EVANGELICAL WOMEN IN MINISTRY A CENTURY AGO

The 19th and Early 20th Centuries

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In 1927 the *Moody* Bible Institute *Alumni News* proudly published a letter containing an astounding personal account of the ministry of Mabel C. Thomas, a I graduate. Thomas, called to the pastorate in a Kansas church, had taught weekly Bible classes and baptized dozens of converts. She concluded her letter with praise, since she- "could not have met the many and varied opportunities for service without the training of MBI."[1]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, evangelical churches in America grappled with two thorny issues-theological liberalism and feminist demands for women's equal rights. Many evangelicals responded to the first challenge by reasserting scriptural inspiration and inerrancy. Some of these same "proto-fundamentalists"[2] were convinced that a literal approach to the Bible, and especially to prophecy, demanded equality for women in church ministry.

Today, however, female graduates of MBI and other evangelical institutions rarely enter the pastorate or pulpit. Why do evangelical groups that once welcomed women as pastors and preachers now prohibit or discourage such ministry? How could evangelical a century ago have held high their inerrant, verbally inspired Bible in one hand while blessing the ministries of women preachers, pastors, Bible teachers and evangelists with the other? This chapter will analyze these provocative historical questions.

While investigating women's roles in early fundamentalist circles, I found that fundamentalism a century ago was neither exclusively male dominated nor inherently antifeminist.[3] Specifically, when I examined the life and ministry of transitional evangelical figures such as W. B. Riley and J. R. Stratton, I discovered key leaders who saw their support of women preachers as consistent with their biblical literalism.

These historical findings counter the popular but misleading claim that evangelical feminism, or biblical equality, is simply an accommodation to recent secular feminist and theologically liberal movements for women's rights. Rather, evangelical feminism in America first surfaced in the mid-nineteenth century and accelerated into the early twentieth century. Even before concern for women's equality had coalesced into a social/religious movement, a number of evangelical women had stepped out into public ministry as part of the revival activity of the Second Great Awakening in the early nineteenth century.

Evangelical Women and the Early Bible Institutes

Bible institutes provided a significant training ground for evangelical women who entered public ministry a century ago. Many women received formal biblical and theological training for the first time. Nationally prominent evangelical leaders-Moody in Chicago, A. B. Simpson in New York, Gordon in Boston and Riley in Minneapolis-established major Bible institutes that dominated the movement. Each man's openness to women's public ministry decisively affected women's roles in each school and

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[1] Mabel C. Thomas, letter in *Moody Alumni News*, June 1927, p.12.

[2] The term *fundamentalists* is used here in the classic sense, referring to the theologically conservative Protestant organizations that emerged in the early twentieth century, such as the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA). This early fundamentalism arose largely as a response by evangelicals to the growing movement of theological liberalism. Se as N. J. Cohen, ed., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: A View from Within, a Response from Without* (Grad Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1990).

[3] For an in-depth account of my research (including bibliography and appendices, which this chapter summarizes, see Janette Hassey, *No Tim for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grad Rapids, Mich: Zondervan 1986; reprint Minneapolis: Christian for Biblical Equality).

also influenced the church at large.

Albert B. Simpson (1843-1919) established North America's first Bible institute in 1883-the Missionary Training College for Home and Foreign Missions in New York City. In 1887 the school relocated to Nyack, New York. In 1897 Simpson formed the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA). Simpson gave women a prominent place in church ministry, encouraging women's participation and leadership in virtually every phase of early C&MA life.[4] He included women on the executive board committee, employed them as Bible professors, and supported female evangelists and branch officers (the early C&MA equivalent to local minister).[5] Simpson's school at Nyack required women to practice preaching in chapel along with men. Having women in church leadership was consistent with Simpson's lay missionary concept-that ordinary people given basic Bible training could evangelize the lost just as effectively as could seminary-trained clergy.

In 1889 Baptist pastor A J. Gordon opened the Boston Missionary Training School, later called Gordon Bible College. He claimed that a sanctified, Holy Spirit-filled life, not gender, qualified one for church ministry. In "Women as Evangelists" his wife Maria Gordon described how Gordon's training prepared women to "answer any call of the Spirit."[6] Yearbooks dearly document the wide ministry of women graduates serving as preachers, pastors, and Bible teachers.

William Bell Riley, pastor of First Baptist Church in Minneapolis, opened what was perhaps the most aggressive of the fundamentalist Bible schools in 1902. Riley's Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training School employed women preachers in its extension department, while alumnae preached, pastored, and evangelized with official school recognition.

Major evangelical schools such as Nyack, Gordon and Northwestern provided women with the training to preach, enter the pastorate and teach Bible while committed to a high view of scriptural authority. Leading the pack was Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, opened by Dwight L. Moody in 1889 as the Bible Institute of the Chicago Evangelization Society.

MBI women openly served as pastors, evangelists, pulpit supply preachers, Bible teachers and even in the ordained ministry. The school's official publication, *Moody Monthly,* listed Lottie Osborn Sheidler as the first woman to graduate from the pastor's course, in August 1929. The activities of alumnae provide the most important indication of MBI's openness to women in public ministry. Equipped at Moody with the skills they needed, female graduates served as pastors and preached in a wide range of denominations.

Although MBI leaders may not have always explicitly encouraged women to preach, pastor or seek ordination, their implicit endorsement of women in those authoritative roles for over forty years cannot be denied. MBI offers the clearest documentation of a turn-of-the-century evangelical educational institution outside of the Wesleyan holiness camp that actively promoted public church ministry for women. None questioned Moody's commitment to a verbally inspired, inerrant Bible. Consequently, the early MBI stands as an appropriate educational symbol of "fundamentalist feminism."

Denominational Approaches to Women in Ministry

Of the Methodist groups, holiness churches were the most open to women's public ministry. For them, the Holy Spirit's second work of grace, not necessarily ordination or education, properly qualified a person to preach. The Free Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists and Church of the Nazarene all promoted equality for women. The Salvation Army admitted women to all ranks of leadership. Newly formed Pentecostal denominations of the early twentieth century continued this holiness practice, often employing Spirit-baptized women as pastors, evangelists, and healers.

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[4] John H. Cable, *A History of the Missionary Training Institute, 1883-1933* (Nyack, NY;Nyack College, 1933), p.20 (available at A. B. Simpson Historical Library, C&MA headquarters building, Nyack, NY).
[5] Wendell W. Price, "The Role of Women in Ministry of the Christian and Missionary Alliance," D.Min diss., San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1977.
[6] Mrs. A. J. (Maria) Gordon, "Women as Evangelists," *Northfield Echoes I* 1894): 151.

Roles for women in Baptist circles differed widely. The Free Will Baptists ordained women, and the German and Swedish Baptists encouraged women as pastors and evangelists. American Baptist churches in the North ordained dozens of women in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In contrast, Southern Baptist women who desired to preach or pastor faced enormous opposition.

Smaller groups, such as Bible-believing Quakers, Evangelical Mennonites, and the Advent Christian Church, also endorsed women's public church leadership. With their historic emphasis on a seminary-trained clergy, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Lutheran churches largely excluded women from the pastorate by limiting seminary education to males. Only the revivalistic Cumberland Presbyterians, who waived the traditional educational requirements for the ministry, utilized women in leadership to a greater extent. In the wake of the modernist-fundamentalist conflict around the 1920s., groups of conservative Christians began to leave existing denominations and form new associations such as the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA). Until 1930 this organization welcomed ordained women as members.

Several factors undoubtedly influenced denominational openness toward women in public ministry. The relative freedom for women in the holiness wing of Methodism points to the influence of theology, especially with respect to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, in opening doors for women. The wide divergence of practice among Baptists-generally more restrictive in the South-illustrates the impact of regionalism on evangelical feminism. The preaching ministry of some Cumberland Presbyterian women represents the powerful force of revivalism in changing traditional roles for women. The surge of women into Congregational pastorates at this time exemplifies the impact of form of church government on opportunities for women.

The Evangelical Free Church denomination, formed in the 1880s, was revivalist in spirit, congregational in church government, premillennial and "Bible-only" in theology, and concentrated among pietist Scandinavian immigrants in the upper Midwest region. The Free Church utilized women as evangelists, Bible teachers and pastors. The committee that drafted the 1908 constitution for the incorporation of the Swedish Evangelical Free Church of America intended that men and women have equal status in the church. The rules for ordination in 1925 state that "a candidate for ordination shall request a reference from the church of which he or she is a member."[7] Two key leader of the Free Church, Fredrik Franson and John Gustaf Princell, wrote in public support of women's preaching ministry.

Evangelical Egalitarian Biblical Exegesis

In looking historically at evangelical feminist biblical exegesis concerning women's public church ministry, we will consider ten representative documents written by evangelicals committed to the authority of Scripture. These publications spanned almost seventy years (1859-1926) and helped open doors for women to minister. Thanks partly to the circulation of these books, pamphlets and articles, evangelical women who preached and pastored understood their public ministry to be consistent with their commitment to biblical authority.

Methodist holiness leader Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874) wrote *Promise of the Father* in 1859 to defend the call and need of women to speak in public. She asserted that the gift of the Spirit promised by the Father arrived at Pentecost and was received by both men and women. She argued for the right of women to preach Christ when so led by the Holy Spirit. Palmer's ministry and writing influenced Catherine Booth, Frances Willard and B. T. Roberts.

After hearing Palmer preach, Salvation Army founder Catherine Booth (1829- 1890) was appalled to read a local minister's violent "scriptural" attack on Palmer and other women preachers. Booth responded with a letter, which was expanded and published as the pamphlet *Female Ministry* in 1859. Booth quoted from Palmer and closely paralleled Palmer's exegesis. For Booth, the Bible urges women

[7] Della E. Olsen, *A Woman of her Times* (Minneapolis: Free Church Press, 1977), p. 81.

gifted and called *by* the Spirit to preach.

Methodist temperance leader Frances Willard (1839-1898) professed sanctification under Palmer's ministry. Willard wrote Women in the Pu it in 1888 to defend women's ordination. Her book displayed familiarity with the writings of both Palmer and Booth. She found close to forty biblical texts in support of women's public ministry.

Free Church leader Fredrik Franson wrote the article "Prophesying Daughters" in 1889 in response to criticism of his advocacy of female evangelists. He concluded that Scripture overwhelmingly supports women's public ministry and the church must never silence women gifted as apostles, prophets, evangelists, or shepherds. For Franson, the Bible cannot forbid what the Spirit blesses. A premillennial dispensationalist like Gordon., Franson interpreted women in the pulpit as an essential sign of the end times.

Converted under Palmer's ministry, B.T. Roberts fought for women's ordination within the Free Methodist denomination. In 1891 Roberts wrote *Ordaining Women*, a scriptural argument emphasizing parallels between slavery and the women's issue. Just as opponents of abolition who appealed to the Bible were greatly mistaken on slavery, so were the opponents of women's ordination.

Baptist A. J. Gordon attended a convention where conservatives forbade a female missionary to speak. In response Gordon wrote "The Ministry of Women" in 1894 to vindicate scripturally the preaching of female missionaries. According to Joel 2:28, female prophecy today should not be the exception but the rule.

When Methodist medical doctor and reformer Katharine Bushnell (1856-1946) sensed God's call to China as a missionary, she agreed on one condition: that God prove to her that Paul did not forbid women's preaching. A scholar of both Hebrew and Greek, Bushnell studied the Bible in depth and then assembled the results of her years of research in a Bible correspondence course for women. In 1919, these lessons were published in book form as *God's Word to Women: One Hundred Bible Studies on Woman's Place in the Divine Economy*.[8] Bushnell exegeted Old Testament passages at length, devoting twenty lessons to Genesis 1-3. She charged that a misunderstanding of Genesis 3:16 lay behind the misinterpretation of Paul's words. Bushnell saw no contradiction between belief in women's equal status in the church and a high view of Scripture as infallible. Because her technical scholarship went over the heads of many untrained laypeople, in 19I9 Jessie Penn-Lewis published, with Bushnell's permission, *The Magna Charta of Women*, which presented *God's Word to Women* in simplified form.

In 1926 Lee Anna Starr published *The Bible: Status of Woman*, which frequently quoted Bushnell's work. Skilled in both Hebrew and Greek, Starr was ordained by the Methodist Protestant Church and ministered as a local pastor. Dismayed that "modern" women might reject Christianity as a whole because of supposed biblical teachings on women's subordination, Starr sought to correct that misunderstanding in an intellectually viable way.

After welcoming female evangelist Uldine Utley to his pulpit, John Roach Straton came under criticism from those who held that allowing a female to preach constituted a denial of biblical authority. To refute these charges, in 1926 Straton wrote *Does the Bible: Forbid Women to Preach and Pray in Public*? He grounded his support of women's preaching in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, seen in Joel2 and Acts 2. This pamphlet by such a militant fundamentalist proves that a commitment to both biblical inerrancy and women's public church ministry was feasible in the early twentieth century.

These ten documents reveal two general approaches in early evangelical feminist exegesis. Those authors who argued primarily for women's right to preach tended to focus on the Joel 2-Acts 2 prophecy-fulfillment passages, which state that "your daughters shall prophesy." They viewed Pentecost as the pivotal event in women's liberation. Other writers pushed for women's equality in all spheres of life, not just the pulpit. They stressed the broader theological issues of creation-

[8] Katharine Bushnell, *God's Word to Women* (Oakland, CA: K. C. Bushnell, c. 1923; reprint, North Collins, NY: Ray B. Munson, 1976).

redemption. They saw the incarnation of Christ and his victory on the cross over Satan as the crucial event for women, since Christ's atonement ameliorates the effects of the Fall.

Without evangelical publications such as these, the rise of women to positions of leadership in evangelical, Bible-believing circles would have been inconceivable. Evangelical women preached, pastored and taught the Bible in the late nineteenth early twentieth centuries because they and many other evangelicals were convinced that their ministry entailed obedience to God's Word, not rebellious disobedience.

Reasons for the Rise of *Evangelical Women in Public Ministry*

Why did so many evangelical women find pulpits and pastorates open to them for the first time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? Evangelical theology, a charismatic style of church leadership, and social activism provide keys to understanding this phenomenon.

Evangelical theology. Evangelical women entered the pulpit because significant elements of their own theology supported such a practice. At interdenominational Bible institutes and conferences, many evangelicals rubbed shoulders with other Christians whose theology promoted an egalitarian concept of women in ministry, including the Quakers, the United Brethren and those in the Salvation Army. In addition, the interaction of holiness churches and even some Pentecostal groups with other branches of evangelicalism significantly influenced views toward women. For example, Moody Bible Institute opposed Aimee Semple McPherson's Pentecostal doctrine of healing but not her right to preach or pastor.

Along with Bible institutes, Bible conferences served as key agencies in the promotion of premillennial and fundamentalist theology among evangelical laypeople. The earliest Bible conferences welcomed women preachers and Bible teachers, thus exposing thousands of conference participants to women in positions of authoritative leadership. In 1880 Moody, for example, organized the Northfield Conference., which frequently featured women such as Maria Gordon. Winona Lake Bible Conference, founded in 1895 and closely tied to MBI, widely publicized the public ministry of women from MBI, the Salvation Army and elsewhere.

An emphasis among evangelicals on the sanctifying, empowering work of the Holy Spirit usually corresponded to increasing openness to the exercise of women's gifts. Bishop Alma White, founder of the Pillar of Fire Church, declared that "so long as the Holy Spirit operates in the world, women must necessarily preach the Gospel."[9] Moody, Gordon, Simpson and Franson also emphasized a second work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian to provide power for witness and missions.

Franson clearly tied his use of female evangelists to the urgent needs he sensed in worldwide missions:

> Brothers, the harvest is great, and the laborers are few. If the ladies want to help out in the fields during the harvest time, then I think we should let them bind as many sheaves as they can. It is better that women bind the sheaves, than that the sheaves get lost. When one has been sent out on the field and heard the real cries for help from dozens of places, places to which one cannot possibly reach, then one cannot help but think, "It seems strange that only such a few verses of Scripture, about which there are so many disputes, should be made such obstacles to hinder those who otherwise would have responded to these calls for help:"[10]

These pietistic evangelicals sought personal holiness expressed concretely in evangelistic witness and missionary concern. Given that context, who dared silence a sanctified woman who was Spirit-led to preach and testify? "It was the theology of the movement and the essential nature of the place of public testimony in the holiness experience which gave many an otherwise timid

[9] Alma White, *Women's Ministry* (London: Pillar of Fire, n.d.). p.2.
[10] Fredrik Franson, quoted in Edvard P. Torjesen, *Fredrik Franson: A Model for Worldwide Evangelism* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1983), p.47.

woman the authority and power to speak out 'as the Holy Spirit led her:'"[11]

Eschatology and prophetic interest as well as emphasis on the Holy Spirit contributed to new attitudes toward women's ministry. For many premillennialists, Joel's description of "prophesying daughters" in the last days took on vital significance Joel 2:28). Franson concluded that "we seem to see Psalm 68:12 being fulfilled in our day, 'the Lord gives the command: the women who proclaim the good tidings are a great host:"[12] Since Christ's second coming would be preceded by a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit, many interpreted the increase in women preachers as visible evidence of such an outpouring.

Truly convinced that the end was near and that at Christ's return the unconverted faced damnation in hell, turn-of-the-century premillennialists urgently pursued fervent evangelism and intensely promoted worldwide missions. Faced with what they considered an emergency situation with eternal souls at stake, these evangelicals often enlisted male and female workers alike to preach the gospel to a dying world.

Bible institute founder Charles H. Pridgeon based his forceful appeal for women in ministry on the reality of hell and the imminent return of Christ in these "last days."

> If it was "last days" on Pentecost, it certainly is now. Millions are perishing for the bread of life. If there is not only a present world that needs regeneration, but also a hereafter of heaven and hell, we who have the light can realize our awful responsibility. Our forces need to be mobilized and that not only of men but also women and children. The question of the ministry of women is more than just an academic question. The force of men who offer for His service is inadequate. Souls are perishing. There is no time to argue whether it be a man or woman that performs the service. The need must be met. The dying one that is saved will be saved just as well by whomsoever brings the Word of Life. We can split hairs, look wise, and hold up some possible meaning of a text or two of Scripture when the whole trend of God's Word is on the other side; millions are going to hell while we delay.[13]

It was said that God's obvious use of women preachers to convert sinners proved he was blessing their ministry. Surely God would not put such a seal of approval on women's disobedience, proponents argued. Arguing that women are morally superior and consequently have the potential to be even more effective preachers than men, T. DeWitt Talmage said women preachers "have a pathos and a power in their religious utterances that men can never reach."[14]

There were, of course, those who disputed women's biblical right to preach publicly-but not always with clear knowledge of what they were disputing. When Christian Golder accused proponents of women's ordination of denying biblical inspiration and charged that "in order to emancipate woman, one must first divorce himself from the Word of God:." he had not read the evangelical feminist interpretations that were circulating.[15] When P. D. Stephenson blamed the women's movement on "free thinkers, Socialists, agnostics, evolutionists and other foes of the Bible and Evangelical Christianity, he failed to account for advocates of biblical inspiration who also fought for women's equality.[16] The editor of the *Western Recorder*, who opposed women's public ministry, finally conceded that some faithful disciples do believe Scripture yet do no silence women.[17]

At any rate, it was obvious that one's commitment to biblical authority was not the deciding factor in whether to oppose or endorse women's ministry; inerrantists sat on both sides of the fence. Most evangelicals at this time were obliged to tolerate legitimate interdenominational differences of opinion on

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[11] Melvin Easter Dieter, *The Holiness Revival in the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1980), p. 42.
[12] Franson, quoted in Torjesen, *Franson*, p. 62.
[13] Charles H. Pidgeon, *The Ministry of Women* (Gibsonia, PA: Pittsburgh Bible Institute, n.d.) pp. 26-28. Pridgeon (19863-1932), a Presbyterian minister who worked as an evangelist with Moody, had contact with Simpson and professed sanctification in 1892. He founded Pittsburgh Bible Institute with his wife, Louise Shepard Pridgeon, in 1901.
[14] T. DeWitt Talmage, *Woman: Her Power and Privileges* (New York: j. S. Ogilvie, 1888), p. 16.
[15] Christian Golder, *History of the Deaconess Movement in the Christian Church* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings and Pye, 1903), p.528.
[16] P. D. Stephenson, *The Woman Question* (Charlotte, NC: Presbyterian Publishing, 1899), p. 227.
[17] "Editorial Response," *Western Recorder,* February 8, 1923, p. 8.

such issues as sacraments, church government, Calvinism and even women's ministry.

Charismatic church leadership. Evangelical women experienced increased freedom to preach and pastor in those circles that emphasized Spirit-given gifts of leadership (Greek charismata) as the essential qualification for ministry. In the early charismatic stages of the revivalist, holiness and fundamentalist movements, evangelicals often perceived women to be as spiritually gifted as men.

Revivalism., which emphasized personal conversion and testimony, tended to loosen institutional structure and foster informal, spontaneous worship; women enjoyed new opportunities to preach in such settings.[18] The emphasis on charismatic authority and lay leadership resulted in relaxed educational requirements for the clergy. Most early fundamentalists continued with this concept of a nonprofessional ministry, sending workers with only Bible institute training or less into gospel ministry and pastorates. Turn-of-the-century women, barred from most evangelical seminaries, could attend Bible institutes and prepare equally with men for ministry in revivalistic churches.

Doors to public ministry were more open to the daughters and wives of evangelical men holding egalitarian views. Presbyterian minister A. T. Pierson, for example, agreed with his close friend A. J. Gordon on the need for wider opportunities for women in ministry.[19] Pierson folly supported his own daughter, who served as a pastor and evangelist in Vermont.

The wife-husband team ministry approach of women such as Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth and Hannah Whitall Smith exemplified the importance of male support for women in public ministry. Similarly, women like Josephine Princell and Maria Gordon were able to teach along with their husbands at newly opened Bible institutes.

Social activism. Between the 1880s and the adoption in 1920 of the Nineteenth Amendment., which gave women the vote, the United States completed its transition from an agricultural society to a worldwide industrial power. Social factors such as accelerating immigration, rapid urbanization and industrialization transformed American life after the Civil War and prepared the ground for various re- form movements.

Most nineteenth-century feminists had championed other reform movements such as abolition or temperance. By the turn of the century, the feminist movement encompassed a wide spectrum of advocates and reform platforms. Religious or evangelical feminism held up religion or Scripture as woman's basis for equality. In contrast., secular feminism, exemplified by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, grounded equality for women in natural law or Enlightenment philosophy, rejecting traditional religion and the Bible as degrading to women.

The social activism of this period provided a positive context for *many* evangelical women to enter public church ministry. Temperance and suffrage did what the abolition movement had done in antebellum America: they provided an impetus for women's rights.

As socially concerned women spoke out on behalf of slaves or victims of alcohol abuse, they found the power and reason to speak out on their own behalf. Women trained through temperance and suffrage work to organize and speak publicly gained the confidence and experience needed for local church leadership. In 1910 Stanton Coit called every suffrage platform a pulpit and each suffragist a preacher.[20] In many evangelical churches, the first woman to preach from the pulpit was a temperance or suffrage worker.

Evangelical women in church leadership were often associated with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), an organization that grew out of the 1873-1874 crusade of Midwestern Protestant women to close saloons.[21] The strategy of "gospel temperance" relied on religious conversion to reform

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[18] Martha Tomhave Blauvelt, "Women and Revivalism," in vol.1 of *Women and Religion in America*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), discusses the early-nineteenth-century setting. The major exceptions to the rule were the revivalistic churches in the South.

[19] Dana Lee Robert, "Arthur Tappan Pierson and Forward Movements of Late-Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism," Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1984, pp. 308-10.

[20] Stanton Coit, *Women in Church and State*(London: West London Ethical Society, 1910), p.27.

[21] Barbara Leslie Epstein, *Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); Susan Dye Lee, "Evangelical Domesticity: The Woman's

both the drunkard and the liquor industry. Frances Willard, WCTU president from 1879 until 1898, developed the Union into the largest, most powerful and most influential organization of women in the nineteenth century, enlisting more than two million members world-wide by 1897. The WCTU enabled many women to develop a changing role for themselves and served as a base for other causes and reforms.[22]

Many evangelical leaders openly promoted women's gospel temperance work. Moody utilized Willard herself in his campaigns, Maria Gordon led the Boston-area WCTU, and Josephine Princell of the Free Church organized a Swedish WCTU. MBI approvingly advertised the temperance work of several WCTU representatives, such as national evangelist Helen L. Byrnes.

Suffrage was likewise a major issue to millions of American women of this era, including evangelical women in public ministry. Willard combined temperance and suffrage advocacies. Many evangelical women followed her challenge to support suffrage as a matter of Christian duty. Pious women, they argued, could use their votes to elevate American *society.* In fact, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) depended on the support of evangelical women. Many churches also supported these women. William Bell Riley, citing Willard as a convincing argument for women's right to preach, opened his church to suffrage meetings.

Anna Howard Shaw represented the overlap in evangelical women's leadership in both church ministry and the temperance and suffrage movements. Rev. Shaw, ordained by the Methodist Protestant Church, served as superintendent of the WCTU Department of Franchise from 1888 to 1892. She resigned from her pastorate to lecture and organize woman's suffrage, serving as NAWSA president from 1904 to 1915. For Shaw, the right to vote was a key to woman's freedom.

Winona Bible Conference speaker Viola D. Romans also symbolized the relationship between the temperance and suffrage crusades and evangelical women in ministry. Romans, a suffragist and WCTU representative, lectured in 1914 on equality with men in home and church, basing her presentation on Genesis.

> I am a suffragist… I understand most of you here are suffragists… My grandmother was a Quaker preacher. I was brought up with the idea in the home and church that we had co-privileges along with our brothers God blessed them and set them at much the same work, that of replenishing the earth and subduing it. He said not a word about subduing each other.[23]

The story of Christabel Pankhurst ties together many of the factors that led to the rise of women in public church leadership a century ago.[24] A strategist of the militant suffrage crusade in Britain before World War I, Pankhurst developed her leadership and public speaking skills in women's struggle to gain the vote. After her conversion to premillennial fundamentalist Christianity, a reporter wrote that "she has been converted to Christianity of a somewhat rigid type, which brings her into great demand as a lecturer in churches on literal inspiration."

Like D. L. Moody, Catherine Booth and others, Pankhurst influenced evangelicalism on both sides of the ocean. She began her public ministry in 1921 and gained new fame in America as a prominent preacher for the premillennial cause, traveling nationwide to speak at Bible conferences, including Winona. A frequent visitor at Moody Bible Institute, Pankhurst preached at Straton's Calvary Baptist Church in New York City in 1924 and then at the National Bible Institute. For more than twenty years she attracted immense audiences and rallied premillennialists; she claimed that thousands were converted through her evangelistic preaching.

In a sense Pankhurst represented the end of an era. Shortly after her time, other conservative evangelical women who were called to preach began to find the pulpits of revival tents, fundamentalist churches.,

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Temperance Crusade of 1873-74," in *Women in New Worlds,* ed. Hilah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, 2 vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1981-1982), 1:293-309.

[22] Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia Temple University Press, 1981); Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, "For God and Home and Native Land: The W.C.T.U.'s Image of Woman in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Women in New Worlds,* 1:310-27.

[23] Viola D. Romans, "The Nation's Call," *Winona Echoes,* August 1914, pp. 349-50.

[24] David Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts: A Study in Tenacity* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

Bible conferences and Bible institutes off limits.

Reasons for the Decline of Women in Public Ministry

What can account for the gradual decline of public ministry opportunities for evangelical women between the world wars? First, fundamentalist separatist subcultures emerged which tended to harden on the women's issue. Second, as fundamentalism institutionalized., women were squeezed out of leadership roles. Third, the conservative Protestant backlash against changing social values resulted in restrictions on women in ministry. Finally, a more literalist view of Scripture among fundamentalists meant less flexibility in interpreting the subject of women in ministry.

Separatist fundamentalist subcultures. Between the world wars, fundamentalists lost the battle for control of mainline denominations and schools; in regrouping, they created a host of separate institutions. Whereas the nineteenth-century evangelical empire had stood near the center of American culture, the fundamentalism of the 1930s withdrew and formed distinct subcultures. Part of the movement veered in a militant, separatist., extremist direction, often allied with far right-wing politics. In that process of narrowing, opportunities for women also tightened.

Although united briefly in the initial attack on modernist theology, fundamentalism began to splinter in defeat. A growing disputatious, antiecumenical attitude among fundamentalists eliminated earlier cooperative interdenominational undertakings such as WCTU meetings. The Pentecostal practices of tongues and healing and even Methodist perfectionism increasingly antagonized fundamentalists.

The feminist heritage was lost even among the holiness churches, except where it was institutionalized, as in the Salvation Army. By World War II most evangelicals could go a lifetime never having heard a woman preacher or pastor, and girls grew up with fewer and fewer role models of women in public ministry.

Significantly, fundamentalism widened geographically during the same decades in which it narrowed denominationally. Whereas early fundamentalist strength had lain in the urban North, the welcoming into their fold of southern conservative cousins like the Southern Baptists produced a shift of strength to the southern Bible Belt. This change paralleled the establishment of Dallas Seminary, a fundamentalist graduate school in the South. Southern conservative social values, which traditionally included the subordinate place of women in society and church, typified an increasingly large segment of the fundamentalist constituency.

The early fundamentalist involvement in social action waned as the movement became more rigid. Historical distance from earlier temperance and suffrage crusades decreased one's chances of hearing evangelical women speak publicly in church. The secular feminist movement certainly lost steam and direction after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the vote in 1920. As evangelicals turned from active social concern and reform to institution-building and theological squabbles, women lost opportunities to speak out on behalf of others as they had done in support of temperance and suffrage.

Institutionalization. Both Moody Bible Institute and the Evangelical Free Church illustrate the process of institutionalization and its effect on women's roles. Changes in educational programs in these denominations furnish one indication of this change. MBI, for instance, began in the 1880s as a practical training center for women and men in lay ministry. MBI's inauguration of a graduate school a century later suggests an enormous transformation. Similarly, early Free churches typically supported itinerant lay evangelists rather than seminary-trained pastors. The establishment of doctoral programs at Trinity University later in the twentieth century also indicates immense institutional transition.

With the rising social status of many churches came the demand for professional, seminary-trained clergy in place of charismatic lay ministry. As frontier churches previously viewed as home mission fields increased in numbers and wealth, congregations could afford to support a married man as minister. Some 'Considered the presence of a female pastor a tacit acknowledgment of a church's poverty.

Educational attainment and credentials often replaced spiritual gifts as the essential leadership qualifications. The establishment of interdenominational Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924 - the

nation's first strictly fundamentalist seminary-symbolized this shift.[25] Lewis Sperry Chafer, undoubtedly influenced *by* Charles Scofield's view on women while teaching at Philadelphia College of the Bible, was the founder of Dallas. Emerging from the modernist fundamentalist debates of the 1920s, it admitted only born-again male college graduates endowed with ministry gifts. Chafer clearly distinguished his school from Bible institutes, claiming that "those Bible courses which have been designed for laymen and Christian workers generally are not adequate as a foundational Bible training for the preacher or teacher."[26]

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Bible institutes furnished a large slice of local church leadership and influenced theology accordingly. Later, Dallas and similar schools began training the men who went on to administer and teach at Bible institutes.[27] When evangelical churches were clamoring for seminary- trained pastors, Dallas sent out only men to fill those posts. Other seminaries trained women but discouraged them from preaching and pastoral roles.

By the mid-twentieth century, churches increasingly directed women gifted to minister away from pulpit and pastoral duties toward safer spheres of service. Since World War I, the rapidly rising field of religious or Christian education has drawn trained women into its fold. A female Bible institute graduate who in 1910 might have pastored a small church or traveled as an itinerant revivalist would by 1940 more likely serve as a director of religious education.

Professionalization affected women's service on the mission field as well. Foreign missions continued as an acceptable ministry option for women throughout the twentieth century. But the shift to overseas specialties in medicine, education, agriculture, and construction influenced perceptions of appropriate roles for women. Before specialization, churches sent missionaries primarily as preachers, church planters and Bible teachers, with women filling those positions along with men. As specialization increased, women more often than not filled supportive roles as men handled preaching and pastoring. And female missionaries unused to preaching overseas felt less comfortable in American pulpits on furlough.

In summary, women found declining opportunities for leadership in evangelical churches, schools and agencies as institutionalization squelched earlier gift-based forms of ministry.[28] In worship as well as in education, routinization set in. In a shift toward more regulated and formalized church services, praying and speaking were no longer left to chance. Structured rather than spontaneous worship tended to exclude women from public participation.

Fundamentalist reaction to social change. Opposition to women's public ministry was part of a post-World War I reaction to vocal, extreme feminism and a perceived decline in womanhood. Dress, appearance, and habits constituted the most conspicuous signs of American women's growing independence. Shorter skirts, bobbed hair, cosmetics, public smoking, and drinking – these externals marked the "liberated" woman. More substantially, the expansion of women into the workforce produced growing economic independence.

The onset of the Depression undoubtedly accelerated the return of fundamentalists and evangelicals to traditional values. Evangelical feared that cultural trends toward women's freedom in dress, habits, morals and occupations might destroy the family. As church identified women preachers and pastors with the secular women's movement, opposition rose. Hoping to save the American home, many evangelicals narrowed their view of appropriate women's roles. The attack by John R. Rice. A separatist fundamentalist, against *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* illustrate how these issues

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[25] Rudolph A. Renfer, "A History of Dallas Theological Seminary," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1949.
[26] Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Effective Ministerial Training," *Evangelical Theological College Bulletin,* May 1925, p. 9.
[27] An examination of the educational background of the men who teach Bible and theology on MBI's faculty listed in the 1985-1986 catalog illustrates the phenomenal impact of Dallas. Thirteen of the nineteen Bible and theology professors graduated from Dallas. The dean of education and chair of five departments – Bible, Theology, Pastoral Studies, Evangelism and Christian Education -also graduated from Dallas.
[28] See David Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), and H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* New York,: Henry Holt, 1929), on the institutionalization process in religious groups.

connect in this era.[29]

The backlash in conservative Protestant circles against changing social mores can be traced in *Moody Monthly* magazines of the 1930s. Numerous articles appeared on the "new woman," exposing the ill effects of modern morality. The disturbing shifts in the roles and behavior of women in American society frightened conservative Christians. Convinced that the survival of the traditional family and of the entire social order was at stake, many evangelicals tightened their approach to women in church ministry. Might not women's leadership there give encouragement to other destructive tendencies?

MBI and other evangelical institutions began to advocate a more limited role expectation for women in an effort to maintain traditional family and moral values. In the process., evangelicals took away ministry opportunities from women.

Fundamental exegesis. In reaction to perceived threats to the family and society, many fundamentalist institutions revised their earlier perspectives on biblical teaching on women. Fundamentalists no longer interpreted the passages in I Timothy 2 or I Corinthians 14 as occasional advice for specific problems: instead these passages were regarded as giving transcultural principles for all times and places.

In the early twentieth century, fundamentalists had tightened the lines around the concept of inerrancy; it became one of the Fundamentals and was understood to require a literalistic interpretation of Scripture. Opposition to women ministers may have been formalized as a byproduct. Just as the South had employed extremely authoritative and literalistic views of Scripture to justify slavery, the North adopted similar attitudes toward women after the modernist battles. As this type of literalism became entrenched, fundamentalists interpreted passages about women more rigidly.

Opportunities for women to preach and pastor declined as evangelical churches identified such service as contrary to Scripture. Support of women's public ministry came to be seen as a denial of biblical inerrancy. Straton's 1926pamphlet was one of the last publications from the fundamentalist camp arguing for women's right to preach. Few evangelical men followed in the steps of Moody, Gordon, Simpson, Franson, Riley and Straton to publicly defend women preachers. When the publications containing feminist exegesis from the evangelical perspective went out of print, little appeared to replace them.[30] Unable or unwilling to view women's public ministry as consistent with Scripture, evangelical churches increasingly labeled their pulpits "For Men Only."

This shift in biblical exegesis produced theological reformulation. For example, the same premillennialism used by Gordon and Franson to advocate women preachers was utilized by later writers to restrict women. Certain dispensationalists began to interpret women's leadership as an evil sign of the end times, identifying such women with the whore of Babylon.

Turn-of-the-century evangelicals committed to the imminent, premillennial return of Christ had put their intense convictions into action. The urgent need to mobilize workers to spread the gospel worldwide left no time for one sex to remain silent. Later premillennialists apparently retained intellectual assent to Christ's soon return but relaxed considerably on the urgency of evangelizing the world. They proved more concerned with opposing evolution than promoting evangelism, and thus evangelical recruitment of female preachers subsided.

Although knowledge of the past does not and should not dictate the future, it helps illumine how recent attitudes toward women developed. For several decades at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, evangelical churches did not leave the public gifts of women in the church buried. We, in turn, dare not bury the accounts of those courageous, committed pioneer women.

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[29] John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* (Wheaton, IL: Sword of the Lord, 1941).
[30] Only recently have reprints of these books, pamphlets and articles been made available.