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 22–23.

24. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 26.

25. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 25–26.

26. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 25–26.

27. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 35.

28. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 36.

29. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 38–39.

30. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 45.

31. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 45.

32. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 46.

33. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 56.

34. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 57.

35. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 57.

36. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 59.

37. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 57–58.

38. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 58.

39. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 71.

40. Bushnell, qtd. in Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 72.

41. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 68.

42. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 70.

43. Bushnell, qtd. in Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 77.

44. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 77.

45. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 77ff.

46. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 77–78.

47. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 78.

48. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 78–79.

49. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 82.

50. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 82.

51. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 83.

52. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 83.

53. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 83.

54. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 89.

55. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 89.

56. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 90.

57. Bushnell, qtd. in Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 91.

58. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 91.

59. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 92.

60. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 90–93.

61. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 93.

62. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 94.

63. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 94.

64. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 94.

65. Bushnell, qtd. in Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 96.

66. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 97.

67. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 97.

68. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 97.

69. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 98.

70. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 98.

71. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 97.

72. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 97.

73. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 97.

74. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 97.

75. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 98–99.

76. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 99–100.

77. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 100.

78. “Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:29 TNIV).

79. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 102.

80. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 102.

81. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 103.

82. Penn-Lewis, *The Magna Charta of Woman*, 103.