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“PRISCILLA AND AQUILA INSTRUCTED
APOLLOS MORE PERFECTLY IN THE
WAY OF THE LORD” (ACTS 18)

PAPERS



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Tertius . . .

Though this introduction will arrive in mailboxes in November, I am writing it in July. More specifically, I write as I wait in the Los Angeles airport, having spent the last few days attending the annual CBE conference. The conference was enjoyable and encouraging from beginning to end, and beyond the end as well, for I continued interacting with co-attendees and making new acquaintances even on the airport shuttle bus.

As has been true, to varying degrees, of all eight CBE conferences I have attended, these last few days have been full of ups and downs. The “downs” are vivid reminders of various forms of oppression around the globe. Happily, each of these painful reminders gives way to an “up”—a powerful proclamation that God is indeed righting wrongs through exemplary Christian servants. Examples of such workers include those ministries that had a presence of some kind at the conference, ministries such as ChabDai.org, DaysForGirls.org, EFOGEInternational.org, EmpowerInternational.org, MarcellaProject.com, OneDaysWages.org, SalvationArmyUSA.org, Vanguard.edu/gcwj, WomenOfWonder.us, WorldHope.org, and Rhema.co.za/gema, which will host the next CBE conference in Johannesburg on September 16-17, 2016.

This issue of *Priscilla Papers* carries the theme, “Oppression.” Oppression comes in innumerable forms—far too many to fit into the twenty-eight pages of this journal. Our cover photo of a ten-year-old girl, for example, was taken in the displaced

persons camp in Atmeh, Syria. In our opening article, Chuck Pitts draws connections between the terrible tale of Judges 19 and the modern scourge of human trafficking, thus offering us a lens through which precious few scholars have looked. Chuck is a member of the *Priscilla Papers* Peer Review Team and is active with the organization, “United Against Human Trafficking” (see HoustonRR.org). Second is an especially timely article by Patricia Conroy, co-winner of this year’s CBE student paper competition. Her article details the history behind the July 8, 2015, vote of the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference regarding ordination of women. (That her article appears in an issue titled “Oppression” should suggest to you which way that vote went.) Jennifer McKinney, author of our third article, likely did not set out to write on a form of oppression. Nevertheless, her outstanding article is foundational for understanding how some forms of systemic oppression come to be. We close with three book reviews, *The Cross and Gendercide*, *Dignity and Destiny*, and *Malestrom: Manhood Swept Into the Currents of a Changing World*, capably reviewed by Shaun Brown, Christa McKirland, and Vicki Scheib, respectively.

In closing, you might be interested to know that this introduction has been written in spurts at three airports and on two planes; thus it, like the conference itself, has had its ups and downs—literally.

. . . greet you in the Lord.

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ASSOCIATE EDITOR / GRAPHIC DESIGNER • Theresa Garbe

PRESIDENT / PUBLISHER • Mimi Haddad

PRESIDENT EMERITA • Catherine Clark Kroeger†

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PEER REVIEW TEAM: Lynn H. Cohick, Havilah Dharamraj,
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Adam Omelianchuk, Chuck Pitts



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122 West Franklin Avenue, Suite 218, Minneapolis, MN 55404-2451. For address changes and other information, phone: 612-872-6898;

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Judges 19 as a Paradigm for Understanding and Responding to Human Trafficking

CHUCK PITTS

Judges 19 contains a seldom read, let alone studied or discussed, story of misogyny, subjugation, rape, murder, and dismemberment. Determining how to handle such atrocities in the Bible makes texts such as these difficult to address. More than thirty years ago, Phyllis Trible labeled Judg 19 as one of the “texts of terror” in the Hebrew Bible (along with the stories of Hagar, Tamar, and the daughter of Jephthah).¹ Texts of terror tend to be avoided unless the reader can clearly separate the perpetrators of evil in the text from themselves. David Garber and Daniel Stallings have argued that the church must stop ignoring sexually explicit texts “because the story of the Levite’s concubine and the brutality contained therein speak vividly to issues of sexual violence that persist to this day. The silencing of sexually explicit biblical texts in American churches mirrors the silencing of issues of sexual violence in contemporary society.”² This article will begin with a look at various approaches to exegesis of this text and then seek to show that we cannot exempt ourselves from this text of terror in light of its application to the twenty-first century problem of human trafficking, especially sex trafficking.

The biblical story

First, here is the story. A Levite (hence, an apparently important man) from the hill country of Ephraim took a concubine from Bethlehem. A concubine was a woman used for a man’s pleasure without the legal protection of a primary wife;³ indeed, some would argue that the concubine in Judg 19 is not a “wife” at all, but is part of a “mistress-type relationship.”⁴ The primary wife is not mentioned in this narrative, which lends a bit of irony to the story. The concubine left the Levite and returned to her father’s house in Bethlehem, either because she committed adultery or because of some type of mistreatment of or by the Levite. The Hebrew text uses the verb *zanah*, which is normally translated “prostitute” or “fornicate,” to describe her behavior. However, the Septuagint Greek version uses the verb *orgizō*, meaning “to be angry” (followed by RSV and NRSV). This could suggest that she became angry or disgruntled and left him. The reason for the Masoretic Text’s reference to sexual infidelity is unknown, although suggestions have been made. Several interpreters have suggested a metaphorical meaning for “prostitution” or “sexual sin,” much like Jeremiah and Hosea use the concept of sexual infidelity as a metaphor for Israel and Judah’s relationship with God. Thus, the act of leaving her husband was an act of unfaithfulness.⁵ Since neither the Levite, the woman’s father, nor the narrator ever mentions any act of unfaithfulness, the metaphorical reading seems justified, perhaps as an act of autonomy, as Ackerman suggests.⁶ However, the reader soon learns that the woman had no autonomy.

Four months after she left him, the Levite went after his concubine. He took with him two donkeys and a male attendant.

After several days of hospitality and negotiation between the Levite and her father—with no input from the woman herself—the Levite left to return to Ephraim with his concubine. The journey began late in the day, so night was approaching before they reached their final destination. The male servant suggested that they stop in non-Israelite Jebus (later to become Jerusalem), but the Levite refused, preferring instead to proceed into the familiar territory of the tribe of Benjamin. One was better off with “brothers” than “strangers,” after all. A bit farther up the road, they entered the Benjaminite town of Gibeah. After no local resident offered hospitality, an Ephraimite who was living in Gibeah offered them the safety of his home (relative safety, as it turned out). After they had settled in for the evening, some men of Gibeah came to the door demanding sexual pleasures from the stranger who had entered the house. The Ephraimite defended the rights of his guest, the Levite, by offering the men his own virgin daughter and the Levite’s concubine for their pleasure, since it was an “outrageous thing” to abuse a visitor (a male visitor, that is). Cheryl Exum points out that male rape by another male would have been a “de-gendering” of the man.⁷ The Levite threw his concubine to the men, who ravaged her. After being gang raped throughout the night, the woman dragged herself to the threshold of the house, and there the Levite found her the next morning. He could not rouse her from her unconscious state, so he placed her on the donkey and made the trip home.

After he arrived home, the Levite took a knife and dismembered her body. Interestingly, the Hebrew text gives no clue whether the concubine was already dead when he cut up her body.⁸ The Septuagint apparently assumes her death, and the Levite claims that she was dead in his explanation in the next chapter, to which we will soon turn. The Levite cut his concubine into twelve pieces to broadcast the sin of the Gibeahites to his own tribal relations. All the people who saw it (apparently those receiving the body parts) said, “Such a thing has never been seen or done, not since the day the Israelites came up out of Egypt” (Judg 19:30 NIV). We will return to this statement later in this article; however, a brief summary of the events of Judg 20-21 is first necessary, since as Jan Fokkelmann has pointed out, Judg 19 cannot be read apart from Judg 20-21.⁹

In Judg 20, the Levite meets with the representatives of the recipients of the body parts for an explanation. The people of Israel gather at Mizpah to hear from the Levite, asking him “How did this evil thing happen?” The Levite’s answer is important and is thus quoted here in its entirety:

To Gibeah of Benjamin I came, I and my concubine, to spend the night. And the leaders [lit. “lords”] of Gibeah surrounded the house at night because of me. They intended to kill me, and my concubine they humiliated and she died. So I grabbed my concubine. I cut her into pieces, and I sent her to all the land of the inheritance

of Israel. For they committed a shameful act—a foolish act—in Israel. Look here, you children of Israel, give your word—give counsel here. (Judg 19:24-27, author's translation)

This brief account given by the Levite warrants comment. First, the Levite leaves out several events found in the earlier narrative. He neglects to say that the men of Gibeah first tried to “humiliate” him and only took the concubine as a last resort. In fact, the same Hebrew word that the Levite uses—*nēbalah*, translated “foolish act” here—was used by the host in Judg 19 concerning the planned act against the Levite. Gale Yee comments,

The Levite manipulates the *real* outrage against his wife (which he himself caused) to exact retribution for the *attempted* outrage against himself. He could not reveal to the tribes that he was almost raped by dissolute men. He would have incurred dishonor and loss of prestige. Instead, he manipulates his relationship with a woman in order to maneuver his male relations to accomplish his personal vendetta against Gibeah.¹⁰

More importantly, he neglects to tell his fellow Israelites that he himself had sent the concubine out to the men of Gibeah, choosing to have her humiliated rather than himself.

Second, the Levite adds elements to the earlier narrative account. He calls the men of Gibeah “lords” or “leaders” (Hebrew *ba'ale*). This could have the effect of making the attack an official act of the city, rather than of a rabble as suggested by the original narrative account. He also states that the men “planned to kill” him, while the narrative states that they wanted sexual relations with him. Also, he adds in this report that his concubine “died” as a result of the attack. However, the previous narrative does not include her death (except in the LXX translation, probably a later addition to remove the possibility that the Levite actually killed the ravaged woman himself). The results of the Levite's report were both immediate and severe. The Israelites immediately began plans to punish the men of Gibeah. However, when the tribe of Benjamin refused to surrender the guilty men to the other Israelites, a civil war erupted and virtually all the men of Benjamin were killed in the ensuing battles.

If the story ended with the rape of the concubine and subsequent destruction of the men of Benjamin, the results would be tragic. However, the actual end of the story is even worse. The Israelites were remorseful that an entire tribe was destroyed and decided they needed women to repopulate Benjamin. Their solution to the loss of Benjamin's men was to conquer the town of Jabesh-Gilead—killing everyone except four hundred young virgins—and taking their virgins to repopulate Benjamin. Unfortunately, there were not enough virgins in Jabesh-Gilead for all the men of Benjamin, so virgins participating in a ritual celebration at Shiloh were kidnapped and given to the men of Benjamin. Thus, the punishment of Gibeah for the rape of the Levite's concubine was more rape! As Alice Keefe concludes, “there is an element of dark absurdity in both the horror of the woman's fate at the hands of the Levite and the horror of a war among the tribes which is to no purpose except mass death and more rape.”¹¹ The tragic irony

of this reality is an appropriate point of departure to discuss interpretive approaches to Judg 19-21.

Connections with sex trafficking

Because sex trafficking is a relatively new addition to social justice discussions, no monograph on Judges makes a connection between human trafficking and the events of Judg 19. Several current studies have focused on the topic of rape in the Hebrew Bible. Alice Keefe's study, “Rapes of Women/Wars of Men,” leads the way. She points out that the Hebrew word translated above as “foolish act” is also found in the narratives of the rapes of Dinah in Gen 34 and Tamar in 2 Sam 13.¹² Other emphases for interpretation include homosexuality, hospitality, and gender inequality. Although some recent interpreters continue to emphasize a condemnation of homosexuality in Judg 19, this does not seem to be the point of the text, but a side issue.¹³ In fact, Michael Carden argues that a man penetrated by another man demasculinizes the man, causing the man to lose his position as a male in the male-dominated society.¹⁴ Thus, while gender inequality is certainly a significant interpretive matter in the text, homosexuality is tangential. The role of hospitality is important to the text, since the Ephraimite host in Gibeah offers his virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine to maintain the honor of his guest; we will return to this topic later in the study. The studies of Tribble, Exum, and Ackerman argue that the primary interpretive issue in Judg 19 (interestingly with little interest in Judg 20-21) is the subjugation of women in ancient Israelite culture. In fact, Ackerman states that the “entire plot concerns the concubine's inability to exert any control over her own fate.”¹⁵ That the inequality of gender is important in reading this text—and exegeting the ancient culture—is without debate, but these authors probably do overstate the “entire plot” of the story. The events represent the downfall of a society, the lack of *shalom* in a community, or a “Canaanization”¹⁶ of Israel, where “there is no king and everyone does as he sees fit” (Judg 21:25). One might argue that “everyone does as he sees fit” is an appropriate description of modern western culture, with human trafficking as an example of this characteristic.

How do these events mirror modern human trafficking, and more explicitly, sex trafficking? First, as Mitzi Smith wrote in one of the few studies that connects Judg 19 with human trafficking, “travel or journey provides a . . . framework for . . . the story.”¹⁷ Much of modern trafficking is predicated on the ability of traffickers to transport victims across borders or even across town, normally in circumstances where the victim's travel rights are limited. Typically, this travel begins with “dreams of a better and different life.”¹⁸ The concubine fled from her husband to her father, presumably for a better life. Smith compares the plight of the runaway wife to the one million to three million runaways on America's streets—the country's most vulnerable population. Not to mention the much larger global number! In the end, however, her travel was restricted by both her father and the Levite. Her father negotiated her back to her husband, and she again travelled. This travel, unfortunately, was completely in the control of her husband. Even as she lay at the threshold, the Levite continued her journey. As Smith has commented,

“The young woman’s terror in the night will not interfere with the Levite’s business in the day.”¹⁹ Carried even further, her final travel incited a retributory war—even after she was dead and dismembered.

A second similarity between the Judg 19 concubine and sex trafficking victims is anonymity. Actually, all of the characters in the story are anonymous, but the concubine is anonymous, hidden, and silent. She is the only character in the story who never speaks. Keefe states, “Her narrative silence points to the eclipse of any speaking of truth in the midst of this black and bloody comedy.”²⁰ In her silence, the concubine seems to be the only person in the narrative with no identity of her own. In comparison, a modern sex trafficking victim from Cambodia testified that:

I want you to remember we are not “problems,” we are not animals, we are not viruses, we are not garbage. We are flesh, skin and bones; we have a heart, and we have feelings. We are a sister to someone, a daughter, a granddaughter. We are people, we are women, and we want to be treat [sic] with respect, dignity. And we want rights like the rest of you enjoy.²¹

The term “invisible” is often used to describe victims of human trafficking.²² In fact, a recent documentary on sex trafficking was entitled, “In Plain Sight,” because these victims are invisible, even in plain sight.²³ The concubine—like modern sex-trafficking victims—was invisible, except when the men wanted her seen.

This brings into view the third similarity in our story to modern human trafficking—patriarchalism. As Smith points out, the concubine’s “victimization is concealed behind ideas of patriarchal normalcy.”²⁴ In the ancient Near East, as in most of the world today, men had authority, power, and often authorization to abuse and even traffic women.²⁵ In Judg 19, “hospitality occurs among men.”²⁶ Andrew Ng has suggested, in fact, that “the rape and murder of the concubine is meant . . . to indict the patriarchal system and to expose the entrenched sinfulness of the *men*—fathers and husbands who are supposed to function as guardians,” but have “renounced this vital role for cowardly self-preservation.”²⁷ Men need not be bothered with women or servants. When the “brothers” in Gibeah come for the Levite, two women are offered by the host in his place. As Smith stated, “an acceptable substitute for sexually ravishing one man is the offering up of two women.”²⁸ The Levite subjugated and oppressed the concubine and clearly had no problem with other men doing the same—and worse. As Tribble stated, the male who could have been protector becomes the procurer.²⁹ Stone has pointed out that the honor of the man was at least partially dependent upon his ability to control the women in his care—and under his control.³⁰ In the same way, modern human traffickers control and subjugate victims in this system of patriarchal normalcy. Furthermore, in many family systems (especially, though not exclusively, non-western) fathers and brothers in authority over women in the family will sell or trade women into sex-trafficking.³¹

Finally, and not unrelated to the patriarchal issue, in both Judg 19 and modern human trafficking, the myth of familiarity and homogeneity hides the realities of pain, rape, abuse, and

treachery. The concubine’s father would not protect her. The host in Gibeah would not protect her. The Levite would not protect her. At the end of the night, she is left lying sprawled before the door of safety, behind which all the men slept, prompting one writer to state, “the Knights in Shining Armor inside the house were snoring.”³² In modern trafficking, familiarity often hides trafficking. Modern-day sex traffickers place themselves in relationships with victims, and potential victims, that appear to be caring, loving relationships. They pretend to love the victims in order to place the victims in positions of vulnerability.³³ Children are pimped by their parents. Women are sold by brothers and husbands. Behind the façade of familiarity lies a web of deceit and destruction.

At the end of the story in Judg 19, the concubine is literally cut into pieces, perhaps symbolizing the destruction that had already occurred in her life. As Tribble points out, she has no one to mourn for her. “Passing her back and forth among themselves, the men of Israel have obliterated her totally. Captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered, and scattered—this woman is the most sinned against.”³⁴ As Garber and Stallings write, “her broken body communicates far more than her words ever could have expressed: *The nation of Israel is in chaos and something must be done.*”³⁵ Like the concubine’s broken body, the oppressed, wounded, and devastated bodies of victims of sex-trafficking in the twenty-first century cry out. Christine, a survivor who was born into sex slavery in Minnesota, writes these words:

It is no small achievement to survive sexual slavery. Survivors are split into pieces, fragmented, broken, filled with despair, pain, rage, and sorrow. We have been hurt beyond belief. We are silent; we are numb. Our eyes see, our ears hear, but we do not tell. Our voices are nonexistent, but even if they did exist, who would believe what we have to say? Who would listen? Who would care? We are dirty, ruined, despised, the whores of the earth. The men who use us throw us away. We are their garbage to piss on, to pile up in the corner. We are their property, they own us. The rest of you turn your backs, avert your eyes, pretend not to see, go on your way. You leave us to the predators.³⁶

How to respond?

The above quotation from a survivor slaps us in the face with a question: what can we do? First, we can recognize that the conclusion of the Judges narrative is incorrect. The narrator said, “Such a thing has not happened or been seen” before (v. 30). This statement is simply untrue. These scenes have been repeated for millennia! In scripture, Dinah was raped. Tamar was raped. Jephthah’s daughter was sacrificed. The concubine was raped and murdered. The virgins of Jabesh-Gilead and Shiloh were kidnapped and raped, even if in culturally sanctioned marriages. We must stand up for the victimized.

Second, we must recognize the evil as evil. What masquerades as *shalom* is actually evil. The men of the story saw life as *shalom*. The concubine knew better, but those in power were saying with the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day, “Shalom, shalom,” but as Jeremiah retorted, “There is not shalom here” (Jer 6:14). As

Garber and Stallings concluded, “In a society where women and children are becoming the victims of horrible violence at an alarming rate, all is not well.”³⁷ We must speak up for the silenced, for the oppressed, for the victimized. Our world, like that of the Levite and concubine, is broken and filled with evil. We must speak the truth into this world.

Third, to quote Tribble, “We must take counsel to say ‘Never again.’ Yet this counsel is itself ineffectual unless we direct our hearts to that most uncompromising of all biblical commands, speaking the word not to others but to ourselves: Repent. Repent.”³⁸ This repentance must include a confrontation of the evil. No one came to the defense of the concubine. She could get to the threshold of safety but never over that threshold. Lapsley concludes:

The narrator [of Judg 19] gently encourages us to read this story so that we will evaluate the actions of the characters, yes, but also, and equally importantly, so that we will enter sympathetically into the experience of these characters, to sit and weep and cry out with the Israelites, because they are us.³⁹

Yes, the Levite, concubine, father, Ephraimite host, and Gibeahites are us. And the experience of the concubine is the experience of millions of women in our world—even in the “enlightened west.”⁴⁰ We must act! To remain ignorant and living in blissful—and sinful—ignorance cannot suffice any longer. The expectations of the biblical Creator and the Son Jesus are clear: Care for the oppressed and the captive and the helpless. Repent! And repentance must include action!

Notes

1. Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 65-91.
2. David G. Garber Jr. and Daniel Stallings, “Awakening Desire Before It Is Season: Reading Biblical Texts in Response to the Sexual Exploitation of Children,” *RevExp* 105 (Summer 2008): 454.
3. See Trent Butler, *Judges* (WBC 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 419, for discussion of the meaning of “concubine.”
4. See Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1998), 236-37.
5. Jacqueline Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women’s Stories in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 37-38. See also Butler, *Judges*, 407.
6. Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer*, 237.
7. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup 163; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 183. See also Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 234; Sheffield: JSOT, 1996), 81.
8. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 80, points out the parallel language with Abraham in Gen 22, suggesting that the text may assume that she was not dead and that, unlike Isaac, no one saved her from the knife.
9. Jan Fokkelmann, “Structural Remarks on Judges 9 and 19,” in *Shāarie Talmon: Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon* (ed. M. Fishbane, E. Tov, and W. W. Fields; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 42.
10. Gale Yee, “Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body,” in *Judges & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. Gale Yee; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 156.
11. Alice Keefe, “Rapes of Women/Wars of Men,” *Semeia* 61 (1993): 92.
12. Keefe, “Rapes of Women,” 82. See also Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007),

521-22. See also Deirdre Brouer, “Voices of Outrage against Rape: Textual Evidence from Judges 19,” *Priscilla Papers* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2014): 24-28.

13. See, for example, K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Judges/Ruth* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 359-66; Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 536-37, 542-45.

14. Michael Carden, “Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A Response to Ken Stone,” *JSOT* 82 (1999): 86. See also Ken Stone, “Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?” *JSOT* 67 (1995): 87-107.

15. Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer*, 237.

16. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 518-19.

17. Mitzi J. Smith, “Reading the Story of the Levite’s Concubine Through the Lens of Modern-day Sex Trafficking,” *ATJ* 41 (2009): 17.

18. Smith, “Reading the Story,” 17.

19. Smith, “Reading the Story,” 26.

20. Keefe, “Rapes of Women,” 92. Concerning the word “comedy,” Keefe earlier says on p. 90, “And though the ludicrously callous behavior of the Levite would tempt one to read this scene as a black comedy, the stark contrast of complete insensitivity and complete suffering still has the rhetorical effect of heightening the reader’s empathy for the tortured woman. If the Levite does not care, who does?”

21. Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, eds., *To Plead Our Own Cause: Personal Stories by Today’s Slaves* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2008), 103, quoted in Smith, “Reading the Story,” 19.

22. Smith, “Reading the Story,” 19.

23. Noah Lamberth and David Trotter, *In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom*, documentary DVD, 2014.

24. Smith, “Reading the Story,” 19.

25. This statement does not reflect ignorance of the fact that many trafficked individuals are male.

26. Smith, “Reading the Story,” 26.

27. Andrew Hock-Soon Ng, “Revisiting Judges 19: A Gothic Perspective,” *JSOT* 32, no. 2 (2007): 201.

28. Ng, “Revisiting Judges 19,” 201.

29. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 74.

30. Stone, “Gender and Homosexuality,” 95.

31. See Smith, “Reading the Story,” 19-20.

32. E. T. A. Davidson, *Intracacy, Design, & Cunning in the Book of Judges* (n.p.: XLibris, 2008), 176.

33. Smith, “Reading the Story,” 22-24.

34. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 81.

35. Garber and Stallings, “Awakening Desire,” 454.

36. Bales and Trodd, *To Plead Our Own Cause*, 101, quoted in Smith, “Reading the Story,” 28.

37. Garber and Stallings, “Awakening Desire,” 466.

38. Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, 87.

39. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 66.

40. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word*, 66.

CHUCK PITTS is a native Texan. He received his BA from Houston Baptist University and both his MDiv and PhD from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the latter with a major in Old Testament. After spending nine years in northern Minnesota in various ministry positions, including church planting, he moved back to the Houston area. He was professor of Old Testament at Houston Graduate School of Theology from 1999-2015 and began teaching at Sam Houston Math, Science, and Technology High School in the fall of 2015. Chuck is active with the organization, United Against Human Trafficking.



Great Disappointment 2015: The Struggle of Adventist Women to Achieve Equality in Ministry

PATRICIA CONROY

For many Seventh-day Adventists (SDA), July 8, 2015, will go down in history as the Second Great Disappointment. For those not familiar with Seventh-day Adventist history, the first Great Disappointment occurred on October 22, 1844, when Jesus did not return, as some had predicted he would. This time, the issue was not the return of Jesus, but the culmination of a long, hard-fought campaign for equal treatment of women in the ministries of the denomination.

The vote was held in San Antonio, Texas, at the business meeting of the worldwide General Conference.¹ While several issues were discussed, the issue of women in ministry was the most publicized and hardest fought. The vote followed two years of study by a committee appointed by the SDA General Conference known as the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC), which produced voluminous reports. There was vigorous campaigning by both those in favor and against—in pulpits, in print media, and on the Internet. The motion was not about whether women can be ordained, but whether the decision to do so should be vested in the divisions of the World Church. The debate leading up to the vote, however, was all about the role of women in the church.

Probably the greatest irony in the controversy surrounding the ordination of SDA women is that it was co-founded by a woman, Ellen Gould Harmon White. A document titled, “The Twenty-Eight Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists” includes an affirmation of the prophetic gift of Ellen White. While her works are not considered to have the same authority as scripture, they are relied upon for “comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.”²

It is unlikely that anyone would dispute that White was a centrally influential leader in the denomination, from its founding in 1863 until her death in 1915. There is, however, much disagreement regarding White’s status as a minister and her opinion regarding the role women should play in gospel ministry. There is also a wide spectrum of opinion on the interpretation of scripture as it relates to the ordination of women.

This is not the first time the SDA Church has confronted the issue of women in ministry. It is remarkable, however, that 150 years after the church was founded, and 130 years after the church began studying the issue, the church still cannot decide whether God calls women to be pastors.

A brief history of the pre-Seventh-day Adventist era

The SDA Church was born in the United States. It arose out of the Millerite-Advent Movement of the early 1840s. Its adherents came primarily from American protestant churches, particularly Baptist, Methodist, and Christian Connection. Their common belief was the expectation that Jesus would return soon, and that the date of his return could be predicted based on prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. When Jesus did not return on October 22, 1844, as had been predicted, many followers left the Advent Movement and returned to their former churches. Some remained, continuing to

study. One of these was Rachel Oakes, a Seventh-day Baptist, who introduced the observation of the seventh-day Sabbath. Other members of the movement, who became the founders of the SDA Church in 1863, were James White, Ellen Harmon White, and William Bates.³

Discussion about whether women may be ordained to gospel ministry in the SDA Church began in the press before the church was even formally organized. In 1849, the early Adventists began to publish. The first publication was known as *Present Truth*, and subsequently as *The Adventist Review and Herald* (now *Adventist Review*). Adherents to the movement were encouraged to use this journal as a newsletter. On the history page of its website, *Adventist Review* describes the function of its early journal as similar to present-day Facebook.⁴ Between 1857 and 1861, *The Adventist Review and Herald* ran eight articles, authored by those who would become the earliest leaders of the SDA Church: James White, David Hewitt, B. F. Robbins, S. C. Welcome, J. A. Mowatt, and one anonymous author.⁵ These articles strongly encouraged women to participate in ministry and to use their spiritual gifts. No corresponding articles or letters advocated restrictions on women’s preaching or public speaking.⁶

Women were fully engaged in the preaching, teaching, and educational mission of the Advent Movement. In a paper presented at the 2012 meeting of the Pacific Union Conference, called to consider the issue ordination of women, Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks-Harwood summarized the position of early leadership as follows:

Movement leadership took a strong stand on the inclusive nature of spiritual gifts and the Christian obligation to exercise them in public assemblies and religious meetings. This was not a rhetorical discussion: women were involved in the preaching ministry of the church. Women traveled to evangelize, spoke in the churches and gatherings of believers, wrote theological, devotional, and scriptural articles, exhorted the believers, and exercised spiritual leadership.⁷

The early Seventh-day Adventist Church

The denomination was formally organized in 1863, with women continuing to play active roles in ministry. Women were, for example, among the first evangelists. In 1868, Sarah A. Hallock Lindsey and Ellen S. Edmonds Lane, along with their husbands, became evangelists. In 1872, Lindsey was licensed as a minister and “recognized for her effective evangelism.” Two other women were licensed as ministers in 1878 and 1879.⁸

Leaders of the early SDA Church apparently saw no biblical reason women should not work alongside men to carry out the mission of the church. John Nevins Andrews, for whom the flagship SDA university and seminary is named, published an

exegesis of 1 Cor 14:31-36 and 1 Tim 2:12 in the *Review and Herald* in January, 1879. He explained that these texts were “not to be taken as directions to all Christian women in other churches and other times. . . .”⁹

In 1881, at a General Conference Session a motion was brought to ordain women: “Resolved, That females possessing the necessary qualifications to fill that position, may, with perfect propriety, be set apart by ordination to the work of the Christian ministry.”¹⁰ The motion was referred to a committee, but never voted upon. White was absent from this 1881 General Conference meeting; some have pointed to her absence as an indication of her disapproval, but others as her approval. She never commented on it in print. She had left the state, following the death of her husband on August 6, 1881, and it seems inappropriate to attach significance to her absence. White’s words and conduct, both before and after the 1881 General Conference, make her position clear.

Ellen White, ordination, and women in ministry

The 1884 *Second SDA Yearbook* lists several female licensed ministers. White is listed among those given ordination credentials.¹¹ The Ellen G. White Estate has published at least six different ordination certificates for her.¹² Opponents of women’s ordination have argued that, despite the issuance of ministerial credentials by the church, White was never officially ordained by church officials and never pastored a congregation or performed a marriage or baptism.

In 1911, the *Review and Herald* published a letter in which White stated, “In the city of Portland the Lord ordained me as his messenger, and here my first labors were given to the cause of present truth.”¹³ Whether or not she had an ordination ceremony conducted by denomination officials, the church validated White’s claim to be ordained by issuing her ministerial credentials, beginning in 1871, and by listing her with ordained ministers in its yearbooks.¹⁴ The fact that she did not pastor a congregation, conduct weddings, or perform baptisms reflects the focus of her ministry of service to the denomination as a whole, rather than to a particular congregation. Many attempts have been made to explain away the issuance of ordination credentials to White. One of the more interesting explanations, given by a representative of the Ellen G. White Estate, is the conjecture that “the church wished to recognize her contribution officially. It had no ‘prophet credentials,’ so it gave her the highest credentials it had. . . .”¹⁵

White apparently believed that she held authority within the church, and that she was not required to submit to the authority of “the brethren.” In June, 1889, White wrote to the Elders of Battle Creek:

Two elders visited me on Sabbath morning, and I was asked by one what I was going to speak upon. I said, “Brethren, you leave that matter with the Lord and Sister White, for neither the Lord nor Sister White will be dictated to by the brethren as to what subject she will bring before them. I am at home in Battle Creek, on the ground we have broken through the strength of God, and we ask not permission to take the desk in the tabernacle. I take it as my rightful position accorded me of God.”¹⁶

Concerning whether White exercised authority over men, it can be argued that she not only exercised such authority during her lifetime, but that she still does so today. In a sermon given to the Annual Council on October 11, 2014, General Conference President Ted N. C. Wilson cited the writings of White almost twice as many times as he did the Bible!¹⁷

Throughout her lifetime, White encouraged women to engage in ministry. Her writings indicate that she believed that all church workers should serve as they were gifted by the Holy Spirit. “It is the accompaniment of the Holy Spirit of God that prepares workers, both men and women, to become pastors to the flock of God.”¹⁸

White not only strongly encouraged women to participate in ministry, she insisted that they be paid. In an 1889 letter concerning married women gospel workers in Australia, she stated that she would not allow these women to go without pay, and that she would withhold money from her tithe to establish a fund to pay these workers.¹⁹ In 1895, White called for an ordination service for women. In 1900, Adventists began ordaining deaconesses.²⁰

Going on without Ellen

With the death of White in 1915, the church lost a strong advocate for inclusion of women. The appointment of women to positions of responsibility within the church slowed. Cultural factors began to have greater influence over the roles women played in the church.

The Great Depression of the 1930s brought new economic challenges. The church attempted to apportion church resources equitably by deciding that only one member of any family could be paid a full wage. Church institutions were thus reluctant to hire husbands and wives. Where circumstances required that they hire both, the policy was to pay the husband a full salary and the wife a much lower salary. This policy remained in place until challenged in the courts in the 1970s.²¹

During World War II, many jobs were available for women. Almost immediately after the end of the war, however, there was pressure for women to leave the workforce to make room for men returning from military service. This was true within the church as well. “By 1950, women had disappeared from positions of leadership in SDA departments.”²² The culture of the 1950s created and reinforced distinct gender roles for men and women.²³ The expectation for women portrayed in the popular media was also reflected in the SDA press. *Review and Herald* authors blamed working women for the breakup of the home. “Adventist admonitions echoed popular secular rhetoric in claiming that women’s work outside the home was unnecessary and threatened the family, and therefore society.”²⁴

In May, 1950, General Conference officers again discussed ordination, after a note from White was found which seemed “to provide for the ordination of certain sisters in church service.” Consistent with the cultural context of the post-war era, Conference officers recommended that a “small” committee be appointed. In 1970, twenty years later, the General Conference officers agreed to appoint an “adequate committee to consider this large topic.”²⁵

In July, 1973, a study under the direction of the General Conference began in Camp Mohaven, Ohio. The recommendation was that women should be ordained as elders, with a pilot program leading to ordination of women ministers. The committee observed:

When God called Ellen White . . . in an era of considerable hostility toward women in religious roles . . . is there any way to suggest that a qualified, called, dedicated, humble woman should be denied the highest recognition that the church is able to place upon the calling of God's Spirit to service, because she is a woman—especially in an age more favorable to the involvement of women in leadership roles?²⁶

The Camp Mohaven report further found that there was “no theological objection to the ordination of women to church ministries, but recommended more study.”²⁷ The results of the study were not released until 1984, nine years later.²⁸

Promises, procrastination, and the fear of feminism

The denomination promised, however, that there would be “continuing study of the theological and practical implications of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.”²⁹

Another factor which stalled progress was the fear of feminism. The 1970s gave birth to the Equal Rights Amendment to the US Constitution and the enormously influential court case *Roe v. Wade*, both of which were associated with feminist causes, and both of which raised concerns for conservative Christian denominations.³⁰ The most direct threat to the SDA Church, however, was the lawsuit filed against Pacific Press, the SDA publishing house in California.

In the early 1970s, Merikay Silver (McLeod) and Lorna Tobler, along with the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, filed a class-action lawsuit against Pacific Press for paying women forty percent less than male counterparts. Silver had become the sole wage-earner in her household, but Pacific Press refused to pay her as a head-of-household, continuing the practice of dual pay scales established during the Great Depression. She subsequently learned that her employer had never paid a woman as a head-of-household.³¹

This challenge of a long-established practice by SDA employers led many to fear that the feminist movement, an “ungodly feminist campaign,” would be responsible for closing down Adventist institutions.³² By the late 1980s, many Adventists viewed feminism as a threat to the mission and survival of the church.³³ Because women's ordination was also seen as a feminist issue, it became a threat as well.

Unity, a new mantra

In addition to the feminist “threat,” the 1970s brought another concern to the church—unity. The SDA Church was now a multi-cultural world church. Before the church had even released the findings of the Camp Mohaven study, finding no theological objections to the ordination of women, a new reason for procrastination surfaced.

The October, 1974, Annual Council reaffirmed the priesthood of all believers, and then denied the ordination of women in the interest of world unity, stating:

because the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a world church which includes in its fellowship peoples of all nations and cultures, and because a survey of its world divisions reveals that the time is not ripe nor opportune,

therefore, in the interest of the world unity of the church, no move be made in the direction of ordaining women to the gospel ministry.³⁴

In March, 1984, women pastors began baptizing in the North American Division, only to be told in October that they must stop. During the 1980s, the General Conference also asked *Review and Herald* and Pacific Press not to publish on women's ordination.³⁵

In 1989, at a meeting of church officers in Cohutta Springs, Georgia, it was decided that ordination of women would not “be welcomed or meet with approval in most of the world church.” This decision was affirmed at the Annual Council meeting that year and then taken to the General Conference in 1990, where delegates voted against the ordination of women pastors.³⁶

Headship theology

The “headship principle,” discussed extensively by TOSC, “may be new truth or may be new heresy, but it is definitely new.”³⁷ Although the theology of male headship has been embraced by many conservative Adventists, it was not part of historic Adventism and is not part of any official Adventist doctrinal statement today. Rather, it is the response of conservative Seventh-day Adventists to the threat of feminism.

Headship made its way into the Adventist church in earnest in the late 1980s through the writings of Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi, a theologian at Andrews University who was strongly influenced by Wayne Grudem and James B. Hurley.³⁸

Bacchiocchi . . . became so concerned about the threat of feminism and the possibility that the church might begin ordaining women, that he cancelled a major research project he had started and went looking for biblical arguments that would stop the Adventist church from voting to ordain women to ministry. . . . In 1987, Bacchiocchi self-published *Women in the Church*. This groundbreaking book imported the entire headship doctrine from those Evangelical Calvinist writers into the Adventist church.³⁹

Prior to the most recent studies, the concerns about ordination of women in the SDA Church were centered on social and cultural issues, and the risk to unity. With the introduction of headship theology and the publishing of the TOSC Report, however, theology has moved to the forefront.

Rebellion?

In 1995, the ordination of women was again brought to the General Conference in Utrecht, Holland, at the request of the North American Division which requested approval for ordination only within its own division. On July 5, 1995, the General Conference voted against the proposal.⁴⁰

On August 3, 1995, the president of the North American Division suggested that “a commissioning or dedicatory service, even with the laying on of hands, is biblical and affirming to the call to ministry.” On September 23, 1995, the Columbia Union's Sligo Church, in Takoma Park, Maryland, issued ministerial credentials and certificates of ordination to three women. The action was seen by some as rebellion and reported as such in newspapers, including the *New York Times* and *The Washington*

Post, and on *Wikipedia*. The Maryland ordinations were followed by several women being ordained in southern California in 1995 and 1996. In 1995, the Pacific Union voted that “while being loyal to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, [we are] committed to the ordination of women to the gospel ministry and to working toward that day when that will happen.”⁴¹

New fire

Since the Pacific Union and Columbia Union began ordaining women in 1995, there has been significant attention to the issue of women’s ordination by the Adventist press, as well as in the pulpit and by the General Conference. The Internet has played a large role in promoting positions for and against the issue.⁴²

In 2007, then General Conference President Jan Paulsen, commented, “Why don’t we ordain women to the ministry in the same way as we do men? You all know we’ve been around this one a few times. It’s just a question of ‘can we make this major change and still hold together as a global community?’”⁴³ In 2009, he acknowledged that women are ordained in China and are recognized as such in the church records and yearbooks.

In 2010, however, Jan Paulsen retired, to be replaced by Ted N. C. Wilson, who ordered yet another study of women’s ordination, by the Biblical Research Institute, in order to prepare recommendations for the 2015 Annual Conference.⁴⁴

In 2012, TOSC began working on a report. In that same year, both the Columbia Union and the Pacific Union adopted resolutions expressing commitments to ordain without regard to gender. Both unions maintain that the right to make decisions regarding who will be ordained belongs to the unions, not to the General Conference.⁴⁵ The General Conference refuses to recognize the ordination of women in these conferences, stating:

The world Church cannot legitimize practices that clearly contradict the intent of General Conference Session actions. This applies to ordination decisions as well as to other matters in which a local organization may feel constrained not just to voice its disagreement with the world Church but to proceed along a pathway that directly conflicts with the expressed will of the worldwide Church. Accordingly, the world Church does not recognize actions authorizing or implementing ministerial ordination without regard to gender.⁴⁶

On October 27, 2013, the Southeastern California Conference (part of Pacific Union), elected the first female conference president, Sandra Roberts.⁴⁷ Her name has been conspicuously omitted from the list of conference presidents maintained by the General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. That list shows a blank line where her name should be.⁴⁸

Theology of Ordination Study Committee

TOSC, appointed in 2012, was comprised of 106 members, including pastors, administrators, theologians, and lay members.⁴⁹ In addition to input by committee members, the committee considered numerous position papers. The committee was unable to reach consensus on a single solution, but came up with three alternative recommendations for the General Conference, referred to as Positions 1-3. At the conclusion of the TOSC meetings, the

members were polled, and sixty-three percent favored Position 2 or 3, either of which would permit ordination of women based on regional needs.⁵⁰

Position 1

Position 1 opposes ordination of women as pastors or elders under any circumstances. It gives three primary reasons: the church must be Bible-based in all matters of faith and practice; an elder must be the husband of one wife; allowing competing methods of interpreting scripture brings disunity. Specifically, this position rejects the “principle-based, contextual, linguistic and historical-cultural method of interpretation,”⁵¹ and asserts that the Bible must be taken “as it reads.”⁵²

Position 1 rests primarily on Gen 1-3, 1 Tim 2:13-14, 1 Tim 3:2, and 1 Cor 11. Position 1 accepts these texts as absolute, applicable to all times, and not to be interpreted based on culture or context. Headship of males is interpreted as applicable in both the home and the church.

Angel Manuel Rodriguez, a member of TOSC, critiqued Position 1 as follows:

Their interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:2 is at the very heart of their case. According to them, the phrase, “the husband of but one wife” (NIV) needs no interpretation because its meaning is plain. . . . Based on 1 Corinthians 11:2-10 they, first, trace headship back to the pre-fall condition of Adam and Eve and, second, they find support for the eternal headship of God over Christ. These two details lead them to conclude that headship belongs to the inter-Trinitarian relationships and that it plays a fundamental role in the order of the cosmic kingdom of God and in His church on earth.⁵³

Position 2

Position 2 is the most pro-ordination, finding no theological impediment to the ordination of women. This position argues that context must be considered in interpretation.⁵⁴ It relies on Gen 1:27, that both man and woman are made in the image of God,⁵⁵ and discusses the leadership roles that women served in Israel and in the NT.⁵⁶ It rejects the doctrine of headship, as it applies to the church.⁵⁷

With respect to husband/wife relationships, Position 2 asserts that Eph 5:21-23 is “not about the unconditional obedience of the wife to the husband and much less about coerced submission. The reference to the husband being the ‘head’ of the wife (v. 23) must be understood in relation to the nature of Christ’s headship described in the same verse.”⁵⁸

Position 3

Position 3 takes a middle-ground. It states that male ecclesiastical leadership is preferred, but denies that men have general headship in the church. It leaves room for local jurisdictions to ordain women, if necessary to carry out the mission of the church. Position 3 asserts that men and women had complementary, non-hierarchical roles before the fall, and that male headship existed in the family, after the fall, but does not exist in the church. It also differentiates between gifts and offices in the church.⁵⁹ Position

3 further asserts that God makes accommodations to his divine plan and that we can rely on study and guidance by the Holy Spirit to determine when such variances are indicated.⁶⁰

One concern about Positions 1 and 3 is that they both contain elements of male headship which are not currently in SDA doctrine. Now that headship has been made the subject of substantial study and attention, there is the possibility that it may find its way into official doctrine, especially considering that the greatest growth in the church is occurring among more conservative cultures.

Shortly after the TOSC report was released in June, 2015, the faculty of Andrews University released its seven-page theological study, “The Unique Headship of Christ in the Church,” which addresses headship theology. The Andrews University study addresses several aspects of Position 1, which are based on male headship. First, it affirms the view of the Trinity expressed in the “Twenty-eight Fundamental Beliefs” as follows:

Scripture affirms that the Son is eternally equal with the Father and the Spirit. . . . Scripture also affirms the *temporary voluntary* functional subordination of Christ the Son in order to accomplish the salvation of humanity. . . . The interpersonal relationships within the Trinity provide the ultimate model of love and self-sacrifice for us. As such, they do not furnish a model for a top-down governmental structure for human leadership within the Church.⁶¹

The Andrews University study further refutes Position 1 by stating that “No inspired writer teaches the headship of man over woman at the Creation. Rather Genesis 1 teaches us that male and female participate equally in the image of God, with no hint of pre-fall subordination of one to the other.”⁶² The study also affirms SDA belief fourteen, which states, in part: “In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. . . . In sum, any form of headship claimed by a mere human, whether male or female, usurps the sole headship of Christ over the Church.”⁶³

From extreme to absurd

Women’s ordination has not only become a polarizing issue, but an intensely emotional one as well, especially from the independent “Adventist” ministries.⁶⁴ Opposition to women’s ordination has generated some extreme responses. The examples below represent what many Adventists, as well as the public, are seeing in the independent Adventist media.

Doug Batchelor, SDA evangelist and pastor, has been a noted opponent of women’s ordination. He and Dwight Hall published *Strange Fire*, a book distributed in SDA congregations, in which he warns about the dangers of departing from God’s divine plan. In one example he likens a woman wanting to serve outside of her divinely assigned role to the aspirations of Lucifer.

What happens when men and women take it upon themselves to change their roles and do their own thing?

There are plenty of Bible examples, but, significantly, the first case involved neither a man nor a woman. Instead, it was the highest of the angels. Lucifer—now called the devil and Satan—was not happy with his role . . . from that one issue, sin was born, and from there things have just kept going downhill.⁶⁵

In another example from *Strange Fire*, Batchelor and Hall state, regarding the complaints of Aaron and Miriam in Num 12:1-15, “It is also worthy to note that only Miriam—and not Aaron—became leprous. She was trying to change God’s divine order.”⁶⁶

In 2015, Daniel Mesa, another opponent of women’s ordination, posted the following on the AdVindicate website:

Christ represents the Husband, and the church represents the bride. They are expected to be symbolically intimate one with another. . . . If the local pastor represents Christ, and the local church represents the bride, then what would it mean if we took the male pastor out of his position to place a female pastor there? It would mean we are giving a symbolic representation of homosexuality (See 1 Cor 6:9).⁶⁷

San Antonio and beyond

By the time the 2015 General Conference session began, it was apparent that the struggle for equality of women in the church would likely face yet another defeat. A full day of debate preceded the vote, with emotions running high at times. One of the first speakers made a motion for the General Conference to deal with the disobedience of those conferences which had already ordained women. The motion was not allowed to proceed.⁶⁸ Both President Wilson and past president Paulsen addressed the delegates. One of the more disturbing moments came when Paulsen issued a plea to the delegates of the Global South to allow North America and Europe to do what they discern is best in their own divisions, even though it might differ from what is acceptable elsewhere. The plea was met with booing and hissing from some! There has been a strong reaction around the world from Adventists who are offended by the disrespect shown to this exemplary servant leader.⁶⁹

Although the vote resulted in an acute disappointment, few were surprised. “The official ballot count was 977 yes and 1,381 no . . . a significantly greater yes vote than the last time the idea was put forward, in 1995 at the session in Utrecht, Holland.”⁷⁰

What does defeat of this motion mean to those striving for gender equality in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? President Wilson says that nothing has changed. Women can still serve as “commissioned” pastors and as ordained local church elders and deaconesses. They cannot, however, have the title of “ordained pastor,” which would allow them to hold certain church offices, such as General Conference president.⁷¹ There is a logical gap in this thinking. If one believes the theological arguments advanced by those in opposition to women’s ordination, then women should not be serving in any leadership capacity whatsoever. To say that women can do the work, as long as they are classified differently and prevented from advancing, is not a theological decision, but just plain discrimination.

Women were seen at the conference embracing and weeping after the result was announced. The Danish delegation marched in the Parade of Nations on July 11—wearing all black. Women and men from around the world posted pictures in social media of themselves dressed in black. Some have vowed to continue to wear black to church. Some have said they are leaving the denomination. Others have said they will remain and work for change and will not be silent. The response by some organizations has been immediate. The Adventist Church in the Netherlands, for example, announced the day after the vote that it would continue ordaining women.⁷²

Probably the greatest ongoing obstacle to achieving equality is the change in the demographics of the SDA Church. At the first General Conference in 1863, the church had 3500 members, mostly in North America.⁷³ Now the church has over eighteen million members. Over ninety-one percent of its membership, and ninety-seven percent of its baptisms, are in the Global South, where equality for women is not favored.⁷⁴ While some take encouragement from the closer vote at the recent conference, optimism has to be balanced against rapid growth in the Global South. Furthermore, “Women and young adults continue to be greatly under-represented in the decision-making process. Women make up 57% of the membership of the SDA Church. At the General Conference only 17% of the voting delegates were women, and only 16% of the delegates were under 40.”⁷⁵

The church cannot continue to devalue and discriminate against fifty-seven percent of its membership and hope to maintain support for its leadership. Many Adventists have become open in their criticism of the General Conference and its leaders. Two days after the vote on women’s ordination, *Adventist Today* published an article entitled, “Six reasons why I no longer trust the General Conference.” Among the reasons listed: “The General Conference is showing signs of becoming a threat to our Adventist heritage” and “Our General Conference leadership is asking us to yield our conscience to ecclesiastical authority.”⁷⁶

What is the future of women in the SDA Church? There is no question that this issue has deeply divided the denomination and polarized its members throughout the world. The vote, however, has not ended the struggle. Those deeply and optimistically committed to equality have already begun to prepare for the next General Conference in 2020, where possible changes in church administration could create a more favorable climate for ordination of women. One interim goal is developing strategies for educating those who may not have had an opportunity to study the issue prior to the vote in San Antonio. Only time will tell whether the Global South, which now controls the SDA Church, will make room for those who are committed to equality.

Notes

1. A brief overview of the structure of the church will be helpful throughout this article. A worldwide General Conference governs the SDA Church. Issues of importance to the entire church are decided by the General Conference, which meets every five years. Decisions are made by a vote of delegates representing each of the divisions, major church institutions (such as universities), and members of the church administration. In between sessions of the General Conference, the Annual Council meets to decide some issues and to set others on the

agenda of the General Conference. The church governance structure is as follows: local congregations make up a conference; several conferences constitute a union; unions are organized into divisions; and the thirteen divisions constitute the worldwide General Conference. See “Organizational Structure,” Seventh-day Adventist Church, North American Division website, <http://www.nadadventist.org/article/19/about-our-church/organizational-structure>.

2. “28 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” *SDAnet, At Issue*, <http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/doctrines/gc28.htm>. Fundamental Belief 18, “The Gift of Prophecy,” says, “One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10.)”

3. “History,” The Seventh-day Adventist Church website, <http://www.adventist.org/information/history/>.

4. “Our Roots and Mission,” *Adventist Review*, <http://www.adventistreview.org/our-roots-and-mission>.

5. Beverly Beem and Ginger Hanks-Harwood, “Your Daughters Shall Prophecy,” Pacific Union Conference Session website, <http://session.adventistfaith.org/assets/393508>.

6. Beem and Hanks-Harwood, “Your Daughters Shall Prophecy,” 3.

7. Beem and Hanks-Harwood, “Your Daughters Shall Prophecy,” 2.

8. Kit Watts, “An Outline of the History of Seventh-day Adventists and the Ordination of Women,” *SDAnet, At Issue*, “Women in Ministry,” appendix 5.

9. Quoted in Denis Fortin, “What Did Early Adventist Pioneers Think about Women in Ministry,” *Memory, Meaning and Faith* (Apr 8, 2010), <http://www.memorymeaningfaith.org/blog/2010/04/adventist-pioneers-women-ministry.html>.

10. Alberto R. Timm, “Seventh-day Adventists on Women’s Ordination, a Brief Historical Overview, Theology of Ordination Study Committee, January 21-25, 2014,” *Adventist Archives*, 4, <https://www.adventistarchives.org/seventh-day-adventists-on-womens-ordination-a-brief-historical-overview.pdf>.

11. Watts, “Outline of the History,” 2.

12. Ellen G. White Estate, “Records Pertaining to Ellen G. White’s Ministerial/Ordination Credentials,” http://www.whiteestate.org/issues/egw_credentials/egw_credentials.htm.

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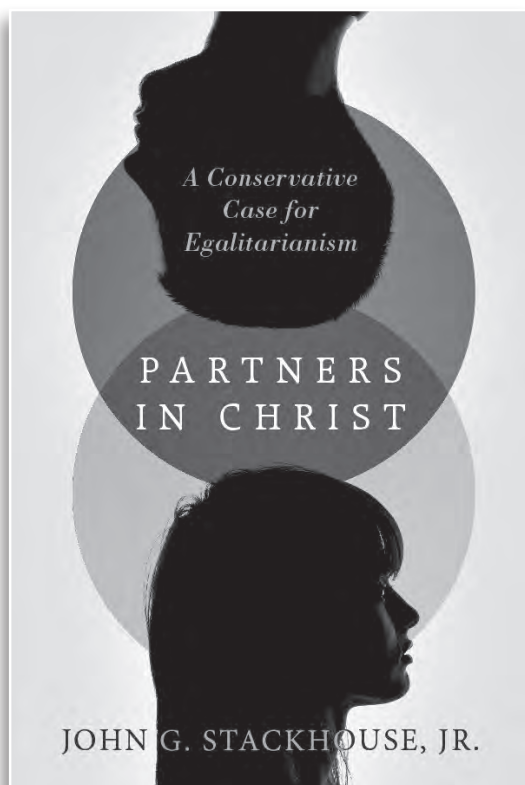
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PATRICIA CONROY is a California family law attorney. She received her BS from University of Maryland, and JD from Santa Clara University. She is currently an MDiv student at Fuller Theological Seminary in Houston, Texas. This article was co-winner of the student paper competition at CBE's annual conference, held in Los Angeles, in July 2015.



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SAY ABOUT GENDER ROLES?



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Sects and Gender: Reaction and Resistance to Cultural Change

JENNIFER MCKINNEY

A tale of two Baptists

Throughout American history, gender theologies have been used to signify a religious organization's level of tension to the surrounding culture. As a result, religious organizations have changed their gender theologies in response to cultural change. This process can be illustrated by a tale of two Baptists. Invigorated by the First Great Awakening of the 1740s, a robust American tradition of female piety was born. Revivalists broke with Puritan orthodoxy that equated Christianity to a hierarchical family. The revivalists, instead, envisioned a new covenant—one that emphasized individual rebirth within a community that was related, not by biological ties, but by grace. Within the bond of spiritual fellowship, the revivalists affirmed that men and women, rich and poor, lettered and ignorant,¹ were as capable as ordained clergy of discerning spiritual truth, leading to communities of relative egalitarianism.

The revivalist spirit had significant implications for Colonial Baptists. Rejecting the hierarchical Puritan ideals of gender, Baptist women in the mid- to late-eighteenth century served along with men in unprecedented access to Baptist governance and authority. Women participated in all major decisions, including election and dismissal of ministers, admitting and excluding of members, and vociferous theological debates.² In the mid- to late-eighteenth century, Baptist women's religious authority posed a challenge to the hierarchical mainline denominations—the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists.

More than 200 years later, the largest Baptist organization in the United States, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), made headlines when they changed their Statement of Faith and Message for the first time in their history. The SBC “overwhelmingly voted against having women serve as pastors, despite the fact that many women were already serving as pastors.”³

This shift in Baptist theology represents the ways in which gender has come to symbolize an ideological divide within American Protestantism. The divide rests on the *tension* between the denominations and the culture. Both Colonial and twentieth-century Baptist movements stood in opposition to the secular and established religious cultures. Both used gender as a measure of orthodoxy. Yet the outcomes were opposite. Reacting to the cultural norm of patriarchy, Colonial-era Baptists *adopted egalitarian gender ideals*, putting them in *higher tension* to the culture. Reacting to the cultural norm of equality, twentieth-century Baptists *adopted hierarchical gender ideals*, also putting them in *higher tension* to the culture.

The theological shifts represented by these Baptist movements illustrate the *social* nature of religious organization. Sect-church theory explains that religious organizations “range along a continuum from complete rejection to complete acceptance” of the cultural environment.⁴ Sect-like religious organizations

reject the social environment, placing them in *higher* tension with their environment. Church-like organizations accept the social environment, placing them in *lower* tension with their environment.⁵ In rejecting cultural gender norms sect-like religious bodies often maintain higher tension to the society by adopting strict gender beliefs and practices.⁶

Part I: Gender theologies and sect-church theory

Gender Theologies

Throughout Christian history two narratives have been articulated regarding gender. The most well-documented, and perhaps most criticized, is the “tradition in which gender relations are organized by the principles of hierarchy and subordination.”⁷ Sally Gallagher illustrates this strain of belief, citing church fathers who mirrored their own Greco-Roman culture which was predisposed to misogyny.⁸ These writers state that women do not bear the full image of God (Augustine), that women are the means through which Adam was deceived (Ignatius), that women are the devil's gateway (Tertullian), or that women are misbegotten men (Aquinas). This narrative is the root from which many modern Christians adopt gender essentialism (the idea that women and men were created differently in essence) and hierarchy. Today, this narrative relies on the apostle Paul's teachings in 1 Cor 14:34, 1 Cor 11:3, and 1 Tim 2:11-12.⁹

A second narrative may be less well-known, but also enjoys a long history. It emphasizes partnership and mutuality between women and men¹⁰ and relies on the apostle Paul's teaching that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28 NRSV). Proponents cite heroines who spread the good news of Christ, such as Mary Magdalene, Philip's four daughters, Priscilla, and Phoebe.¹¹ They also point out Paul's apparent inconsistencies, arguing that if women were forbidden from preaching, Paul would not have instructed them to cover their heads when praying or prophesying in public (1 Cor 11:5);¹² nor would he have given spiritual authority to Priscilla in the teaching of Apollos (Acts 18:24-26). Church fathers like Tertullian (the same who taught “woman is the devil's gateway”) are also cited for urging mutuality between husbands and wives.¹³

The question most often asked is which narrative is the correct one, which is the true biblical perspective. That is a theological and hermeneutical question. As a sociologist, I ask a different question: “Why do Christian groups change their gender theologies?” This question is critical because the fact that Christians do change their gender interpretations over time strongly suggests they are responding to changes outside of the scriptures. Underneath these narratives lies an often overlooked element of the *social* nature of religion—how religious groups function in regard to the larger culture. At any given moment, religious groups are negotiating,

either as a reaction against or as an accommodation to, secular culture. Today we see the same phenomenon within American Christianity, where mainline and liberal denominations adopt increasingly *egalitarian* gender ideals and fundamentalist and evangelical Christian groups adopt increasingly *hierarchical* gender ideals. To explain these patterns, we turn now to sect-church theory.

Sect–church theory: Tension, strictness, and limits to strictness

According to economist Larry Iannaccone, “Few concepts in the sociology of religion have engendered as much fascination or frustration as those of church and sect.”¹⁴ As concepts that underpin the classification of religious bodies, sect and church have generated significant controversy.¹⁵

By the end of the twentieth century researchers clarified the differences between sect and church by using the concepts of *tension* and *strictness*. Stark and Finke proposed that the acceptance or rejection of the surrounding socio-cultural environment could be characterized by the amount of *tension* between religious bodies and the larger culture: “the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the ‘outside’ world.”¹⁶ Thus, sect-like bodies exist in relatively higher tension with the surrounding culture, and church-like bodies exist in lower tension with the surrounding culture.¹⁷

To account for the success of sectarian movements Iannaccone refined sect-church theory using an additional characteristic: strictness. For sectarian groups, tension creates strong in-group boundaries, because the group sustains norms and values significantly different from those of the surrounding culture.¹⁸ These distinctive group norms influence all aspects of the lives of the sect’s adherents, creating strict groups that are extensive, exclusive, and expensive.

Extensive: The higher the tension between the group and its surrounding environment, the more extensive the *commitment* to the group, allowing doctrine (the collective teachings of the group) to impinge on everything from defining whom members associate with to how they spend their leisure time.¹⁹

Exclusive: Protestant religious organizations claim exclusive *beliefs*, worshipping the same God, yet differing greatly regarding what God is like and what is required to be a good Christian. Exclusive Protestant groups recognize only one road to salvation and require a life-changing conversion experience for membership.²⁰

Expensive: Groups impose nonnegotiable demands on members’ behavior.²¹ In meeting these demands, members pay a high social cost to belong to the group.

Extensive, exclusive, and expensive groups generate higher levels of commitment, solidifying the truth of the group’s doctrine, practices, and promises. Strict groups have higher personal costs that are balanced by the higher personal satisfaction of belonging to a strong religious body—higher costs screen out those whose participation would otherwise be low, while simultaneously increasing participation among those who join.²² Members of strict religious groups contribute more money, attend more services, have stronger beliefs, and are less involved in secular activities and organizations.²³ Strictness does more to explain individual

rates of religious participation than any other individual-level characteristic, including age, sex, race, region, income, education, marital status, or even personal beliefs.²⁴ This “strict churches are strong” argument has proven to be a powerful predictor of congregational growth, as well as a powerful predictor of the role of gender within a religious group.

Organizational strictness, however, can result in diminishing returns: increased strictness adds to the attractiveness of a church only because its benefits outweigh its costs. These benefits can take the form of greater group participation, commitment, or solidarity.²⁵ The costs can include stigma, self-sacrifice, and social isolation.²⁶ Groups can “eventually reach a point beyond which the benefits of increased strictness are outweighed by the costs,” driving away virtually all current and potential members.²⁷ To maintain an optimal level of strictness, sect-like groups must maintain a certain tension with society, “adjusting to social change so as not to become too deviant, but not embracing change so fully as to lose all distinctiveness.”²⁸

Part II: Gender and sect-church theory in American Christianity

Gender and social structure

One of the most powerful mechanisms through which sect-like groups maintain tension with the larger culture is their gender theology. Gender has long been a dividing line between sect-like and church-like groups, functioning as a central element of boundary work.²⁹ For sect-like groups, higher tension is explained as an extension of the apostle Paul’s teaching to be in, but not of, the world (Rom 12:2).

Rather than being static, gender ideals are fluid because culture is fluid. As economic, political, or social structures change, gender ideals change, with religious groups rejecting or accepting new ideals. For example, the most powerful predictor of gender ideals—both secular and religious—is changing economic conditions. When the United States shifted from an agrarian to an industrial economy, American gender ideals substantially changed, ushering in the feminist movement as a protest to increasingly restrictive roles for women. The second wave of the feminist movement, the Women’s Liberation movement of the 1970s, resulted from the shift from manufacturing to service economy. During both periods religious groups responded by shifting their gender ideals to maintain a particular level of tension with the culture.

A review of American Christian history demonstrates how and when sect-like groups have reacted against the prevailing culture by shifting gender ideals to maintain higher tension with the culture, whereas church-like groups have accommodated to new gender ideals remaining in low tension with the culture. This historical perspective is crucial to understanding how gender is constructed by social forces that lead to Christian groups’ rejection or acceptance of the culture’s gender ideals in order to increase or decrease their tension with the culture. The following review clarifies the social nature of the shifts in American Christian gender ideals by looking at several historical periods

The upstart sects: Revolutionary-era gender equality, 1790–1840

Throughout American history Christian understandings and practices of gender theologies have shifted with the larger culture.

The largest, most influential denominations of the early nineteenth century, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, restricted women's religious speech and forbade them to preach.³⁰ The 1832 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, for example, declared that "to teach and exhort, or to lead in prayer, in public . . . is clearly forbidden to women in the Holy Oracles."³¹

Inspired by the populist rhetoric of the American Revolution, "upstart" religious groups rejected the established denominations' restrictions on women. Increasing their tension with the larger religious and secular cultures, these Methodists and Baptists supported women in leadership and preaching.³² The "upstart sects" believed that religious authority came from heartfelt experience.³³ Since God communicated directly to believers, it was just as likely that God would inspire women to proclaim the gospel.³⁴ Women participated in governance as well as preaching at meetings³⁵ and exercising full rights as members of the body.³⁶ Nothing, however, symbolized the upstart sects' counter-cultural identity more "than their willingness to allow large numbers of women into the pulpit."³⁷ This widening of women's authority drew strident criticism from Episcopal, Congregational, and Presbyterian ministers, many of whom argued for the continued silence of women at religious gatherings.³⁸ Maintaining strict standards of behavior (for example, no drinking, no gambling, no swearing) and emphasizing the natural equality of all believers, the Methodists and Baptists created high tension with the established religious and secular cultures—by being less restrictive on women.

Strictness, however, does not necessarily mean greater restrictions on women. Strictness is about beliefs and practices that create a higher level of tension with the surrounding culture. The established denominations in the Revolutionary era were especially restrictive for women, meaning that in order to increase tension with the culture, the upstart sects adopted more egalitarian theologies—but still had significantly strict beliefs (the right of all believers to discern God's teachings apart from an established clergy) and practices (no drinking, no gambling, no frivolity). Thus they were strict religious groups in higher tension with the patriarchal culture.

The upstart sects' egalitarian bent and focus on persuasion, rather than coercion, for conversion³⁹ resulted in the groups becoming larger and more powerful.⁴⁰ By the 1830s and 1840s, these flourishing groups had become established denominations. During this shift from sect-like to church-like, the denominations purposely turned away from their more radical roots, decreasing tension with the culture to blend in with the Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians.⁴¹ Denominations like the Methodists that had once been open to women in leadership were now restricting women—going so far as to excommunicate one preacher when she refused to stop holding meetings.⁴² The decreasing of tension of the upstart sects coincided with the significant economic shift to industrial capitalism. This economic shift would prescribe denominational gender roles for several decades.

The Cult of True Womanhood and the Cult of the Self-Made Man, 1840-1880

In the nineteenth century, America's agrarian economy gave way to the wage-based industrial economy, where not only did the

nature of work change, but gender ideals changed as well. By the mid-nineteenth century industrialization had created a "separate spheres" gender ideology. As men moved away from the family farm and home production and into wage-based urban factory work, women carried on with the traditional home production of the rural economy. The separation of families—women still engaged in home production and men working in factories—created a gender ideology that constituted women and men as opposites. This ideal awarded some human traits to men and others to women, creating what we now call the Cult of True Womanhood and the Cult of the Self-Made Man. True Women were pious, sexually pure, submissive, and domestic.⁴³ Self-Made Men were economically successful, independent, self-controlled, and responsible.⁴⁴ This gender dichotomy shifted the institution of religion into the female sphere, defining women as the naturally religious sex. Defining men as the naturally productive sex shifted work and business into the male sphere.⁴⁵

American denominations quickly adapted to these gender ideals, legitimating them through scripture and stipulating that women and men were created by God to hold these particular gendered traits and roles—even though praxis and history illustrated otherwise. The white middle-class⁴⁶ denominations that accepted the gender theology of True Women and Self-made Men were often the same denominations that had previously existed in higher tension with the culture—the old upstart sects were now church-like in their acceptance of cultural gender ideals.

Not all white Protestants acceded to the upstart sects' slide toward church-like denominations and their acceptance of restrictive gender theologies. The holiness movement served as a protest to denominations decreasing their tension with the culture. Phoebe Palmer, one of the foremost leaders of the holiness movement, wanted a stricter religion with higher tension with the culture, including the right of women to preach. When denominations like the Methodists criticized the women preaching in the holiness movement, Palmer responded with a spirited defense of their right to preach in her 1859 book, *The Promise of the Father*.

While most white denominations were adapting to the Cult of True Womanhood and the Cult of the Self-Made Man, black Christians created an alternative gender theology. Traditionally designated as "laborers," a category that cast them as less than fully human, black women and men were excluded by the dominant gender theology. Developing an alternative theology, black families rejected "separate spheres," instead defining women (like men) by their resourcefulness, independence, and intelligence. For white women to openly be and/or use their intelligence was not considered acceptable, for it was equated exclusively with masculinity.⁴⁷ For black women, not using their God-given intelligence was to dishonor God and their families. Black feminist Maggie Walker declared in a 1912 speech to the Federation of Colored Women's Clubs that, "every woman was by Divine Providence created . . . not for some man to marry, take home and support, but for the purpose of using her powers, ability, health and strength to forward the financial . . . success of the partnership into which she may go, if she will."⁴⁸ Therefore, white Protestant denominations decreased their tension with the culture, adopting

the Cults of True Womanhood and the Self-Made Man, while black Protestant denominations increased their tension with the culture, rejecting the Cults of True Womanhood and the Self-Made Man.

The cults of True Womanhood and the Self-Made Man segregated women and men into separate spheres; men inhabited the competitive economic world of business, while women inhabited a world of religion and piety. But as industrialization and the market economy grew, people worried about the moral dangers of unrestrained capitalism.⁴⁹ To minimize these dangers, while maximizing the potential rewards, Protestants married morality to productivity—literally—by coupling productive men to pious women, to create a moral capitalist order. Together, pious women and productive men formed Godly homes—“the epitome of Christian progress.”⁵⁰

Muscular Christianity, 1880-1920

By the end of the nineteenth century, the changing relationship between religion and business called for a new gender theology. Protestant men began to see religion as effeminate and moved to recodify it as masculine.⁵¹ As one proponent of Muscular Christianity stated, “The women have had charge of the church work long enough.”⁵² In the words of Muscular Christianity star, Billy Sunday, “The Lord save us from off-handed, flabby-cheeked, brittle-boned, weak-kneed, thin-skinned, pliable, plastic, spineless, effeminate, ossified, three-carat Christianity.”⁵³ The Muscular Christianity movement was an effort to counteract the attachment of women to religion,⁵⁴ bringing congruence to Protestantism and twentieth-century business and politics.⁵⁵

Muscular Christians successfully realigned the relation between religion and commerce by reshaping constructions of gender,⁵⁶ reducing tension between the established Protestant denominations and the economic culture. Women, who had been considered the purveyors of religious faith for home, church, and society during industrialization, lost their influence in Protestant denominational life. In fact, by the end of the 1920s, the vibrant women’s missionary associations, which had been organized and run entirely by women, had all been taken over by male denominational leaders.⁵⁷ By decreasing tension with the larger culture the established Protestant denominations significantly restricted religious women.

Fundamentalism and modernism, 1920-1942

Muscular Christianity peaked in the 1920s, precisely when American Protestantism fractured into fundamentalist (sect) and modernist (church) factions.⁵⁸ Fundamentalist Protestantism “was born in an era of anxiety over gender roles.”⁵⁹ The Great Depression made women’s economic contributions to the family crucial for all but the wealthy. As women moved more and more into paid labor, mainline denominations decreased tension with society. These denominations relaxed restrictions on women, mirroring the culture’s new economic realities and gender ideals. Fundamentalists increased tension with society in a “decisive reaction” against the conventional Victorian piety that had elevated women as the “keepers of morality.”⁶⁰ Reversing Victorian ideals, fundamentalism asserted that men had a natural aptitude for religion and were divinely equipped to defend Christian orthodoxy.

Women, on the other hand, were defined as the psychologically vulnerable sex.⁶¹

Because fundamentalism claimed a monopoly on Protestant orthodoxy, by adhering to five fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith,⁶² their emerging tradition conflates gender theology with orthodoxy. In the wake of fundamentalism’s success at defining orthodoxy through a strict gender theology, and increasing tension with society, the Protestant modernists (mainline) lowered tension by adopting increasingly egalitarian gender theologies—to blend in more with the culture, but also to separate themselves from the fundamentalists.

Mainline denominations defended gender equality primarily through a Wesleyan perfectionist doctrine that required a “nonliteral, thematic reading of the Pauline prescriptions used to silence women.”⁶³ This egalitarian argument relied on the idea that biblical restrictions on women’s leadership in the church were temporary, swept away by the atoning death and resurrection of Christ.⁶⁴ Fundamentalists rejected cultural and historical readings of the NT, especially regarding women and women’s roles.⁶⁵ Fundamentalists increased their tension with the secular and religious establishments by rejecting arguments for gender equality in both home and denominations.

In the 1930s and ’40s a group of men within fundamentalism sought to bridge the chasm between fundamentalist and “moderate” Protestantism with “neo-evangelicalism.”⁶⁶ What we refer to today as “evangelical” comes from this fundamentalist fracture. The evangelical movement was an attempt to bring fundamentalism out of intellectual isolation in order to broaden its appeal.⁶⁷ These evangelicals (e.g., Billy Graham, Charles Fuller, Harold Ockenga) wanted to combine the scriptural orthodoxy of fundamentalism with the social engagement of liberalism, creating a Protestant movement of engaged orthodoxy.⁶⁸ Conflating gender theology with orthodoxy, the evangelicals adopted gender hierarchy as the naturally ordered creation of masculine authority and strength, and subsequently feminine weakness. As America came out of World War II, fundamentalist and evangelical gender theologies would set the stage for the gender controversies that would consume Protestants from the end of the twentieth through the beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

The long decade of the breadwinner/homemaker, 1946-1965

Having adopted the gender hierarchy of fundamentalist Protestantism, the fledgling evangelical movement of the 1950s lowered tension with society by reinforcing the ideal of a husband as provider, leader, and decision-maker and wives as helpmates and mothers—ideals perfectly suited to the post-War family life of the breadwinner/homemaker cultural ideal.⁶⁹ Fundamentalists and evangelicals saw the breadwinner/homemaker roles as self-evident God-ordained roles for women and men. Their ability to practice these roles was a result of the post-War economic boom that enabled an unprecedented number of white, middle-class families to live on the wages of one earner.⁷⁰ Fundamentalist and evangelical Protestants decreased their tension with society, aligning with the breadwinner/homemaker gender ideal—as did mainline Protestants.

While the breadwinner/homemaker gender ideal remains the most iconic standard of American Christian gender ideals, it

began to fray by the late-1960s. With higher levels of education for women, compressed child bearing and rearing, and an expanding service market, middle-class white women re-entered the labor force in striking numbers.⁷¹ As wages began to fall for men, working wives became critical for families trying to maintain a middle-class lifestyle. Responding to these changing social and economic conditions and with a push toward equality for women dominating discourses of the larger culture, mainline denominations adjusted their practices, decreased tension with the culture, and adopted more egalitarian gender theologies. Fundamentalists and evangelicals reacted harshly to changes in women's roles, blaming working women for rising divorce rates, out-of-wedlock births, declining marriage rates, and the destruction of the American family.⁷² They increased tension with society in order to maintain a strict breadwinner/homemaker gender theology.

Fundamentalists and evangelicals rejected equality and feminism outright, making the case that "gender hierarchy and difference were not only the clear message of the Bible but unavoidably reflected in the physiological and psychological differences between women and men."⁷³ Unable to dismiss the spread of feminism in the culture and the mainline churches, conservatives worked to discredit it. One tactic was to claim that egalitarianism undermined the authority of the Bible by treating texts related to gender as culturally relative truths. Moreover, according to conservative Christians, when egalitarians treated texts on gender as culturally relative, they were distorting God's ordained hierarchy, erasing the clear differences between women and men in both function and authority.⁷⁴ The result would be utter social chaos.⁷⁵

Headship/submission vs. egalitarianism/Christian feminism, 1970-1990

By the end of the 1970s the word "feminism" had become conservative Christianity's true "F-word." Conservative Christians embraced a "gender essentialist" ideology, where God's primary design for men is as economic providers and for women as homemakers and nurturers. In the mid-1990s, researchers focusing on conservative Christianity and gender found that, although gender essentialists still espoused a gender hierarchy, the rhetoric and practice had shifted. Noting that much of their audience were dual-working families, conservative Christians decreased tension with society, somewhat, by redefining hierarchy as a headship/submission hierarchy rather than breadwinner/homemaker. Even this was mostly symbolic.⁷⁶ The "headship/submission" gender ideology preserved hierarchical gender roles, while allowing dual-earner families to align with a religiously legitimated gender ideology. The mostly symbolic nature of the headship/submission gender ideal decreased tension and muted hierarchy while maintaining conservative Christianity's orthodox core.⁷⁷ Mainline churches responded to the cultural movement toward women's equality, decreasing tension with the culture.

Yet, by the end of the twentieth century, social scientists and historians specializing in gender and religion found that conservative Christian hierarchy had yielded to pragmatism.⁷⁸ Most conservative Christians affirmed two ideals, the ideal of husbands' headship—including men being the spiritual leaders of

the household and having the final authority in decision-making—and the ideal of partnership in marriage.⁷⁹ The latter ideal gave way to a wider acceptable range of gendered experience, particularly for men.⁸⁰ Hierarchy is still used by conservative Christians as a baseline understanding of gender relations, resulting in a higher level of tension with society. Hierarchy is softened, however, by "complementarianism," which argues that women and men are *equal in essence*, but different in role.⁸¹

In spite of the fact that most conservative Christians are pragmatically egalitarian, they retain the ideals of headship and submission. Because they are pragmatic egalitarians, husbands' headship takes on even greater significance as a mark of conservative Christian identity. Abandoning the ideal of husbands' headship would remove a primary way in which evangelicals distinguish themselves from secular culture: "What is the benefit, after all, of arguing that God calls men and women to share responsibility and authority within the household when the broader culture espouses the same ideal?"⁸²

Promise Keepers, 1990s

The Promise Keepers movement of the 1990s came as a response to the softening of conservative Christian gender ideals through symbolic headship and pragmatic egalitarianism. The movement initially sought to increase tension with society by exhorting men to "take back" leadership within their homes and congregations. With the economic necessity of dual-earner families, the movement also tried to decrease tension by broadening men's gender roles, making them practical in light of the changing social and economic realities of home life.⁸³ For example, drawing from practical egalitarianism, some in the movement advocated men take leadership by helping their wives with household labor.

Promise Keepers initially appealed to both conservative and mainline men, growing rapidly. But the movement was ambivalent in regard to gender. Started by conservative Protestants who tried to increase tension with the culture using a message of male headship, the movement eventually decreased tension with a message of practical egalitarianism. John Bartkowski writes that, "Although many Promise Keepers would probably not see themselves as heirs to the egalitarian legacy of evangelical feminism . . . much Promise Keepers rhetoric has clearly been informed by biblical feminist critiques waged against 'unchristian' forms of domination and exclusion."⁸⁴ This ambivalence between gender hierarchy and egalitarianism partially explains the movement's quick demise; Promise Keepers did not create enough tension with the culture to satisfy sect-like groups, but created too much tension for church-like groups. The rapid rise and fall of Promise Keepers illustrates that by the end of the twentieth century the rhetoric of strict gender roles had given way to a less aggressive and more ambivalent division of gender.⁸⁵ Conservatives and mainliners had both decreased tension to survive in the economic climate, yet by keeping the symbolism of headship conservatives were able to remain in higher tension to the larger culture.

Neo-Muscular Christianity, 2000-present

As headship/submission became mostly symbolic and practical egalitarianism reigned within conservative Christian homes,

this caused a crisis for sect-like groups who contested the church-like accommodation of symbolic headship and practical egalitarianism. In response to the softening of strict gender ideals and praxis and the ambivalence about gender within Protestant culture, a competing sectarian gender ideology seeking to raise tension with the culture emerged—neo-Muscular Christianity.

Neo-Muscular Christianity focuses on adopting more masculine styles and developing programs that teach men to be manly, casting Jesus as a “religious Rambo” and portraying the Christian life as a “heroic quest” of spiritual manhood.⁸⁶ Books like John Eldredge’s *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul* state that men are hardwired by God to be wild and dangerous creatures—that all men need to live out three essential desires: to fight a battle, to live an adventurous life, and to rescue a beauty.⁸⁷ Men are adjured to reappropriate traits like action, leadership, courage, and economic prowess as exclusively male by biological and divine design in order to reclaim Christianity from women, who have feminized the church.⁸⁸ In this milieu, Christian theology and doctrine are interpreted to validate the norms of hegemonic masculinity, while being billed as “counter-cultural,” creating a strict gender theology in significant tension to the secular norm of gender equality.

Part III: Strictness and gender at Mars Hill Church

The rise and fall of Mars Hill Church emphasizes the social nature of sect-like movements and the importance of gender theologies as a boundary marker. Nondenominational megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll received international attention for his rhetoric of Christian masculinity. Driscoll’s strident masculine focus helped Seattle’s Mars Hill Church become one of the fastest growing congregations in the country. Similar to other sect-like movements, Driscoll’s gender theology was a reaction to the softening of sect-like gender ideals, increasing the tension between his congregation, local Seattle culture, and other Christian groups.

Driscoll’s theology reverted to a strict gender essentialist ideology. In an online forum from December 2000, Driscoll outlines his perspective on gender. Posting as William Wallace II (a nod to Mel Gibson’s character in the movie *Braveheart*, apparently an exemplar of a true Christian man), Driscoll writes:

We live in a completely pussified nation. We could get every real man as opposed to pussified James Dobson knock-off crying Promise Keeping homoerotic worship loving mama’s boy sensitive emasculated neutered exact male replica evagellyfish, and have a conference in a phone booth. It all began with Adam, the first of the pussified nation, who kept his mouth shut and watched everything fall headlong down the slippery slide of hell/feminism when he shut his mouth and listened to his wife who thought Satan was a good theologian when he should have lead [sic] her and exercised his delegated authority as king of the planet. . . . And so the culture and families and churches sprint to hell because the men aren’t doing their job and the feminists continue their rant that it’s all our fault and we should just let them be pastors and heads of homes and run the show. And the more we do, the more hell looks like a good place because at least a man is in charge, has a bit of order and let’s [sic] men spit and scratch as needed.

Driscoll’s gender theology created significantly more tension toward the culture than the “soft patriarchy” of symbolic headship and practical egalitarianism. But Driscoll is no rogue itinerant teacher—he is one of many (though he stands alone in his flamboyant language and caricatures of women and men).

Driscoll teaches strict gender essentialism and complementarianism: “God made men and women equally important, but gave them distinct roles in the church and home.”⁸⁹ These roles are hierarchical with the man as the head and the woman as his helper, as Driscoll describes:

[The Bible] lays out authority and respect for authority and submission to authority. God the Father, and then who? Jesus Christ, and then who? The husband or the man, and then what? The woman or the wife. That’s the order of authority. . . . A lot of you women will say, “I don’t need to submit to any authority.” Well, you’re not any better than Jesus, and if it was good for him it’s good for you (CGW25).⁹⁰

While Driscoll draws clear lines between women and men, his focus is on *men*: “Mars Hill is about men. . . . We see Mars Hill as a man factory; boys come in, men go out. Period. That’s what we’re about” (CGW33). Driscoll upholds Jesus as the ideal man: “Before I was a Christian, I was very disinterested in Jesus because I thought, ‘Why give your life to a man you can beat up?’ That’s what I thought. Because the pictures I’d all seen of Jesus—he had feathered hair, was wearing a dress, listening to a lot of Elton John” (VJ5). Luckily for his followers, Driscoll found a Jesus he could worship:

Now, this guy right here, I can’t take Him, right? He’s got a robe dipped in blood. Any guy who has blood as an accessory is tough, right? And it ain’t His blood, that’s another point. . . . On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written, “King of Kings, Lord of Lords,” tattooed down the leg of Jesus, right? This is tattooed-up, white-horse-riding, blazing-eyes, all-seeing, sword-coming-to-slaughter-the-nations, robe-dipped-in-blood Jesus. Love that guy. (VJ5)

Like other neo-Muscular Christian proponents, Driscoll blurs the line between sex and gender, proclaiming that gender is fixed, unchanging across time and place. “Men should be masculine, women should be feminine . . . chicks should be chicks, dudes should be dudes. That’s the way it is [because] gender roles are not subject to change and preference” (CGW25). Yet he is also telling his audience that men have forgotten how to be men and must learn how to be masculine—like Jesus.⁹¹ Driscoll uses the apostle Paul as an example of how to learn true Christian manhood from Jesus:

Paul was out making trouble, [Jesus] comes down from heaven and smacks Paul around, kind of like an Ultimate Fighter. I love that about Jesus, because you never know when he might show up and just knock you around a little bit. . . . Jesus comes down from heaven knocks [Paul] on the ground and blinds him for three days. . . . Yeah, if Jesus came down and like punched you in the mouth and then made you blind for three days and said you’re gonna be a Christian now, and you’re gonna be a missionary—after

three days you'd be like, "Yeah, that's what I'm doin' now that I'm blind, and I would like not to be blind." (CGW₂)

Once Driscoll established Jesus's largely misunderstood masculine nature and Paul's new masculinity, he casts a hypermasculine lens over the interpretations of other biblical characters:

You got around Paul when he was a young guy, you got around John the Baptist, or Elijah, I mean these dudes seem pretty rough to me. You know, they don't look like church guys... walking around in sweater vests singing love songs to Jesus. I mean guys like David are well known for their ability to slaughter other men. I've got to think these guys were dudes: heterosexual, win a fight, punch you in the nose, dudes.⁹²

Another important component of neo-Muscular Christianity is a man's ability to be the sole economic provider for his family. True men must emulate Jesus the carpenter, "a normal working guy with a lunch box and a tool belt." (VJ₁) Driscoll tells his audience: "Paul says if a man does not provide for the needs of his family, he's denied the faith; he's worse than an unbeliever" (CGW₁).⁹³ While Driscoll's rhetoric harkens back to the iconic breadwinner/homemaker ideal, he takes it a step further, telling men who do not fully provide for their families that they are neither real men nor real Christians.⁹⁴

Boundary keeping: Beware of wolves in sheep's clothing

For pastors like Driscoll, neo-Muscular Christianity creates strict boundaries between a congregation and the culture at large, helping congregations to thrive because sect-movements thrive on distinction, tension, conflict, and threat.⁹⁵ While Driscoll successfully created high tension between his congregation and the larger culture, he did more than that. Driscoll created a religious group with all of the hallmarks of strictness; Mars Hill Church was extensive, exclusive, and expensive.

Recall that strict religious bodies proclaim an exclusive, comprehensive, and eternal doctrine, demanding adherence to a distinctive faith, morality, and lifestyle.⁹⁶ Sect-like groups distinguish two classes of people. The group's members comprise the true believers. The non-members—the heathen or heretics—reject the sect and their doctrines, and in turn are rejected by the sect.⁹⁷ Being a true believer is exclusive, creating not only tension between the sectarian group and the larger culture, but tension between the group and other sect-like and church-like groups.

Mars Hill Church created clear boundaries around who was a true believer, cementing the collective identity of the Mars Hill family.

There's a lot of people who say they're a Christian and they're not.... Well, we're not all Christians. Some of us are lying or deceived. Just like when you look at Jesus and his twelve disciples, there was Judas on the team who looked like he was on the team but was ripping off Jesus and didn't love him. There's always a few Judases in the bunch.... In this church, there are people who love God and are living new lives; there are people who aren't living new lives, which indicates that they don't love God. (CGW₁₂)

Mars Hill Church created a strikingly expensive group. Mars Hill not only put boundaries between the congregation and outsiders,

but also generated boundaries within the congregation. Driscoll describes the threat from within:

So the question becomes if [Mars Hill is] . . . constantly under attack from within by people that are deceived and claim to be Christians. . . . How in the world does a church like Mars Hill defend, protect itself from this kind of deception coming in, leading to the destruction of the church, getting completely off track, and thus becoming yet another church that had a great start and a tragic end? (CGW₅)

Mars Hill members understood that the biggest threat to the congregation came from within—the wolves in sheep's clothing. One woman articulated to me in an interview how she interpreted this dynamic at Mars Hill:

The core mission of Mars Hill Church is to give you direct ways to get to Jesus—and it may cost you friends, loved ones, family members, [and] lovers, because loving Jesus is the core mission. But that breeds a distrust between the people in the pews and that distrust has to occur for someone to be on board with Mars Hill Church. When Mark Driscoll talks, there's a divide between those who are Christian and those who aren't. You are never sure who's next to you in the pew—if it's a believer or not. . . . you're always on guard.

Costs were high for those who could not or did not conform to group doctrine. The ever-present threat of being defined as a wolf kept members adhering to complementarian gender theology. A strict gender theology, however, is not always a successful strategy for groups. Shifts in the economy and other social conditions impact the ability of members to maintain the theology.

Mars Hill Church's gender theology was successful in setting the congregation apart from the larger culture. In 2013 the group claimed more than 12,000 members across fourteen campuses in four states.⁹⁸ But things were changing for Mars Hill. While sect-church theory can explain the growth of religious groups through strictness, the theory can also explain the decline of groups that are too strict. How strict is too strict? How extensive, exclusive and expensive can groups be and still survive?

Gender in hindsight

Mars Hill Church thrived under Driscoll's leadership, taking strictness to new levels. For nearly twenty years Mars Hill sustained an optimal level of strictness, resulting in explosive growth. There are, however, limits to strictness: "As a group becomes progressively more strict, it eventually reaches a point beyond which the additional benefits of increased strictness are outweighed by additional costs."⁹⁹ At some point too much strictness will drive away virtually all current and potential members, causing just as much harm as too little.¹⁰⁰ There is a balance; adjusting enough to social change in order to maintain tension with society, but not adjusting too much, driving the tension beyond an acceptable level.

In the wake of the economic recession, Mars Hill Church exceeded the acceptable level of strictness. As Mars Hill fell apart over the summer of 2014, many stories emerged, linking the congregation's strict gender theology to the disillusionment of

members who found they could no longer practice the doctrines. The result of this shift often resulted in these members being shunned by the larger congregation. These former members describe their initial acceptance of the strict gender theology at Mars Hill:¹⁰¹

Kyle: “Mark set a high bar for men: a mix of ‘hardline’ complementarianism. . . . I and many others in Mars Hill Church mirrored much of what Mark taught. We’d get together to watch UFC fights. . . . We’d take our brothers to task when we saw them not looking like the cultural version of ‘men’ Mark pressed us to look like.”

Chandin: “At Mars Hill I felt like women were occasionally brushed aside in favor of men. I even felt that Mark gave permission to objectify women as long as the woman was their wife. But I never felt like it was misogynistic. That seemed too strong, too extreme.”

Economic shifts in the culture significantly altered the costs of complementarianism. Even for those who followed the prescribed complementarian path, at some point circumstances changed and the costs of maintaining strict gender ideals became too high:

Sara: “Over time, we were influenced by the pressure we heard from the pulpit on how we need to have children because they are a blessing (not saying they aren’t) and it is biblical to not use birth control. . . . The more we went to church the more we thought about having children and so we changed our plans and got pregnant. . . .”

But during the recession, when Sara’s husband lost his job she was told by congregation leaders that her husband “wasn’t doing enough and wasn’t fit to be a father or husband since he had no job. As if all his other Godly qualities are worthless because of the economy! Unfortunately, I agreed with the church and started to resent my husband for not having a job.” Like Sara, others from Mars Hill noted that watching their spouses struggle with gender ideals made them question the ideals.

Autumn: “I want to share how harmful Mark’s preaching was to my husband. . . . my husband is the most humble man I know and I am still sad about what he went through for years as a result of being told almost every Sunday; how he’s not man enough, how he needs to live up to unrealistic expectations, and how to live by the gospel of hard work and shame instead of the gospel of grace and love.”

Mike: “Misogyny. There, I said it. I stood idly by and willingly participated in a culture of misogyny. . . . During this time I made some huge mistakes. I pressured my brilliant and hard-working wife to give up her dream of law school and have a baby and be a stay-at-home mom as soon as possible.”

As they began to see gender ideals differently, some of the women and men expressed concerns about the impact of the group’s strict complementarian ideals and their complicity in the system.

Amanda: “People were afraid to question the severe complementarian theology Pastor Mark encouraged. . . .”

the chauvinistic culture was negatively impacting the marriages of people I knew and loved. I knew women who were afraid to deny sex to their husbands, women who were afraid to pursue passions outside the home, and women who were afraid to speak about the neglect they experienced from husbands who were absorbed in ministry. These women thought that any unhappiness they felt was because they weren’t praying hard enough, didn’t know how to submit to their husbands well enough, didn’t have hearts that were right enough.”

Whereas women were concerned about how other women were impacted by gender ideals, men were more likely to express how they had participated in the shaming of other men for not being “man enough.”

Kyle: “Over the past few months I’ve sought forgiveness from several men I sat across from and shamed: I yelled at them and intimidated them for failing to ‘stand up as men’. . . . The hardest thing for me as I process my time at Mars Hill Church has been my response to Mark’s shaming of men—shaming of me—from the pulpit.”

For others, the consequences of following strict complementarian theology were more severe.

Christine: “I took what I was being fed and foolishly believed it because it was disguised so well with scripture. I believed what was preached numerous times over the years about how a woman should look, so much to the extent that I thought I was being a good wife by starving myself so that I’d be pleasing for my husband to look at almost to the point of my death. . . .”

Mars Hill’s gender theology did not change, but economic conditions did. Mars Hill’s strategy to set themselves apart from the culture and from other religious groups made it impossible for them to accommodate to changing social conditions. Adhering to a strict complementarian theology became too expensive for many members.

Conclusion

American Christians have regularly shifted their gender ideologies in response to cultural changes. Sect-church theory explains *how* and *why* Christian gender theologies develop: groups change their gender theologies in order to maintain a particular level of tension with the society. The current secular cultural ideal of gender is egalitarianism. Therefore sect-like groups adopt headship/submission gender theologies to be in greater tension with the culture, while church-like groups adopt egalitarian theologies to be in lower tension to the culture. For sectarian groups like Mars Hill Church, increasing tension by adopting strict essentialist or complementarian theologies may initially produce high levels of commitment. In the midst of changing cultural conditions, however, strict gender theologies may impose demands that become too costly for members.

American Christians often have trouble seeing the impact of social and cultural forces on religious institutions and belief structures, leaving them vulnerable to adapting to a status quo that shapes, and may even subvert, Christian ideals. The apostle

Paul says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2 NRSV). Sect-church theory states that religious groups shift their gender theologies as a reaction or accommodation to the culture. Constantly shifting our gender theologies by reacting or accommodating to the world makes us lose sight of being transformed by the renewing of our minds to test and approve God’s will.

Notes

1. Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics & Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).
2. Juster, *Disorderly Women*.
3. Julie Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women: War Stories in the Gender Battles* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 47. Their new faith statement was revised to say, “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.” Southern Baptist Convention, “The Baptist Faith and Message” (2000), <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.
4. Benton Johnson, “On Church and Sect,” *American Sociological Review* 28 (1963): 542.
5. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Johnson, “On Church and Sect”; H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Holt, 1929); Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival, and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
6. Before reviewing gender shifts in American Christianity, it is important to delineate gender from sex. “Sex” refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish females and males, emphasizing anatomy, physiology, hormones, and reproductive systems (“male” and “female” are the appropriate words when referring to sex differences). Sex differences, because they are rooted in biology, are universal across time and place. “Gender” refers to the social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to females and males (“women” and “men” are the appropriate terms when discussing gender). Gender differences vary significantly across time and place because they are socially constructed. Distinguishing these concepts allows us to measure the differences between biological characteristics of males and females and the cultural characteristics of women and men. See Jennifer McKinney and Kevin Neuhauser, “Divided by Gender: How Sociology Can Help,” *Cultural Encounters* 9, no. 1 (2013): 38-55.
7. Sally K. Gallagher, “The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism,” *Sociology of Religion* 65, no. 3 (2004): 218.
8. Gallagher, “The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism.”
9. Catherine A. Brekus, “Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America” (2009), <http://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/98759.pdf>.
10. Gallagher, “The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism.”
11. Brekus, “Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America.”
12. Brekus, “Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America.”
13. Notice that proponents of both Christian gender narratives draw from the same sources. The first narrative draws on specific statements made by church fathers for gender prescriptions. The second narrative draws from statements from the same church fathers that contradict prescriptions for gender. Gallagher, “The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism.”
14. Laurence R. Iannaccone, “A Formal Model of Church and Sect,” *American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988): 268.

15. Iannaccone, “A Formal Model of Church and Sect”; Laurence R. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong,” *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 5 (1994): 1180-211; Benton Johnson, “A Critical Appraisal of the Sect-church Theory Typology,” *American Sociological Review* 22 (1957): 88-92; Johnson, “On Church and Sect”; Benton Johnson, “Church and Sect Revisited,” *JSSR* 10 (1971): 124-37; Dean D. Knudsen, John R. Earle, and Donald W. Shriver Jr., “The Conception of Sectarian Religion: An Effort at Clarification,” *RRelRes* 20 (1978): 44-60.
16. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*, 143.
17. Sect and church as organizational designations operate as “ideal types.” Ideal types function as abstract descriptions of characteristics of a phenomenon. Rarely will a phenomenon perfectly correspond to an ideal type. For example, no religious body can completely reject or completely assimilate to the social environment. See Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*; Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 20-21.
18. Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*; Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*.
19. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*.
20. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*.
21. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*.
22. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong.”
23. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong”; Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*.
24. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong.”
25. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong.”
26. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong.”
27. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong,” 1202.
28. Iannaccone, “Why Strict Churches Are Strong,” 1203.



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29. Sally K. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity and Gendered Family Life* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism"; Ingersoll, *Evangelical Christian Women*.
30. Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America."
31. Cited in Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America," 21.
32. Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America."
33. "Upstart sects" describes the sectarian groups that formed in the early republic. They are "upstarts" because they turned the established rules of religion upside down. See Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America."
34. Baptists, for example, were considered "back-country" egalitarians whose meetings recognized no racial, class, or gender distinctions, where "Rich and poor, men and women, black and white all communed together in the presence of the Lord." See Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 19; Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America."
35. Members of the sects drew from Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17, "Your sons and daughters will prophesy," to support women's equality in the pulpit.
36. Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America"; Juster, *Disorderly Women*.
37. Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America," 22.
38. Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America"; Juster, *Disorderly Women*.
39. The disestablishment of religion in the US Constitution gave everyone equal footing in pursuing adherents. Whereas established state churches coerced members by law and taxes to support their organizations, the lack of regulation made persuasion the best tactic for converting new members to a religious organization.
40. Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America"; Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*.
41. Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*.
42. Brekus, "Female Preaching in Early Nineteenth-Century America."
43. Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); *idem*, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Bart Landry, *Black Working Wives: Pioneers of the American Family Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
44. Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
45. Gail Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism," *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1989); Margaret Lambert Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*; Landry, *Black Working Wives*.
46. While the Cult of True Womanhood and the Cult of Self-Made Man pervaded American culture, only the economic elite could afford to forgo the economic contributions of women to the household. White working class and immigrant women who could not afford this gender ideal masked their economic status by working inside the home for wages by taking in laundry, doing clothes repair, and supplying boarders with their cooking and cleaning needs.
47. Landry, *Black Working Wives*.
48. Landry, *Black Working Wives*, 73.
49. Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.'"
50. Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.'" 436.
51. These movements were organized around the practices of white, native-born Protestants, not immigrants, blacks, or Catholics, the latter finding movements like the Men and Religion Forward Movement unappealing. See Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.'"
52. Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough,'" 432.
53. Cited in Margaret Lambert Bendroth, "Why Women Loved Billy Sunday: Urban Revivalism and Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth-Century American Culture," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 14, no. 2 (2004): 251-71.
54. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Michael A. Messner, *Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997).
55. Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.'"
56. Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.'"
57. R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Women's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 1985.
58. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*.
59. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 6.
60. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 3.
61. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*.
62. The five "fundamentals" of fundamentalist doctrine include: the virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Christ, the supernatural reality of miracles, and the inerrancy of scripture. See Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*.
63. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*, 6.
64. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*; Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism."
65. As dispensational premillennialists, fundamentalists believed that women were under the curse in Genesis, which placed them in a subordinate position to men until Christ's Second Coming could lift their curse and the penalty of sin produced by the fall. See Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*; Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism."
66. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*; Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
67. Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender*.
68. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*.
69. Margaret Lambert Bendroth, *Growing Up Protestant* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*.
70. Largely excluded from the breadwinner/homemaker were the working class, poor, and communities of color, who continued to have dual-earner households. See Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*; Coontz, *The Way We Really Are*; Landry, *Black Working Wives*; W. Bradford Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men: How Christianity Shapes Fathers and Husbands* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
71. Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*; Landry, *Black Working Wives*.
72. Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*; Coontz, *The Way We Never Were*; Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
73. Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism," 225.
74. Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism."
75. William Lockhart, "'We Are One Life,' But Not of One Gender Ideology: Unity, Ambiguity, and the Promise Keepers," *Sociology of Religion* 61 (2000): 73-92.
76. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; Sally K. Gallagher and Sabrina L. Wood, "Godly Manhood Going Wild?: Transformations in Conservative Protestant Masculinity," *Sociology of Religion* 66 (2005): 135-60; Griffith, *God's Daughters*; Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*.

77. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; Griffith, *God's Daughters*; Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*.

78. John P. Bartkowski, *The Promise Keepers: Servants, Soldiers, and Godly Men* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism"; Griffith, *God's Daughters*; Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*.

79. Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*.

80. Bartkowski, *The Promise Keepers*; Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism."

81. Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism," emphasis added.

82. Unless, of course, conservative Christians demonstrated more egalitarianism than the culture in the sharing of paid and unpaid family labor. See Gallagher, "The Marginalization of Evangelical Feminism," 231.

83. Lockhart, "We Are One Life."

84. Bartkowski, *The Promise Keepers*, 41.

85. Bartkowski, *The Promise Keepers*; Gallagher, *Evangelical Identity*; Griffith, *God's Daughters*; Lockhart, "We Are One Life"; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Wilcox, *Soft Patriarchs, New Men*.

86. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*.

87. Conversely, in their follow-up book, *Captivating: Unveiling the Mystery of a Woman's Soul*, John and Stasi Eldredge write that women are designed by God to watch a man's battle, facilitate his adventure, and be rescued by a man.

88. Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Messner, *Politics of Masculinities*.

89. Mars Hill Church, "Annual Report" (2013), <http://marshill.se/marshill/annual-report-2013>.

90. Sermon quotations come from two sermon series, "Christians Gone Wild" (CGW) and "Vintage Jesus" (VJ). The number attached to the sermon is the number for that sermon within the series (which is how Mars Hill Church denoted them on their website).

91. For a review of the practices and processes through which men learn and perform manhood acts as part of the socially constructed category of "man," see Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe, "Man, Masculinity and Manhood Acts," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 277-95.

92. "Church Needs Dudes" (2006), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lex6orNNzTs>.

93. Here Driscoll refers to 1 Tim 5:8.

94. Women who want to work once they are married with children are told they are denying God's call; they are deceived idolaters who are in sin. For a compelling example of this, see Elizabeth Pak's post, "A Desperate Housewife Comes Clean" on the Reforming the Feminine blog, <http://reefem.wordpress.com/category/professional>.

95. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*.

96. Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong."

97. Iannaccone, "A Formal Model of Church and Sect."

98. Mars Hill Church, "Annual Report" (2013), <http://marshillbus.com/marshill/annual-report-2013>.

99. Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong" 1201, emphasis added.

100. Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong."

101. These data come from the website WeLoveMarsHill.com, a forum for former members to share their stories.



JENNIFER MCKINNEY is professor of sociology and director of women's studies at Seattle Pacific University. She holds MS and PhD degrees from Purdue University. This article was first delivered as Seattle Pacific's 2015 Winifred E. Weter Faculty Award Lecture for Meritorious Scholarship. The annual lecture series honors Winifred E. Weter, Seattle Pacific professor emerita of classics. Dr. McKinney's lecture has been adapted for *Priscilla Papers*.

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Book Review

The Cross and Gendercide: A Theological Response to Global Violence Against Women and Girls

By Elizabeth Gerhardt (IVP Academic, 2014)

REVIEWED BY SHAUN C. BROWN

The media has in recent years given increasing attention to global violence toward women and girls. In 2012, the Academy Award for Best Documentary (Short Subject) went to *Saving Face*, which focuses upon survivors of acid attacks in Pakistan. In October 2014, Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani teenager, became the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate for her activism on behalf of young people (especially girls) denied access to education. Another past Nobel Peace Prize laureate, former US President Jimmy Carter, has also committed himself to activism on behalf of subjugated women. In light of these occurrences, Gerhardt's *The Cross and Gendercide* is a timely work.

Gerhardt confronts domestic violence, rape, gender-selective abortions, female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, early marriage, disfigurement, and other acts of violence toward women and girls around the globe. Gerhardt utilizes the term "gendercide," coined by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn in *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunities for Women Worldwide* (Knopf, 2009), as an umbrella term that can refer to all of these acts of violence. She also notes that many women and girls live in poverty and lack access to education, nutrition, clean water, and basic health care.

She warns the church against "detached confessionism"—the preaching of the gospel divorced from the "reality of the plight of millions of women and girls" (19). Alongside the need for prayer and reflection, she argues, "What is needed is a powerful, holistic and missional response rooted in a biblical theology of the cross because a theology of the cross does not separate proclamation of the gospel from the prophetic and active role of working to end injustice for millions of women and girls" (25). She sees the gospel as "the right point of departure" for the church's response to gendercide (32). In addition to theological resources, she utilizes the writing of journalists, social scientists, and statisticians, as well as her own extensive experience with victims of gendercide as a clinical counselor, battered women's program director, and educator.

Gerhardt notes, "Historically, most societies have tolerated physical abuse of women when it occurs in a family setting," seeing this violence as a "private matter" (60). Many have blamed the victims of abuse rather than supporting and protecting women from male aggressors. Unfortunately, the Christian tradition has also often tolerated domestic violence. Gerhardt connects this tolerance with theological views that blame women for the fall or see women as an impediment to male sexual purity. Fortunately, support for abused women has increased through the building of women's shelters and the criminalization of domestic abuse. Unfortunately, Gerhardt notes, "Christian churches in the United

States were marginally represented in these late-twentieth-century efforts to end violence against women" (65).

Gerhardt notes that while human rights language concerning violence toward women and girls is relatively new in the United States, statements on human rights by the United Nations or other organizations in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa have used rights language for decades. She argues that human rights language "ensures its high visibility" (69). She also discusses the relationship of human rights to the Bible and theology, noting the use of human rights language used by Lutheran and Reformed theologians, as well as in encyclicals by popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II. Gerhardt rejects the discussion of human rights in the abstract and says, "The gospel is the foundation for human rights" (77).

Gerhardt primarily develops her theology of the cross in dialogue with Martin Luther. She argues, "A theology of the cross is rooted in the self-giving act of Jesus on the cross" (84). While a theology of the cross does not negate human experience, Gerhardt notes, it "shifts the center of ethics from human experience to the *theologia crucis*" and "provides a broader paradigm for addressing" issues of injustice like gendercide (84). Since Christians are called to take up their crosses and die to themselves, then "Christ is the starting place for the mission of the church" (86). The cross of Christ conquers evil and gives the church freedom "for the other as God has acted for us" (86). As Luther emphasized, the Christian is justified by faith "that empowers works" (102).

Gerhardt sees Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Confessing Church's response to Nazi Germany as "a helpful example of one church response that was rooted in a theology of the cross" (114). She sees Bonhoeffer's discipleship, confession, resistance, and proclamation that the church act on behalf of the other as a framework for the contemporary church's response to gendercide. Gerhardt closes the book by calling the church to theological reflection, confession for its past sins, activism, prophetic speech on behalf of the voiceless, and providing aid to victims through programs like counseling services, transitional housing, and microfinancing. Churches should also provide leadership opportunities for women.

Gerhardt's work has a few weaknesses. While she is correct that Christians have misused theology to tolerate abuse of women, in her historical account of Christian views of women she paints with too broad of a brush and misses resources that could have aided her theological critique of gendercide (e.g., John Chrysostom's critique of violence toward wives and female slaves). In addition, she associates the medieval church with an

emphasis upon “piety” at the expense of “social ethics,” ignoring the role of the church and monasteries in developing hospitals and other services for the poor and downtrodden. Gerhardt’s account lacks any engagement with Christian ethicists, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Oliver O’Donovan, and Stanley Hauerwas, who see “rights” language as inadequate because of its complicity in liberal social orders, and instead understand justice as right order and/or mutual obligation within particular virtue-forming communities. She also accepts the view popular in the twentieth century that God suffers in God’s nature.

Despite these weaknesses, Gerhardt’s work has much to commend, and her own experience with victims of gendercide only bolsters her scholarship. She correctly identifies abuse

and oppression of women and girls due to their gender as sin and heresy, and provides churches with resources to confront gendercide locally and globally.



SHAUN C. BROWN holds an MDiv from Emmanuel Christian Seminary and is a PhD student in Theological Studies at Wycliffe College, University of Toronto. A native of Pennsylvania, he served in youth and associate ministry in Bristol, Tennessee, for six years before beginning his doctoral program. His wife, Sherri, is a registered occupational therapist.

Book Review

Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God

By John F. Kilner (*Erdmans, 2015*)

REVIEWED BY CHRISTA L. MCKIRLAND

In his book, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God*, bioethicist John F. Kilner sketches the theological history of the image of God, critiques prominent viewpoints from this sketch, and offers a robust formulation of what it means to be in God’s image. Since the understanding of this theological doctrine has both dignified and vilified certain human beings, Kilner astutely asserts the importance of explicating this doctrine well. All human persons, regardless of sex, ethnicity, class, ability, etc., must be valued, and this book gives the theological underpinning for the imperative nature of this valuation.

Kilner begins with stark examples of how the image of God has been used as a weapon to oppress certain human beings. Such oppression was especially prevalent, for example, during the time of slavery in the United States and has been used throughout church history to subordinate women to men. He specifically notes how women have borne the brunt of a misunderstood image of God, especially when it has been associated with rationalism and the soul. Women have been caricatured as being less rational, less spiritual, and consequently, less in the image of God and even less human. Kilner argues this is the necessary consequence of basing the image of God on the manifestation of certain attributes believed to be the possession of males rather than females.

The second chapter proffers that the starting point for understanding the image of God is Jesus Christ since he *is* the image of God. Here, Kilner offers the thesis of his book: “*actual* likeness to God is not what being created in God’s image involves. Creation in God’s image is God’s expressed *intention* that people evidence the special connection they have with God through a meaningful reflection of God” (79). This approach differs

markedly from most theological approaches throughout church history. Instead of claiming that humans intrinsically possess the image of God, Kilner affixes the divine image to God’s intention that all people *become* like Christ. Furthermore, humans are created in this image as whole beings—including the physical and non-physical. This formulation ensures that everyone is equally in the image of God, regardless of attributes, and it also inhibits sin from damaging the image.

Knowing that many theologians have argued for an attributive understanding of the image of God, Kilner shifts to exegetical support for all persons being in the image of God, regardless of their attributes. A helpful distinction he articulates in ch. 3 is between image and glory. Being in the image of God cannot be degraded, but how well someone reflects God’s glory can be degraded. A potential concern might arise here for an egalitarian reader since Kilner claims that men and women reflect God’s glory differently (94). Although he is clearly making the point that men and women share the same image, his argument could be interpreted as “equal in image (essence), different in glory (function).” For this reason, a more complete elaboration of what this means would strengthen his argument.

Chs. 4 and 5 focus on the impact of sin on the image of God and also on misunderstandings about the image that have pervaded church history. Since Jesus Christ is the image of God and humans are in this irrevocable image, sin cannot mar it. This remains true for all human beings, regardless of whether they are being conformed to the image of Christ. Furthermore, maleness and femaleness do not constitute the image of God. Kilner argues, focusing on the Hebrew syntax of Gen 1:27, that the statement “male and female he created them” gives the means by which

the image continues. This language parallels the words given for animals since this is their means of reproduction as well.

However, humans are intended to move beyond Eden and be conformed to the image of Christ, which can only happen through trust in Jesus. Thus, chs. 6 and 7 explain how God's intention is enacted through special connection with God which then meaningfully reflects God. Such intention can only occur through the power of the Holy Spirit and will look like certain attributes (rulership, relationship, reason, righteousness) being cultivated in the believer's life. Ultimately, the intended destiny of all human beings is to become the actual image of God through imitation of Christ's humanity and to be perfected in glory.

Kilner concludes with an exhortation to adopt such an understanding of the image of God and to allow this theology to permeate one's life. He makes a strong appeal to men, specifically in light of this doctrine, that "overcoming gender bias requires more than acknowledging women as created in God's image" (326). Even though this book is not expressly related to advocacy for gender equality, this appeal is a clear consequence of having a non-attributive view of being in the image of God.

Kilner makes a strong argument that all people are in the incorruptible image of God. However, a few questions remain that warrant clarity. For instance, how is the image of God connected to human personhood? Since this is a major question

in bioethics, clarity of terms and the relationship between the two would be beneficial. Also, Kilner addresses the value of the body since it is part of the whole person being in the image of God. However, a statement about how this impacts being in the image during the temporal, disembodied existence of the dead prior to Christ's return would also be helpful. Finally, if the reader is strongly Reformed, the idea that God intends that all human persons spend their destinies being conformed to the image of Christ will seemingly contradict some persons being predestined for destruction. Because he assumes that all humans are intended to commune with and reflect God, this concern is not addressed. While these questions may arise for certain readers, this book remains a solid contribution to understanding theological anthropology and a wonderful basis for advocacy on behalf of all human persons.



CHRISTA MCKIRLAND is completing her ThM in systematic theology at Talbot School of Theology and has prior degrees from Talbot (MA in Bible Exposition) and the University of Georgia (BA in Philosophy and Women's Studies). She plans to pursue a PhD with a focus on the role of the image of God in a theology of embodiment.



The graphic features a stylized map of Africa composed of many small, grey, irregular shapes. A thick black outline of the continent is overlaid on this. In the center of the map, the words "TRUTH BE TOLD" are written in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below this, in a smaller white font, is the subtitle "SPEAKING OUT AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE".

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Book Review

Malestrom: Manhood Swept Into the Currents of a Changing World

By Carolyn Custis James (Zondervan, 2015)

REVIEWED BY VICKI SCHEIB

I am in a unique position. I am a woman who leads a men's group. After years of leading an identity formation group for women, I was asked to create a similar process for men. While developing the curriculum, I was hard-pressed to find material that was not complementarian, or that did not rely heavily on archetypal models to frame a man's identity. Because I wanted the curriculum to be rooted in the biblical story and the *imago Dei*, I searched for resources that provided a biblical framework for a male identity. I never quite found what I was looking for—until *Malestrom*.

Carolyn Custis James has written a seminal work on masculine identity using the biblical story. She invites the reader to consider the impact of the fall on men and God's redemptive work to restore a man's identity. Similar to her writing in *Lost Women of the Bible*, James's exegesis helps the reader read between the lines of the stories of men in scripture. She steers clear of "male as leader" interpretations and avoids the western cultural lens that only notices the strong man or hero. Instead, James helps us visualize each story within the cultural context of patriarchy, all the while helping us "see through" patriarchy to what God was doing redemptively in the midst of a system distorted by the fall.

James begins by illustrating how the fall disrupts the lives of men. She coins the term "malestrom" to describe the global and far-reaching effects of the fall on humankind and on men in particular. Her play on words demonstrates that, just as a maelstrom is a powerful whirlpool with the potential to destroy those caught in its pull, the "malestrom" is "the particular way in which the fall impacts the male of the human species—causing a man to lose himself, his identity and purpose as a man, and above all, to lose sight of God's original vision for his sons" (18). The "malestrom" not only has a powerful influence on men, it also impacts women and disrupts the Blessed Alliance¹ God intends as men and women partner in the redemptive mission of God.

James argues that the principle expression of the "malestrom" is historic patriarchy (30). She defines patriarchy as a social system in which the role of the male is the primary authority figure in organizations, families, and legal and political structures (31). She also notes its influence on religious systems, whether it is the "soft patriarchy" of evangelical churches or the more extreme and violent structures of the Taliban and Isis. One of James's strengths is that she does not solely address the typical male-female issues in the Christian subculture. She also tackles patriarchy as a global phenomenon and frequently makes reference to how it impacts global systems and family structures.

James emphasizes that humankind has strayed far from what God intended. She stretches our imaginations and invites us to recapture the un-fallen state of humanity by coining the phrase "the missing chapter" to convey how men and women lived in

shalom with God and one another prior to Gen 3. The "missing chapter," if it were available, would be situated between Gen 2 and 3 and offer us a glimpse at life the way God intends. This phrase is used throughout the book as she exegetes biblical stories and has us consider how each story illustrates what life would look like in the "missing chapter."

The majority of the book tackles biblical stories of men, viewing each through the lens of patriarchy, and providing interpretations that are often overlooked. She skillfully shows how each story illustrates part of the "missing chapter" and gives us a glimpse of life as God intends. Particularly poignant is the story of Barak and Deborah. Interpreters often describe Barak as a weak male; God therefore allowed Deborah to lead since Barak would not. James turns the tables on this interpretation—not only was Deborah God's choice for leadership, but Barak is a living example of the "missing chapter" by being one who was not threatened by Deborah's leadership. He rejoiced with her in the defeat of the enemy. By doing so, Barak and Deborah, along with Jael, illustrate the Blessed Alliance through their "mutually dependent efforts" (110).

While the format of this book is similar to that of *Lost Women of the Bible*, in *Malestrom* James makes a significant shift. She no longer writes using complementarian overtones. Instead, she affirms the Blessed Alliance as an interwoven, interdependent, and inseparable partnership (26) and presents compelling stories supporting the equality of men and women throughout her book. Even so, James seems to be averse to using the term "equal" to define the Blessed Alliance. She alludes to equality only when describing it as a faulty starting point for a discussion on what it means to be male (40). James also pushes back against evangelical egalitarianism saying, "even that system does not go far enough" (69). She aligns herself with David Fitch's broad-sweeping perspective that egalitarian approaches to leadership (often unintentionally) utilize male systems of leadership and invite women into them. James says Jesus is "making something new" by recovering the missing chapter, not creating another world system (69). James seems to support a middle or alternative stance. Unfortunately, her illustrations put her at odds with egalitarianism rather than finding important common ground (69, 99). Even though she differentiates herself from egalitarianism, she never expands upon nor clarifies her own position within the text.

Malestrom, while compelling, could be strengthened by the following. First, questions remain as to why she distances herself from egalitarianism. She would bring clarity to her work by not only expanding upon her differences but also recognizing common ground. Second, I was surprised that James uses the pronoun "he" when referring to God. It seems a glaring oversight.

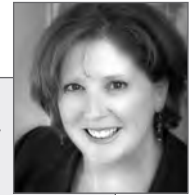
She could have strengthened her writing and her argument by using more inclusive language. Another bit of feedback comes via a male friend. While he enjoyed the book immensely, he was puzzled about the chapter on Abraham (ch. 2). His question was, “I understand James’s argument about the impact of patriarchy on humankind. But, with Abraham, wasn’t God’s call one that would be a patriarch’s dream . . . to be the Father of a great nation? How do I know that James’s interpretation is not a bit of confirmation bias?” As we discussed his question further, it became apparent that more historical and cultural research into the patriarchal context of Abraham and each biblical story would have strengthened her writing and premise. By using broad strokes to define patriarchy, she neglects providing scholarly historical and cultural support for her interpretations of each story.

James is unapologetic about being a woman tackling a tough issue. She believes that a female perspective is an essential part of combating the malestrom and that women need to come alongside men as “ezer warriors”² as they together form the Blessed Alliance. I have to agree. As a woman leading a men’s group, I find that a woman’s perspective and style can disrupt male patterns of relating and help them to see life and scripture through a new lens. James certainly does that for us through


Malestrom. It is a worthwhile read and contributes significantly to our understanding of scripture and how men and women can flourish together.³

Notes

1. “Blessed Alliance” is a phrase coined by James in her previous work and used in this book as well. It describes the partnered alliance between men and women in the redemptive work of God. By calling it a “blessed alliance,” she notes that men and women need one another to accomplish God’s purposes.
2. James coins the term “ezer warriors” to describe the role of women as “strong helpers,” referring to the phrase *ezer kenegdo* in Gen 2:18, 20 and the frequent OT description of God as *ezer* (“helper”).
3. Readers are invited also to read Mark Kubo’s review of *Malestrom* in the autumn 2015 issue of *Mutuality*.



VICKI SCHEIB received her DMin in Leadership and Spiritual Formation from George Fox Seminary in Portland, Oregon. She is a spiritual director, an educator, and has developed resources on the spiritual formation and identity formation of men and women leaders. She lives in York, Pennsylvania.



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- *We believe* in the full deity and the full humanity of Jesus Christ.
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- While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relationships.
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- Followers of Christ are to oppose injustice and patriarchal teachings and practices that marginalize and abuse females and males.

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Featured Resource from CBE



Is Gender Equality a Biblical Ideal?

Mimi Haddad, president of CBE and Sean Callaghan, Tearfund consultant

- Should women be allowed to lead in the church and the home?
- What does the Bible mean when it calls Eve "helper"?
- How do cultural beliefs devalue women?
- How can we foster egalitarian beliefs in other cultures?

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