

WOMEN IN THE HOLINESS MOVEMENT

by

Lucille Sider Dayton

and

Donald W. Dayton

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by

Mrs. Lucille S. Dayton

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Introduction

We seek to uncover in this paper the important role of women within early Holiness traditions. We concentrate on outstanding women within the movement and on various defenses of their right to be leaders and preachers. This is just the beginning of the research that needs to be done. A more comprehensive study would include a statistical analysis of women ministers in the early Holiness traditions as compared to now. It would more carefully discuss the opposition women ministers faced, and it would seek to discover reasons for the decline of the participation of women within the Holiness traditions in recent years.

We begin this paper with a discussion of the role of women in early Methodism in England. We then notice the influence of revivalist Finney and Oberlin College on woman's participation in early revivalism. We see the conjoining of Methodism and Revivalism in Phoebe Palmer and her followers. We discuss Maggie Van Cott, the first woman licensed to preach in the Methodist Church, and other women preachers and writers of the mid-19th century. We examine the Holiness literature as it speaks about woman's role and we trace the influence of women in several Holiness denominations. In conclusion, we ask if the 1972 Christian Holiness Association resolution on "Women's Place in Society" adequately encourages women to a significant role, as the early Holiness traditions so clearly did.

Women and Early Methodism in England

The prominent role women were to play in the Holiness traditions was foreshadowed in early Methodism. Susanna Wesley, mother of John and Charles Wesley, is often called the Mother of Methodism. She exercised a powerful influence over her 10 children as she taught them six hours a day in her "household school" and as she met each of them for private tutor and prayer one evening a week.

When John left home, the influence of his mother went with him and he sought her advice to the time of her death. It was her practical counsel to allow laymen to preach that led the way to his allowing laywomen to preach as well. It was her example of teaching the Gospel that convinced him other women could do the same. John Newton has suggested she also had major impact on Wesley's formulation of the doctrines of Christian Perfection, of Assurance and the witness of the Holy Spirit.¹

1. John A. Newton, Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1968), pp.186-193.

Susanna Wesley exercised religious leadership outside the home as well. Exasperated about her limitations in the home she wrote to her husband:

It came into my mind that though I am not a man nor a minister of the Gospel, and so cannot be employed in such a worthy employment as they were, yet if my heart were sincerely devoted to God, and if I were inspired with a true zeal for His glory and did really desire the salvation of souls, I might do something more than I do.²

Soon after this, she turned her Sunday family worship into an evening service which 200 people attended regularly. When her husband returned home he questioned the propriety of a woman leading the service, but he could not deny her success so he capitulated.

Under such maternal influence Wesley could not deny women a positive role in religious activities. From the beginning many women took an active part in Methodism. In 1739 Wesley appointed women as leaders of the Classes in Bristol and after prolonged consideration he allowed women to serve as local preachers and itinerant ministers, though they were never ordained. Since these early Classes were comprised of more women than men, the women could have out-voted the men in the regional meetings. But Wesley was not threatened. "God owns women in the conversion of sinners," he once said, "and who am I that I should withstand God."³

Before Wesley, Robert Wearmouth explained, it was unheard of in England, that women hold positions in government or in the church. "It might be claimed that the emancipation of womanhood began with him."⁴ For he, more than any man in 18th century England, encouraged women in the service of Christ and humanity.⁵

One of the first women Wesley encouraged, though reluctantly at first, was Mrs. Sarah Crosby, who early in her ministry encountered resistance to her preaching. The question occurred unexpectedly when Mrs. Crosby found 200 people at her Class meeting. The large crowd prevented an intimate discussion as was the custom, so Mrs. Crosby simply stood up and testified of her life with Christ. Wesley applauded her action although he requested that she not preach. Praying and giving short exhortations and testimonies were acceptable, Wesley advised. But taking a text and expounding it beyond four or five minutes was out of order. Two years later

2. F. Townley Lord, Great Women in Church History (London: Cassell and Company, 1940), p. 161.

3. Ibid, p. 165.

4. Robert F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century (London: The Epworth Press, 1945), p. 223.

5. Lord, op. cit., p. 165.

6. Thomas M. Morrow, Early Methodist Women (London: Epworth Press, 1967), p.14.

Mrs. Crosby's unusually successful ministry forced Wesley to change his mind and he gave her as well as other women permission to preach.

Another woman Wesley encouraged was Mrs. Mary Fletcher who preached to crowds of 2,000 to 3,000 people. After the death of her husband, John, Wesley exhorted her to preach as much as possible and he described her preaching as, "fire, conveying both light and heat to all that heard her....Her manner of speaking smooth, easy and natural, even when the sense is deep and strong."⁷

Mrs. Fletcher withstood much mockery in her faithfulness to the work to which God had called her.⁸ On one occasion, when responding to the criticism that it was immodest for a woman to preach, she retorted:

Now, I do not apprehend Mary could in the least be accused of immodesty when she carried the joyful news of her Lord's resurrection, and in that sense taught the teachers of mankind. Neither was the woman of Samaria to be accused of immodesty when she invited the whole city to come to Christ....Neither do I suppose Deborah did wrong in publicly declaring the message of the Lord...⁹

Also important in early Methodism was Mrs. Hester Rogers. She visited the sick and poor, instructed penitents and counseled believers. According to her biographer, she was leader of several classes and lead hundreds to Christ.¹⁰

We could go on and describe the work of Hannah Ball, Francis Pawson, Mary Taft, Sarah Bentley, the Countess of Huntingdon and others, but this is sufficient to indicate the important role of women in early Methodism.

Biblical commentator Adam Clarke also encouraged women. He said, "Under the blessed spirit of Christianity they women have equal rights, equal privileges, and equal blessings, and, let me add, they are equally useful."¹¹ At a time in Israel when many men were available, God called Hulda, a woman, to prophesy. Clarke believed God still called women to prophesy--to prophesy not just in the restricted sense of foretelling, but also in the broader sense of "preaching, exhorting, praying, and instructing." At Pentecost the Spirit was poured out to the daughters as well as the sons and

7. Ibid, p. 98.

8. Henry Moore, The Life of Mrs. Mary Fletcher, (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1820), p.445.

9. Phoebe Palmer, Promise of the Father (Boston: Henry V. Degen, 1859), p.11.

10. Our Excellent Women of the Methodist Church in England and America, "Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers", by Rev. J.B. Wakeley, (New York: James Miller, 1873), p. 94.

11. B. T. Roberts, Ordaining Women, (Rochester, N.Y.: Earnest Christian Publishing House, 1891), p.59.

and all prophesied and spoke in tongues. "The gifts," he insisted, "shall not be restricted to any one class or order of people."¹² Least of all should they be withheld from women, for the influence of one woman, Clarke calculated, was equal to the influence of 7½ men.¹³

American Revivalism and Oberlin College

The tendencies toward fuller participation of women within Methodism were intensified on the American scene by contact with Revivalism and pre-Civil War reform movements. Revivalism itself, especially the forms practiced by Charles G. Finney, tended to give more prominence to the place of women. Apparently it was Finney's most famous convert and assistant, abolitionist Theodore Weld, who first pushed Finney in this direction. On the night of his conversion Weld testified and encouraged women to do the same, with the result:

That seven females, a number of them the most influential female christians in the city, confessed their sin in being restrained by their sex, and prayed publickly in succession at that very meeting.¹⁴

This caused a great deal of discussion throughout Western New York and, in fact, the practice became one of the "new measures" for which Finney was so severely criticized.

Revivalism coalesced with the rising tide of the "Holiness" emphasis on "Christian Perfection" in the early years of Oberlin College. Among the many reforms (Abolitionism, peace movement, "physiological reforms", etc.) to which Oberlin was committed was "female reform" and it became the first co-educational college in the world. Asa Mahan, whose later writings were widely distributed and read in Holiness circles, was the first president, while Finney served as Professor of Theology before succeeding Mahan in the presidency. Earlier revivalist tendencies to give prominence to women were developed at Oberlin even beyond Finney's inclinations. Finney insisted that the scripture did not prohibit the speaking or praying of women in mixed assemblies,¹⁵ and he, unlike some other professors, encouraged

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12. John O. Foster, Life and Labors of Mrs. Maggie Newton Van Cott (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1872), p. 306.
 13. Palmer, op. cit., p. 98. Although Clarke argued strongly for the equality and rights of women, at one point he stated that there are some functions of the ministry of which only men are capable. He never explained what he meant by this. Roberts, op. cit., p. 64.
 14. Letter dated August, 26, 1837 from Theodore Weld to Angelina Grimke in Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, (eds.), Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), p. 432.
 15. Oberlin Evangelist, April 23, 1845.

women to participate in class discussions.¹⁶ But he never went as far as Mahan in advocating that women give commencement addresses, etc. Of all the Oberlin faculty, Mahan apparently was the most liberal. In his autobiography he suggested for a monument epitaph:

That I was the first man, in the history of the race, who conducted women, in connection with members of the opposite sex, through a full course of liberal education, and conferred upon her the high degrees which had hitherto been the exclusive prerogative of men.¹⁷

A number of Oberlin graduates went even further and became some of the most important feminists of the period. Lucy Stone, the most well known of these, is notorious for working out a marriage contract which provided equal legal and personal rights for herself and her husband Henry B. Blackwell.¹⁸ Also among these graduates were Antionette Brown, the first woman to be ordained,¹⁹ and Salie Holly, a famous anti-slavery lecturer.²⁰

Phoebe Palmer and Her Impact

In the next generation Holiness leadership passed to Phoebe Palmer, Methodist laywoman, who, as evangelist and editor of Guide to Holiness, was the major force behind the mid-19th century Holiness revival. Being an organizer by nature, she was one of the first officers of the Ladies Home Missionary Society and a founder of the Five Points Mission in New York. She was responsible for the establishment of a mission in China, which her physician husband, Dr. Walter C. Palmer, and friends supported, and she was instrumental in the establishment of Garrett Biblical Institute and Drew Theological Seminary.²¹

More outstanding than her organizing skills was her ability to preach, and the "Tuesday Meeting" started with her sister Sarah Lanford in 1829 "for the promotion of Holiness", quickly expanded. Her revival work took her through Canada, United States and Britain where she claimed 25,000 converts. She fervently preached the doctrine of Holiness as one Brooklyn minister reported:

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16. Robert Samuel Fletcher, A History of Oberlin College, Vol. I, (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College, 1943), p. 293.
 17. Asa Mahan, Autobiography, Intellectual, Moral and Spiritual (London: T. Woolmer, 1882), p. 169.
 18. Aileen S. Krador, (ed.), Up from the Pedestal (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 149.
 19. Fletcher, op. cit., p. 294.
 20. Ibid, p. 290.
 21. Ernest Wall, "I Commend Unto You Phoebe", Religion in Life, Vol. 26, (Summer, 1957), p. 398.

She showed the church of God that there were mountain peaks of sanctification that it had never attained, and created in the souls of us who had not reached that elevation, a longing for the glorious ascent.²²

Mrs. Palmer, however, was not without opposition, and many churches still barred women from praying, speaking or preaching. Mrs. Palmer found this intolerable and in 1859 produced a 421 page book, The Promise of the Father, in defense of the call and need of women to speak in public. She argued that the promise of the Father in Joel 2:28 was that in the later days the Spirit was to be poured out on the daughters as well as the sons and both were expected and compelled to pray, prophesy and preach.

Mrs. Palmer tried to avoid the question of "Women's Rights" but she did note that "some reforms contemplated in recent movements may, in various respects, be decidedly advantageous,"²³ and that it would not be undignified for women to play a prominent part in legislative halls and church conventions. Though the ordinary way for women to serve was not in preaching and governing, she insisted, in unusual circumstances God breaks out of this pattern as is seen in the call of Deborah and Hulda to prophesy and Queen Victoria to govern.

In Chapter I Mrs. Palmer discussed the main objection to allowing women to speak; Paul's prohibition, "Let your women keep silence in the churches." She first pointed out the inconsistency of those who apply the prohibition. They apply it literally to preaching but not to other forms of participation, for they do allow women to sing, pray and respond in liturgies. She then examined the circumstances under which the prohibition was given, and found it was given to the church at Corinth which was experiencing disorder when people prophesied. "It was in reference to this...that Paul enjoins silence, and not in reference to the exercise of the gift of prophesy, which...he so plainly admits"²⁴ when he says that every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head (1 Cor. 11:5). Mrs. Palmer added:

Surely it is evident that the irregularities here complained of were peculiar to the church of Corinth, and in fact, we may presume, were not even applicable to other Christian churches of Paul's day, much less Christian churches of the present day, as no such disorders exist.²⁵

22. Ibid, p. 396.

23. Palmer, op. cit. p. 1.

24. Ibid, p. 7.

25. Ibid, p. 6.

Passages such as, "I suffer not a woman to teach nor usurp authority over the man." and, "If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home," Mrs. Palmer explained, "do not pertain to the question of preaching but rather to the question of ^{usurping} authority which is wrong for both men and women. While saying this and while insisting that the New Testament raised the position of women, Mrs. Palmer still held to some distinction between men and women: "Adam was first formed, then Eve, and all the daughters of Adam must acknowledge man first in creation, long as time endures."²⁶

In Chapter II Mrs. Palmer stated the thesis of her book in terms of a question:

Has not a gift of power, delegated to the church on the day of Pentecost, been neglected? Or, in other words, has not a marked speciality of the Christian dispensation been comparatively unrecognized and kept out of use?²⁷

Mrs. Palmer next asked if the tongue of fire descended alike upon God's daughters as upon his sons and if the effect was the same? She answered with an emphatic "yes" because both daughters and sons received the cloven tongues and both then began to preach.²⁸ The only scriptural difference between the preaching of men and women was that women were to be veiled and men were not to be. But this distinction, she explained, is no longer applicable since it was based on an obsolete Oriental custom.²⁸

Mrs. Palmer then lauded women for fearlessly serving the church. She discussed Phoebe, deaconess of the church of Cenchrea who propagated the Gospel in foreign countries. She noted the many women whom Wesley encouraged to preach but lamented the present trend to discourage women. She praised the Quakers for allowing women to preach and she described many American women who, after responding to the doctrine of Holiness, became great witnesses for Christ. She also noted that after men responded to this doctrine, their attitudes changed and they became much more open to allowing women to preach.

While Mrs. Palmer insisted on the right of women to preach, she never pressed for ordination. Her reason for this was not that women are not suitable for ordination, but rather that the whole system of ordination was unscriptural and vastly different from the New Testament church where everyone--man, woman and child--was called to preach the Gospel.²⁹

26. Ibid, p. 3.

27. Ibid, p. 14.

28. Ibid, p. 21.

29. Ibid, p. 45.

In conclusion, Mrs. Palmer summarized her plea and concern ~~as~~ follows:

The church in many ways is a sort of potter's field, where the gifts of woman, as so many strangers, are buried. How long, O Lord, how long before man shall roll away the stone that we may see a resurrection.³⁰

O, the endless weight of responsibility with which the church is pressing herself earthward through the depressing influences of this error! How can she rise while the gifts of three fourths of her membership are sepulcred in her midst?

"Daughters of Zion, from the dust
Exalt thy fallen head;
Again in thy Redeemer trust.-³¹
He calls thee from the dead."³¹

The impact of Mrs. Palmer was felt throughout Canada, Britain and United States. Two prominent women, in particular, felt this influence. In Britain the most well known of these was Catherine Booth, wife of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. After hearing Mrs. Palmer preach, Catherine Booth was overjoyed, but then appalled to read a pamphlet which denied on scriptural grounds the right of Mrs. Palmer and other women to preach. Catherine responded with a 32 page pamphlet on "Female Ministry" in which she described Jesus' humane attitude toward women, the work of the prophetesses in the New Testament, etc. She, like Mrs. Palmer, argued that at Pentecost:

The Spirit was given to the female as to the male disciple and this is cited by Peter...as the peculiar speciality of the later dispensation. What a remarkable device of the devil that he has succeeded in hiding this....but the time of her deliverance draweth nigh.³²

Soon after the pamphlet was written, Catherine, in a religious experience during an illness, promised to obey God whatever that might mean. She found what that meant a few Sundays later when she felt God telling her to go to the pulpit and confess her call to preach. She went and began a ministry which was to last the rest of her life.

William became sick soon after this and Catherine took his place in the pulpit. She wrote to her mother: "William is, of course, very pleased and says he feels quite comfortable at home minding the bairns, knowing who was supplying his place."³³

30. Ibid, p. 341.

31. Ibid, p. 347.

32. F. De L. Booth-Tucker, The Life of Catherine Booth, Vol. 1 (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892), p. 348.

33. Ibid, p. 364.

When William did not get better for some time, Catherine ~~not~~ only preached but she also carried out all his duties as Superintendent at Gateshead.

By this time William was thoroughly convinced of the right of women to preach and of the equality of men and women, but this was not so when he first met Catherine. "Woman has a fibre more in the heart and a cell less in the brain," he argued in a letter to her during their engagement. Catherine denied this and insisted that lack of training and opportunity were solely responsible for woman's secondary place in society. Unless William would change, Catherine threatened, the engagement would have to be broken. Gradually William began to acquiesce and three years later, in 1855, they were married.

The following year in her first published article in The Connexion Magazine, she pointed out that "Women were last at the Cross and first at the sepulchre," and she plead:

Oh that the Church would excite its female members to emulate their zeal and remove all undue restraints to its development.³⁴

I believe it is impossible to estimate the extent of the church's loss, where prejudice and custom are allowed to render the outpouring of God's spirit upon His handmaidens null and void.³⁵

In the next three years Catherine gave birth to two of her eight children and from the beginning she taught them equality:

I have tried to grind it into my boys that their sisters were just as intelligent and capable as themselves. Jesus Christ's principles were to put woman on the same platform as men, although I am sorry to say His apostles did not always act upon it.³⁶

In the Salvation Army, founded several years later, Christ's principles of equality were clearly enforced. It emphatically declared that "no laws can be good in effect that profess to care for and guard the interest of one sex at the expense of the other."³⁷ After considerable debate women were admitted to all ranks, including those which had authority over men. In 1934 Evangeline Booth, daughter of

34. Ibid, p. 177.

35. Ibid, p. 176.

36. Ibid, p. 125.

36. The Salvation Army: Its Origin and Development (London: Salvationist Publishing and Supplies, 1951), p. 63.

Catherine and William was elected to the highest office in the Army, that of General.

In 1861 Catherine and William broke from the Methodist Church and travelled all over England conducting revivals. To double "their power for good", they often held separate meetings and crowds thronged to hear Catherine. In Portsmouth, the crowd averaged 1,000 people for 17 consecutive weeks, and at Hastings 2,500 attended nightly. Some attended just to hear a woman, for her advertisements read, "Come and Hear a Woman Preach." But more than curiosity it was her remarkable powers as a preacher coupled with her complete devotion to God that sustained the interest of her listeners.

In contrast to William, Catherine was at ease with the rich as well as the poor. William was reluctant to tackle the intellectuals of London until her success there, convinced them in 1865 to open a mission which became the Salvation Army in 1878. Catherine preached to royalty, she did not hesitate to lobby with Queen Victoria for changes in oppressive laws, and she fearlessly castigated the wealthy for their irresponsibility to the poor.

Catherine continued to preach and write (authoring half a dozen books), for the rest of her life. When she died at 61 all of England mourned and 50,000 filed past her coffin. William reflected at her death that she was indeed the Salvation Army Mother. Other religious organizations had Fathers as guides and authorities, but God in His wisdom, and mercy gave the Salvation Army a Mother as well as a Father. While William was the creative organizer, she had the critical and analytical intellect. Today Catherine Booth's place in the founding of the Salvation Army is often ignored. But at her death her co-founder husband recognized the place that was rightfully hers.

Catherine Booth not only attained a position hitherto foreign to women but she fought for the equality of all women. "She was to the end of her days, an unflinching, unflinching, uncompromising champion of woman's rights,"³⁸ declared her son-in-law biographer Booth-Tucker. "One half of her mission consisted in resurrecting the buried talents of her sex, the other half in humanizing...the spiritual in bringing religion out of the vague...into the area of practical politics."³⁹ And though much too idealistic, he claimed:

When an unprejudiced posterity distributes its award, surely no secondary place will be allotted to her who fought and won the Waterloo of woman's equal right to serve and save, cancelling the absurd monopoly of man, and banishing the perpetual and inglorious exile, the dicta of prejudice and pride.⁴⁰

38. Booth-Tucker, op. cit. p. 123

39. Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 676.

40. Ibid, p. 659.

Also influenced by Phoebe Palmer was Francis Willard, founder and long term president of the World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union. In 1865 during a revival meeting in Evanston, she was sanctified under the ministry of Dr. and Mrs. Palmer, although there is some doubt about the extent of later identification with the Holiness movement.

Francis Willard is known most for her work in the W.C.T.U. although she was also prominent in the movement for woman's suffrage. She described her call from God to work for woman's suffrage as follows:

While alone on my knees one Sabbath, in the capital of the Crusade state, as I lifted my heart to God crying, "What wouldst thou have me to do?" there was borne in my mind, as I believe from loftier regions, this declaration, "You are to speak for woman's ballot as a weapon for protection for her home." Then for the first and only time in my life, there flashed through my brain a complete line of arguments and illustrations.⁴¹

Francis asked to speak about the woman's ballot at the next W.C.T.U. convention but was refused because, "suffrage was too advanced and radical a thing, connected in those days with too much ridicule and and scorn, a thing unwomanly and unscriptural, and to touch it was contamination."⁴² Francis backed off for a time but then remembered her call and said, "Woe is me if I proclaim not this gospel."⁴³

At the W.C.T.U. convention in 1876 she made her first important suffrage speech. Her friends were shocked and sad, yet they could not disagree with her. One of these friends, Hannah Whitall Smith, listened silently to her speech, but after the meeting she burst into bitter crying. "Francis Willard has just convinced me,"⁴⁴ she sobbed, "that I ought to want to vote, and I don't want to!" These women feared the responsibilities the vote would give them, yet they knew within themselves that this responsibility had to be faced.

The next year Dwight L. Moody asked Francis Willard to assist him in his evangelistic work. She thoroughly loved this work and Moody encouraged her to preach temperance and suffrage as well as the Gospel. Through her connection with him, she reached thousands of people she otherwise would have never touched. Eventually she had

41. Ray Strachey, Francis Willard: Her Life and Work (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1913), p. 208.

42. Ibid, p. 209.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid, p. 211.

to break with Moody for although he was liberal in social issues, in religious matters he was too narrow. When he prohibited her from appearing on the platform with a person who⁴⁵ denied the divinity of Christ, she terminated her work with him.

She returned to work for the W.C.T.U. and in 1879 was elected president. of the National W.C.T.U. and in 1891 she founded and became president of the World's W.C.T.U. She spent the rest of her life with the World's W.C.T.U. although she also helped organize the Prohibition Party, she was president for a time of the National Council of Women,⁴⁶ and she authored many books and articles, among them Woman in the Pulpit, an argument for the ordination of women.⁴⁷

By the end of her life Francis Willard was widely known in Britain and had spoken in every state and territory of the United States. At her death flags were flown at halfmast and 1,000 memorial services were held in all parts of the country. In 1905 a statue of her was placed in the Capital in Washington and⁴⁸ she became the first and only woman ever to receive this honor.

At her death a memorial book was published and among the many tributes was the following by W. T. Stead, well known English journalist:

Francis Willard stood for the capacity of women to do, to act, to plan all by their lone selves. She might have done more for temperance and other causes if she had allowed men to work in the W.C.T.U., but she would have done less for women. It was her great work--teaching women that they could do things by themselves. Women who knew, and those more numerous who felt the significance of the stand she made, felt toward her⁴⁹ a devotion which no mere apostolate of temperance have evoked.

45. Ibid, p. 217.

46. Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. XX (New York: Scribners, 1936), p. 234.

47. Published in 1888 by D. Lothrop, Boston.

48. Strachey, op. cit., p. 305.

49. Anna A. Gordan, The Beautiful Life of Francis E. Willard (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publishing Association, 1898), p. 406.

Other Mid-19th Century Holiness Women

Mrs. Maggie Van Cott, the first woman licensed to preach in the Methodist Church, merits attention. Though she was a faithful Episcopalian, her friends entreated her to attend a Methodist class meeting, where she was filled with the Spirit. She soon began to lead Bible studies, to visit the Five Points Mission in N.Y. (founded earlier by Phoebe Palmer), and she was largely responsible for reviving it.

A friend, hearing of her success in the city, asked her to preach near her home, but she replied, "I preach? Impossible. I in a pulpit? Never."⁵⁰ The thought came to her, however, "What is a pulpit but a place where the speaker better sees the audience and the audience the speaker?"⁵¹ She entered the pulpit soon after this, in 1860, and began to travel all around New England, where hundreds were converted under her preaching. She was not concerned about her ecclesiastical standing as a minister, but members of her class meeting were, so they gave her an Exhorter's License in September of 1868.

The next year she was asked if she had a license to preach. When she produced her Exhorter's License, she was informed that it did not allow her to preach from a text. She replied:

Don't it. Well, God allows it. I received my commission from him...and have used texts years before I ever saw brother Morehouse [who gave her the license] and God has honored the work in the salvation of hundreds of souls. I think what God owns and blesses, man has no right to condemn.⁵²

Shortly thereafter, though still not seeking it, she was given a Local Preacher's License. Upon receiving it she inquired, "Will this make me more efficient in winning souls for Christ?" When the reply was, "I cannot say that it will," she retorted, "Well then... I value it but very little."⁵³

Mrs. Van Cott never sought status or honor for herself. The following statement by Bishop Gilbert Haven, however, indicates the respect others had for her:

She is without doubt, today, the most popular, most laborious and most successful preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church. She has more calls, does more work, and wins more souls to Christ than any of her brothers.⁵⁴

50. Foster, op. cit., p. XVIII

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid, p. 219.

53. Ibid, p. 221.

54. Ibid, p. XXIII.

Although the over-all reception of Mrs. Van Cott was positive, she and other women preachers were criticized by some. In response to this criticism, Rev. D. Sherman devoted the Preface to Mrs. Van Cott's biography to a discussion of "Woman's Place in the Gospel." He argued that, "Christianity is emphatically the Gospel of woman.... In other systems she holds a place below man; in this, as his equal."⁵⁵ This principle of equality is clearly stated in Galatians 3:28: "In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female." Rev. Sherman explained that these principles were not always carried out in the New Testament because the people were not ready to accept them. The institutions of slavery and the subjection of women were not openly attacked by Christ or the apostles although the principles for their freedom were layed down. Since the first century the Church has matured and thus has denounced slavery. Rev. Sherman then asked the Church to continue to mature and to allow woman her place of equality in the ministry of the church.

More famous than Mrs. Van Cott was Mrs. Hannah Whittall Smith, born in 1832 into a Philadelphia, Quaker home. Mrs. Smith is known most for her devotional classic of 1875, The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life, which has been translated into many languages and by 1950 had sold over two million copies. Being a reformer by nature, she worked for the peace movement, the temperance movement and for the widening of the influence of women.⁵⁶ (Her grand-daughter Ray Strackey was a prominent English feminist and writer.)

In 1874 she moved to England where she and her husband, Robert Pearsall Smith were prominent in the founding of the Keswick Movement. She preached regularly and her success was equal to her husband's. Wherever she went she was loved and called "the angel of the churches."⁵⁷

Also well known around the middle of the 19th century was the evangelist, Mrs. Amanda Smith, who was born a slave in 1837. Herself a runaway slave, she helped other slaves to freedom. She was converted under the preaching of Rev. John S. Inskip, first president of the National Camp Meeting Association and she attended the "Tuesday" meeting, started by Phoebe Palmer. In the 1870's she began to preach throughout the country in Camp Meetings and churches and hundreds were converted under her ministry. Though criticized as a woman and as a black she travelled extensively not only in America but in England, Ireland, Scotland, India and Africa. She had only three months of schooling, but was respected by the

55. Ibid, p. XXXI

56. Dictionary of American Biography, Vol 17, op. cit., p. 275.

57. Logan Pearsall Smith, (ed.), Philadelphia Quaker: The Letters of Hannah Whittall Smith (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1950), p. XIII.

educated and uneducated alike. Bishop Thoburn of India said of her:

That she was not only a woman of faith, but that she possessed a clearness of vision which I have seldom found equalled.... During the seventeen years that I have lived in Calcutta, I have known many famous strangers to visit the city, but I have never known anyone who could draw and hold so large an audience as Mrs. Smith.⁵⁸

Women in late 19th century Holiness Literature

Toward the end of the 19th century the Guide to Holiness, the major Holiness magazine, contained considerable discussion about the role of women. In 1869 M. Annesley wrote: "The New Testament includes male and female as brethren, and that which applies to the one in Christian fellowship, applies to both.... If we receive, we must also impart."⁵⁹ Rev. L. H. Baker, in 1895, welcomed the new age that had dawned, where woman is no longer treated as "a beast of burden," or as "a soulless something". Woman, he explained, is a priestess and her ministry extends beyond the home into the church, into educational institutions and even into politics.⁶⁰

In the following year a special two-page essay was written each month by Rev. J. Willing Fowler, "to glance over the fields where women are at work for our Lord...and help the silent two-thirds of the Church to see that there is a place for them in the ranks."⁶¹ At the beginning of each essay, Willing quoted the prophesy from Joel, "Upon the handmaidens...will I pour out my Spirit," and then he described the work of women in various organizations.

One year later Mrs. Fowler began to write these essays instead of her husband, and she soon became a regular Corresponding Editor. In her December, 1897 essay, she described God's model woman. This woman is full of power and mental energy; she is industrious, "not content to be a consumer, she becomes a producer; she is a business woman who knows the laws that underlie the rise and fall of real estate. She is strong and serious and "feels too keenly the great work God has placed in her hands to indulge in silly dawdling, fainting at the sight of a mouse, pluming herself on her general feebleness."⁶² The model woman "feels the nobility of labor" and realizes:

That working for pay is no more beneath a woman's dignity than it is for a man....She loves to share his business burdens, that he may share her studies and culture; and

58. Mrs. Amanda Smith, An Autobiography (Noblesville, Indiana: Newby Book Room, 1972), p. VI.

59. M. Annesley, "Speaking in Meeting", Guide to Holiness, Vol 7, (May, 1868), p. 145.

60. Rev. L. H. Baker, "The Priestess", Guide to Holiness, Vol. 64, (April, 1895), p. 152

61. J. Fowler Willing, "Woman In Gospel Evangelism", Guide to Holiness, Vol. 64, (Jan, 1896), p. 22.

62. Mrs. J. Fowler Willing, "God's Great Woman", Guide to Holiness Vol. 67, (December, 1897), p. 226.

they twain are one in service and one in recreation.⁶³

Mrs. Willing, like many other Holiness people, pointed to Pentecost as the beginning of the freedom of woman:

The Pentecost laid the axe at the root of the tree of social injustice. The text of Peter's sermon that marvelous day was the keynote of woman's enfranchisement.⁶⁴

When the Pentecostal light shines most brightly, women do the bulk of the common-school teaching. They are also principles, professors, college presidents, and are admitted to all the learned professions....When the light shines clearly, they have equal rights with men by whose side they labor for God's glory.⁶⁵

In a later essay Mrs. Willing declared Pentecost, "Woman's Emancipation Day". It gave woman the privilege to preach and it even produced a woman who taught theology; Priscilla, whose name is usually mentioned before her husband's, "a strange thing among the heathen or Jews."⁶⁶ Mrs. Willing explained that Paul did not insist on the emancipation of women at every point because the people were too prejudiced to be able to accept it. He gave rather, "axioms which believers would grow to apprehend, with now and then an illustrative side-light."⁶⁷

Mrs. Willing lamented in another essay, the extent to which the Christian woman has fallen into the role society placed on her:

She contents herself with shining, like the moon, with borrowed splendor, as the mother, sister, or wife of the great so-and-so.... She has left her talent in its napkin while she has been obeying the world's dictum by helping to make the most of his.⁶⁸

This series of essays in the Guide to Holiness indicates the seriousness with which questions about the role of women were discussed in the late 19th century Holiness Movement. This concern is evident also in a pamphlet written by Holiness preacher W. B. Godbey in 1891 on "Woman Preacher." Godbey declared that,

63. Ibid, p. 227.

64. Mrs. J. Fowler Willing, "Woman and the Pentecost", Guide to Holiness, Vol. 68, (January, 1898), p. 21.

65. Ibid, p. 22.

66. Mrs. J. Fowler Willing, "Women Under the Pentecostal Baptism", Guide to Holiness, Vol. 70, (February, 1899), p. 52.

67. Ibid, p. 53.

68. Mrs. J. Fowler Willing, "Woman and the Pentecost", Guide to Holiness, Vol. 69, (September, 1898), p. 87.

"It is the God-given right, blood-bought privilege, and bounden duty of the women, as well as the men, to preach the gospel."⁶⁹ The only requirement to preach is that the person be filled with the Spirit. A license or ordination was not necessary for either men or women preachers because they tended to create unnecessary distinctions between the clergy and laity.

The verse, "It is a shame for a woman to speak in the church," was given to keep order, not to keep women from preaching, Godbey also said, "I don't know a Scripture in all the Bible by whose perversion the devil has dragged more souls into hell than this."⁷⁰

Although Godbey stated that in the home the man is the head he argued that woman is in some ways superior to man:

When God made man, he made him out of the dirt. When he made woman, he made her out of man. So woman is a double refinement. . . . Man is physically stronger than woman. . . . But woman is morally stronger than man. Oh, what a victory Satan won when he so awfully paralyzed⁷¹ the larger, truer and more efficient wing of the army.

Give the women a chance, he pleaded:

They will rob Satan of his whiskey, confront him on every ramification of the battle field, fill the saloons and brothels of Christendom, and the jungles of heathendom, with blood-washed and fire-baptized missionaries, march to the music of full salvation to the ends of the earth, belt the globe with the glory of God, and transform a⁷² world long groaning in sin and misery into a paradise.

Oh, brethren, for the sake of the souls Jesus bought with his blood, let us get out of the way of the women.⁷³

Women in the Holiness Denominations

We now turn to several Holiness denominations to examine the participation of women and the discussions about that participation. We will not discuss the Salvation Army since we noted it above in the description of Catherine Booth.

69. Rev. W. G. Godbey, "Woman Preacher", (Louisville, Kentucky: Pentecostal Publishing Co., 1891), p. 1.

70. Ibid, p. 10.

71. Ibid, p. 12.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid, p. 13.

Wesleyan Methodist Church:

The Wesleyan Methodist Church, founded in 1842 over the abolitionist controversy within Methodism, had very close connections with the mid-19th century women's rights movement. The principles of equality and freedom they so strongly upheld in regards to the slave, were quickly and naturally transferred to include women also. When Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton sought a building for their famous 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Convention, they went to the Wesleyan Methodist Church, knowing those who had opened their doors to blacks would also open their doors to women. Their request was granted.⁷⁴

Four years later the Syracuse Men's Temperance Society invited "temperance societies of every name" to send delegates to a forthcoming convention. To their despair the women's temperance society sent two delegates, which brought chaos to the convention. One minister described the woman delegates as "a hybrid species, half man and half woman, belonging to neither sex."⁷⁵ Three men defended these women, one being a Wesleyan Methodist minister, Rev. Luther Lee. When the three men were shouted down, and when the secretary announced he would not count the votes of the women delegates, Rev. Lee offered his church to the women for an evening meeting. That evening the church was packed, while the convention was almost deserted, and Rev. Lee, Susan B. Anthony and others gave stirring pleas for the right of women to work and speak for temperance.⁷⁶ Rev. Lee's involvement with women's rights is seen also one year later when he ordained to the ministry, Antionette Brown, a Congregationalist, who was the first woman ever to be ordained.⁷⁷

The question of the role of woman was discussed also by Jerathan Blanchard, pastor of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Wheaton and founder of Wheaton College. Blanchard said that, "the first alteration which Christianity made in the polity of Judaism was to abrogate this oppressive distinction of sexes."⁷⁸ In Judaism, "women had almost no rights; they were menials to their husbands and parents. They had no name in the church rolls, and could take no part in their worship rites."⁷⁹ Christianity, on the other hand, taught:

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74. Andrew Sinclair, The Emancipation of the American Woman (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 61.
75. Ira Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, Vol. 1 (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Co., 1899), p. 70.
76. Ibid.
77. Robert Samuel Fletcher, A History of Oberlin College, Vol. 1 (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College, 1943), p. 294.
78. Rev. J. Blanchard and N. L. Rice, A Debate on Slavery (Concinnati: Wm. H. Moore, 1846. Republished by Negro History Press, Detroit), p. 433.
79. Ibid.

That while the husband is the head of the wife, yet in "Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female....Christ declared the husband and wife to be "one flesh," and set the woman in the family, by the side of her husband, as she stood when first created his helpmeet, and not his menial dependent.⁸⁰

The question of the ordination of women was faced in the Wesleyan Methodist General Conference in 1864, after a woman was ordained an elder in the Illinois Conference. A resolution against the licensing of women to preach failed, and the Conference left the decision of the ordination of women to the local annual conferences.⁸¹ At the 1887 General Conference the question was raised again and after large numbers of the delegates had left for home, a resolution was passed forbidding the ordination of women.⁸² In the next General Conference in 1891, however, this rule was repealed, although a resolution to encourage the ordination of women was not passed. "The whole subject was left as if there had been no legislation on the subject, and the conferences wishing to ordain women have done so on the ground that what is not forbidden may be done."⁸³

Free Methodist Church:

The question of the ordination of women was debated also in the Free Methodist Church, founded in 1860. Founder B. T. Roberts presented a resolution in 1890 General Conference in favor of the ordination, and when it failed he was so disappointed that he vowed never to attend another conference. He died before the next conference never to have realized his dreams. The question was debated again in 1894, but failed. It was taken up for a third time in 1907 and passed with one stipulation; that women be allowed to be ordained as deacons but not as elders. This stipulation still holds in the Free Methodist Church and women ordained as deacons may not proceed to full ordination.⁸⁴

In a book, Ordaining Women, Roberts articulated his reasons for allowing women ordination. He argued that in the beginning God created man and woman equal, both being made in the image of God and both being commissioned to subdue and replenish the earth. Quoting from Adam Clarke he noted that the word help-meet means, "like, or as himself....This implies that the woman was to be a perfect resemblance of the man, possessing neither inferiority or superiority, but being in all things like and equal to himself."⁸⁵

80. Ibid.

81. Arthur T. Jennings, History of American Wesleyan Methodism (Syracuse, N. Y.: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1902), p. 113.

82. Ibid. p. 124.

83. Ibid.

84. Leslie R. Marston, From Age to Age A Living Witness (Winona Lake, Indiana: Light and Life Press, 1960), pp. 418-419.

85. B. T. Roberts, Ordaining Women (Rochester, N. Y.: Earnest Christian Publishing House, 1891), p. 49.

But at the fall, Roberts explained, woman transgressed first and for a punishment she was made subject to her husband. Christ restored her, however, to her position of equality--to an equality which extends into the church, into society and even into the domestic realm:

The greatest domestic happiness always exists where husband and wife live together on terms of equality. Two men, having individual interests, united only by business ties, daily associate as partners for years, without either of them being in subjection to the other. They consider each other as equals. Then, cannot a man and woman, united in conjugal love, the strongest tie that can unite two human beings, having the same interests, live together in the same manner.⁸⁷

Roberts showed that the objections to equality based on Scripture, arose from wrong translations or misinterpretations. The apostle Junia, for example, mentioned in Romans 16:7, was a woman according to the best texts, although many translations do not reflect this. In the New Testament women filled every office of the church: apostle, prophet, deacon, preacher and pastor.⁸⁸ In the Apostolic Church women took part in governing and women ministers were among those persecuted.⁸⁹ Roberts concluded:

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST, IN THE PROVISIONS WHICH IT MAKES, AND IN THE AGENCIES WHICH IT EMPLOYS, FOR THE SALVATION OF MANKIND, KNOWS NO DISTINCTION OF RACE, CONDITION, OR SEX, THEREFORE NO PERSON EVIDENTLY CALLED OF GOD TO THE GOSPEL MINISTRY, AND DULY QUALIFIED FOR IT, SHOULD BE REFUSED ORDINATION ON ACCOUNT OF RACE, CONDITION OR SEX.⁹⁰

Pilgrim Holiness Church:

Discussion of the role of women can be seen in the Pilgrim Holiness Church also. Founder Seth C. Rees, in his book, The Ideal Pentecostal Church, said that one of the 14 marks of an ideal church is that it is without distinction as to sex. He accused:

Nothing but jealousy, prejudice, bigotry, and a stingy love for bossing in men have prevented woman's public recognition by the church. No church that is acquainted with the Holy Ghost will object to the public ministry of women. We know scores of women who can preach the Gospel with a clearness, a power, and an efficiency seldom equalled by men. Sisters, let the Holy Ghost fill, call and anoint you to preach the glorious Gospel of our Lord.⁹¹

87. Ibid, p. 52.

88. Ibid, p. 159.

89. Ibid, p. 153.

90. Ibid, p. 159.

91. Seth C. Rees, The Ideal Pentecostal Church (Cincinnati: M. W. Knapp, 1897), p. 41.

Among the women ministers whom Seth Rees encouraged was his wife Hulda, known as "the Pentecostal Prophetess." Having begun to preach at 16,⁹² she continued until her death, accompanying her husband as co-pastor and co-evangelist. Her son Paul S. Rees said of her, "Like Catherine Booth, she was a balanced soul in whom domestic virtues and platform gifts developed apace."⁹³

Church of God (Anderson, Indiana):

Women played a prominent part in the early days of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), founded in 1881 by D. S. Warner. Historian John Smith wrote that from its beginning, women were considered an essential part of the leadership and functioned on the same level as men. In a 1902 publication, Familiar Names and Faces, 50 of the 200 leaders of the church were women. Smith claimed:

Forty years before the time of woman's suffrage on a national level, a great company of women were preaching, singing, writing, and helping to determine the policies in this religious reform movement.⁹⁴

It is probably safe to say that no other movement, either religious or secular, in this period of American history, except the suffrage movement itself, had such a high percentage of women leaders whose contribution was so outstanding.⁹⁵

Most well known of these women are Mary Cole, Sarah Smith, and Lena Shoffner, all of whom were preachers and evangelists. They faced considerable criticism, however. Mary Cole said she had to explain the Scriptural teaching on the subject of women preachers at almost every meeting, but she held to her convictions and as a result of her work, many people were converted.⁹⁶

Church of the Nazarene:

The right of women to preach was not debated in the early conferences of the Church of the Nazarene because the matter was settled at

92. Byron J. Rees, Hulda A. Rees: The Pentecostal Prophetess (Philadelphia: Christian Standard Co., 1898), p. 15.
93. Paul S. Rees, Seth Cook Rees: The Warrior Saint (Indianapolis: The Pilgrim Book Room, 1934), p. 13.
94. John W. Smith, Heralds of a Brighter Day (Anderson, Indiana: Gospel Trumpet Co., Church of God, 1955) p. 125.
95. Ibid, p. 126.
96. Mary Cole, Trials and Triumphs of Faith (Anderson, Indiana: Gospel Trumpet Co., Church of God, 1914), p. p. 85.

its founding in 1894. The original constitution specifically stated the right of women to preach,⁹⁷ and the first woman to be ordained, Mrs. W. S. Knott, was among the 82 founding members of the church.

Women, in the Church of The Nazarene, were primarily responsible for starting the missionary work, the youth work and for founding Pacific Bible School, the first educational institution. The faculty roster the second year of its existence shows that the principal and five of the eight faculty members were women.⁹⁸

One entire conference from West Tennessee consisted for a time of only women ministers. These women were criticized severely and in 1905, 12 of them defended their right to preach in a book, Women Preachers, edited by Mrs. Fannie McDowell. Historian Timothy Smith found:

The women who carried on this independent gospel work seem to have combined piety and practicality to a remarkable degree. Between revivals they maintained a normal and apparently stable family life, if the few surviving letters may be taken at face value. Their husbands joined happily in their meetings when they were near home and accepted periods of separation without much protest. Only one of the women seems ever to have gone to extremes of religious emotionalism, and on that occasion the sound common sense of the others shook her out of it.⁹⁹

Pillar of Fire:

The Pillar of Fire, another Holiness denomination started around the turn of the century, has a woman as its founder, Mrs. Alma White. Mrs. White believed that in the old dispensation men filled the priestly office, but when Christ was crucified, the veil was rent asunder, and both men and women were invited into the "sanctum sanctorum."¹⁰⁰

At one point Mrs. White referred to women as the weaker sex and less qualified than men to be leaders.¹⁰¹ But the position she most consistently advocated is reflected in her following statements:

97. Timothy L. Smith, Called Unto Holiness (Kansas City, Missouri: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), p. 113.

98. Ibid, p. 138.

99. Ibid, p. 155.

100. Mrs. Alma White, The New Testament Church (New Jersey: The Pentecostal Union, 1912), p. 225.

101. Ibid, p. 217.

Let Christ reign in the heart, and woman will take her place beside man and help to fight the battles of life, and not only be a helpmeet, but socially and mentally his equal.¹⁰²

In spite of the decisions of men, it is impossible to invalidate that which God has decreed, and so long as the Holy Ghost is in the world, women will preach the Gospel.¹⁰³

Great has been the loss the Church has suffered from the lack of proper teaching on this subject, but the world is no longer in darkness, women are now exercising their blood-bought privilege in wielding the sword of the Spirit.¹⁰⁴

The interest in the role of women by the Pillar of Fire denomination has continued into recent years. In 1955 it republished a book by Dr. Lee Anna Starr on The Bible Status of Woman. This 416 page book was published originally by Fleming Revell in 1926 and is one of the most thorough and scholarly studies on the subject.

Conclusion

A complete study of the role of women in the Holiness traditions would require much more detail and a continuation of the story into the 20th century. But we have provided enough material to indicate that from the very beginning, the American Holiness Movement in particular has been very self-conscious in giving a major role to women. This stance has varied from a reserved openness to women's religious activity, through a developed argument for the ordination of women, to, in some cases, an ardent feminism. But in each instance and at each stage of development the Holiness stance was generally in advance of the positions taken by other traditions. This practice continued well into the 20th century, but has declined in recent years. With the rising social status of the Holiness denominations and the consequent socialization to dominant society, this distinctive pattern has become more a memory than a living reality.

The extent to which this is true is revealed in a 1972 resolution on "Women's Place in Society" adopted by the Christian Holiness Association, the descendant of the 19th century National Campmeeting Association. This statement in both its spirit and letter as well as in what it omits, stands in sharp contrast to the sentiments of the 19th century founders and leaders.

102. Ibid, p. 227.

103. Ibid, p. 224.

104. Ibid, p. 230.

We believe in a divinely established distinction between the sexes, a distinction which should in no way impair political, civic, or moral rights but which may reflect unique qualifications of one sex or the other for certain occupations. We believe that remuneration should be paid on the basis of responsibility assumed and skill levels required, rather than on the basis of sex. We reaffirm our belief in the biblical principles establishing the sanctity of the family and home and the relationships and responsibilities of the home's several members. We do not consider that such principles are patterns of enslavement but rather that they provide for primary fulfillment in woman's role of wife, mother, and homemaker. We commend women for the strategic and important place they have historically filled in church and missionary life and activity, we urge a continued investment of time and strength in these causes, and we encourage them to significant involvement in community, civic, and political life.

Lucille and Don Dayton
5104 N. Christiana
Chicago, Ill. 60625