

Egalitarian Pioneers: Betty Friedan or Catherine Booth?

MIMI HADDAD

One source of tension between egalitarians and complementarians is the frequent complementarian claim that egalitarians are the theological descendents of radical feminists such as Betty Friedan, Mary Daly, and Daphne Hampson. This is inaccurate. Egalitarians in fact see mentors in people like Catherine Booth, Jessie Penn-Lewis, Frances Willard, A. J. Gordon, Katharine Bushnell, William Baxter Godbey, Amanda Smith, Fredrik Franson, Sojourner Truth, B. T. Roberts, and Pandita Ramabai. Our theological moorings, as egalitarians, are directly linked to the first wave of feminists—people whose passion for Scripture, evangelism, and justice shaped the golden era of missions in the 1800s.¹ These people not only advanced the biblical basis for the gospel service of women and people of color, but many of them also labored for the abolition of slavery and for voting rights for women.

Because there seems to be a lack of familiarity with the broad sweep of the history of Christian women, this paper will consider two matters. First, I will explore 1800 years of Christian teaching that reflected a patriarchal cultural evaluation of women as inferior, subordinate, more prone to sin, and less rational than men, in spite of examples of women who served as gifted leaders. Second, I will outline how change first took place in the 1800s, rather than with the radical feminists of the latter 1900s, as is often argued. The Christian feminists of the 1800s broke rank with generations of Christian leaders and theologians who had failed to observe the consistent teaching of Scripture not only on gender, but also on other social issues such as slavery. The first wave of feminists therefore represents a radical break with patriarchal cultural values.² For the first time in human history Christians began articulating a biblical basis for gift-based rather than gender-based ministry. By doing so, they raised a voice of protest to a patriarchal evaluation of women and people of color as inferior to white men and as unfit for public ministry and leadership.

Thoroughly dedicated to evangelical ideals, particularly evangelism, the early feminists questioned restricting the gospel service of Christian women whose callings and abilities were firmly established on mission fields around the world. In some detail then, I will examine the contributions of the first wave of feminists whose commitment to biblical authority, evangelism, and social justice came to characterize evangelicals as a whole.³

From the patristic period to the 1800s: The inferiority of women as a self-evident axiom

From the patristic period throughout the 1700s, the church held that women were ontologically inferior to men.⁴ Despite the many examples of women's leadership throughout Scripture as well as in church history, for nearly 1800 years Christians interpreted texts

such as 1 Timothy 2:11–14 to confirm women's inferior nature and of their proneness to sin and error. For these reasons it was concluded women were not suited for leadership positions or public ministry.

Greek philosophy influenced the early church's view of the nature and being of women. According to Plato (427–347 B.C.), “[Woman's] native disposition is inferior to man's”⁵ and “a different function should be appointed for each corresponding to this difference of nature.”⁶ Likewise, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) held that “the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled.”⁷

The presumed ontological superiority of men was foundational to the patriarchy that characterized Greco-Roman culture.⁸ As the following quotes show, these patriarchal cultural values were largely adopted by leading Christians theologians and passed along through generations of church history.

- “Both nature and the law place the woman in a subordinate condition to the man” — Irenaeus (A.D. 130–202)⁹
- “[Women] are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of *your* desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die.” — Tertullian (160–220)¹⁰
- “Nor can it be doubted, that it is more consonant with the order of nature that men should bear rule over women, than women over men.” — Augustine (354–430)¹¹
- “The woman taught once, and ruined all. On this account therefore he saith, let her not teach...for the sex is weak and fickle...” — Chrysostom (347–407)¹²
- “The image of God, in its principal signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman...But in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature.” — Aquinas (1225–1274)¹³
- “[T]he very reason why [women] are forbidden to teach, is, that it is not permitted by their condition. They are subject, and to teach implies the rank of power or authority...for *gynaikokratia* (the government of women) has always been re-



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 she served as the Convener of the Gender Issue Group for the 2004 Lausanne III Conference for World Evangelization.

garded by all wise persons as a monstrous thing” — John Calvin (1509–1564)¹⁴

- “Nature, I say, does paint them forth [women] to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish; and experience has declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment.” — John Knox (1514–1572)¹⁵
- “Man’s superiority enables and entitles him to command... This superiority of the man is...taught in Scripture, founded in nature and proved by all experience.” — Charles Hodge (1797–1878)¹⁶

These comments may sound misogynistic to our modern ears, but these men were simply reflecting the prevailing cultural ideas and attitudes about women’s inferiority in their interpretations of Scripture. Their writings also include positive comments about women, and many of these men worked beside talented women leaders who demonstrated that they, like men, were created in God’s image, redeemed by Christ, and gifted for service as missionaries, martyrs, leaders, Bible scholars, and administrators. Examples of women’s moral, rational, and spiritual leadership caused Christians to increasingly question sexist assumptions regarding their presumed inferiority and pioneered the way for later generations. A small sample of church history reveals women who were able to transcend the strictures of their culture. Here are a few examples.

Prominent women leaders

The Early Church

The earliest Western translation of the full Bible was the product of a male-female translation team—**Paula** (347–404) and Jerome. Inheriting tremendous wealth, Paula came to faith after the death of her husband. She used her vast resources to build hospitals, to care for the poor in Rome and Palestine, to build and establish monasteries and churches, and to purchase the ancient manuscripts that were translated into the Latin Bible. Paula mastered the Hebrew language, and her linguistic skills proved to be a priceless resource to Jerome, who hailed Paula’s intellect and ability to speak Hebrew without a Latin accent. In gratitude for assistance of Paula and her daughter Eustochium, Jerome dedicated much of his work to her. He wrote:

There are people, O Paula and Eustochium, who take offense at seeing your names at the beginning of my works. These people do not know that Huldah prophesized when men were mute; while Barak trembled, Deborah saved Israel; that Judith and Esther delivered from supreme peril the children of God...Is it not to women that our Lord appeared after His Resurrection? Yes, and the men could then blush for not having sought what women had found.¹⁷

Apollonia of Alexandria (martyred in 249) served as a deacon¹⁸ in the church in Alexandria. She was martyred under the Roman emperor Decius when a mob seized known Christians, including the elderly Apollonia. After pulling out her teeth, the mob tied her to a stake and burned her alive.¹⁹

Deacons in the early church cared for the ill, provided a theological education to those preparing for baptism, and anointed the sick with oil. Historians have recovered prayers read at the ordination of women deacons, and the following example may have been read at Apollonia’s ordination:

O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and of woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah; who didst not disdain that thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the temple, didst ordain women to be keepers of Thy holy gates,—do Thou now also look down upon this servant, who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit, and “cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” that she may worthily discharge the work which is committed to her to Thy glory, and the praise of Thy Christ, with whom glory and adoration be to Thee and the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.²⁰

Sister to Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, **Macrina the Younger** (330–379) taught that humility and love were the goals of philosophy. Macrina modeled material simplicity as a spiritual discipline and both Basil and Gregory joined her ascetic, monastic life. A person of means, Macrina distributed her wealth among the poor and required members of her monastic community to work for their food. In his biography of Macrina, her brother Gregory describes how she transformed their household into a monastic retreat where she lived “on a footing of equality with the staff and maids.”²¹

Basil, famous for his defense of the Nicene Creed, and Gregory, known for his theological development of the Holy Spirit, both credit their older sister for their theological educations. Macrina’s holy life attracted many followers, and as her fame spread she became known simply as “the Teacher.”²²

Despite these women and numerous others whose spiritual leadership helped shape the early church, the presumed inferiority and subordination of women persisted.

The Middle Ages

Throughout the Middle Ages, the leadership of women such as Theodora, Praxedis, Hildegard von Bingen, Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Avila brought spiritual vitality and moral accountability to the highest levels of the church.

Together with her husband Justinian, **Theodora** (500–548) built the most modern city of her day—Constantinople. This city advanced justice for women due to Theodora’s efforts. As a young girl, Theodora worked as a mime in the hippodrome and later became an actress and a prostitute. At the age of twenty, Theodora came to faith in Christ and abandoned her old life. She moved to a house near the palace and soon attracted the attention of Justinian, heir to the throne. The couple married in 525.

In 527, Justinian and Theodora were crowned emperor and empress of the Byzantine Empire. Working as a team, Justinian encouraged Theodora to use her wisdom and intellect to advance the good of the people. She wisely refused to desert Constanti-

nople during a riot between the Monophysites and orthodox Christians, and her courage and counsel helped save Justinian's rule. Together they rebuilt Constantinople with architectural feats including Hagia Sophia, believed to be the most impressive Byzantine church ever built.

Theodora worked tirelessly on behalf of women. She proposed legislation that prohibited forced prostitution and she built homes for prostitutes. Theodora insisted upon giving women a greater voice in divorce, and she advanced laws that allowed women to hold property. After her husband's death, Theodora worked to build unity between Orthodox Christians and the Monophysites.

One of the most admired women of the Middle Ages, **Hildegard of Bingen** (1098–1179) was celebrated for her learning, intimacy with God, and unquenchable industry. Hildegard's range of talent was daunting. A Benedictine nun who served along the Rhine, Hildegard was an

Abbess over a double monastery. As such, she exercised authority over both male and female religious leaders, while popes, bishops, and kings sought her counsel. Hildegard was a trained physician, composed music and poetry, and was deeply involved in the politics of her day. Hildegard revived the spiritual health of a church that had become morally and spiritually indifferent. Greatly troubled by the moral poverty of church leaders, Hildegard called the people to find salvation by looking to the Bible and to Christ rather than to the priests. Hildegard's writings were collected in a book called the *Scivias* or "know the ways of the Lord." The *Scivias* reveals a profound understanding of the prophets, the apostle Paul, and Revelation.

Catherine of Siena (1347–1380) worked tirelessly among victims of the plague, opposed corruption and the abuse of power, and stood before bishops and popes demanding that they lead righteous and humble lives. Leadership for Catherine was built upon an intimate relationship with Christ, a relationship that began when she was seven years of old. By the age of twelve, Catherine developed a life of spiritual discipline that included fasting, prayer, and material simplicity. At sixteen, she sought a life of solitude and prayer. God called Catherine to public service at the age of twenty-one. Though she questioned whether her gender might be an obstacle, she obediently left her life of solitude to serve plague victims in Siena. She cared for the sick and dying and she also advocated for those who were imprisoned without cause. When a young man had been unjustly condemned, Catherine led him to Christ and remained with him through the execution, stirring the conscience of the town. Her wisdom and fame spread, and soon a group of disciples shadowed her ministry.

Though Catherine preferred a life of solitude and prayer, God reminded her that the salvation of men and women demanded her leadership in public life. God also reassured Catherine that he would give her the power to lead, whereupon she found herself confronting church leaders. Denouncing greed and spiritual poverty, Catherine presented the following letter to Pope Gregory XI:

[God] is asking you to take just action against the multitudinous crimes of those who graze and feed in the garden of holy Church.... Since he has given you authority and you have accepted it, you ought to be using the power and strength that is yours. If you don't intend to use it, it would be better and more to God's honor and the good of your soul to resign.²³

Catherine boldly entered the Pope's palace at Avignon where she reminded him of the church's highest mission. Pope Urban turned to his cardinals afterward and said, "Behold my brethren,

how contemptible we are before God.... This poor woman puts us to shame.... It is she who now encourages us."²⁴

While God used many women like Catherine, Hildegard, and Theodora to guide the church through war, conflict, corruption, and the plague, theologians such as Aquinas continued to uphold the belief that women were inferior to men.

Examples of women's moral, rational, and spiritual leadership caused Christians to increasingly question sexist assumptions regarding the presumed inferiority of women and pioneered the way for later generations.

The Protestant Reformation

Protestant reformers such as John Calvin and John Knox also assumed the moral and spiritual superiority of men. In his commentary on Timothy, Calvin associated the subordination of women with their inferior nature. Yet, women were prominent leaders in the Protestant Reformation. From Katharine Von Bora, wife of Martin Luther; to Anne Askew and Lady Jane Grey in England; to Jeanne D'Albret, defender of the Huguenots in France, Protestant women fearlessly and intelligently promoted the Protestant faith even when threatened and/or tortured to death. Here is one example.

Anne Askew (1521–1546) was a leader in the English Reformation and was the only woman tortured in the Tower of London. Possessing a brilliant mind, a determined will, and a fearless faith in Christ, Anne defended her right to read, study, and argue her interpretation of Scripture. When arrested for preaching the Protestant faith in London, Anne remained calm during her interrogation and torture. Placed on the rack until her hips were dislocated, Anne had to be carried in a chair to her execution by fire. Anne's comments, recorded during her inquisition, reflect her skill as a biblical scholar as well as the scholarly tenor of the English Reformation.

The first wave of feminists call for change

Beginning with the modern missionary movement, for the first time in history, Christians began to affirm a biblical basis for the ontological and functional equality of women and people of color. Between 1808 and 1930, more than forty-six biblical treatises were printed in support of women's gift-based ministry,²⁵ signifying the emergence of the first wave of feminists. These early feminists' convictions about women's ontological and functional equality grew out of their commitment to evangelical priorities of biblical authority, evangelism, and social justice.²⁶ Thus, the early feminists were the first to provide both a biblical and social voice to gender and ethnic equality. By doing so, they represent a radical

departure from previous generations of believers whose patriarchal assumptions about women's nature and capacity for service went unchallenged.

The Modern Era

According to historian Dana Robert, the modern mission movement began at the end of the nineteenth century, as Christians in "Great Britain, Europe, and North America, newly awakened to their missionary 'obligations,' founded an impressive array of mission societies."²⁷ Motivated by a concern for the imminent return of Christ, this movement would have far-reaching results.

By the final years of the twentieth century, more than half of all Christians were to be found outside the region that had been the historical heartland of Christianity for nearly fifteen hundred years. New centers of Christian strength and vitality were now to be found where missionary initiatives were focused in widely scattered places in the Americas, Africa, and Asia.²⁸

First-wave feminists dedicated themselves to goals that came to characterize evangelicals as a whole, and that also led them to attain new levels of prominence as biblical exegetes in advancing evangelism and social justice. Students of the Bible who were dedicated to a high view of Scripture, these feminists were called to the mission field, abolition and suffrage movements, and preaching ministries. They resisted higher critical methods that undermined the authority of the Bible. They also opposed the "proof text" method and the plain reading of Scripture that gave support to slavery and women's exclusion from leadership and public speaking. Rather, they sought to harmonize those passages that appeared in conflict with the whole of Scripture regarding the equal value and dignity of every human being. First-wave feminists developed a whole-Bible hermeneutic that addressed gender and justice from a Gospel perspective. It is to their approach to the Bible that I now turn.

Affirming the authority of Scripture

Fredrik Franson (1852–1908) founded the Evangelical Alliance Mission and was a prominent leader of the Free Church Movement. He engaged women as part of his evangelistic outreach, and he published his support of women's leadership in an article entitled, "Prophesying Daughters: A Few Words Concerning Women's Position in Regard to Evangelism." Insisting that the whole of Scripture affirms women's public ministry, Franson preferred a whole-Bible approach to reliance upon two passages (1 Tim. 2:12 and 1 Cor. 14:34). He "labeled as heretics those who grounded a doctrine on one or two passages in the Bible, without reading the references in their context."²⁹

A. J. Gordon (1836–1895), after whom Gordon College is named, was a prominent advocate of missions, abolition, and women in ministry. Gordon also put forward a whole-Bible hermeneutic when considering women's service. Gordon's support of biblical equality for women resulted in an 1894 publication entitled "The Ministry of Women."³⁰ It begins with an affirmation of biblical authority. Gordon wrote:

[I]t is exceedingly important that [women's ministry and] work, as now carried on, should either be justified from Scripture, or if that were impossible, that it be so modified as to bring it into harmony with the exact requirements of the Word of God.³¹

Gordon considered Pentecost to be the "*Magna Charta* of the Christians Church" and it demonstrated that women and all ethnic groups share equally in Christ's new covenant community.³²

Gordon's dispensational view of history gave his egalitarian theology a sense of urgency. In the new dispensation, those who had once been viewed as inferior by natural birth attain a new spiritual status through the power of the Holy Spirit. Women, along with all ethnic and social classes, now have an "equal warrant with man's for telling out the Gospel of the grace of God."³³ For God's gifting no longer rests on a "favored few, but upon the many, without regard to race, or age, or sex."³⁴

Gordon believed that Paul's instructions in 1 Timothy 2:8–11 and 1 Corinthians 14:34 should be understood in light of biblical examples of women's leadership, preaching, and prophesying. He also questions why Paul would prohibit all women's public ministry after describing the propriety in which their public service should be conducted.

All texts that prohibit a practice in one place, while allowing it in another, must be considered in the light of the entire New Testament teaching—the teaching of prophecy, the teaching of practice, and the teaching of contemporary history—if we would find the true meaning.³⁵

According to Gordon, there is "no Scripture which prohibits women from praying or prophesying in the public assemblies of the Church."³⁶

A whole-Bible approach must also be supplemented with a consideration of the historical context. When this is ignored, readers are more vulnerable to prejudiced interpretations and biased translations.³⁷ Gordon used the examples of Phoebe and Priscilla to show how the long-standing assumption of women's inferiority impacted Bible translations. The Greek word, *diakonos* was translated as 'minister' when it was used of Apollos and Paul (1 Cor. 3:5), but as 'servant' when used of Phoebe (Rom. 16:1). This bias is also evident in the transposition of Priscilla and Aquila's names in Acts 18:26, so that Aquila rather than Priscilla "instructed Apollos in the way of the Lord more perfectly." The most reliable manuscripts place Priscilla ahead of her husband in four of the six references to this couple, including Acts 18:26.³⁸

Gordon also acknowledged the significance of the whole church in the interpretative process. "The final exegesis is not always to be found in the lexicon and grammar" alone, but also in the Spirit working through the church as a "body of regenerate and sanctified believers."³⁹ The Bible is to be read first through the wisdom and counsel of all believers, as they consider passages in their historical context and in light of the whole of Scripture.

To follow the voice of the Church apart from that of the written Word has never proved safe; but, on the other hand, it may be that we need to be admonished not to ignore the teaching of the

deepest spiritual life of the Church in forming our conclusions concerning the meaning of Scripture. It cannot be denied that in every great spiritual awakening in the history of Protestantism the impulse for Christian women to pray and witness for Christ in the public assembly has been found irrepressible.⁴⁰

Katharine Bushnell (1856–1946) worked as a medical doctor, scholar, missionary, and activist. She was a prominent leader in the first wave of feminists. Her book, *God's Word to Women: One Hundred Bible Studies on Woman's Place in the Church and Home*, written in 1919, remains in print and is frequently cited by today's egalitarians. Like other first-wave feminists, Bushnell's commitment to the authority of Scripture was pronounced. She asserted that "the Bible is all that it claims for itself. It is (1) Inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16; (2) Infallible, Isa. 40:8, and (3) Inviolable, John 10:35. Indeed,

no other basis of procedure is available for us."⁴¹ Bushnell insists that "no authority [is] final, but the Word of God."⁴²

Bushnell studied Greek and Hebrew as well as biblical history in order to understand the scriptural teaching on gender, authority, marriage, and vocation. Like A. J. Gordon, she refuted the pervasive assumption of women's ontological inferiority, an endeavor greatly strengthened by her reading of Scripture in the original languages, by her observations of women's leadership on the mission field, and by her efforts to redress the global abuse of women.

Bushnell grounds the ontological equality of men and women first in the early chapters of Genesis where, according to Bushnell, we learn that Adam and Eve were both created in the image of God,⁴³ that Adam and Eve were both equally called to be fruitful and to exercise dominion in Eden,⁴⁴ that Eve was not the source of sin,⁴⁵ and that God does not curse women because of Eve.⁴⁶ Rather, it was Satan, not God, who inspired the domination of men over women.⁴⁷ God bestows leadership on those who do what is right in God's sight, regardless of their gender, birth order, nationality, or class.⁴⁸

In assessing the teachings of Paul, Bushnell determined that the apostle affirmed the authority and leadership of women, provided that their leadership was neither domineering nor abusive (1 Tim. 2:12); that those who teach must understand and advance the truth concerning the Gospel (1 Tim. 2:11–12, Acts 18:26, Rom. 16:1–5, 7, 12–13, 15), and that when women pray and prophesy in public they are not disruptive, either by their clothing or through their chatter (1 Cor. 11:5, 1 Cor. 14:34). Ultimately, Bushnell grounds her understanding of women's status not in the Fall, but in Christ's completed work on Calvary. Bushnell insists that a correct interpretation of Scripture as it relates to "women's social, ecclesiastical and spiritual status"⁴⁹ should be ascribed in the same manner as "man's social, ecclesiastical and spiritual status, [based] on the atonement of Jesus Christ. [We] cannot, for women, put the 'new wine' of the Gospel into the old wine-skins of 'condemnation.'"⁵⁰ Bushnell condemns the prejudice and interpretative bias noted throughout church his-

tory such that women's status was always viewed through Eve's sin, rather than through their full redemption and inheritance in Christ. By challenging misinterpretation and error in Bible translation, Bushnell established a theological foundation for women's ontological equality, a foundation that today's egalitarians continue to build upon.

Catherine Booth (1829–1890), cofounder of the Salvation Army along with her husband William, was a noted preacher and a tenacious inner-city missionary. Catherine and William committed their lives to Christian service among the poverty-stricken neighborhoods of East London. When evangelist Phoebe Palmer was criticized for addressing audiences of both women and men in her lecture series, Catherine took it upon herself to write a defense of women's preaching. Her pamphlet entitled "Female Ministry or, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel," is a concise and thorough survey of the biblical support for women's public ministry.

Booth used a whole-Bible approach in interpreting 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34, stating that,

If commentators had dealt with the Bible on other subjects as they have dealt with it on this, taking isolated passages, separated from their explanatory connections, and insisting on the literal interpretation of the words of our version, what errors and contractions would have been forced upon the acceptance of the Church, and what terrible results would have accrued to the world.⁵¹

According to Booth, if women bring people to Christ, then they are gifted by God and should be supported by their church or denomination. She also warned that those who hinder women from ministry on the basis of their gender will be judged for keeping the Gospel from reaching those whom Christ died to save. Booth recognized a clear link between affirming the biblical basis for gift-based ministry and furthering the work of evangelism.

Frances Willard (1839–1898) was invited to preach by revivalists such as D. L. Moody. Raised in an abolitionist home,⁵² Willard became president of the largest nineteenth-century women's organization, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The WCTU was comprised of women both north and south of the Mason Dixon Line who worked for abolition, suffrage, and temperance around the world. Willard was also president of Evanston Ladies College (now Northwestern University). When she died, 30,000 people came to grieve her loss, and flags were lowered to half-mast in New York, Chicago, and Washington, D.C.

In 1880, Willard wrote *Woman in the Pulpit* with four objectives: to expose faulty biblical interpretation used to limit women's ministry; to examine, through the whole of Scripture, the passages that appear to prohibit the leadership of women; to consider the success of women's public ministry; and to evaluate the opposing view. *Woman in the Pulpit* challenges a literal interpretation of Scripture inconsistently applied to women. Why should women be compelled to silence (because of 1 Timothy 2:11) and, at the

same time, allowed to wear braided hair and gold jewelry, as both are prohibited in the same epistle? To interpret Scripture with such variability confuses the “plain Bible-reading member of the laity.”⁵³

Willard’s activism was motivated by a careful reading of Scripture. She saw that all too often self-interest guided the interpretative process in using Scripture to support the subjugation of women and slaves. To avoid a preferential reading of the text, Willard insisted that Scripture should interpret Scripture. For example, 1 Timothy 2:11 should be understood through Judges 4:4–5, Acts 18:26, 1 Corinthians 14:3, and Romans 16:3–4. Willard discovered more than thirty passages that favored “woman’s public work for Christ, and only two against it, and these not really so when rightly understood.”⁵⁴ She clearly saw that to allow women to use their gifts alongside men from a biblical perspective challenged the presumed inferiority of women.

As the worldwide leader of the WCTU, Willard was uniquely poised to observe the success of women leaders—women who headed departments of evangelism and preached to thousands, thereby influencing the spiritual direction of whole families and communities. Yet those churches and denominations that support women on mission fields are often the ones who prohibit their service at home, proving not only inconsistent, but also providing a spectacle that is “both anomalous and pitiful.”⁵⁵

In preparation for missionary service, nineteenth-century women pioneers began enrolling in Bible institutes in large numbers. As a result, women became skilled exegetes, a discipline that strengthened their missionary leadership and also provided them with the interpretive tools to assess the gender restrictions placed on them by the very churches and denominations that spent thousands of dollars supporting their ministries overseas. Their biblical studies gave rise to a hermeneutic that asserted women’s ontological and functional equality as an overarching biblical principle. On this basis, first-wave feminists offered a serious blow to any biblical support for ascriptivism—ascribing value, dignity, and worth to individuals based on their heritage, skin color, or gender—thus challenging the long-held sexist and racist assumptions within the church. Their efforts also fueled activism in the areas of voting rights and the abolition of slavery.

First-wave feminists trusted in the power of God to transform culture and to set people free. Successful in opposing slavery, these early Christian feminists also helped articulate a biblical basis for shared leadership among men and women. The continuation of their work has now become the responsibility of future generations of egalitarians who share the same evangelical commitment to biblical authority, evangelism, and social justice.

Conclusion

Women’s intellectual, moral and spiritual leadership on the mission fields around the globe provided obvious and ample challenge to the long-held patriarchal evaluations of women’s worth. As women’s

functional equality indicated an ontological equivalence, this led to a feminist awakening of the 1800s, an awakening that was integrally embraced by those with a high view of Scripture.

Exegetes such as Bushnell and Gordon challenged long-held negative culturally based evaluations of women. They were the first to insist that Gospel values must triumph over cultural values, especially in regard to women and slaves. Thus, the liberation of women was a deeply biblical movement, and it began not with Betty Friedan or Mary Daly in the 1960s, but with A. J. Gordon and Catherine Booth in the 1800s.

The momentum gained by the first wave of feminists was slowed by the emergence of secular feminists who, after the Second World War, severed their feminist ideals from a commitment to biblical authority. Many of these secular feminists placed their individualist values ahead of their commitment to Scripture. As a result, by the late 1960s evangelicals had become cautious of secular feminist rhetoric and its impact on the church, home, and world.

Though few evangelicals today deny the ontological equality of men and women, an ideal inherited from the first wave of feminists, a new position emerged within the evangelical community in the 1970s. This perspective, a so-called complementarian view, affirms women’s ontological equality but insists on subordinate “roles” for women in the church and the home.⁵⁶

The complementarian formulation of gender roles is clearly a reaction to secular feminists. While insisting that women are equally created in God’s image, equally redeemed in Christ, and therefore of equal value with men, this view ascribes men to positions of authority over women in the church and home (no specific instruction is ever given regarding women’s authority relative to men’s in the secular sphere). While women’s ontological equality is no longer overtly challenged, women are routinely denied shared authority as image-bearers, as redeemed in Christ, as gifted for service, and as called to exercise their spiritual gifts to advance Christ’s kingdom. This position is illogical, for one cannot be ontologically equal while also permanently and functionally unequal.

Moreover, egalitarians are often accused of capitulating to a secularist agenda regarding gender, authority, and Scripture by some who seem to be unaware of the history of evangelicalism or the centrality that first-wave feminists played in that history. They thus overlook the theological kinship of first-wave feminists with today’s egalitarians. Such oversights not only weaken Christian unity and the mission of the church, but also reflect poorly on the scholarly tenor of evangelicals as a whole. Let us hope that through careful scholarship and dialogue, evangelicals will embrace a more thorough historical understanding of today’s egalitarians so that together we might also celebrate, rather than argue about, our commitment to biblical authority, evangelism, and social justice.

First-wave feminists trusted in the power of God to transform culture and to set people free....The continuation of their work has now become the responsibility of future generations of egalitarians....

Notes

1. Wendy Zorba, "A Woman's Place: Women Reaching Women is Key to the Future of Missions," *Christianity Today*, 7 August 2000, 40–48. See also Dana Robert, ed., *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002).

2. The church continues to undergo renewal and reform, and the early feminists represent a significant reform movement. Reform movements often begin as intellectual endeavors with important moral consequences, as noted in the Protestant Reformation and the abolitionist movement. The church continues to undergo a gender reform, as scholars and activists raise a prophetic voice opposing shallow exegesis and a misuse of power.

3. These categories parallel the defining evangelical characteristics of "biblicism, activism, and conversionism," as articulated by church historian, David W. Bebbington in his *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1979), 3.

4. Ontology is the study of being, nature, or existence, often assessed through relationships of comparison. It has historically been held that men's ontology is more godlike than women's, because men are presumed to be more rational, morally pure, and physically strong; therefore, they should be in authority. This view has also been applied to claim the ontological superiority of ethnic groups and social classes.

5. Plato, *Laws* 6.781a,b, trans. A. E. Taylor, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letters*, Bollingen Series LXXI, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1963), 1356.

6. Plato, *Republic* 5.453b, trans. Paul Shorey, in *Collected Dialogues of Plato*, 692.

7. Aristotle, *Politica* 1.5.B4v, trans. Benjamin Jowett, vol. 10 in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English Under the Editorship of W. D. Ross* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921).

8. The patriarchy of the Greco-Roman culture does cede ground to the early church as Christian women participated in the *agapē* meals, served as apostles and house church leaders, and worked as missionaries. By doing so they engaged with men in the world of theological ideas. See Gordon Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 68–70. See also Philippe Ariés and Georges Duby, gen. eds., *A History of Private Life: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 90–91.

9. Irenaeus, *Fragment 32*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff [hereafter ANF] (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 1:573.

10. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, 1.1.1 (ANF 4:14).

11. Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1.10, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 1, ed. Philip Schaff [hereafter NPNF¹] (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1886), 5:267.

12. Chrysostom, "Homily IX," in *Homilies on 1 Timothy* (NPNF¹ 13:436).

13. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* part I, question 93, article 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947).

14. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1856), 37.

15. John Knox, "The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women 1558," in *The Political Writings of John Knox*, ed. Marvin A. Breslow (Cranbury, N.Y.: Associated University Presses, 1985), 43.

16. Charles Hodge, "The Bible Argument for Slavery," in *Cotton Is King and Pro-Slavery Arguments*, ed. E.N. Cartwright (New York: Basic Afro-American Reprint Library, 1968), 863.

17. Jerome, "Preface to Commentary on Zephaniah" (PL 25:1337ff), quoted in *Great Inspirers*, by J. A. Zahm (New York: D. Appleton, 1917).

18. Paul used the term "deacon" to identify leaders such as himself (2 Cor. 11:23) and also Timothy (1 Tim. 4:6).

19. Eusebius, *Church History* 6.41.7, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert (NPNF² 1:283). See also Foxe's *Christian Martyrs of the World* (West-

wood, N.J.: Barbour & Company Inc., 1985), 77ff; Ruth Tucker and Walter Liefeld, eds., *Daughters of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic Books, 1987), 115.

20. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 8.3.20, ed. James Donaldson (ANF 7:492). On Miriam see Exod. 15:20; Deborah, Judges 4, 5:7; Hannah, 1 Sam. 2:1–10; Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14.

21. Gregory of Nyssa, "Life of Macrina," in *Earliest Christianity to 1453*, ed. John W. Coakley and Andrea Sterk, vol. 1 of *Readings in World Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004), 150.

22. Justo L. González, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1 *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 183.

23. "To Gregory XI" in *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanne Noffke, vol. 203 of *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* (Tempe, Ariz.: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 2:193.

24. Quoted in Edith Deen, *Great Women of the Christian Faith* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour, 1959), 58.

25. Charles O. Knowles, *Let Her Be: Right Relationships and the Southern Baptist Conundrum Over Women's Role* (Columbia, Mo.: Knowell Publishing, 2002), 85.

26. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 3.

27. Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2005), ix.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. A. J. Gordon, "The Ministry of Women," *The Missionary Review of The World* 17 (1894): 910–21. Available on-line at http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/free_articles/ministry_of_women.pdf.

31. Ibid, 910.

32. Ibid, 910–11.

33. Ibid, 911.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid, 913.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid, 914.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Katharine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Christians for Biblical Equality, 2003), 1.

42. Ibid, 9.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid, 10.

45. Ibid, 39ff.

46. Ibid, 39, 48.

47. Ibid, 75.

48. Ibid, 68, 75.

49. Ibid, 169.

50. Ibid.

51. Catherine Booth, "Female Ministry; or, Women's Right to Preach the Gospel," in *Terms of Empowerment: Salvation Army Women in Ministry* (London, 1859; reprint, New York: The Salvation Army Supplies Printing and Publishing Department, 1975), 19–20.

52. Hassey, *No Time for Silence*, 101.

53. Frances Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Society, 1978), 21. See also Mimi Haddad, "Woman in the Pulpit," *Christian Ethics Today* 7.2 (April 2001): 19ff.

54. Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit*, 34.

55. Ibid, 57–8.

56. Kevin Giles, "Three Interpretations of What the Bible Teaches About Gender," in *Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 53: Empowering Women and Men to Sue Their Gifts Together in Advancing the Gospel*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Minneapolis, Minn.: Christians for Biblical Equality, 2004), 90ff.