



Tell Her Story Well

As Christians, we are informed as much by the past as we are by the events of each day. While each generation faces new challenges, we can look to the courage and wisdom of Christians over the centuries, as the Scottish theologian John Baillie (1886–1960) reminds us. He thanked God that the

Christian way whereon I walk is no untried or uncharted road, but a road beaten hard by the footsteps of saints, apostles, prophets, and martyrs. I thank thee for the finger-posts and danger-signals with which it was marked at every turning and which may be known to me through the study of the Bible, and of all history, and of all the great literature of the world.¹

Yet within the church and culture more broadly, a disinterest in history persists, especially concerning an accurate telling of women's achievements. You may be familiar with the African American chemist, Alice Ball (1892–1916), whose discovery and development of a treatment for leprosy were attributed instead to a male colleague. Likewise, the chemist Rosalind Franklin (1920–1958) first documented the double-helix structure of DNA but was not widely recognized for her work until more recently. The achievements of ancient and modern women are too often obscured, devalued, and usurped by assumptions that men alone are real leaders in areas like science and, sadly, even the church. The more profound a woman's success, the more likely her history is to be at risk—as in the case of Lottie Moon (1840–1912).

A Southern Baptist missionary from Virginia, Moon's evangelistic leadership in China pioneered the first key initiative of the Foreign Mission Board at the very *first* Southern Baptist Convention in 1849.² The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board, today's International Mission Board (IMB), celebrates Lottie Moon as the "namesake of Southern Baptists' international missions offering. . . [since] she was like today's missionaries. She labored tirelessly so her people group could know Jesus."³ For Lottie, there was "no greater joy than that of saving souls."⁴ Without ordination, Moon could not *officially* lead the churches filled with the believers she evangelized, so she invested her efforts in training pastors who, several

decades later, baptized more than 2,000 Christians in Pintu. An example to aspiring women evangelists, Moon recruited many women missionaries.

As her church in Pintu was ravished by famine, Lottie shared her food and refused to eat while others were starving. She died of starvation on Christmas Day, 1912. She is celebrated among SBC Christians today as "the best man among our missionaries,"⁵ and ever since the year after her death, a Lottie Moon missionary offering has been held on Christmas Eve in Southern Baptist churches.⁶

Lottie's history includes her fearless challenge to Southern Baptists to treat women missionaries as equals to men. She said, "What women want who come to China is free opportunity to do the largest possible work. . . What women have a right to demand is perfect equality."⁷ Insisting that women missionaries receive equal voting privileges beside their male coworkers, Moon said, "Simple justice demands that women should have equal rights with men in mission meetings and in the conduct of their work."⁸ Inevitably, Moon confronted her field director on the scope and location of her work with a stated willingness to part ways and "go it alone." Stunningly, Moon's work in Pintu was viewed "as the 'greatest evangelistic center' among the Southern Baptists 'in all China.'"⁹

The history the IMB paints today is one colored by its own complementarian ideology. Raising funds on Moon's legacy since 1913, would the IMB tolerate women like Lottie Moon today—women who expect an equal voice beside their male coworkers and who challenge male field directors as she did? Thankfully, Moon's legacy has inspired countless women missionaries in the SBC and beyond. As complementarians gained control of the SBC in the 1990s, women leaders (and their male allies) were forced out of the IMB when they refused to sign the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which restricted leadership to men.¹⁰ CBE honored many of these individuals at our 2001 and 2003 international conferences.¹¹ Yet, year after year, the legacy of Lottie Moon funds a male-led missionary agency at odds with the values and legacy of a woman who preached, married, buried, planted churches, and trained the next generation of pastors. Furthermore, the