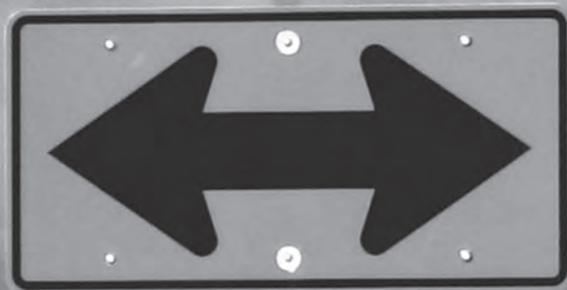


# A Biblical Tradition

## or a Path to Liberalism?



Featuring...

The central role of egalitarians in the evangelical movement

Are egalitarians on a slippery slope?  
Examining the claim and assessing the logic

Understanding evangelical feminism and its implications

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# Editor's Reflections

My first grade teacher was one of the few missionaries in our little corner of the Philippines who remembered what it was like fifty or sixty years ago. She told me that the rice and sugar cane fields that now stretch to the distant mountains had once been fields of tall grass, with blades sharp enough to cut skin. The narrow strip of jungle along the river was the remnant of a massive rainforest that had been home to hundreds of now-endangered species of tropical birds. I realized for the first time that my view of the world was severely limited without the input of previous generations.

There were a few others who had been around as long as her. All were elderly, and most were single women. At the time, I just thought of these women as old, intimidating, and unduly bothered by little boys trampling their gardens and destroying their carefully-tended orchids. But as I grew older, I began to realize they were the pillars of our community.

They had been there, dutifully serving God since the time my parents were children. Why did so many in the neighboring towns know and love God? Who had waged war against the spirits that held entire villages in bondage for generations? God accomplished these things through the work of these women, who had devoted their lives to Jesus long before I was born.

Families like mine came and went. Children grew up, moved back “home,” and eventually the parents followed. The few single men around tended to marry and follow the same pattern as other families. Sometimes we tell women that the biblical ideal for them is to marry, bear children, and raise those children up to follow God. These are admirable goals, to be sure, but is this always the best for the global family of believers? Countless people around the world would have been born and died without knowing Jesus if women like my teacher had quietly pursued marriage, rather than traveling alone to the other side of the world. But they answered God's call, using their leadership, resourcefulness, devotion, and initiative to bring thousands to Christ.

For centuries now, evangelical women have answered the call to every conceivable kind of service. The single women I knew as a child are part of this proud tradition. So are the women who fought against slavery in the United States, the women who

served the poor and impoverished, who fought to end child labor, and who championed prohibition as a means to rescue society from domestic abuse. Evangelicals have long recognized the urgency of God's call to share the gospel with the world in word and in deed—and have long acknowledged that the task requires the full engagement of the gifts God gives all people, regardless of gender.

Historically, many Christians have affirmed the participation of women in all positions of service, not in spite of, but because of Scripture. The Quakers who combatted slavery realized the connection between the perverted theological justifications for slavery and the oppression of women and girls. Others recognized that the urgency of the Great Commission required both men and women to pour out their lives for Christ. But it was not just social workers and missionaries. Evangelical scholars like A.J. Gordon stood with them in affirming an egalitarian understanding of Scripture. For evangelical abolitionists, social workers, missionaries, and scholars alike, the Bible taught the full equality and mutuality of men and women in all things; the Great Commission demanded the gifts of all people, regardless of gender; and the love of God compelled women and men to serve the people of the world side by side.

Just as my perspective was limited because I never knew a world of wild grasses, endless jungles, and exotic birds, the church suffers when it lacks historical perspective. Many are now skeptical of egalitarian ideas, supposing them to be an attempt to reinterpret Scripture to accommodate secular values that place our own desires and experience above the authority of God's Word. The articles that follow explore this claim and find that quite the contrary is true. Far from being a path away from biblical teaching and toward liberal theology, egalitarian perspectives have arisen specifically because evangelicals held the Bible as authoritative and sought to apply it to every aspect of life.



Tim Krueger is the editor of *Mutuality* magazine and is publications coordinator at Christians for Biblical Equality. He was raised in the Philippines and studied history and Bible at Bethel University (MN). He and his wife, Naomi, live in Saint Paul, MN.

Greetings from CBE International,

Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) is a nonprofit organization of Christian men and women who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women of all ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Scriptures such as Galatians 3:28:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (NIV 2011).

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.

CBE 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.

We offer this journal as an invitation to revisit the history of the egalitarian movement in the evangelical church.

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# *a forum of* **Sensible Voices**

## 19th Century Forerunners of Evangelical Egalitarianism

*Brandon G. Withrow*



*Elizabeth  
Fry*



*Pandita  
Ramabai*



*Mary  
Lyon*



*Fidelity  
Fiske*

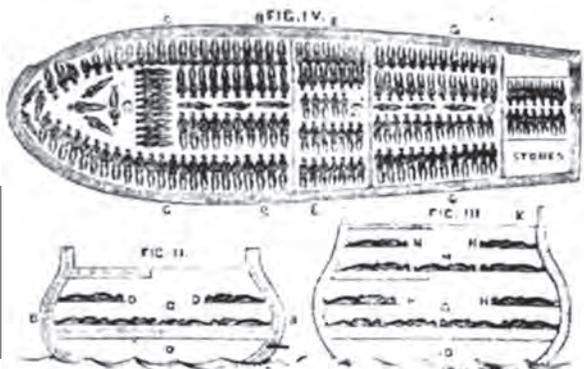
C.S. Lewis once wrote that “the unhistorical are usually, without knowing it, enslaved to a fairly recent past.” The same might be said for the conclusion that evangelical egalitarianism is merely the child of the radical feminism of the 1960s and ’70s.

Guilt by alleged association is, without a doubt, a powerful tool; but in this case, such a conclusion is a textbook example of reductionism, or the oversimplification of history. It misses the historical precedent, one we might accurately call the evangelical roots of modern egalitarianism. Ignorance of these roots is an educational issue, and celebrating those forerunners is a potential remedy.

### **Nineteenth Century Foundations**

The story of civil rights violations—as well as the story of humans fighting to preserve those rights—is as old as history. But the nineteenth century in particular saw several developments that paved the way for great change. Early in the century, for example, there was a move for the fair treatment of the mentally ill. Men and women began to take notice of the rights of those who, for lack of a better plan, were locked away out of sight. Calls to treat these people as created in God’s image brought radical change in England.

In the area of gender, the suffrage movement called for the equal rights of women who were often treated as chattel. This new perspective on gender not only led to the right to vote, but also to more opportunities for itinerate female preachers and higher education for women. Evangelicals of the nineteenth century were by no means of one voice on these issues, but many were leading international voices for change.



The late eighteenth century public exposé of the plans of a slave ship called *The Brookes* showed human beings packed like sardines and shackled to wooden planks. The stories of those slaves who escaped this death sentence helped stir calls for the abolition of slavery well into the nineteenth century.

## Evangelical Forerunners

A few of these evangelical pioneers in human rights are almost household names. Thanks to the recent movie *Amazing Grace*, many people have heard of William Wilberforce, William Pitt, and Olaudah Equiano, who led the charge to end the slave trade in Britain. And one would have to be locked away in a closet to have never heard of Sojourner Truth, an American former slave who converted to Christianity under Methodism and a brief period with the Millerites. Truth, as both a black abolitionist and a woman, called for the equal treatment of all people regardless of race or gender with one fell swoop in her famous 1851 speech, “Ain’t I a woman?” Yet there are those champions who, while making waves (and history) in their day, remain unfamiliar to many today.

One such champion in England was Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845), an evangelical reformer with Quaker convictions. Inequality on the basis of gender, race, economics, and mental health were apparent in many ways in England, and Fry found this to be particularly true for women prisoners. She was moved to get involved, and in a different way, so was her husband. Joseph Fry was a wealthy but struggling businessman, and an egalitarian by the standards of the day. He supported his wife’s causes by hiring servants to free her from what were considered her domestic concerns, enabling Elizabeth to devote significant time and energy to pursuing reform in areas such as abolitionism, legislation for the humane treatment of the mentally ill, and the end of the death penalty.

Fry’s most famous work began with her visit to the women’s ward of Newgate Prison in London. Many women were imprisoned without trial or justification; England at the time had about 200 offenses that called for execution, including theft and forgery. Some prison guards used the women’s ward as their own private brothel. Female prisoners gave birth and raised children within their cells and many existed in relative nakedness and poverty. No prison is paradise, but the severity of the women’s wing at Newgate offered ample evidence of inequity based on gender. Fry brought them food, clothing, and medicine, and—in a move for which she was most derided initially—she gave them an education. She set up a schoolroom for the women inmates and their children, donated textbooks, and made business contacts outside the prison to help them produce and sell textiles. She preached to them and taught them to read Scripture. And she convinced the authorities to hire a matron to oversee the women’s ward to help protect them from exploitation by male guards. Fry’s efforts helped bring lasting legal change for these prisoners, and served as a model for the fair treatment of other human beings around the world.

Likewise, in India, Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922) defied her culture with her egalitarian principles. She was born into a wealthy Brahmin family and her father, Anant, was a well-known and respected Sanskrit scholar and a teacher of sacred Hindu texts. Women were forbidden to study Sanskrit and the sacred texts, but Anant harbored different opinions and taught both to his wife and, later, his daughter. Anant eventually paid a price

for his counter-cultural beliefs, losing his position and income and becoming ostracized from his community as a destroyer of the Indian family. After receiving a scholar’s education from her parents, Ramabai followed the path modeled by her father and continued to challenge the cultural norms, eventually marrying outside of her caste.

Ramabai took special interest in the treatment of young widows. In an inhumane practice called *sati*, widows were burned on funeral pyres with their deceased husbands. Those who avoided *sati* had few options, considering that remarriage was forbidden and widows were treated as cursed (including being forced to shave their heads). Given the large number of young women married to old men, this miserable life became the worst nightmare for many. Ramabai sought to improve their lives and remove that stigma through care and education, a decision that led her to study medicine in England in 1883. There she met up with Anglican evangelicals who demonstrated their religion through acts of mercy as she had tried in India. Her dissatisfaction with her own religion and the promise of justice Christ offered drove her conversion to Christianity. From her perspective, Christ’s willingness to lower himself and heal sinners identified him as the only solution for the ills of India and its caste system.

From India to England to the United States and back to India, Ramabai met likeminded individuals (Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Emily Howland, etc.). She also met opposition, but left a lasting impression in her wake nevertheless. In Boston, she formed the Ramabai Association (1887); in India she formed the Sarada Sadan (1889), to serve as both a home and place of education for widowed women; and in 1900 she built the Mukti Mission. A prolific writer armed with an arsenal of languages, she put her knowledge of Greek and Hebrew to use by translating and publishing a new version of the Bible in the Marathi vernacular. For her work, she earned the reputation of being the “mother of modern India.”



Pandita Ramabai’s father, Anant, defied custom in his Hindu context by teaching the women in his family. Pandita eventually mastered seven languages.

**Influential Female Teachers, Preachers, and Theologians of the 19th and 20th Centuries Include:**

Katharine Bushnell  
Amanda Berry Smith  
Maria Woodworth Etter  
Carrie Judd Montgomery  
Catherine Booth  
Aimee Semple McPherson  
Kathryn Kuhlman  
Florence Crawford  
Pandita Ramabai  
... and many more!

**To learn more, look for the following resources at [cbebookstore.org](http://cbebookstore.org):**

Estrela Alexander, "In the Name of the Gospel: Holiness and Pentecostal Women Who Transformed the World for Christ" *Mutuality*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Autumn 2009), 8-10.

Katharine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women*

Jennifer Dunham, *Carrying on the Great Tradition: Rediscovering Strong Women of History*

Roger E. Hedlund, Sebastian Kim, and Rajkumar Boaz Johnson, eds., *Indian and Christian: The Life and Legacy of Pandita Ramabai*

During her trip to America (1886–1889), Ramabai was impressed with the growing suffrage movement, but found America's treatment of slaves and Native Americans in need of serious reform. She was both encouraged and influenced by America (she later wrote a book about her travels there), yet women in the United States still struggled for their own rights.

Post-Revolutionary America had become a hotbed of rights discussions as feminist ideals—as well as the reactions to them—fell across the spectrum. In light of their role in educating the nation's future senators, the young country gave greater weight to the education of women. This idea, now dubbed "Republican Motherhood," focused on the woman's place in the home and echoed what is sometimes viewed as the "traditional" gender role. However, it also provided for a new perspective on what women were capable of doing on a larger scale and opened up educational opportunities. Evangelical schools for women began to appear across the Northeast.

Indicative of this era was Mary Lyon (1797–1849), who founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary (now Mount Holyoke College) in South Hadley, Massachusetts in 1837. Lyon, a school teacher by profession, taught at Sanderson Academy, Adams Female Seminary, and Ipswich Female Seminary. Gifted with a marvelous intellect and evangelical convictions, she opened her Mount Holyoke Seminary to the tune of eighty students, and by the next year had to turn away more than four hundred applicants.

The evangelical tradition of revivalist Jonathan Edwards and his students, known as the "New Divinity," laid the theological foundation for Lyon's students. Ever since the 1989 work of David Bebbington on evangelical origins, historians have recognized that the key characteristics of the evangelical movement in its earliest years included an emphasis on conversion,

a commitment to the Bible, a focus on the cross, and activism; in other words, evangelicals emphasize the need for salvation, the source of our knowledge about salvation, the way of salvation, and the progress of the gospel of salvation. From its earliest years, evangelical activism took many forms, most often in missions, and, as the nineteenth century progressed, in social reform—the very hands of the gospel itself. For anyone, man or woman, to be an effective minister of the gospel, a proper education was foundational. Through her school, Lyon was able to connect her students to the field of international missions.

One Mount Holyoke student, Fidelia Fiske, remains a quintessential example of Lyon's success. At the encouragement of a missionary, Reverend Justin Perkins—and

contrary to what was then socially acceptable—Fiske went to modern day Iran as a single female missionary to build a school for girls. Appealing to fathers who saw no need for women to be educated, and who instead married off their daughters at very young ages or abandoned them

on the streets when they could afford to feed only their sons, Fiske's call was "Give me your daughters!" She housed them, fed them, nursed them, and educated them. The result was the transformation of the lives of numerous young Iranian girls, and an example for the society she had left back home in America.

Evangelical activism in the United States was also spurred by the powerful theology of John Wesley and the Methodists. Men and women of this tradition carried their message across the U.S. and throughout the world. Among these women was evangelist and holiness movement leader Phoebe Palmer (1839–1874), who acted according to her belief in Spirit baptism by traveling the globe, preaching the news of the gospel and calling the church to egalitarianism. Likewise, Amanda Berry



Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, founded in 1837 by Mary Lyon

Smith (1837–1915), an evangelist and a freed slave from York, Pennsylvania, found resistance to her work as a preacher from some men in her denomination, but persisted in ministering to people in America, England, India, and West Africa, and established a school for girls in her last years.

### Egalitarianism Today

Whether rich or poor, black or white, male or female, free or slave, egalitarians of the nineteenth century called the world to answer for its oppression of those made in the image of God. These messengers of equality—coming from different theological backgrounds—demonstrate the rich history of evangelical egalitarianism, a history that crosses denominational lines and well pre-dates the American feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s. Without an accurate understanding of this historical context, as Lewis wrote, the modern Christian church is “enslaved to a fairly recent past.”

Today’s evangelical egalitarians follow the trajectory set by those in the nineteenth century. Like those leaders of previous eras, they seek to define equality in a world that is hostile to that biblical ideal and yet full of eager souls ready to follow their call. Social and polemical barriers persist. And no human being is exempt from the influence of his or her culture. But when we properly view the historical context of forerunners like these, we discover a forum of sensible voices leading the way toward greater change.

These messengers of equality—coming from different theological backgrounds—demonstrate the rich history of evangelical egalitarianism, a history that crosses denominational lines and well pre-dates the American feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s.

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**A.J. Gordon** (1836–1895)  
Baptist preacher and scholar. Founder of  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.



**Catherine Booth** (1829–1890)  
Co-founder of the Salvation Army



**Roger Nicole** (1915–2010)  
Distinguished theologian and founder  
of the Evangelical Theological Society

# Egalitarians

## A New Path to Liberalism? Or Integral to Evangelical DNA?

*Mimi Haddad*

*“Nescire autem quid ante quam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerim.”*  
“To be ignorant of what occurred before you, is to remain always a child.”

Cicero (106–43 B.C.)

I selected the title, “Egalitarians: A New Path to Liberalism? Or Integral to Evangelicals DNA?” in order to examine the claim often made that Christians who advance the shared leadership, authority, and ministry of men and women in the church and home do so only by circumventing the authority of Scripture. Because of this claim, egalitarians are accused of theological liberalism.

I was inspired to write this paper after an evangelical scholar confessed candidly to me that though he was trained in a tradition that viewed egalitarian theology as pernicious, through a series of circumstances including a positive encounter with an egalitarian leader, he determined to study egalitarian thought more thoroughly. Cicero reminds us that a fair hearing of any position will always include a full grasp of the historical context. This paper will briefly consider historical material often overlooked in assessing the theological orthodoxy of egalitarians.

### Defining Terms

*Egalitarianism:* Egalitarians are Christians who affirm that when Scripture is interpreted consistently, it teaches the fundamental equality of men and women, both in being and service, so that gender is not a criterion by which to exclude women from public service in church, society, or the home. As early as the late 17th century, Christians began publishing interpretations of Scripture that supported women’s public preaching and teaching, so that by 1930, more than fifty scriptural treatises were circulated, from many different branches of the evangelical church.<sup>1</sup> Egalitarians today share the same exegetical methods of these early egalitarians, concluding that

women may serve in any position, including senior pastor; elder; deacon; board member; professor of any field; or president of a Christian college, seminary denomination, or country. The criteria for service are holiness, giftedness, and calling—not gender.

*Evangelicalism:* Defining evangelicalism is a difficult endeavor to be sure. Yet, the following examples offer significant theological qualifications in defining the theological identity of evangelicals:

- The Nicene Creed<sup>2</sup>
- The Evangelical Theological Society Doctrinal Basis (written in 1949—a very interesting year to take note of for the purposes of this discussion).<sup>3</sup>
- Bebbington’s quadrilateral, which offers a definition of evangelicalism by two noted historians, Mark Noll and David Bebbington. In an effort to capture the depth and scope of evangelical history, Bebbington and Noll assessed the earliest usage of the term “evangelical” as it embodied both theological ideals and also evangelical praxis.<sup>4</sup>

Noll and Bebbington not only considered what evangelicals affirmed theologically. They also considered how evangelicals lived out their theological ideals in daily life—in their churches, denominations and organizations. Their analysis of the evangelical movement gave way to Bebbington’s quadrilateral: four theological ideals that capture the DNA or fundamental theological focus of evangelicals which, (to quote Noll) “drove its adherents in their lives as Christians.”<sup>5</sup> These include:

- *Conversionism:* The belief that sin has corrupted every life. Thus everyone needs redemption from sin.
- *Activism:* The expression of the Gospel through effort. Activism generally takes two forms—evangelism and social action, two elements that work together symbiotically.
- *Biblicism:* A particular regard for the Bible. . . . that all spiritual truth is to be found on its pages.
- *Crucicentrism:* A stress on Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.<sup>6</sup>

These four qualities comprise the focus of evangelical theology and enterprise, which fueled the modern missionary movement, and also led to sweeping social reform. Evangelical missionaries had a difficult time separating the good news of the gospel from efforts to make life better for the poor and the abused. Evangelicals challenged injustice because they were biblicists of the highest order, and the teachings of Jesus, such as “treat your neighbor as you would want to be treated” drove their social reform. They believed that Scripture was supremely authoritative, and a consistent reading of the Bible and living out its teachings brought moral, theological, and social wholeness to communities influenced by evangelicals, especially the evangelical revivals. It was to Scripture that evangelicals turned when resolving the challenges of each age, such as suffrage, slavery, and whether women preach and teach or hold positions of authority beside men.

Bebbington’s quadrilateral offers us, I believe, the most complete definition of an evangelical, particularly in understanding why

many evangelicals gave women and also slaves positions of leadership, a freedom that was unknown to them in the culture in which they lived.

*Liberalism:* Finally, let us consider liberalism. The term “liberal” is used to suggest that egalitarians place their so-called feminist ideals—their demand for social equality with men in any sphere—ahead of a commitment to the authority of Scripture. Rather than allowing Scripture to shape culture, egalitarians are accused of giving secular culture greater authority than the Bible when the two are at odds. The charge of “liberal” typically means that the teachings of Scripture have been ignored in the wake of self-interest and cultural pressure. The following are some examples of how some understand egalitarianism through the lens of liberalism:

- Sarah Sumner, formerly a professor of theology and ministry at the Graduate School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University, in the June 2008 issue of *Christianity Today*, said the following: “. . . I believe that many egalitarians tended to appeal more to political liberal thought than to Scripture.”<sup>7</sup>
- Wayne Grudem, in his book *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism*, in explaining why he writes this book, suggests that he has a deep concern “about the widespread undermining of the authority of Scripture in the arguments that are frequently used to support evangelical feminism.”<sup>8</sup>
- A headline from the August 25, 2008 *Dallas Morning News* reads: “Woman’s turn in pulpit at Irving Bible Church brings buzz, beefs.”<sup>9</sup> After eighteen months of study, an all-male board of elders decided to give a woman access to the pulpit, for the first time in its forty years history, a decision that raised cries of concern among many Baptists. Chief among these was that of the Rev. Tom Nelson of Denton Bible Church. Nelson believed that his friends in Irving were on “dangerous” ground. “If the Bible is not true and authoritative on the roles of men and women, then maybe the Bible will not be finally true on premarital sex, the homosexual issue, adultery or any other moral issue,” he said. “I believe this issue is the carrier of a virus by which liberalism will enter the evangelical church.”

Is there a necessary connection between egalitarianism and liberalism, as Sumner, Grudem, and Nelson suggest? To answer this question, consider the observations made by three evangelical women, in their eighties. All three were raised in evangelical homes. All three attended evangelical churches from childhood, and all were members of Baptist General Conference churches. All three attended Wheaton College and each remembers hearing the female evangelist team Stockton and Gould preach in evangelical churches and institutions throughout the greater Chicago area. Alvera Mickelsen, one of these women, said with a chuckle, “You, know, it wasn’t until 1950 that women preachers were considered liberal. Before that, no one thought twice about women preaching.”

## Alvera's Hypothesis

If Alvera's observation is correct, we would expect to see fewer women preaching and teaching in conservative Christian institutions after 1950, which indeed we do. Contrary to the claim that today's egalitarians capitulate to secular feminist ideology, history offers another perspective. There are numerous examples of Christians whose egalitarian views are the result of a consistent reading of Scripture, particularly with the rise of the modern missionary movement.

Even as early as the 1660s, a focus on the egalitarian teachings and practices of the New Testament church became popular among evangelicals, as seen in the writings and teachings of Margaret Fell Fox, an English Quaker and leading evangelical.<sup>10</sup> What started with Fell Fox gained momentum in what is called the "Golden Era of Missions," a movement in which new centers of Christianity flourished in the Americas, Africa, and Asia, leading to an unprecedented shift of Christian faith in the Global South.<sup>11</sup> This movement was led by evangelical women, who outnumbered men two to one. What is more, these women became founders and often the sole financial providers of missionary and humanitarian organizations, holding all positions of service and leadership. Significantly, the success of women and slaves serving in the most challenging circumstances globally gave the church ample reason to examine gender and ethnic bias biblically.<sup>12</sup> World-renowned scholars joined this conversation, including Dr. Adoniram Judson Gordon (1836–95), perhaps the most prominent evangelical pastor of his day. For Gordon, Pentecost was the "Magna Charta of the Christian church," in which those who were considered inferior by birth inherited a new spiritual status through the power of the Holy Spirit. God's gifting no longer rests on a "favored few, but upon the many, without regard to race, or age, or sex."<sup>13</sup> As with Pentecost, so today, all people regardless of class, ethnicity, or gender are one in Christ, with equal (ontological) value and therefore equal (teleological) spheres of service.

Gordon was joined by leading evangelicals like Catherine Booth, cofounder of the Salvation Army. Like Gordon, Catherine Booth also engaged the whole of Scripture, insisting that the biblical texts be understood in their historic and cultural context. She wrote:

If commentators had dealt with the Bible on other subjects as they have dealt with it on this [gender], taking isolated passages, separated from their explanatory connections, and insisting on the literal interpretation of the words . . . [oh] what errors and contractions would have been forced upon the Church, and what terrible results would have accrued to the world.<sup>14</sup>

But, perhaps the most systematic biblical assessment of gender was put forward by Katharine Bushnell (1856–1946), the youngest graduate of Chicago Women's Medical College. After completing her medical training, Bushnell worked briefly as a medical missionary in China, but returned home to eventually lead the "Social Purity Department" with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)—an organization that typifies the

four theological priorities of Bebbington's quadrilateral. Within the WCTU, Bushnell served as an evangelist and activist of the highest order,<sup>15</sup> saving girls from forced prostitution in the US and India. After two decades of rescuing girls from brothels, Bushnell believed that God was asking her to turn her attention from addressing the symptoms—trafficking—in order to discern and dismantle the roots of gender-based abuse. This was the beginning of her theological reflection, which constitutes the pinnacle of her reforming work.

Bushnell observed that most religious traditions, including Christianity, create a gender-caste system that declares females innately depraved. It is not their character, giftedness, education, or devotion to God that renders them corrupt. It is their materiality, their gender—which is fixed and unchangeable. In such a system, virtue is believed to be the result of gender, through which the character of females is deemed incorrigible, irredeemable, and therefore perpetually in need of their moral superiors—males. The Bible, the Koran, and the teachings of Hinduism have been consistently interpreted to make this case. For Bushnell, the devaluation of females was the root idea that subjugated females and also drove the sex industry.

Bushnell and her colleagues perceived that religion provides the most exalted, convincing, and irreproachable devaluation of individuals, whereby their *subjugation* is justified. Because religious ideas have consequences, Bushnell believed any effort to dismantle the sex industry, though necessary, would inevitably fail without addressing the spiritual or philosophical presuppositions that fueled the industry. Of course, there is a great irony here: while religious commentators portray women as morally and intellectually feeble, God uses those who are considered weak to shame human pride. It was women's acumen that exposed the flawed reasoning and shallow theology that devalued individuals because of their materiality. And, their example seems to suggest that effective social reform is nearly always inseparable from a robust philosophical and theological deliberation. Again, biblicism and activism work in tandem to advance the gospel. Few accomplished this with greater elegance than Katharine Bushnell.

To expose the interpretive errors that led directly to the suffering and subjugated females, she writes:

. . . until [we]—come to understand that a woman is of as much value as a man; and [people] will not believe this until they see it plainly taught in the Bible. Just so long as [Christians] imagine that a system of caste is taught in the Word of God, and that [men] belong to the upper caste while women are of the lower caste; and just so long as [we] believe that mere flesh—fate—[birth, materiality] determines the caste to which one belongs; and just so long as [we] believe that the "he will rule over you" of Genesis 3:16 is [prescriptive—that is—part of the moral teachings of the Bible, rather than descriptive—describing life in a fallen world] . . . the destruction of young women into a prostitute class will continue.<sup>16</sup>

Bushnell was among the first to reason that male rule is *not* a biblical ideal. Rather, it is part of the chaos and domination

resulting from sin, which Christians must dismantle and oppose. Male authority, privilege, and patriarchy are consequences of sin. They are therefore at odds with justice and the moral precepts of Scripture, as Bushnell reasoned throughout her writings, which represent the first systematic biblical approach to gender justice.

Beginning in Genesis, Bushnell observes that because both Adam and Eve are created in God's image,<sup>17</sup> both were given dominion in Eden.<sup>18</sup> Scripture does not fault Eve as the source of sin, and God does not curse females because of Eve.<sup>19</sup> It was Satan, not God, who inspires the domination of men over women.<sup>20</sup> God extends leadership to those who do what is right in God's sight, regardless of their gender, birth order, ethnicity, or class.<sup>21</sup>

In assessing Paul, Bushnell shows that the apostle did not oppose the authority and leadership of women unless their leadership was domineering (1 Tim. 2:12), when they failed to teach the gospel consistently (1 Tim. 2:11–12, Acts 18:26, Rom. 16:1–5, 7, 12–13, 15), or when their clothing or chatter were disruptive (1 Cor. 11:5, 14:34). Fundamentally, Bushnell locates women's status not in Eve's disobedience, as so many theologians had, but in Christ's completed work on Calvary. To be consistent, an assessment of "woman's spiritual and social status"<sup>22</sup> should be determined in the same manner as "man's spiritual and social status," [based] on the atonement of Jesus. To quote Bushnell, "[We] cannot, for women, put the 'new wine' of the Gospel into the old wine-skins of 'condemnation.'"<sup>23</sup> Calvary is good news for men and women because it is the means to reconciliation and also sanctification for God's people.

In addition to providing an egalitarian hermeneutic, the activism of early evangelicals aimed at institutionalized injustices by working toward the abolishment of slavery and by helping women gain the vote. Therefore, the egalitarian movement was a deeply biblical movement that began not in the 1970s with secular feminists such as Gloria Steinem or Betty Friedan, but in the 1800s with evangelicals such as A.J. Gordon, Catherine Booth, and Katharine Bushnell. According to Alvera Mickelsen, it was after 1950 that evangelicals retracted their earlier support of women's leadership. Consider the following examples of evangelicals who supported the leadership of women, biblically, prior to 1950.

### Frank E. Gaebelein (1899–1983)

A prominent evangelical theologian, educator, prolific writer, founder of Stony Brook Christian School, and one of the founders of *Christianity Today*, Frank Gaebelein was also an early member of the Evangelical Theological Society. Trained at Harvard, Gaebelein believed that faith should impact all of life, including the arts, literature, science, and social action. A strong supporter of civil rights and the equality of women, Gaebelein probably coined the phrase, "All truth is God's truth." To grasp the breadth of his erudition, review a list of his publications on the Talbot School of Theology's web site.<sup>24</sup>

Gaebelein's daughter, Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, now in her eighties, was a founding board member of Christians for Biblical Equality. As a child, Gretchen learned that it was her Christian duty to discover her God-given abilities in order to develop and

use these with all of her strength. When considering her childhood, Gretchen recalls no encounter with Christian teaching that suggested ministry and work were limited by gender. It was not until the 1960s that CBE founders like Gretchen Gaebelein Hull and Alvera Mickelsen encountered sermons and publications from evangelicals that made gender the basis of Christian vocation. And it was this very shift in emphasis from "Christian vocation," centered on God's gifting and calling, to "gender vocation," rooted in gender, that led evangelicals like Gretchen Gaebelein Hull, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Alvera Mickelsen, Roger Nicole (founder and former president of the Evangelical Theological Society), Gilbert Bilezikian, Stan Gundry (former president of the Evangelical Theological Society), Alan Johnson (former president of the Evangelical Theological Society), and others to inaugurate Christians for Biblical Equality—an organization that promotes the biblical foundations for the shared service and leadership of women and men. The roots of egalitarian thought also included other early evangelical leaders.

### J. Barton Payne (1922–1979)

Former president of the ETS and professor of Old Testament at Princeton, Bob Jones, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Wheaton College, and Covenant Seminary (Creve Coeur/St. Louis), J. Barton Payne was a vocal advocate of women in ministry. His son, Dr. Philip Payne, a noted New Testament scholar and author of *Man and Woman, One in Christ*, published by Zondervan, recalls his father's egalitarian commitment in this way:

Bushnell locates women's status not in Eve's disobedience, as so many theologians had, but in Christ's completed work on Calvary.

My father argued that women were not excluded from any form of Old Testament ministry with the possible exception of priest. He argued that in that instance, it was the standard association of priestesses with temple prostitutes combined with the Old Testament principle that God's people should avoid the appearance of evil practices that would reflect poorly on God that explains why there is no mention of priestesses approved by God in the Old Testament. He saw no solid basis in the account of creation in Genesis for a second class status for women. Not long before he died climbing Mt. Fuji, he gave an annual lecture at Presbyterian Theological Seminary in [Dehradun, India] in which he argued that women should not be excluded from any form of ministry in the church. The editor of the journal in which these annual lectures were always published, refused to publish it since there was no advocacy of a contrasting opinion, even though they had published George Knight III's advocacy of the other side the previous year.<sup>25</sup>

When the biblical defense of women's equal service by accept-

ed evangelicals such as J. Barton Payne is censored, it may explain why egalitarians are viewed as liberal. Perhaps *JETS* should publish Dr. Payne's final address at Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Maxwell was one of the most zealous advocates of missions. He was also an outspoken advocate of women preaching and teaching at all levels. If you were in favor of missions you had to be egalitarian.

### **The Prairie Bible School (PBS)**

Founded in 1922 in Alberta, Canada, Prairie Bible School (today's Prairie Bible Institute) has for "more than eight decades . . . helped prepare thousands of Prairie Bible School (PBS) alumni to become faithful servants of Jesus Christ, reaching out

to people in more than 114 countries around the globe."<sup>26</sup>

Prairie Bible Institute's Doctrinal Statement is compatible with Bebbington's quadrilateral, making clear the school's commitment to biblical authority: "We believe the Old and New Testament Scriptures as originally given by God are divinely inspired, inerrant, trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and conduct."<sup>27</sup> Prairie's doctrine clearly differentiates it from liberal or feminist theology. Yet, this supremely evangelical institute gave women strategic positions of leadership on their board of directors; as professors of theology and Bible doctrine; as principal of Prairie's high school; and as preachers, not only during their summer conferences, but also on Sunday mornings in PBS's auditorium, the Tabernacle—the largest religious auditorium in Canada.

From the time PBS opened its doors to eight students in 1922, women's spiritual leadership was endorsed by Prairie's first principal, L.E. Maxwell (1895–1984). The school grew to become the most prestigious missionary training school for evangelicals in all of Canada. During Maxwell's 58-year presidency, his passion for evangelism and his respect for the authority of Scripture drew thousands of evangelicals to Three Hills, Alberta.

Maxwell was not only passionate about training students as missionaries; he was equally determined to include women in every aspect of the Great Commission, according to Dr. Robert Rakestraw, a graduate of Prairie Bible School and a retired professor of theology at Bethel Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Rakestraw attended Prairie Bible School from 1963–1967, earning a diploma in Bible and missions in 1967. According to Rakestraw:

Maxwell was one of the most zealous advocates of missions. He was also an outspoken advocate of women preaching and teaching at all levels. If you were in favor of missions you had to be egalitarian. I remember Maxwell preaching on Psalm 68:11, the great company of women who published the glad tidings. For L.E. Maxwell, the cause of Christ was shared by both men and women alike.<sup>28</sup>

Maxwell claimed to have located over 300 passages that support the leadership of women. Together with his long-standing

colleague Ruth Dearing, they published a book on this topic in 1987, entitled *Women in Ministry*. What is more, the 1960 yearbook, the *Prairian*, was dedicated to a female graduate who had distinguished herself as a missionary in China. Maxwell writes:

It was some forty years ago that I heard Miss Louisa Vaughan of China speak on John 14:13–14. She recited her heart-breaking experience with an "impossible" class of 25 ignorant Chinese women.

Like a flash of light to her dark unbelieving heart came the words: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do . . . If you shall ask anything in my name, I will do it."

She said, "My burden rolled away as I realized that I had nothing to do but to ask, and Christ would fulfill His promise, 'I will do it.'"

Through mighty faith and prayer Miss Vaughan saw revival work advanced in China during the following years. She was used of the Spirit to bring Ding Le Mei through for God. Never man spake like this woman. Ding Le Mei became "the Moody of China." Miss Vaughan conquered wherever she went on her knees—in His Name.

My own father-in-law also attended Prairie Bible School from 1958–1961. After graduation he and his wife worked for thirty-seven years as missionaries in Brazil. Both Rakestraw and my father-in-law were students of Ruth Dearing, who not only taught Bible at Prairie Bible School, but also preached frequently in chapel.

Dearing served in leadership for 59 years at Prairie Bible School, as a member of the faculty of Bible, theology, and doctrine; as a board member; and as principal of Prairie's high school. Both male and female high school teachers reported to her. It was L.E. Maxwell who first hired Dearing, initially inviting her to teach at Prairie's high school. Yet, her administrative abilities were prominent and she was promoted to vice principal, and then principal—a position she held for 18 years. Holding a degree in religious education from Seattle Pacific College (today's Seattle Pacific University), Dearing was invited by Maxwell to teach introductory Bible to Prairie's freshman college class. She eventually became full time faculty at Prairie Bible College. When challenged as to the biblical propriety of a woman teaching adult males, Dearing responded:

. . . that, based on careful interpretation of certain Bible verses—"there are only two or three that are used to suggest that women should not teach—that they have been misinterpreted in their absolute ban on women teaching." If that explanation did not satisfy, she would refer the student to either Maxwell, or Dr. Ted Rendall, who later succeeded Maxwell as Principal of the Bible College.<sup>29</sup>

In 1928, Ruth Miller joined the Bible faculty of PBS. Like Dearing and the other members of faculty, Miller was invited to preach from the pulpit of Prairie's Tabernacle on Sunday morning. Women were frequently platform speakers, especially during summer conferences sponsored by PBS. Conferences included women such

as Gladys Aylward and Helen Roseveare, who addressed enormous audiences at events sponsored by Prairie Bible School.

Prairie's female graduates were as pioneering as Dearing and Miller. They too courageously ventured off alone, to distant and dangerous places around the world, a fact touted in *Prairian* yearbooks as means of inspiring the service of other students. The 1958 *Prairian* gave a realistic view of dangers embraced by female missionaries, perhaps also aimed at shaming a few men into joining them. The following solicitation was entitled, "Opportunities for Young Women!"

There are still some areas where refrigerators and washing machines are scarce, where the food becomes monotonous, where rough trekking through mosquito-infested jungles and bridgeless rivers is common, where people do not want the Gospel and think they do God a service if they kill you.

It is still possible to endure loneliness and apparent frustration amid heat, filth and stench. Probably you will not marry, as the percents of men going to the mission fields is very small.

But, if you have given your life to Jesus and can trust Him to supply your needs (or give you grace to die joyfully), we will be glad to consider you application as one of the four hundred urgently needed on the W.E.C. [World Evangelization Crusade] fields.

This is an opportunity to prove the Omnipotent God! If there are still some old-fashioned young men who feel called to serve the Lord in hard places, with no earthly security, they too may apply.

Prairie Bible School was unabashedly evangelical in its high view of Scripture; its devotion to evangelism and the gospel; and its commitment to preparing students as missionaries, evangelists, pastors, Bible expositors, and Christians ready to give their lives for the gospel. Gender bias was eclipsed by the Great Commission, and it was to this that Prairie, under the leadership of L.E. Maxwell, devoted itself. Serving in more than 114 countries, Prairie graduates, both men and women, recognized that much of the world was unacquainted with Christ. What did it matter if a woman carried the good news to these souls for whom Christ died? Roused by Maxwell's "Great was the company of women who brought the glad tidings (Psalm 68:11)," women and men set their sights on leading the world to Christ, and gender was no deterrent because the task was great, the harvest was ripe, and the workers were few.

### **Fredrik Franson (1852–1908)**

There is perhaps no other individual more compatible with the evangelical ethos of Prairie Bible School and its founder L.E. Maxwell than Fredrik Franson, founder of the Evangelical Alliance Mission (TEAM). Born in Sweden in 1852, Franson immigrated to the US and came to faith in Nebraska in 1872. After an encounter with D.L. Moody, Franson was unsurpassed in his zeal for evangelism and missions, driven by the belief that Christ's return was imminent. A passionate dispensationalist, Franson traveled extensively, training missionaries on four continents,

while also publishing popular biblical treatises and establishing strategic partnerships with other like-minded evangelicals such as A.B. Simpson and Hudson Taylor. Ultimately, Franson is credited for founding not only TEAM, but also the Danish Mission Confederation, the Swiss Alliance Mission, the Barmea Alliance Mission, the Finnish Alliance Mission, the Swedish Evangelical Mission in Japan, and the Swedish Alliance Mission. Franson, like Maxwell, was an ardent supporter of women missionaries. Determined to make known the biblical basis for women's evangelistic service beside men, Franson wrote "Prophesying Daughters" in 1896. Relying on a whole-Bible approach, "Prophesying Daughters" is striking for its cohesive, original, and concise survey of Scripture. From Genesis through the epistles, Franson celebrates Scripture's consistent support for women's spiritual leadership. Fundamental to "Prophesying Daughters" is the goal of confronting gender prejudice in order to free women for evangelism. He "labeled as heretics those who grounded a doctrine on one or two passages in the Bible, without reading the references in their context."<sup>31</sup> "Prophesying Daughters" opposes a selective reading of Scripture, showing that the main biblical themes include, rather than exclude, women's leadership. Franson also offers an assessment of the gender teachings not only of the the early church fathers but also reformation leaders like Martin Luther. Ultimately Franson perceives no ministry in which women may not lead. He is no gradual emancipationist, but a full-fledged egalitarian, and his biblical scholarship has one focus and goal—to give the God-given gifts of women expansive opportunities on any mission field.<sup>31</sup> Hence, in the introduction to "Prophesying Daughters," he writes:

What the Bible says about the woman's place in evangelistic work and prophesying is a very important question, especially in our day, when . . . so many doors are open for missionary work. Many of China's 400 million inhabitants thirst for the Gospel . . . In Japan reception of the Gospel is so great that it has been said that [those] who would see [unbelief] in Japan must hurry out there. Thousands of witnesses are needed . . . In India there are 250 million and in Africa about as many who have the right to receive from us the glad tidings of Jesus Christ which we know. . . . The field is thus very large, and when we consider that nearly two thirds of all converted persons in the world are women . . . the question of woman's work in evangelization is of highest importance . . . If there is no prohibition in the Bible of public service by women, either in political franchise . . . then we stand face to face with the fact that the devil has succeeded in excluding nearly two thirds of the total number of believers—damage to God's work so great that it can scarcely be described.<sup>32</sup>

According to Franson, the whole of Scripture endorses women's preaching and teaching, beginning with Genesis. Here Franson notes that the "help" or *ezer* woman offers man is primarily spiritual "influence." He then asks, if woman was persuasive in leading Adam to sin, how much more might her influence be used to "remove sin from the world,"<sup>33</sup> in leading men to the gospel?

Similarly, the prophets Deborah and Huldah influenced Israel's decision-makers—the kings, priests, and other prophets.<sup>34</sup> In this way, prophets like Deborah and Huldah led the entire nation of Israel. For Franson, the whole of Scripture reveals women as part of a great company (predicted in Psalm 68:22), who declare the glad tidings of God's victory over sin and death. For this reason, women were prominent at Pentecost as Joel prophesied (Joel 2:28). And a woman—Anna—was also the first to announce the birth of the Christ and was the only prophet active at the time of Christ's presentation at the Temple. (Luke 2:36).<sup>35</sup>

The Samaritan woman was also part of that great company of women. After meeting Christ (John 4:28), that same day she “persuaded the whole town to seek the Savior.”<sup>36</sup> Like the Samaritan woman, Mary Magdalene carried the glad tidings of the risen Lord to the disciples. News that “was preached to the farthest boundary of the earth, was first proclaimed by a woman, and not only to the eleven,”<sup>37</sup> but to those who were also with them, the other women (Mark 16:10).

If Jesus was not ashamed to include a woman in his work, why should we be ashamed to do so? Neither was Paul afraid to work beside women like the teacher Priscilla, Phoebe the deacon, and Junia, whom both Chrysostom and Theophilus understood to be a female apostle.

If all of Scripture points to Christ, can we afford to overlook the women of Scripture

who declared the good news of Jesus? Yet, their voices have been stopped by those who rely upon two passages (1 Timothy 2:11–15, 1 Corinthians 14:34) “without reading them in context.”<sup>38</sup> While Franson fails to offer a thorough explanation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 or 1 Corinthians 14:34, he argues that all of Scripture stands against any exclusion of women's teaching and prophetic leadership, particularly the teachings and service of Christ and Paul. If female teaching itself was forbidden, then Franson notes:

... the instruction which Prisca gave to Apollos would also be against God's command, and Paul's order to women to be “good teachers” (Titus 2:3) would be abrogated, and then women's work in Sunday schools, in public schools, and in the teaching they convey through books and articles in religious papers would all be forbidden.<sup>39</sup>

“The danger of founding a doctrine on a single text, without comparing it with hundreds of other texts that speak of the same theme, cannot be emphasized enough,”<sup>40</sup> said Franson. “If a sister can more easily bring souls to the Savior . . . then she sins if she does not use those gifts God that has given her.”<sup>41</sup> And, the results of this are disastrous in light of eternity. There is a sense of urgency that comes with the fact that there are so many “people in the water about to drown.”<sup>42</sup> Franson writes:

A few men are trying to save [the drowning], and that is considered well and good. But look, over there a few women have untied a boat also to be of help in the rescue, and immediately a few men cry out . . . ‘No, no, women must not help, rather let the people drown.’ What stupidity! And yet this picture is very fitting. Men have, during all these centuries, shown that they do not have the power alone to carry out the work for the salvation of the world: therefore, they ought to be thankful to get some help.<sup>43</sup>

Like today's egalitarians, Franson's commitment to evangelism and scriptural authority was fundamental to his egalitarian views and advocacy. What is more, his biblical defense of women's leadership employs the same methods of interpretation used by egalitarians today, even though today's egalitarians are accused of succumbing to liberalism. Perhaps our neglect of historic individuals like Franson, Maxwell, Dearing, and others contributes to this problem. It was only in 2009 that “Prophesying Daughters” was made available on the web. Prior to this, it had been sequestered in the archives of an Evangelical Covenant publication, *The Covenant Quarterly*.

## Conclusion

Prior to the 1950s, biblicism and conversionism compelled the early evangelicals to welcome women as Bible teachers, preachers, board members, and as innovators of mission organizations and Bible institutes. A high view of Scripture and a commitment to evangelism also propelled the Golden Era of Missions, in which women outnumbered men two to one. This posed no challenge to biblical authority; it threatened only human bias that circumvented Scripture's support for women's equal service and leadership in Christian mission.

An openness to the gifts of women among evangelicals changed dramatically during the Fundamentalist—Modernist Controversy, with its concern over higher critical methods and a disregard for the authority of Scripture. Bible institutes sought to distance themselves from an intellectualism that smacked of higher critical methods. The Northwestern Bible Training School (today's University of Northwestern—Saint Paul), for example, responded to the threat of modernism by eliminating courses on “archaeology, history, and the ancient languages.”<sup>44</sup> Instead, some evangelicals relied on a literal or “plain reading of the text” as their principal interpretive method. By abandoning a rigorous intellectual engagement, not only theologically but in other fields, fundamentalists and a small number of evangelicals lost their capacity to impact culture through the academy, an observation made by Dr. Charles Malik in his opening address at the dedication of Wheaton's Billy Graham Center in 1980.<sup>45</sup> According to Malik, it will take decades to recover the intellectual ground and social engagement surrendered by fundamentalists and evangelicals after 1950, a fact Mark Noll expands on in his insightful book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

A plain reading of Scripture, accompanied by a neglect of history, culture, and the ancient languages also had devastating consequences on women's leadership. Some passages pertaining to women's

... one wonders if the early evangelicals might view our generation as liberal for placing the priorities of evangelism behind our obsession with gender roles . . .

leadership pose interpretive challenges that require a thorough knowledge of ancient history, culture, and language. One such passage is 1 Timothy 2:11–15, with its unusual Greek verb, *authentēin*, and its suggestion that women are saved through childbearing, to say nothing of its apparent conflict with Paul’s established practice of advancing the gospel beside female leaders like Junia, Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, Chloe, Priscilla, Lydia, and so on. The impact of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy led to a literal and often a shallow reading of Scripture for many fundamentalists and evangelicals, divorced from the academic rigor and social engagement that had characterized an earlier generation of evangelicals, thus diminishing their influence intellectually, spiritually, and socially.

One needs only to browse the archives of an evangelical college or university founded prior to 1950 to read journals and correspondence from female graduates serving on global mission fields. Their writings are filled with an explicit commitment to biblical authority and evangelism—ideals that exemplify an evangelical faith. In reflecting on their legacy, one wonders if the early evangelicals might view our generation as liberal for placing the priorities of evangelism behind our obsession with gender roles that truncate the leadership of women, thereby diminishing the good news of Christ.

Egalitarians do not comprise a new path to liberalism. Rather, egalitarians are devoted to the authority of Scripture, though they differ with complementarians in their interpretation of passages like 1 Timothy 2:11–15 or 1 Corinthians 14:34. Let us recognize that evangelicals arrive at opposing interpretative conclusions even while upholding the authority of Scripture. An accusation of theological liberalism must be balanced against actual facts, beginning with the history of evangelicals as a whole. The early evangelicals advanced women’s leadership because the Scriptures called them to “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation” (Mark 15:16) regardless of gender, class, or ethnicity.<sup>46</sup>

I would like to end with a troubling observation. Over the last fifteen years, I have encountered too many Christian college students who seem more concerned with “gender roles” than with discerning their God-given gifts and calling. A preoccupation with “gender differences” (what sociologists call “gender essentialism”) also appears in popular evangelical literature in which passive beauties await male rescue. This preoccupation exhibits an anemic expression of Christian faith, apparently unaware of its own feebleness, as Malik predicted. How vastly different were the lives and work of evangelicals like Catherine Booth, A.J. Gordon, Katharine Bushnell, Amanda Smith, Fredrik Franson, and L.E. Maxwell with their determination to prove God omnipotent in dire circumstances. I would rather be among that great company of women Franson celebrates and which Scripture compels us to emulate with impunity.<sup>47</sup>

## Notes

1. Charles O. Knowles, *Let Her Be: Right Relationships and the Southern Baptist Conundrum Over Women’s Role* (Columbia, MO: KnoWell Publishing, 2002), 85. See also the writings of Margaret Fell Fox at Available online at [onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/search?author=fell%2C+margaret&mode=words&title=&tmode=words&c=x](http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/search?author=fell%2C+margaret&mode=words&title=&tmode=words&c=x), accessed September 28, 2013.
2. The Nicene Creed: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord

Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

3. Evangelical Theological Society Doctrinal Basis: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.” Available online at [etsjets.org/?q=about](http://etsjets.org/?q=about).

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

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

6. Ibid.

7. Sarah Sumner, *Christianity Today*, vol. 52, no. 5, (June 2008): 41.

8. Wayne Grudem *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway books, 2006), 11.

9. Sam Hodges, “Woman’s turn in pulpit at Irving Bible Church brings buzz, beefs,” *Dallas Morning News*, August 2008.

10. Margaret Fell Fox’s best known egalitarian treatise is entitled, *Women’s Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scripture*, (London, 1666). Available online at [onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/search?author=fell%2C+margaret&mode=words&title=&tmode=words&c=x](http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/search?author=fell%2C+margaret&mode=words&title=&tmode=words&c=x), accessed September 28, 2013.

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

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

13. A.J. Gordon, “The Ministry of Women,” *The Missionary Review of the World* 17 (1984): 911.

14. 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.

15. See a timeline of Katharine Bushnell’s life here: [http://godswordtowomen.org/gwtw\\_bushnell\\_timeline.pdf](http://godswordtowomen.org/gwtw_bushnell_timeline.pdf)

16. Katharine Bushnell, *Dr. Katharine C. Bushnell: A Brief Sketch of her Life and Work* (Hertford, England: Rose and Sons Salisbury Square, 1930),

14. Available online at [godswordtowomen.org/bushnell\\_brief\\_sketch.pdf](http://godswordtowomen.org/bushnell_brief_sketch.pdf), accessed Oct 5, 2013.

17. Katharine Bushnell, *God’s Word to Women: One Hundred Bible Studies on Women’s Place in the Divine Economy* (Mossville, IL: God’s Word to Women Publishers, 1999), 10ff.

18. Ibid., 10ff.

19. Ibid., 39ff.

20. Ibid., 74ff.

21. Ibid., 68, 74ff.

22. Ibid., 169.

23. Ibid.

24. See [www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/protestant/frank\\_gaebelein](http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/protestant/frank_gaebelein).

25. Comments sent by email from Dr. Philip Payne, on Thursday, October 16, 2008, 4:11 p.m.

26. See page 6, [prairie.edu/document.doc?id=58](http://prairie.edu/document.doc?id=58), accessed Sept 30, 2013.

27. Prairie Bible Institute's Doctrinal Statement reads:

**The Scriptures:** We believe the Old and New Testament Scriptures as originally given by God are divinely inspired, inerrant, trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and conduct.

**The Godhead:** We believe there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who are the same in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

**Jesus Christ:** We believe in the full deity and full humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ; we affirm His virgin birth, sinless life, divine miracles, vicarious and atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension, ongoing mediatorial work, and personal return in power and glory.

**The Holy Spirit:** We believe in the Holy Spirit by whose regenerating power and ongoing ministry the believer is enabled to live a holy life, to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Creation:** We believe in the direct creative acts of God as recorded in Genesis.

**Satan:** We believe in the personality of Satan, a fallen angel, who, with other angelic beings rebelled against God and was cast out of Heaven. Although he was defeated at the cross and his final destiny shall be the lake of fire, he continues to be the archenemy of God, angels and humanity.

**Humanity and Sin:** We believe humanity was created in the image of God. In Adam all humankind fell and incurred eternal separation from God. As a consequence, all human beings are declared by God to be inherently depraved in need of salvation.

**Salvation:** We believe the grace of God provides salvation from sin for all humanity only through personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and His atoning work.

**The Church:** We believe the Church, the Body of Christ, constitutes of all true believers and with Christ as head, the church exists in local expression to glorify Him, edifying believers, and evangelizing lost humanity everywhere.

**Christ's Return:** We believe in the literal, physical, imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The statement is also available online at [prairie.edu/document.doc?id=312](http://prairie.edu/document.doc?id=312), accessed September 25, 2013.

28. Mimi Haddad interviewed Robert Rakestraw in his home in Saint Paul, Minnesota, August 2008.

29. [albertasource.ca/aspensland/fr/society/footnotes.html](http://albertasource.ca/aspensland/fr/society/footnotes.html), accessed October 2008.

30. Knowles, *Let Her Be*, 85.

31. Fredrik Franson, "Prophesying Daughters," *The Covenant Quarterly* vol. 34, no. 4 (November, 1976): 25. Available at [cbeinternational.org/files/ui/free-art/prophesying-daughters.pdf](http://cbeinternational.org/files/ui/free-art/prophesying-daughters.pdf), accessed July 20, 2013.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, 26.

35. *Ibid.*, 28.

36. *Ibid.*, 29.

37. *Ibid.*, 30.

38. *Ibid.*, 35.

39. *Ibid.*, 36.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, 39.

42. *Ibid.*, 29.

43. *Ibid.*

44. William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 94. Riley was also president and founder of the World Christian Fundamentals Association. As such, he led fundamentalist momentum toward the plain reading of the Scriptures as opposed to studying about the Bible.

45. See [www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/BGCdedication.htm](http://www2.wheaton.edu/bgc/archives/BGCdedication.htm), accessed October 1, 2013.

46. For a more thorough study of the support evangelicals gave women's leadership, see Janette Hassey, *No Time For Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Minneapolis, MN: Christians for Biblical Equality, 1986).

47. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).

"Egalitarians: A New Path to Liberalism? Or Integral to Evangelical DNA" is adapted from its original version, first published in *An Evangelical Tradition*, a special edition journal produced by Christians for Biblical Equality in 2013.

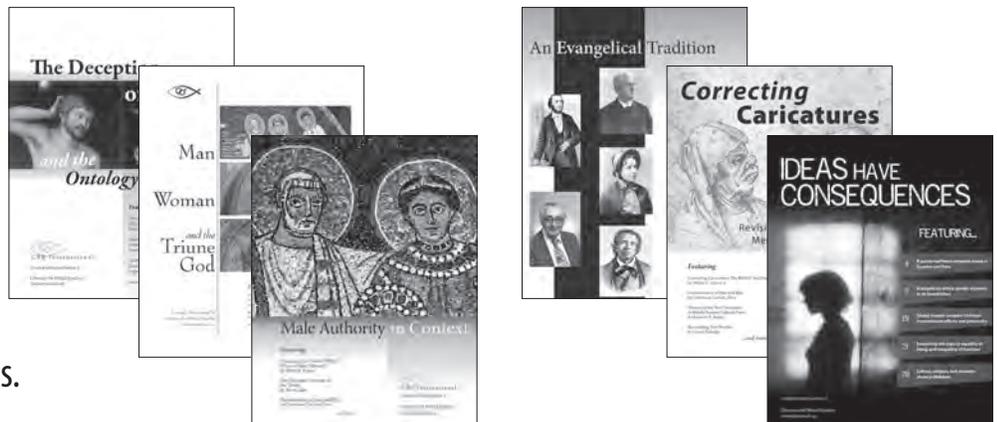


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# Egalitarianism

*Stephen R. Holmes*

as a

*Slippery Slope?*



I have heard or read a number of people recently arguing that an egalitarian position is to be rejected by evangelicals because it necessarily involves an approach to the Bible which tends towards the erosion of Scriptural authority. This argument comes in two forms, one which has a degree of plausibility but is weak, and one which would be powerful but is, in fact, implausible.

## **Plausible, but weak**

This is based on hypotheticals: “someone who treats 1 Timothy 2 or Ephesians 5 like egalitarians do must therefore . . .” The problem with this argument is that it is based on the theological (and therefore exegetical/hermeneutical) imagination of the one making the argument. What is, in fact, being said is, “I cannot imagine a way of responsibly understanding Scripture that allows these conclusions . . .” What we can or cannot imagine about another’s beliefs is not a sound basis upon which to evaluate egalitarianism.

Further, the “egalitarianism as slippery slope” position often relies on assertions drawn from personal experience: “I have seen this over and over again,” “in three decades of ministry it has become clear to me;” “I, sadly, can think of many former friends who . . .” Ironically, many making these statements also argue that egalitarians interpret Scripture too much through the lens of their own experience. There is a place for personal reminiscence in forming historical argument, but it is a carefully delimited one.

Responsible scholarship recognizes an individual’s tendency to conform our perception of experiences to personal

expectations.

I am sure Christian pastors and scholars who say things like the comments above are honestly reflecting what they think they have experienced, but I am equally sure that, were we able to test their narratives against the facts of their life, we would find the intrusion of a considerable amount of unconscious bias. Historical reality serves to balance our unconscious biases, and is more relevant to the discussion than personal experience or imagination. We should ask questions such as, “How have people who take this view in fact dealt with Scripture?” This brings us to the second form of the argument.

## **Powerful, but implausible**

The second form, powerful but implausible, involves an assertion that it is a matter of historical fact that someone who accepts an egalitarian position will probably—not necessarily, but probably—soon cease to be evangelical because they have lost any adequate account of the authority of Scripture. An acceptance of the ministry of women is one of the first steps on a slippery slope to liberalism, which can be clearly shown by historical example. This argument would be strong if a historical correlation could be shown between the acceptance of the ministry of women and a later denial of biblical authority.

There is only one problem: the absence of historical support for this position. In fact, I would argue that there is a significant body of historical data pointing in precisely the opposite direction. Since the Reformation, there has been a broad correlation between a high view of Scriptural authority and an acceptance of the ministry of women. What is needed is proper historical scholarship to amend these faulty arguments. The Salters' Hall synod of 1719 is a case (though drawn from older dissenting history rather than evangelicalism, and relating not to gender but to the Trinity) that provides the type of evidence that would be needed.

At Salter's Hall, ministers gathered to discuss best language to talk about the Trinity, and considered a proposal that required its subscribers to adhere to the language of the first of the 39 Articles of the Church of England. The Trinity is an important Christian doctrine, but it is not explicitly laid out in Scripture. Therefore, many ministers opposed the language of the Articles on Scriptural grounds. We can trace their future careers, or the later denominational alignment of their churches; almost all ended up denying the deity of Christ. Here is an example of a group of people who upheld the Bible to such a high degree that they ended up denying one of the most important tenets of the faith!

Where is the equivalent detailed historical work that shows that those who embrace the ministry of women tend to fall from a conviction of the authority of Scripture? It is just not there. I submit that there is a good reason it is not there: there is no available historical evidence to support assertions that egalitarians tend to cease being evangelical. Such assertions are, when tested against historical evidence, simply fantasies.

## The historical evidence

Until the second half of the twentieth century, evangelicalism was more consistently hospitable to the teaching and leading ministry of women than any other Christian tradition except the Quakers. (And the change during the twentieth century was generally other traditions becoming more hospitable, not evangelicals becoming less so.) Major evangelical leaders have often accepted the ministry of women. Wesley and Booth stand out, but there are many, many others. And major evangelical traditions have rejoiced in, and benefited from, the ministry of women—from Primitive Methodism through the Salvation Army and the holiness movements into Pentecostalism. In addition, women were preachers and leaders in the evangelical missionary movement, which has been defining for evangelical identity through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

I think I know the history of evangelicalism moderately well, but happily acknowledge that there are others who know the field far better. Indeed, we are blessed to live in an age of several truly great historians of evangelicalism. So I ask very simply, where, in any of the works of any of these historians—David Bebbington, Mark Noll, George Marsden, Timothy Larsen, etc.—is there a single suggestion that there is a correlation in evangelical history

between an acceptance of the ministry of women and a loss of evangelical conviction? Can those who so loudly trumpet this “slippery slope” argument point to any credible body of evidence?

If we expand our gaze from evangelicalism to Protestantism more generally, there is an observable, broad correlation between views of biblical authority and views of the ministry of women. Namely, those who accept the ministry of women tended, prior to the second half of the twentieth century, to be those with the highest accounts of biblical authority.

Of course, before the rise of higher criticism, an account of the authority of Scripture was common to all strands of the church, and so at this point in time, the issue was not about “Bible-believing” versus “liberal.” Rather, it was about how the authority of Scripture is lined up against respect for the (subordinate) authority of tradition.

Repeatedly, those most insistent on elevating Scripture above tradition have been most ready to accept the ministry of women. Notable examples are Baptists and Quakers in the seventeenth century, evangelicals in the eighteenth, Primitive Methodists in the nineteenth, and Pentecostals in the twentieth. Of course, this correlation is only approximate—the Brethren serve as a counter-example in that they fit into this pattern of radical counter-cultural Biblicism, but refuse the teaching ministry of women. Further, correlation is not causation. The observed correlation stands in need of historical explanation.

What is the explanation? My version would go something like this: there are various theological positions that seem easy to find in the biblical text, but have been difficult to hold because (Western) host-cultures have found them dangerous. These include (among others) separation of church and state; a thoroughgoing commitment to religious liberty; pacifism or something close to it; believers' baptism; communal possession of goods; the refusal to swear oaths; and the full ministry of women. Groups that deny the authority of tradition and see their commitment to biblical authority as being essentially counter-cultural have found it easier to embrace some or all of these positions. Prior to the 1950s almost every denomination which embraced the ministry of women did so because they believed the authority of Scripture trumped cultural norms. This correlation and the history behind it suggest very strongly that the “egalitarianism is a slippery slope to liberalism” argument is, in fact, groundless.

“Egalitarianism as a Slippery Slope?” is adapted from Dr. Holmes' blog post, “‘Egalitarianism’ as a Slippery Slope?” (August 21, 2013). Available at <http://steverholmes.org.uk/blog/?p=1253>.



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# Assessing Hierarchist Logic

## Is Egalitarianism Really on a Slippery Slope?

*David C. Cramer*

### Introduction

Most evangelicals, regardless of our views on gender issues, recognize that within evangelicalism there will always be a diversity of views on any number of issues regarding faith and practice. Since for evangelicals there is no higher authority than Scripture, the inevitable result is that—for better or worse—there will always exist within evangelicalism competing interpretations of Scripture. Under the evangelical umbrella are Arminians and Calvinists, paedobaptists and Anabaptists, premillennialists and postmillennialists, egalitarians and male hierarchists. While most evangelicals realize that many of these positions may be irreconcilable, we also recognize that those who come to a different view than ours may be just as honest, well-intentioned, and well-informed interpreters of Scripture as we try to be.<sup>1</sup> And while we do our best to share our views with others—even pointing out the weaknesses of competing views—we attempt to do so in an irenic fashion, knowing that one's evangelical witness is not ultimately determined by the position one comes to on any one of these complex issues.<sup>2</sup>



However, within the hierarchical camp, there exists a vocal and influential minority of strongly hierarchist scholars who argue that a commitment to egalitarianism does indeed undermine one's evangelical commitment. But, since many of us either are or at least know strongly committed egalitarian evangelicals, this argument seems strange. It would be easy for evangelical egalitarians simply to dismiss these hierarchists' arguments as disingenuous or to respond in kind by excluding hierarchists from their vision of evangelicalism. However, I would caution against such a reaction for a number of reasons. First, Jesus explicitly commands us to refuse recourse to such *lex talionis* or "eye for eye" reasoning in a command that is just as relevant in scholarship as it is in other social contexts. Second, such a response would probably generate more heat than light and make the divide over gender issues even

greater. Third, as Christians, we should always respond to dissent with charity rather than skepticism. That means that, rather than questioning others' motives, we should try to the best of our ability to understand the perspective of those with whom we disagree and lovingly respond to their concerns. When it comes to the hierarchists' arguments, then, we must realize that

Does the fact that liberal denominations support women's ordination entail that there is a necessary or universal correlation between egalitarianism and liberalism?

they are motivated by very real concerns. They are not (necessarily) the result of a deep-seated hatred toward everything egalitarian; rather, they are motivated by a deep concern for evangelicalism. So, whether or not we agree with the hierarchists' arguments, we should nevertheless sympathize with the motivation behind them, namely, the desire to see our sisters and brothers living out the *evangel*, the gospel, faithfully in every sphere of life. Where we perceive the gospel being compromised by fellow evangelicals, we should be ready to offer a gentle rebuke. On the other hand, when we perceive a misguided rebuke, we should also be prepared to offer a gentle response. Such a response is what I intend to offer in the following.

### Assessing the logic of *Evangelical Feminism*

Instead of surveying the proliferation of hierarchical literature, my goal is much more modest. I want to focus particularly on a more pointed rebuke of evangelical egalitarianism, namely, the book entitled *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?*<sup>3</sup> As the title suggests, the author fears that egalitarianism undermines one's evangelical commitments and thus could begin "relentlessly leading Christians down the path to liberalism."<sup>4</sup> Since such fears seem characteristic of many evangelical hierarchists, we would do well to assess the arguments. And, since many of the particular exegetical and hermeneutical arguments of the book are regularly debated among hierarchical and egalitarian scholars,<sup>5</sup> I focus my assessment instead on the underlying logic of the argument

presented in the book. I argue that the book contains a number of logical missteps and that, once these are corrected, the hierarchists' concern proves to be chimerical. I conclude by arguing what many of us already know: despite our irreconcilable differences, there is room under the evangelical umbrella for egalitarians and male hierarchists alike.

### *The fallacy of hasty generalization or selective evidence*

The fallacy of hasty generalization occurs when certain evidence that supports one's conclusion is emphasized, and evidence that contradicts one's conclusion is downplayed or ignored entirely. In short, a hasty generalization is drawn when a universal claim is based on only partial evidence. In its first section, *Evangelical Feminism* sets out to prove the correlation between egalitarianism and liberalism. It makes much of the supposed historical connection between the two, claiming repeatedly that "egalitarian advocacy of women's ordination goes hand in hand with theological liberalism."<sup>6</sup> It discusses at length a number of undisputed instances where liberal denominations support women's ordination. Indeed, it argues, "There is no theologically liberal denomination or seminary in the United States today that opposes women's ordination."<sup>7</sup> Such statements are relatively uncontroversial. But what are we to make of them? Does the fact that liberal denominations support women's ordination entail that there is a necessary or universal correlation between egalitarianism and liberalism? Clearly not, for it also mentions in a footnote some important counterevidence:

Chaves lists many other denominations, such as some Baptist and Pentecostal denominations, that were ordaining women much earlier and were not affected by theological liberalism. Many of these other groups placed a strong emphasis on leading and calling by the Holy Spirit (such as Pentecostal groups) or on the autonomy of the local congregation (such as many Baptist groups) and therefore they were not adopting women's ordination because of theological liberalism. My point here is that when liberalism was the dominant theological viewpoint in a denomination, from 1956 onward it became inevitable that the denomination would endorse women's ordination.<sup>8</sup>

And again at the conclusion of his historical discussion, the author concedes,

I am not arguing that all egalitarians are liberals. Some denominations have approved women's ordination for other reasons, such as a long historical tradition and a strong emphasis on gifting by the Holy Spirit as the primary requirement for ministry (as in the Assemblies of God), or because of the dominant influence of an egalitarian leader and a high priority on relating effectively to the culture (as in the Willow Creek Association).<sup>9</sup>

It is a bit perplexing why, with such ample evidence of evangelical egalitarianism, the book nevertheless concludes that there is such a strong correlation between egalitarianism and liberalism. Perhaps it dismisses the counterevidence as insignificant. But this would

surely be unfair to the many Pentecostals, Baptists, Assemblies of God churches, and associations such as Willow Creek, around the world, not to mention numerous other evangelical denominations and groups<sup>10</sup>—including not a small number of black churches—that “place a strong emphasis on gifting by the Holy Spirit as the primary requirement for ministry.” Indeed, Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE), the group that receives the harshest criticism in the book, explicitly places “a strong emphasis on gifting by the Holy Spirit as the primary requirement for ministry.” As CBE’s Statement of Faith reads, “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.”<sup>11</sup> If all such denominations and groups that serve as exceptions to the supposed correlation were included as evidence, the apparent correlation would diminish significantly, if not dissipate entirely. Indeed, given the global rise of denominations focusing on the leading and gifting of the Holy Spirit,<sup>12</sup> the evidence of liberal churches in the United States from 1956 onward is almost negligible. Certainly, it does not constitute a wide enough sample to justify the claim that egalitarianism and liberalism “go hand in hand.”

Rather, by ignoring the counterevidence of the many evangelical egalitarian denominations and groups, the argument for a correlation is reduced at best to the tautology:

- (1) All egalitarian denominations that become liberal are liberal,  
and all egalitarian denominations that remain evangelical are evangelical,

and at worst to an instance of the formal fallacy of affirming the consequent:

- (2) If a denomination is liberal, then it is egalitarian; therefore, if a denomination is egalitarian, it is (or will inevitably become) liberal.

Neither (1) nor (2) is reason for concern for evangelical egalitarians or their evangelical hierarchical friends who are worried about them, since neither (1) nor (2) actually establishes a correlation between egalitarianism and liberalism.

#### *The fallacy of equating correlation with causation*

If we grant, contrary to fact, the argument for the correlation between egalitarianism and liberalism discussed above, another problem with the main argument still persists. For, in order to support the main thesis that evangelical egalitarianism leads down the path to liberalism, more than evidence for mere *correlation* is required. What is required is evidence that evangelical egalitarianism *causes* liberalism. This at least seems to be the claim implicit in the book title’s wording that evangelical egalitarianism is a “path to liberalism.”

The fallacy of equating correlation with causation is common and thus seductive. In the philosophy of mind, for example, many materialist philosophers argue that, because neuroscience has demonstrated a *correlation* between brain activity and mental activity, the former must be the *cause* of the latter. But a number of dualist philosophers (many of them Christian) have cried foul,

pointing out that correlation and causation are two completely different things.<sup>13</sup> There are a number of ways to make sense of such correlation. Perhaps brain activity is indeed the cause of mental activity,<sup>14</sup> but perhaps mental activity is the cause of brain activity. Moreover, there is a competing materialist view which holds that brain activity is simply mental activity, and vice versa.<sup>15</sup> So clearly arguing that two things “go hand in hand” is quite distinct from arguing that one is the cause of the other. Rather, there are at least four ways that two things could correlate:

- (3) A could be the cause of B,
- (4) B could be the cause of A,
- (5) A could be the same thing as B, or
- (6) A and B could both be caused by another variable C.

Options (3) through (5) were already illustrated by the example from the philosophy of mind, but (6) can be illustrated by a less pedantic topic. A study once demonstrated that in New York City the consumption of ice cream directly correlates to the city’s murder rate.<sup>16</sup> When ice cream sales go up, so does the murder rate. When ice cream sales go down, the murder rate does too. But, even given these findings, one would be hard pressed to convince anyone that ice cream consumption is a new path to homicide. Rather, there is a lurking variable—presumably, the temperature—that serves as an underlying factor for both. In hot summer months, people consume more ice cream, but more people are also out of the confines of their homes and on the city streets, where murders may take place. So, though there is no causal connection between eating ice cream and the tendency to murder, there is a strong correlation.

While the title *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism* clearly suggests the possibility of a causal relationship between egalitarianism and liberalism, the arguments only suggest a correlation. How is this correlation to be understood? Is it an instance of (3), namely, that egalitarianism causes liberalism? This certainly seems to be the book’s thesis. So, for example, in the introduction, the author asserts that his argument is “of a ‘slippery slope’ from evangelical feminism to liberalism. . . . Once an evangelical feminist position is adopted, the development only goes in one direction, again and again.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that he has conceded that there are many exceptions to this supposed trend (see above), many of his arguments actually point instead to instances of (4), that *liberalism* causes *egalitarianism*. So, for example, he discusses the Christian Reformed Church, which left an official inerrancy position in 1972 and approved the ordination of women in 1995.<sup>18</sup> How evangelical egalitarianism is the path to liberalism in this instance, when inerrancy was rejected *more than twenty years before* women’s ordination, is perplexing. Indeed, the author notes that the trend he finds among such denominations is *first* to abandon biblical inerrancy officially and then *second* to endorse the ordination of women officially. So, in his support for (3), the main thesis of his book, he only cites instances of (4). It may be an interesting historical fact that liberalism is one path to egalitarianism, but why this should concern evangelical egalitarians who have come through a different path (evangelicalism) is difficult to see.

It seems unlikely that the author would argue for (5), that evangelical egalitarianism is identical to liberalism, since he repeatedly identifies evangelical egalitarians “who have not moved one inch toward liberalism in the rest of their doctrinal convictions, and who still strongly believe and defend the inerrancy of the Bible.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, by his very definitions, evangelicalism and liberalism are mutually exclusive. Thus, if a form of egalitarianism is evangelical, then it must not be liberal.

That leaves us with (6), that evangelical egalitarianism and liberalism share a common underlying variable that gives rise to each in different ways. And, perhaps they do. After all, liberals are not wrong about everything. Perhaps evangelical egalitarians and liberals share the same convictions about justice and the plight of the oppressed, a variable that has led them each in their own way to supporting egalitarianism. Or, perhaps liberals came to this view by affirming the inherent dignity of each member of the “human family,” while evangelicals came to this view from their reading of Scripture. In such a case, a correlation could exist without any causal relationship one way or the other.

In his defense, the author does suggest a common underlying variable, namely, that both groups undermine the authority of Scripture. But if this is really true, then we are back to a case of (5), the identity view, since he defines liberalism as “a system of thinking that denies the complete truthfulness of the Bible as the Word of God and denies the unique and absolute authority of the Bible in our lives.”<sup>20</sup> The author could have then spared us from his slippery-slope argument and simply argued that evangelical egalitarianism *is simply* the new liberalism. But this argument would be much harder to credit, especially when groups such as Christians for Biblical Equality include as the first point in their Statement of Faith: “We believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, is reliable, and is the *final authority for faith and practice*.”<sup>21</sup> If evangelical egalitarians are simply liberals, then that is news to them, not to mention that it goes against the explicit statements of the author himself. So, neither (3), (5), nor (6) has been established, though some support has been given for (4). It appears, then, that we have been given no reason to worry that evangelical egalitarianism is a cause of liberalism. Indeed, in some instances, it may be the other way around. But, if liberals are becoming *evangelical* egalitarians, this should be a cause for rejoicing, not for concern.

### The slippery-slope fallacy

If we grant, contrary to fact, the book’s argument for the correlation between egalitarianism and liberalism (see above), and, if we further grant, contrary to fact, its argument that this correlation is the result of evangelical egalitarianism causing liberalism (see immediately above), then yet another problem with the argument persists. For it is one thing to demonstrate that there is a contingent, historical causal relationship between two views, but it is quite another thing to show that such a causal relationship is a necessary or inevitable one that will occur in all future cases.<sup>22</sup> But the book’s thesis would be significantly weakened if evangelical egalitarianism is only a historical, contingent path to liberalism.

After all, many positions that are inherently good can be used as paths to bad positions. So, for example, as I understand it, the author is himself a committed Calvinist. But, as any historian can tell you, six of the eight Ivy League colleges and universities were founded by committed Calvinists.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, I doubt that he would be happy with any of these schools’ theological positions today. Should we conclude, then, that Calvinism is an old path to liberalism? Each of these schools did, after all, slowly shift from Calvinism to liberalism. But, of course, noting this contingent, historical trend says nothing about the intrinsic worth of the Calvinist system itself. There are too many variables that cause large institutions to shift theologically over time. Trying to isolate one particular variable as the cause for the shift is a quixotic task. And that, of course, is the problem with slippery-slope arguments in general. They attempt to show that one position is wrong or bad because it possibly leads to another position that is wrong or bad. But, unless the causation from the first to the second position is a logically necessary one, the wrongness or badness of the second position does not reflect on the value of the first.

The author twice explicitly notes that he is offering a slippery-slope argument,<sup>24</sup> apparently not realizing that the slippery-slope argument is ordinarily considered the slippery-slope *fallacy* in any introductory logic text.<sup>25</sup> Here the author—and, indeed, all of us—would all do well to recall N. T. Wright’s insightful words on the gender debate:

Part of the problem, particularly in the United States, is that cultures become so polarized that if you tick one box many assume you must tick a dozen other boxes down the same side of the page—without realizing that the page itself is highly arbitrary and culture-bound. We have to claim the freedom, in Christ and in our various cultures, to name issues one by one with wisdom and clarity, without assuming that a decision on one point commits us to a decision on others.<sup>26</sup>

So, despite the author’s impassioned contention that evangelical egalitarianism “inevitably leads” to a whole host of “liberal” positions—such as “the denial of anything uniquely masculine,” the rejection of biblical language about God, the church’s acceptance of homosexual practices, and the “denial of the authority of the Word of God”<sup>27</sup>—there is simply no logically necessary relationship between these positions. His contingent, historical examples might provide at best an emotional or psychological connection between these positions, but that is a far cry from establishing a logical connection.

Indeed, in his discussion of the “trajectory hermeneutic,” he notes that “the process of determining a ‘trajectory’ is so subjective that the same argument could be used in just the other way.”<sup>28</sup> The author might have done better to remember his own words when he began charting the trajectory in which evangelical egalitarianism is headed. His argument that egalitarianism leads to a “rejection of anything uniquely masculine” tells us more about his subjective view of masculinity than it does about the trajectory of egalitarianism. Apparently, he believes that, if males and females are not ordered hierarchically, then they cannot be

truly differentiated—in the same way that he believes that, if the persons of the Trinity are not ordered hierarchically, they cannot be differentiated.<sup>29</sup> This is a rather peculiar argument. I can differentiate between any number of things that are not hierarchically ordered. I can tell the difference between oak trees and pine trees, owls and cardinals, white people and black people, Father and Son, and men and women, all without making a distinction of hierarchy between each pair. Only by presupposing a necessary hierarchical structure would one ever suggest that egalitarianism inevitably leads to undifferentiated androgyny. In the same way, there is no logical connection between affirming the full equality of men and women in the church and home and the rejection of biblical language about God, the church's acceptance of homosexual practices, or a rejection of biblical authority.<sup>30</sup> These connections are purely psychological ones in the mind of the author and likeminded hierarchists. They are supported (when at all) only by circumstantial historical evidence, which itself establishes neither a strong correlation, nor much less, that such a correlation is causal. Once the psychological connections between these views are subjected to logical scrutiny, we find that the supposed connections are nothing but that—psychological. We must therefore conclude that, rather than offering a sound argument, the book is instead engaging in emotionally based rhetoric, however intuitive and persuasive it may initially appear to some.

## Conclusion

The author can, of course, argue against egalitarian interpretations of Scripture, which he does throughout the book. But, even if he were to establish cases of incorrect egalitarian interpretations of Scripture in certain instances,<sup>31</sup> this would be a far cry from establishing that evangelical egalitarians undermine or deny the authority of Scripture and are thus on the inevitable path to liberalism.<sup>32</sup> All it would show is that they have misread a particular passage of Scripture—perhaps because of their own biases. We all have biases, and, the sooner we admit it, the better interpreters we will be. Indeed, New Testament scholar Gordon Fee argues that the author's own biases are read into a particular biblical passage. And while Fee somewhat polemically states that the author's interpretation of that one particular passage is “a marvelous example of a prior hermeneutical agenda's preceding the reading of texts—so much so that the plain reading of [the passage] is subjected to, and thus rejected because of, language that is not biblical at all,”<sup>33</sup> this argument is not used as evidence that the author is on the path to liberalism (or fundamentalism, or any other kind of *ism*). Instead, it is a simple instance of iron sharpening iron—of one evangelical Bible scholar who is fully committed to biblical authority pointing out where another evangelical Bible scholar who is fully committed to biblical authority has allowed presuppositions to cloud the reading of the text. Such critiques should be welcomed by both sides of the gender debate, while we all continue to affirm biblical authority and strive to understand Scripture better together. But, when in addition to biblical arguments, one side begins questioning the

evangelical credentials of the other, then we may truly be on a slippery slope to some real problems in the church.<sup>34</sup>

## Notes

1. For further discussion of biblical underdetermination and the gender debate, see David C. Cramer, “Creating a Culture of Equality as Witness to the Truth: A Philosophical Response to Gender Difference,” *Priscilla Papers* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 18–22.
2. For a prime example of such irenic and open debate, see William and Aída Spencer and Steve and Celestia Tracy, *Marriage at the Crossroads: Couples in Conversation about Discipleship, Gender Roles, Decision Making, and Intimacy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).
3. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). I believe that the logical fallacies identified in Grudem's work are shared *mutatis mutandis* by a number of hierarchist scholars, though that claim will have to remain unsubstantiated for now.
4. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 261. Though Grudem prefers the term “feminism,” it is clear he has in mind what is typically considered “egalitarianism.” In what follows, I use these terms interchangeably.
5. See, e.g., Kevin Giles, “Book Review: *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?*” *Priscilla Papers* 22, no. 3 (2008): 27–30; cf. Karen Fulton, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Sharon James; John Wilks, ed., “Biblical Truth and Biblical Equality: A Review Article on Two Recent Books from IVP on Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Manhood and Womanhood,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 78 (2006): 65–84.
6. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 26, cf. 29. It is initially unclear how to understand this correlation, though, as will be shown later, the author intends for it to be interpreted as a causal relationship.
7. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 29.
8. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 24, n. 4.
9. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 29.
10. For example, in her study of the autobiographies of more than thirty Wesleyan-Holiness women ministers, Susie C. Stanley observes: “Many . . . have assumed, incorrectly, that women preachers were extremely rare outside Pentecostalism and recent mainline Protestantism and have no knowledge of the long tradition of Wesleyan/Holiness women preachers” (*Holy Boldness: Women Preachers' Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self* [Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2002], xxvii). Stanley notes that “a 1976 survey reported 1,801 women clergy in [mainline Protestant] denominations while the number reported for Wesleyan/Holiness groups was 4,131” (*ibid.*).
11. “Statement of Faith,” Christians for Biblical Equality Website, [cbeinternational.org/?q=content/statement-faith](http://cbeinternational.org/?q=content/statement-faith), accessed 2010. Italics mine.
12. See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
13. See, e.g., John Hick, *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience, and the Transcendent* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
14. A view in philosophy of mind known as epiphenomenalism.
15. A view known as brain/mind identity.
16. I recall reading about this study long ago in an introductory sociology book. See, for example, “Causal Inferences,” University of California at Fresno Web site, <http://psych.csufresno.edu/psy144/Content/Measurement/causation.html>, accessed 2013.
17. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 12.
18. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 25.
19. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 20.
20. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 15.
21. “Statement of Faith,” Christians for Biblical Equality. Italics mine.
22. Another way of stating this critique is that Grudem is attempting to offer deductive arguments, when his historical evidence at best can be used to support inductive arguments. Deductive arguments are

universal and necessary, whereas inductive arguments are probabilistic and contingent. Throughout the book, there seems to be a fundamental confusion between these two types of logical arguments.

23. Specifically, as I understand it, Brown was founded by Calvinist Baptists; Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth by Puritans; Princeton by Presbyterians; and Columbia by Calvinist Anglicans. The University of Pennsylvania and Cornell are the only two exceptions, the former founded by Benjamin Franklin and the latter founded explicitly as a secular institution.

24. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 12, 240.

25. See, e.g., Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *Come, Let Us Reason: An Introduction to Logical Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990), 113–14. As with the other fallacies discussed, the slippery-slope fallacy is informal, meaning that the use of such an argument is guilty until proven innocent. It is not my argument that there are no possible sound uses of such arguments, but rather that Grudem's arguments do not constitute such uses.

26. N. T. Wright, "The Biblical Basis for Women's Service in the Church," *Priscilla Papers* 20, no. 4 (Autumn 2006): 5.

27. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 262, 224, 263.

28. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 61.

29. See the debate, "Do relations of authority and submission exist eternally among the Persons of the Godhead?" held on 9 October 2008 at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where Bruce Ware and Wayne Grudem argue the affirmative answer and Tom McCall and Keith Yandell offer the counterargument; outline available at <http://www.henrycenter.org/blog/?p=36> (accessed 2009). Audio and video of the debate are available at <http://www.henrycenter.org>. Cf. Thomas McCall and Keith E. Yandell, "On Trinitarian Subordinationism," *Philosophia Christi* 11 (2009): 339–58.

30. Christians for Biblical Equality sees no contradiction among the following Statements of Faith: (1) "We believe the Bible is the Word of God, is reliable, and is the final authority for faith and practice"; (2) "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"; and, (3) "We believe in the family, celibate singleness, and faithful heterosexual marriage as God's design" (see [www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org)). I, too, see no contradiction here.

31. My own assessment of Grudem's arguments is similar to that of hierarchical New Testament scholar Robert Yarbrough, who states on the endorsement page of the book that the "chapters and charges carry varying weights."

32. Moreover, as a number of evangelical scholars are beginning to realize, even the dichotomy between evangelical and liberal is too simplistic; in some instances, one may be *more* evangelical, i.e., able to interpret the Bible more faithfully, by being *less* conservative, i.e., less tied to tradition. For the sake of discussion, I will bracket this interesting hypothesis for now. See Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007); see also my review of Olson's book in *Ethics and Medicine: An International Journal of Bioethics* 24 (2008): 189–90.

33. Gordon D. Fee, "The Priority of Spirit Gifting for Church Ministry," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 247.

34. This paper was first presented at the Evangelical Philosophical Society Midwest Regional Meeting, 19 March 2010, St. Paul, Minnesota. Thanks to those in attendance for their insightful and charitable dialogue. Special thanks to Brother Tim Erdel for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

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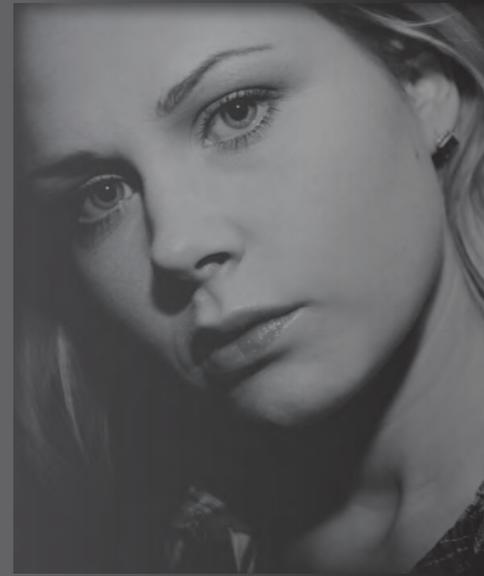
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*Allison Quient*

# Equating “Feminisms”

“All I ask of our brethren is, that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy.”  
—Sarah Grimké<sup>1</sup>

Throughout history, movements have arisen to challenge the status quo of society and the institutional church. In the history of the United States and into the present, many have spoken out against the way women are perceived and treated. These voices have fought to open to women spaces and leadership positions in the church and society that have traditionally been exclusively for men. These movements, known collectively as *feminism*, have requested—sometimes demanded—a transformation in the ways evangelicals conceive of women’s roles.

For evangelicals, the Bible is the ultimate, infallible and inerrant authority, which serves as the arbiter of acceptable views, and theological liberalism exists as a looming menace to biblical authority. Unfortunately, evangelicals are often confused over who is challenging their biblical and cultural perceptions. They generally do not understand the critiques of liberal feminists or of their own evangelical sisters and brothers, nor do they recognize

that they are dealing with separate movements in important and foundational ways. For many, feminism is a recent phenomenon, a threatening force, liberal in origin, which in the end rejects the authority of Scripture in order to conform to modern culture. Evangelicals commonly known as biblical *egalitarians* are quickly tied to liberal forms of feminism because it is commonly supposed that “liberalism and the approval of women’s ordination go hand in hand,” and inevitably lead the church down the slippery slope into the abandonment of scriptural authority.<sup>2</sup>

This paper seeks to begin to correct the equation of biblical egalitarianism with liberal feminism by considering them on a foundational level—looking at where each locates its authority and how each understands the Bible’s authority. Given the limited nature of this paper, I will focus on two individuals—Sarah Grimké and Elizabeth Cady Stanton—who have been widely considered seeds or prototypes of their respective movements and whose beliefs and

approaches to Scripture today correspond to those of egalitarians and liberal feminists, respectively. Finally, I will consider the question of whether the beliefs of egalitarians logically lead to the acceptance of a form of liberal feminism and the subsequent abandonment of Scripture as the ultimate authority. It is my hope that, as evangelicals, we will be engaged “in a more earnest search after truth and a more loyal devotion to it once it is found.”<sup>3</sup>

## Egalitarianism and Sarah Grimké

Evangelical *egalitarianism* is a view committed to what it understands to be the biblical principle of mutuality. “According to this principle, there can be no moral or theological justification for permanently granting or denying status, privilege, or prerogative solely on the basis of a person’s race, class, or gender.”<sup>4</sup> In the introduction to *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*, the essential message of egalitarianism is:

Gender, in and of itself, neither privileges nor curtails one’s ability to be used to advance the kingdom or to glorify God in any dimension of ministry, mission, society or family. The differences between men and women do not justify granting men unique and perpetual prerogatives of leadership and authority not shared by women.<sup>5</sup>

While most egalitarians today affirm gender differences and the necessity of hierarchies in some situations, all deny that gender is a key deciding factor in determining gifts and leadership. It is only in this sense that men and women are no different. Egalitarians believe their convictions are taught in Scripture and are grounded in the Bible as the inerrant word of God.<sup>6</sup> Is egalitarianism really an effort to give scriptural validation to a recent, feminized, liberal culture?

Evangelical egalitarianism did not originate with the feminist liberation movements of the 1960s or 1970s, or even with the found-

ing of Christians for Biblical Equality in 1987–1988. Rather, it came out of the reformations and revivals following the Second Great Awakening and continues on today. More directly, egalitarianism as a *movement* in the United States arose when many women found that the equality principle of the abolitionist movement also applied to them. In their fight against slavery, they naturally found par-

allels with their own condition. A seed of this egalitarian movement is Sarah Grimké, a Quaker woman who faced gendered opposition to her preaching and public speaking against the evils of slavery. In response, she wrote one of the first American scriptural defenses of the equality of women and a justification for their public speaking, titled, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*.

In *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, it is evident that Sarah Grimké believed that, like slaves, women were being denied their God-given positions as equals alongside white men and that the inferior position women occupied was the product of sinful oppression, not nature as God intended it.<sup>7</sup> Women were created to be equals. Equality meant that women were also made in the image of God, and were indeed moral beings with an immortal nature.<sup>8</sup> This notion of equality assumed functional equality (most of her opponents were not making a case for ontological equality alongside functional subordination). Men were the ones who decided that the position of a female preacher and public reformer was “unnatural” and they were the inventors of the idea that there was a “distinction between the duties of men and women as moral beings.”<sup>9</sup> Grimké writes:

I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethren is, that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy. If he has not given us the rights which have, as I conceive, been wrested from us, we shall soon give evidence of our inferiority, and shrink back into obscurity, which the high souled magnimity of man has assigned us as our appropriate sphere . . . He has done all he could to debase and enslave her mind; and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought, and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior.<sup>10</sup>

For Grimké, the problem was not only the mere fact of gender discrimination, but also that it violated God’s design for women and thus hindered them from their service as “helpers.” Only one who was truly an equal could fulfill her place as the helper of man.<sup>11</sup> Men usurped God’s authority and molded women into the images they themselves desired, rather than what God wanted, and this had unfortunate implications for the “welfare of the world.”<sup>12</sup> Women were meant to occupy a mutual place alongside men and when this does not happen, the benefit that naturally arises from understanding and submitting to God’s intention does not follow, diminishing even the woman’s service as wife and mother.<sup>13</sup>

On the surface, Grimké’s egalitarianism could still look suspiciously like forms of theologically liberal feminism in that both deny any God-given distinction in the moral duties or “roles” of men and women, both devote significant attention to the problem of the oppression of women, and both use the rhetoric of “equality.” However, Grimké does not base her authority in women’s experience nor does she use female oppression as her starting point. For her, Scripture, which is inerrant in the original autographs, is the authority on which all else is judged, including the position of women. She explains, “I will depend solely on the Bible to designate the sphere of woman . . . I therefore claim the original as my standard, *believing that to have been inspired*” (emphasis mine).<sup>14</sup> Scripture is her final authority and it alone decides the place of women. It is upon this notion that her arguments against female oppression and for the equality of women is based. Without it, her views on the plight of slaves and women do not make sense.

Continually throughout *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, Grimké brings our attention to the fact that nowhere does the Bible teach that men are to have dominion over women or that women were created

While most egalitarians today affirm gender differences and the necessity of hierarchies in some situations, all deny that gender is a key deciding factor in determining gifts and leadership. It is only in this sense that men and women are no different.

to be dependent on men. Many of Grimké's positive arguments are the same as those made by today's egalitarians. Some of these are:

1. Man and woman were both made in the image of God and given dominion over the earth (as opposed to dominion over each other).<sup>15</sup>
2. The woman's position as "helper" indicates that she is a companion, not merely an instrument of the man's pleasure.<sup>16</sup>
3. Galatians 3:28 teaches that we should in a sense forget about gender insofar as our ideas about gender have negatively influenced how we relate to one another socially and domestically and kept us from benefiting from each other the way God intended.<sup>17</sup> She believed that women must be allowed to "glorify God to the fullest extent that God enables them, and the prerequisite of women's liberation is an unprejudiced translation and interpretation of the biblical passages that have traditionally been used to keep women in subjection."<sup>18</sup> For Sarah Grimké, the problem was not the Bible or its authority, but human corruption, a perverted *interpretation* of Scripture and incorrect translations.<sup>19</sup> She abhorred the evils of slavery and sexism rampant in a society claiming to be enlightened by Christianity and used Scripture to speak prophetically against such evils. She found *in Scripture* the keys to the liberation of slaves and women according to the glory and desire of God and the benefit of his people. Scripture was the standard by which she judged her place as a woman, and it was by this standard—not her own experience as a woman—that she judged the evils of slavery and sexism in her society.

### Liberal Feminism and Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Feminism and liberalism are diverse concepts, so some attention will be paid to the definitions of each before identifying the basic claim of liberal feminism and taking a closer look at the thought of Elizabeth Stanton. *Feminism*, although diverse, has been defined as "a social vision, *rooted in women's experience* of sexually based discrimination and oppression, a movement seeking the liberation of women from all forms of sexism, and an academic method of analysis being used in virtually every discipline" (emphasis mine).<sup>20</sup> Gary Dorrien defines theological *liberalism*, specifically of a "Christian" variety, as:

A tradition that derives from the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Protestant attempt to reconceptualize the meaning of traditional Christian teaching in the light of modern knowledge and modern ethical values . . . Fundamentally it is the idea of a genuine Christianity not based on external authority. Liberal theology seeks to reinterpret the symbols of traditional Christianity in a way that creates a progressive religious alternative to . . . theologies based off of external authority.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, theological liberalism seeks to accommodate Christian teaching to modernity. Wayne Grudem rightly points out that theological liberalism is a "system of thinking that denies the complete truthfulness of the Bible as the Word of God and denies

the unique and absolute authority of the Bible in our lives."<sup>22</sup> *Liberal feminism* maintains this basic foundation, but makes the female experience its guide.

Unlike the evangelical egalitarian, who believes error is found only in the human interpreter and that the Bible conceptually affirms the mutuality of men and women in ontology and function, the theologically liberal feminist agrees with those who claim the Bible teaches the exclusive subordination of women. Liberal feminism, though, rejects these portions of Scripture because they are believed to oppose female experience and liberation. Therefore, liberal feminism and evangelical egalitarianism differ in their *interpretations* of Scripture and in their views about the *nature* of Scripture.

Theologically liberal feminism has its prototype in *The Woman's Bible* of the late nineteenth-century.<sup>23</sup> *The Woman's Bible* was the first "book-length challenge to male interpretations of the Bible"<sup>24</sup> and is considered by many to be the "original" feminist attack on Scripture.<sup>25</sup> While it was not well received and was formally repudiated by the National Woman's Suffrage Association, Elizabeth Stanton, who is considered to be a forerunner of twentieth-century feminism, considered it "a step in progress."<sup>26</sup> She reasoned:

It still requires courage to question the divine inspiration of the Hebrew Writings as to the position of woman. Why should the myths, fables, and allegories of the Hebrews be held more sacred than those of the Assyrians and Egyptians?<sup>27</sup>

For Stanton, the key problem was not in how the Bible was interpreted, and it did not matter a great deal whether the women working on its critique knew the original languages.<sup>28</sup> Rather, the *Bible itself* and its use for the oppression of women were the primary problems.

Bible historians claim special inspiration for the Old and New Testaments containing most contradictory records of the same events, of miracles opposed to all known laws, of customs that degrade the female sex of all human and animal life, stated in most questionable language that could not be read in promiscuous assembly, and call all of this "The Word of God."<sup>29</sup>

Stanton also claims:

From the inauguration of the movement for woman's emancipation the Bible has been used to hold her in the 'divinely ordained sphere,' prescribed in the Old and New Testaments . . . The canon and civil law; church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man.<sup>30</sup>

Elizabeth Stanton, like many liberal feminists today, did not believe all of the Bible was wrong or should be rejected. "There are some general principles in the holy books of all religions that teach love, charity, liberty, justice and equality for all the human family" and such notable women such as Deborah, Huldah, and Vashti serve to show us that the Bible is diverse and cannot be thrown out in its entirety.<sup>31</sup> Within the Bible we find the means for both female oppression and female liberation.

Before proceeding, it must also be noted that not all liberal feminists share Stanton's stance on Scripture. While many deny the inerrancy of all or portions of Scripture, a good number maintain a Christian commitment to the essentials of the faith and have an ethos that is "not revolutionary but reformist in spirit and substance."<sup>32</sup> For many of these individuals, the Bible contains a valuable message of equality and liberation, which is contradicted only by portions of the canon. While they believe that the Bible itself is not the Word of God, at least parts of Scripture might express true words *about* God and be influenced by real events.

Throughout *The Woman's Bible*, whether a given passage adds or detracts from the status of women is the standard Stanton uses to detect what should remain and what should be thrown out, reformulated, or understood in the light of modernism. This criterion for evaluating Scripture is suspiciously similar to the feminist critical hermeneutic used by more recent feminists such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, who also understands Elizabeth Stanton as some sort of precursor to her view.<sup>33</sup> The liberal feminist hermeneutic "seeks to assess the function of the Bible in terms of women's liberation and wholeness" and "derives this canon, *not* from the biblical writings, but from the contemporary struggle of women . . . It places biblical texts under the authority of feminist experience."<sup>34</sup> These women transform their biblical heritage. Stanton believed this could be accomplished even in light of the fact that "not only biblical interpretations but the biblical texts themselves were androcentric." They could still "serve to recover a feminist biblical heritage" because female experience could draw from those portions of the Bible deemed to be liberating.<sup>35</sup>

### Similarities and Dissimilarities between Two Movements

Throughout this study, one thing has been clear: biblical egalitarianism is not to be equated with liberal feminism when considering their most basic beliefs regarding the authority of Scripture. One believes Scripture is its ultimate authority with any fault lying exclusively in a bad interpretation or translation. The other believes it is not interpretation that is the only or primary problem, but the Bible itself, which contains errors and contradictory messages. It is the latter group that believes the female experience dictates what in Scripture is authoritative and what must be reformulated or conformed to fit modern female perceptions. Rebecca Groothuis sums up the implications well. "In liberal theology, religious symbols do not stand in a true/false relationship to objective theological realities, but serve as elements of a circular, self-enclosed system. Human imagination creates religious myths and metaphors—for the purpose of evoking the desired response in the imaginations of the religion's adherents."<sup>36</sup> The enormous difference between egalitarianism and liberal feminism lies in the fact that egalitarians go to the Scriptures to diagnose the problem and to find the solution whereas liberal feminists ultimately must look to themselves. Only superficially are the two movements similar, and this is in a shared recognition that exclusive male authority is a problem and that women have something to contribute at the highest levels of authority.

### The Logic Behind the Equation of Feminisms

Despite the differences enumerated herein, many evangelicals continue to equate egalitarianism with liberal feminism. Further, they fear that one "feminism" logically entails the other, even though the two differ in their historical development and have radically different views on the authority of Scripture, resulting in very different diagnoses of and solutions to the problem of female oppression. For example, in his *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?*, Wayne Grudem attempts to warn evangelicals of the dangers of those he calls "evangelical feminists," claiming that they're sliding into liberalism. He appeals to Mark Chaves's *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* in order to draw attention to a *recent pattern* where the ordination of women is supported by those who do not accept the Bible's authority and is opposed by those who do. It should be noted that he also gives examples of individuals or institutions upholding both women in ministry and the authority of Scripture. Yet, in making his case, he tends to disregard these individuals and institutions.

There are two basic problems with his approach:

1. Grudem's claim is logically invalid.
2. Dr. Chaves' work, upon which Grudem builds his argument, contradicts Grudem's argument that evangelical feminism is a path to liberalism.

How is Grudem's argument logically invalid? The clear aim of the book (as the title suggests) is to warn evangelicals that accepting what he calls "evangelical feminism" will eventually lead to liberalism and ultimately undermine the gospel. He articulates this fear: "I am concerned that evangelical feminism (also called 'egalitarianism') has become a new path by which evangelicals are being drawn *into* theological liberalism" (emphasis mine).<sup>38</sup> For Grudem, liberalism is a "direct consequence" of egalitarianism because the "nature" and key "principles" of egalitarianism undermine Scripture.<sup>39</sup>

Grudem's reasoning is internally inconsistent. First, he argues that the data shows a seven-step process. The first step is "abandoning biblical inerrancy," which is followed by "endorsing the ordination of women." Given his argument that egalitarianism leads to liberalism, we would expect these steps to be reversed, with the ordination of women preceding and leading to the abandonment of inerrancy. This inconsistency is unsurprising, however, when we consider that Grudem's data demonstrates only a correlation, not a logical consequence—even though he is trying to convince us of a logical connection. He says, "It is unquestionable that theological liberalism leads to the endorsement of women's ordination. While not all egalitarians are liberals, all liberals are egalitarians."<sup>40</sup> He appears to be, in a big picture sense, arguing in an "If p then q, q, therefore p" fashion. He notices that liberal denominations are also egalitarian, and then concludes that if a denomination is egalitarian it must be liberal or become liberal. This is a well-known formal fallacy called *affirming the consequent*. Instead of establishing a valid logical connection, all he has managed to show is that liberals endorse a form of egalitarianism or feminism, not the reverse.

What Grudem is trying to accomplish is an equation of other types of feminism with egalitarianism. If people can start identifying them as the same in their minds, they will wish to reject egalitarianism in order to avoid the unsubstantiated slippery slope into the liberalism that he fears. The argument assumes the equation of these two movements as well as the related assumption that if one endorses biblical inerrancy, one will be resistant to women's ordination. Of course, if Grudem wishes to label egalitarianism as "liberal" on the grounds that it functionally undermines biblical authority by advocating an incorrect biblical interpretation, then he himself is open to the charge of liberalism by all who believe his interpretations are incorrect.

Unfortunately, the problems with Grudem's argument do not end here. He uses Mark Chaves's study, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations*, to support his idea that liberalism follows from egalitarianism. The great irony of his appeal to Chaves's study is that *Ordaining Women* indicates that the key to the difference in the practice of ordaining women is not whether a denomination affirms inerrancy or is sacramental. Belief in inerrancy does not logically predispose one away from female ordination. Instead, *a subculture needing to define itself against liberalism does*. Liberalism is not inherently a logical corollary from egalitarianism; instead we have made it a symbol of what we are resisting. Chaves writes:

Within the religious world itself, biblical inerrancy and sacramentalism are the most significant *cultural boundaries* when it comes to women's ordination . . . Why are biblical inerrancy and sacramentalism so deeply and so tightly connected to resistance to female clergy? . . . *for both of these denominational subcultures, gender equality has come to symbolize the liberal modern world that they define themselves against.* (emphasis mine)<sup>41</sup>

And later, Chaves states:

*These examples are meant to illustrate the basic point that a commitment to biblical inerrancy does not require, either logically or historically, opposition to women's ordination . . . If it is not logically or intellectually difficult to combine inerrantism with full gender equality, why has it become so culturally difficult to do so? . . . Because gender equality is such a defining core of the modern liberal agenda, resisting women's ordination became a way to symbolize antiliberalism within the religious world.* (emphasis mine)<sup>42</sup>

Dr. Chaves's study describes a situation where evangelicals feel threatened by liberalism, so they resist other causes or ideas that liberals affirm, even when these are not necessarily connected exclusively to liberalism. Is this a fair assessment by Chaves? Grudem gives us reason to believe it is.

Does it seem likely that all of the liberal churches who no longer believe the Bible have suddenly gotten the interpretation of the Bible regarding men's and women's roles exactly right, and that the most conservative churches who hold strongly to Biblical inerrancy have gotten it exactly wrong? And does it seem

likely that as soon as a denomination begins to abandon belief in inerrancy it suddenly discovers new skill and accuracy in interpreting the Bible on the roles of men and women so that it finally arrives at the correct answer?<sup>43</sup>

Recall Grudem's earlier grouping of those with a high view of Scripture with those who hold to his view of women in leadership, as opposed to those with a low view who accept women in leadership (a grouping assumed in the quote above). He is appealing to our newfound sensibility that the two are inseparable. Under this paradigm we should apparently be suspicious of the likelihood of a "liberal"—who rejects the Bible's authority—correctly interpreting the Bible's teachings on gender. If liberals believe it, it is likely false and we should resist. However, liberal methodology does *not* interpret the Bible in the same way as biblical egalitarianism does (many liberals believe biblical passages are actually sexist). Moreover, this is a dangerous way to decide church polity, as it effectively gives the opposing group, rather than the Bible itself, control over church decisions. It may be that today secular or "sacred" culture tells us to "uncritically reject everything associated with any particular movement . . . but Christians need not buy into such force-choice logic."<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper challenges the notion that biblical egalitarianism and liberal feminism are equivalent movements. Considering the examples of Sarah Grimké and Elizabeth Stanton, who are widely considered either seeds or prototypes of their movements, revealed that the two movements have widely divergent views on the authority of Scripture. Further, not only are the two movements dissimilar in what they profess, but the argument that one logically or necessarily leads to the other is invalid.

The church is not infallible in its understanding of God's will. Only through dialogue with those who differ from us will we begin to see what we may have missed and make changes for the better. Listening carefully to their critiques should spur us on to look at the Scriptures and allow God's eternal and unchanging truths—not uncritical rejection of anything associated with particular movements—to shed light on our situation and determine church polity. If egalitarianism is true, more than half the church is being underused, and not only do we contradict God's will for men and women, but we also cripple the church and undercut the power of the gospel. When we stand on Scripture and fully use the gifts God has given his people, we will release the gospel and the body of Christ to transform the world for God's glory.

## Notes

1. Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes And the Condition of Woman* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 10.

Belief in inerrancy does not logically predispose one away from female ordination. Instead, *a subculture needing to define itself against liberalism does*.

2. Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism?* (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2006), 29.
3. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub, 1923), 17.
4. Rebecca Groothuis, "Sexuality, Spirituality and Feminist Religion," *Christians for Biblical Equality* (1999): cbeinternational.org/?q=content/sexuality-spirituality-and-feminist-religion, accessed January, 2013.
5. Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 13.
6. See Philip Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 28 and John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), xiv.
7. Sarah Grimké believes the condition of white women is comparable to that of slavery in that the subjugation of slaves and women both break from the equality taught in Scripture and render them inferior or subjugated. However, she strongly believes the plight of black women is on another level incomparable to the situation of white women due to the sheer unique evil of their treatment. Black women are sold in market places and exploited sexually and because of this "the moral purity of the white woman is deeply contaminated" especially since she benefits from the exploitation and does not speak out against it. Sarah Grimké, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes And the Condition of Woman* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 15, 50–55.
8. *Ibid.*, 23.
9. *Ibid.*, 20.
10. *Ibid.*, 10–11.
11. *Ibid.*, 23.
12. *Ibid.*, 3.
13. *Ibid.*, 48–49.
14. *Ibid.*, 4.
15. *Ibid.*, 4, 23.
16. *Ibid.*, 5, 23.
17. One will quickly notice that Grimké does not even try to show why ontological equality (part of being made in the image of God) is antithetical to the idea that women are ordained by God to be functionally subordinate to men. This connection is assumed. The theological complementarianism of today simply did not exist as a movement in her time. The idea that somehow women were equal in essence, but forever subordinate in function had not become prominent, so most of her opponents were not asking those questions.
18. Rebecca Groothuis, *Women Caught in the Conflict: The Culture War between Traditionalism and Feminism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub, 1997), 51.
19. *Ibid.*, 3, 16.
20. Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 16–17.
21. Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805–1900* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), xxiii.
22. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 15.
23. Stanton herself is considered a prototype and not a seed because her influence on feminism and liberalism was limited for her time even though feminists of a much later era saw in her their own experiences and beliefs.
24. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 46.
25. This idea is conveyed in the title of *The Woman's Bible*, which is introduced by Barbara Welter.
26. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years & More: Reminiscences 1815–1897* (NY: Schocken Books, 1971), 467.
27. *Ibid.*, 467.
28. *Ibid.*, 467.
29. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Original Feminist Attack on the Bible: The Woman's Bible* (New York: Arno Press, 1974), 12.

30. *Ibid.*, 7.
31. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
32. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, xxiii, xxv.
33. Schüssler Fiorenza falls more into the liberation camp of feminism than the liberal.
34. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 14.
35. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins: In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 27.
36. Groothuis, "Sexuality, Spirituality and Feminist Religion."
37. Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 23–25.
38. *Ibid.*, 15.
39. *Ibid.*, 17–18, 20–21.
40. *Ibid.*, 28–29. Also see note 4 on page 24 where Grudem acknowledges there are conservative denominations that were egalitarian without any liberal influence.
41. Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 10.
42. *Ibid.*, 101–102.
43. Grudem, 29.
44. Craig Keener, *Paul Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub, 1992), 6.

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## Christians for Biblical Equality

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### 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.

### Opposing Injustice

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.

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

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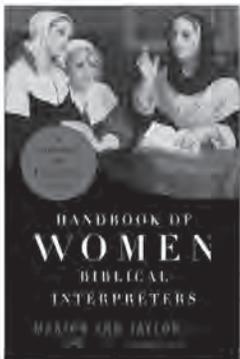
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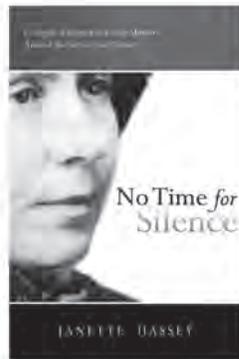
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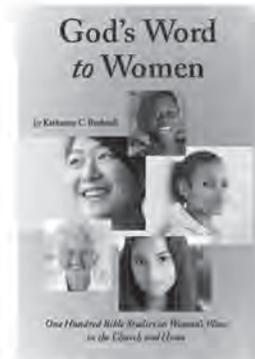
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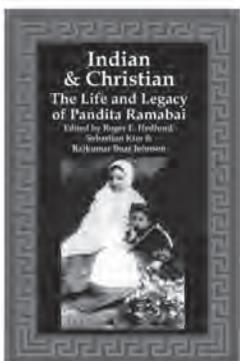
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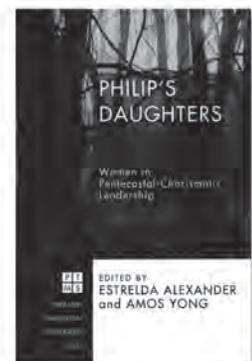
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