

CALL THE QUESTION:
RECLAIMING A RHETORICAL WITNESS OF WOMEN'S CLAIMS TO PREACH
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA FOR CONTEMPORARY HOMILETICS

By

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This dissertation is a labor of love.

With gratitude, I dedicate this dream-come-true endeavor

to three truly inspiring and extraordinary women:

my grandmother Ruth McKinney Wertz, who was ...

my mother Marylu Wertz Giver, who is ...

and my daughter Rebecca Giver Johnston, who always will be ...

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PREFACE

Once upon a time ... The story of this project begins with my story. It is a story of denial, re-imagination, claim, practice, affirmation, and celebration.

At the age of twelve, I received a divine call to serve in the Roman Catholic Church in which I was raised, but could not respond to the call, so said my priest, because of my gender. He said, “As I girl, you can become a nun or sing in the choir.” At twelve years old, I was just beginning to believe that not all boys had cooties, so I did not want to become a nun. And, as for the choir, I thought to myself, “Obviously, Father has never heard me sing.” I concluded that the call I heard was not for me; I had merely overheard the call meant for the boy kneeling next to me in the pew. And so I tucked it away and thought nothing more about it.

Several years later, when I entered a Presbyterian Church, I could not believe my eyes: I saw a woman preaching from the pulpit. Finally, I had a picture of my own call. At last, I could imagine what my call to preach looked like. And so, inspired to claim my call, I quit my stable government job, and went to seminary—literally on a wish and a prayer. After three years of studying deeply and broadly the stories of the Bible, church history, theology, and preaching, I graduated with a Master of Divinity degree. On July 7, 1996, seventeen years after my experience of call, I was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). Since then, my call to the preaching ministry has been affirmed and celebrated during ten years of pastoral service in the church.

I have since learned that my story of call is not unlike the stories of denied calls of other contemporary women. During my graduate studies as a Teaching Assistant for Fundamentals of Preaching, numerous women told me of their struggles to preach, of how their call was challenged, ridiculed and denied, based on their gender alone.

One woman's divine call was ridiculed by a male elder: "How could God speak to you when I have never heard God's voice? I don't know how a woman could have possibly heard God's voice, when I, a man, have never heard it."

Another woman was challenged by a long-time member of the women's guild, who said, "Don't worry dear, women in the church have an important place: they bake bread for communion or teach the children in Sunday school. It's tradition. We've always done it like that. That's what women are best suited for."

When one woman shared her call to preach with her parents, they were so disappointed that they said, "Didn't we teach you anything? The Bible says clearly that women are to be silent in church. If you pursue this path, consider yourself cut off."

An ordained woman called as associate pastor to a church met with the pastor and asked when she might preach. He responded, "Well, let's not rush into things, now. I am the head pastor here, so I will preach and you can offer the prayer afterwards. Oh, and be sure to wear a skirt when you help during worship."

I began to realize that my story and the stories of other women I had met were only part of a bigger story of women's call to preach—a story of denial, oppression, exclusion, and silence, but also of re-imagining, re-location, claim, affirmation, practice, and celebration—what I am calling a "narrative of neglect."

Wanting to know more of this story and attend to this neglected narrative, I began researching women in the past who, in the face of resistance, managed to claim their call and preach. It began with Antoinette Brown—the first woman ordained to the preaching ministry in America. I studied her story so well, I felt as if I knew her. I learned that Antoinette Brown was born in 1825, and grew up at a time when Victorian ideas about women’s place in society did not include a public voice. At a young age, when she was reminded that girls should not speak during worship, she said, “I am a Christian; why shouldn’t I pray?” As she got older, her question became, “why shouldn’t I preach?”

Despite her family’s resistance, Brown traveled from New York to Oberlin, Ohio to study theology. Even though she was denied both a voice in class and a theological degree, she made a Biblical defense of women’s right to preach, arguing that Paul did not mean for women to be silent in church, but instead not to babble; therefore, she concluded, women should be educated and trained to be preachers.

Antoinette Brown was a pioneer on the frontier of women’s ordination. The battle was not easy: Brown had to challenge the nineteenth-century American cultural norms of “a woman’s proper place” and a re-prioritized religious belief of “decency and order” which prohibited women from public speaking and preaching. As Brown recalls the struggles of becoming an ordained minister, she remembers one occasion in a class at Oberlin when the new theological students were asked to state their reasons for pursuing ministry:

The students who were asked were called upon alphabetically. My name came early in the list and Professor Finney asked after a few speakers, “Who comes next?” Someone answered, “Antoinette Brown”...Professor Finney looked rather surprised and said, “Oh the women, we don’t ask them to speak now.”

As Brown recalls, this was near the close of the meeting and she went home feeling rather hurt, but

when Professor Finney was informed that I was to become a regular student of theology, he said, “Oh, of course, then, she must tell us why she wishes to become a minister.”¹

This quote is instructive because it exposes the power of the institution to silence women and deny their calls, but it also reveals the power inherent in the call narrative. While the cultural convention of the time silenced women from public speaking, a theological call was deemed to be of such great significance that the cultural code was set aside in the case of a woman who could tell a compelling story of her call to preach.

Despite her story of her call to preach, Brown was not granted ecclesial endorsement. Therefore, she joined the circuit of women’s rights speakers. After being invited to be the pastor of the Congregational Church in South Butler, New York, she was ordained as a minister on September 15, 1853. In order to justify women’s ordination to the preaching ministry, Brown employed a distinct rhetorical strategy that re-interpreted an authoritative Scriptural text known to be prohibitive for women into a liberating one. Through Brown’s critical skill and rhetorical finesse in transforming the scriptural standard of ‘decency and order’, the barrier to ordination was bridged and the place of women was expanded into the pulpit. In reflecting on this long-awaited event in her life, Antoinette Brown wrote to her friend Lucy Stone, describing her ordination with these words: “the great wall of custom has been breached at last.”²

¹ Gibson, ms in Beverly Ann Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists : Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 33.

² It is curious to note that after her hard-fought battle, Antoinette Brown only served as a pastor for one year, and then left the church. The reasons why and the implications for women in ministry merit further research. Elizabeth Cazden, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell, a Biography* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist

On September 15, 1853 Antoinette Brown became the first woman to be ordained to the preaching ministry in the Protestant Church in the United States. The Reverend Luther Lee, a liberal abolitionist Methodist minister who knew Brown through the temperance movement, preached at her ordination. He began by appreciating the historicity of the event, saying, "I should deem it out of place, tame and cowardly, for me to deliver an ordinary sermon . . . without taking hold of the peculiarity of the occasion, and vindicating the innovation which we this hour make upon the usages of the Christian world."³ Lee thereby recognized not only the battle that had been fought for women's ordination, but also the impact the victory would have on the South Butler Congregational church, and even on the whole Christian church. Lee's sermon, "A Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel," was based on the Scripture text: *There is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*⁴ In his sermon, Lee argued: "the apostle's injunction was not given as a general rule, but as a remedy for a specific difficulty, and to construe it against the public efforts of competent and orderly female teachers, in the face of unanswerable proof that females did teach under divine sanction, is in my view, doing violence to the word of God."⁵ In essence, Lee confirmed Brown's argument that educated and rightly-trained women are justified to preach, by the authority of Scripture.

Even though Antoinette Brown established a precedent of women ordained to preach in 1853, it did not become a regular practice. Women who received a divine

Press, 1983), 83. Also note that it would be ten years until the next woman was ordained. In June 1863 in New York, Olympia Brown (no relation to Antoinette Brown) was ordained by the Universalist Church.

³ Luther Lee, "Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel": A Sermon Preached at the Ordination of Rev. Miss Antoinette L. Brown, South Butler, Wayne County, N.Y., September 15, 1853 (Syracuse, NY: Luther Lee, 1853), 3.

⁴ Galatians 3:28 (KJV).

⁵ Lee, 21.

inward call to preach faced significant obstacles in their quest for an endorsement of their outward call. The most significant obstacle was the institutional and conventional interpretation of the call to preach which did not include women. Although women had answered their call to preach throughout the first twelve centuries, in 1234 the church's institutional interpretation excluded women from the pulpit. Throughout the centuries since, women have faced resistance in the form of both canon and convention. Today, one hundred and sixty years after Antoinette Brown's ordination, churches still debate the question of who can be called to preach, based in part on the ability of candidates for ministry to stand up and give a compelling account of their call to preach. The individual's account of their call to preach is a significant factor in the church's sanction of call.

Once I knew a little, I wanted to know more of Antoinette Brown's story. And so, somehow I convinced my family to turn my historical research into a family vacation. In July of 2011, we traveled to the Finger Lakes region of New York, which allowed us to make a day trip to South Butler, New York. I wanted to see the place where history was made. I wanted to gather more information to add to her story. I wanted to stand in the place where Antoinette Brown preached.

I met up with the local historian and she gladly took me to the place. But, the problem was that the place looked different than I imagined. The Congregational church where Brown served had since been turned into a private home, and a run-down house at that. After Antoinette Brown left the ministry in 1855, the Congregational Church closed. The building was used as a school and then as a private residence, after adding bedrooms, a kitchen and a porch. It was purchased and occupied by several different

owners, some who could not make payments, and eventually it fell into disarray.

Although Brown was called to serve as minister of the Congregational Church, she could not be ordained there because heavy rains had caused the roof of the church to leak.

Therefore, the ordination service took place across the street in the Baptist Church.

When I visited, the Baptist Church was no longer a church; in fact, the local historian explained that it had been a house, then a horse stable, and most recently a garage, before it fell down a few months ago. Now it was simply a dilapidated structure, a pile of rotting wood. I peered in through the boards, hoping to catch a glimpse of a pulpit, a marker of some kind to honor this historic event. I stood in dismay as I surveyed the church, wondering how this milestone of history could be so neglected. Noticing my disappointment, our guide pointed to a historic marker. She proudly walked me over to the sign that had just been placed at the corner, forever honoring the historic event of Antoinette Brown Blackwell's ordination on September 15, 1853.

As I stood looking at the sign, I sadly realized that this is all people would know about Antoinette Brown—that this was the place that the first woman was ordained in the United States. They will not know the rest of the story or how it fits in with the bigger story of women's call to preach—unless I tell it, that is.

So, on we traveled to nearby Seneca Falls—the birthplace of women's rights—to learn more of the story. It just so happens that we were there on the day they were commemorating the 163rd anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Sentiments on July 20, 1848. They were also re-dedicating the restored Wesleyan Chapel, the place where the Declaration was signed by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men. One of the declarations supported by the women signers included the right to preach: “*Resolved,*

that the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce.”⁶

Although former Senator of New York Hillary Rodham Clinton could not attend the celebration, she sent a letter which was read during the ceremony. She called us all to the important work of remembering and re-telling this story: “Our collective preservation of the past helps us better understand the present and helps us to move forward together to achieve the universal human rights of all people.”

I will always remember that day—the sights, sounds, speeches, the period costumes and music, the feeling of being there where it all began. But, the best story that I have since re-told many times involves my son Christian. He was as patient as a 10-year old could be listening to all of the speeches, when he asked his father to take him out. I thought he was bored and wanted to go play. Little did I know that he wanted to go to the bookstore, where he received a passport of sorts, in which children could participate in the day’s events. So, he followed the instructions, and took notes, got stamps, and autographs. While I was talking with the park ranger, he was talking with the great-great granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. But, before she would sign his book, she asked him, “Are you a feminist, young man?” When he didn’t answer, she went on, “do you believe that men and women are equal?” He said “yes.” And so, she signed his book.

All this was going on while I thought he was bored and complaining; and I was feeling guilty about imposing my interests on my family, wondering what my son could

⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al., *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York,: Fowler & Wells, 1881), 73.

possibly get out of this place and this commemoration when he did not understand what it was all about anyway. When I finally caught up with Christian, he gave me a gift. It was a piece of the ribbon they had cut when re-dedicating the chapel. He said he went right up to the woman and said, “My mom is writing her dissertation on these women and their stories, so can I please have a piece of ribbon to give to her?”

He was going to save it until I finished my dissertation, but he decided to give me the ribbon that day. I am forever grateful. The ribbon still hangs above my dissertation-writing desk. It reminds me daily of the importance of my work. It challenges me to attend to this neglected narrative. It inspires me to keep writing. It convicts me of my belief in a God who created man and woman in God’s image, and calls both men and women to serve the church—some as pastors, some as teachers—according to their gifts given by the Spirit. It speaks to the power of history remembered and retold. It reminds me that in order to make a change today, we need to know our past, especially how people overcame adversity and oppression, and came to a new place of equality and freedom. It calls me to keep writing this story, so that others can tell theirs. It symbolizes for me the power of telling a story: it becomes the truth by which one lives.

Inspired by my beliefs, shaped by my pastoral experience, and informed by my academic studies, in this project, in the pages that follow, I will tell a story. It is a particular story—one that begins with the history of call told in such a way that women are an integral part, despite a dominant institutional narrative to the contrary. Then, I will share the stories of four incredible women who, in spite of the resistance of cultural convention and the opposition of church canon, managed to claim their call to preach. I tell their stories of claiming call so that they can inspire and equip women today to claim

their call to preach. Then, I will end this story with a call to the preachers and teachers to integrate the lessons learned along the way into their own telling, teaching, and preaching of call.

I will tell a story of the history of women preaching pioneers, so that we can recover their neglected narrative, reclaim their rhetorical witnesses, re-script call stories, reinterpret the dominant call narrative, re-inhabit authoritative tropes, reconstruct a feminist ecclesial homiletic, and re-imagine the church as a place, where, it is true that *there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

This story does not end with “and they lived happily ever after.” In fact, this story does not end. It is still a story that is unfolding and being re-told and re-interpreted and re-constructed and re-claimed. It is a story that needs more chapters, so that others can find their place. It is my hope that this story I have written will help you tell your story and that it becomes the truth by which you live.

Donna Giver Johnston

September 15, 2013
The One Hundred-Sixtieth
Anniversary of Antoinette
Brown Blackwell’s
Ordination

CHAPTER I

THE CALL TO PREACH

*At every word,
Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!
And I reply'd, My Lord.
~George Herbert⁷*

Introduction

Historically and theologically, preaching begins with the call: a divine summons to step forth and speak the Word of God. The call to preach, as portrayed in both theological canons and practical pastoral guides, is a distinct appointment in life that transcends a vocation or a job. According to theologian Karl Barth, “this calling is an act of God issued in Jesus Christ. This calling is holy (2 Timothy 1:9). It is heavenly (Hebrews 3:11). It comes, therefore, from above (Philippians 3:14).”⁸ In *The New Guidebook for Pastors*, James Bryant describes the power of the call to preach: “It can only be described as the call of Almighty God and the touch of His [sic] hand on a person’s life.”⁹ The call to preach is transcendent, and also immanent. “The divine calling comes from above,” explains Barth, “into all human spheres (circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free), cutting diagonally across them.”¹⁰ The call to preach is located equally in the divine and human realms, summoning a response and responsibility

⁷ "The Collar," in George Herbert et al., *The Poetical Works of George Herbert* (London,: J. Nisbet, 1857), 161.

⁸ Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics*, 1st pbk. ed. (London ; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004), 600.

⁹ James W. Bryant and Mac Brunson, *The New Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville, Tenn.: B & H Pub. Group, 2007), 49.

¹⁰ Barth, Bromiley, and Torrance, *Church Dogmatics*, 600. Volume III, Part 4.

to both. The call to preach is “preeminently a divine act, a claim of God that comes from beyond and summons the believer to speak on behalf of God”; yet, claims homiletician Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, “preaching is also a very human act in which God uses ordinary earthen vessels as extraordinary vessels of grace.”¹¹ One who is called to preach, articulates homiletician Barbara Brown Taylor, is summoned to “walk the shifting boundary between heaven and earth, representing God to humankind, representing humankind to God.”¹²

The call to preach, however, is not simply a matter between God and the individual called. Tisdale confirms that the call is communal in nature: “it is mediated by, confirmed within, and ratified in an ongoing way by the church of Jesus Christ.”¹³ Throughout the Bible, those who speak God’s Word do so in response to a summons from God and from the community of believers.¹⁴ Call is the essential impetus by which one assumes the authority to preach; without it, one does not. Christian theologians identify two primary aspects of call: the call to preach includes both the individual’s experience of an “inward call” or divine summons, and the church’s “outward call” or ecclesial endorsement.¹⁵ According to theologian Daniel Migliore, the “inward call” is initiated by God, who through the Holy Spirit, “bestows special gifts and motivates their

¹¹ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, “The Calling of the Preacher,” in John S. McClure, *Best Advice for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 2.

¹² Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1993), 31.

¹³ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, “The Calling of the Preacher,” in McClure, *Best Advice for Preaching*, 4.

¹⁴ John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 10. Note that this project will chart the biblical and theological history of call.

¹⁵ Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, V. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.3.11. Calvin argued that the call of God has two parts: “There is a twofold call; one is internal and the other belongs to order, and may, therefore, be called external or ecclesiastical.”

recipients to dedicate their lives to the gospel ministry.”¹⁶ But the call to preach also has an outward aspect, mediated by the community of faith. “Since the office of ministry is conducted on behalf of the entire community,” explains Migliore, “it is essential that the will of the Spirit be expressed not only to the individual called but also through the community’s acknowledgment of that calling . . . formal calls to ministry are issued by congregations on behalf of the whole people of God.”¹⁷

The “inward call” has often been described as a feeling of inner calm or a clear hearing of God’s voice. Some are called through service, study, or prayer; others are called through dreams, visions, or heavenly or earthly messengers. For some, the call to preach unfolds gradually over time; others experience the call as a sudden moment of illumination. Many people who have experienced a call to preach admit that they did not understand why they were called, and often they go through a time of resistance and struggle (with God and with themselves). Some eagerly and willingly respond to the call, but others need more convincing. In the end, there is a broad consensus that call is such an inspired, compelling, and urgent summons that there remains little choice but to accept the call to preach and become vessels of the divine word. “This call, this grace,” claims Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “is irresistible.”¹⁸ Upon experiencing this inward call, the apostle Paul confesses, “Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel.”¹⁹

No matter how compelling, a divine, inward call does not a preacher make.

Accepting the divine summons is only the first step; the second step is seeking the

¹⁶ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 227.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Rev. & unabridged [i.e. 2nd ed. (New York,: Macmillan, 1959), 61.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 9:16 in Bernhard W. Anderson, Bruce Manning Metzger, and Roland E. Murphy, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

endorsement of authority from an ecclesial body: the outward call. It is not possible to exercise the preaching ministry on one's own, claims Barbara Brown Taylor, "there are no entrepreneurs in ministry, only partners."²⁰ A key aspect in the ecclesiastical process of sanctioning an inward call as an outward call is a suitable answer from the one seeking validation in response to the question: "What is your call story?" It is through the call story that those who are called translate the experience of divine summons and interpret their understanding of how they will embody and exercise their call in the church. The call story acts as the vehicle that connects the dots between the inward call and the outward call.

"Inward" Inspired Call

Looking back on a full and faithful life of the preaching ministry, Fred Craddock wrote a book about his call. In *Reflections on My Call to Preach*, Craddock writes with honesty about his struggle: "If it was my decision, why could I not make it now; if it was God's decision, why did not God tell me, or at least tell my father or my mother? I prayed for the ache to leave me."²¹ When he accepted his calling and said "Yes" to God, he learned that he was also saying "Yes" to his mother who had prayed he would become a minister. He remembers with great joy: "God had answered both our prayers; of that we were both sure. At that moment we could not have been happier"²² Craddock identifies the internal struggle, but once he accepted the call, it was affirmed, the ache left him and

²⁰ Taylor, *The Preaching Life*, 31.

²¹ Fred B. Craddock, *Reflections on My Call to Preach : Connecting the Dots* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2009), 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

he could not have been happier. This is a powerful story of call. It mirrors many similar call narratives throughout the history of the church.

However, the story is often very different for women. Women who have shared their story of call have experienced less than enthusiastic reception. When Choi, Moon Young shared her call and intention to become a pastor, her mother—a long-time member of the Presbyterian Church in Korea—responded with worry and concern: “Can’t you believe in God just as you are? You can follow Jesus as Christian educator and pastor’s wife like you are right now. Somehow, I find myself unfamiliar and uncomfortable with a woman pastor.”²³ Despite her mother’s resistance, Choi, Moon Young had a powerful experience in which God called her to ministry, and through tears during a worship service, with deep gratitude, she answered the call by singing, “Here I am Lord, Is it I, Lord? I have heard You calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if You lead me. I will hold Your people in my heart.”²⁴ Despite her powerful call experience and the firm covenant she made with God to answer the call to ministry, she continued to encounter resistance, from both expected and unexpected places. When Choi, Moon Young was preparing for her ordination service, her not quite three-year old daughter exclaimed, “Mom, you cannot be a pastor!” Young answered, “What ... why?” Her daughter answered, “Because you are a woman!” Young asked, “Then, what about your dad?” Her daughter answered, “He can be a pastor!” She asked, “How come?” Her daughter answered, “Because he is a man!”²⁵ Women are called just the same and pray just as mightily for the ache to leave them. But, when women say “yes” and decide to

²³ Patricia Lloyd-Sidle, *Celebrating Our Call : Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 2006), 49.

²⁴ Daniel L. Schutte, "Here I Am, Lord" in *The Presbyterian Hymnal : Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs*, Large print ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 525. Text and music © 1981.

²⁵ Lloyd-Sidle, *Celebrating Our Call : Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women*, 49.

accept the call, their families are not always overjoyed, their calls are not easily affirmed, and the ache does not leave them.

Sometimes the ache lingers on—beyond their ordination and even throughout their entire ministry. In *Celebrating our Call*, a collection of Presbyterian women's ordination stories, Jean Marie Peacock tells the story of her call as one of re-interpretation. Shortly after she was ordained, she received a phone call asking, "Is Reverend Peacock there?" She answered, "This is she. How can I help you?" The caller responded, "Is your husband there?" She explained, "My husband is not here at the moment. Can I help you with something?" The caller was more emphatic: "Well, I need to talk to the pastor. I'll call back later to see if he is home." She replied, "Don't hang up yet. You are speaking to the pastor. My husband is a biologist." There was a long pause at the other end of the phone, and then came the revelation as the caller exclaimed, "Oh, you're the *woman* pastor." Reverend Peacock reflects on her inward and outward call: "Yes, I am a woman and I am a pastor. God has called me, through the community of faith and by the power of the Holy Spirit, to serve Christ's church as a minister of Word and Sacrament. I confess, however, that this call to ordained ministry has involved struggle, doubts, and questions."²⁶ Like Reverend Peacock's call, the typical story for women is different; it is marked less by unbridled celebration and more by struggle, doubt, and questions—internally and externally.

"Outward" Institutional Call

The call to preach is a fundamental matter both for individuals and churches. Since by definition, the inward call resides within the internal realm of the one

²⁶ Jean Marie Peacock, "Risky Business," in *Ibid.*, 124.

experiencing a divine summons, the church historically has been concerned with the outward or ecclesiastical call. Sixteenth-century reformed theologian John Calvin distinguished between the two types of calls: “I am speaking of the outward and solemn call which has to do with public order of the church. I pass over that secret call, of which each minister is conscious before God, and which does not have the church as witness.”²⁷ Calvin detailed the church’s interest in the external call, as that which depends on and belongs to ecclesiastical order.²⁸ Calvin argued for the necessary role of the church: “the call of a minister is lawful according to the Word of God when those who seemed fit are created by the consent and approval of the people.”²⁹ Calvin insisted upon the examination of call by the witness of all and the selection of pastors by the “common consent of the company of the faithful.”³⁰

This “common consent of the company of the faithful” is what has eluded the church throughout the centuries. In *The Witness of Preaching*, homiletics professor Tom Long describes an inclusive idealized theology of the call where, “God calls the whole church to proclaim the gospel and every disciple of Jesus Christ is part of this calling.”³¹ The Biblical witness attests to the fact that spiritual gifts are freely given by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church—without any mention of gender:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 4.3.11.

²⁸ John Calvin, "Ecclesiastical Ordinances" in Compagnie des pasteurs et professeurs de Genève. and Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* (Grand Rapids,: Eerdmans, 1966), 37.

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.3.15.

³⁰ Jean Calvin and Joseph Haroutunian, *Calvin: Commentaries*, The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia) (Philadelphia,: Westminster Press, 1958). Vol. 10, on Jeremiah 23:21

³¹ Tom Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Second Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 4.

spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. (1 Corinthians 12:7-11)³²

In this passage, the apostle Paul makes it clear that the Spirit calls all to use their gifts in the church, and some to the particular task of preaching. The Spirit's gifts are given by divine power, not under human control. But, the divine message has often met temporal obstacles not included in theological descriptions of call. In *Preaching Words*, homiletics professor John McClure recognizes the gender obstacle: "The call to preach has been experienced by women as problematic, especially in traditions in which women are not permitted to preach."³³ Deborah Block heard the divine call to ministry, but when she told her story in search of ecclesial validation of an outward call, she recalls, "I was admonished not to do this, for reasons ranging from unbiblical to impractical to unprecedented. The college chaplain had refused to write a letter of recommendation for seminary and urged a consideration of Christian education. The seminary president had called women in ministry 'a passing fad.' The Presbyterian Church, then twenty years into allowing the ordination of women to ministry, was debating whether it could be optional."³⁴ That was in 1977. Now, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) confessionally affirms that the Holy Spirit "calls women and men to all ministries of the church."³⁵ But, as ordained Presbyterian minister Cynthia Campbell noted, "this puts Presbyterians out of step with some of the largest and fastest-growing Christian movements in the U.S. (the Southern Baptist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the mega-church movement),

³² 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, in Anderson, Metzger, and Murphy, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*.

³³ "Call" in McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics*, 10.

³⁴ Lloyd-Sidle, *Celebrating Our Call : Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women*, 20.

³⁵ "A Brief Statement of Faith" in Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Confessions : Study Edition* (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 1999).

which either explicitly or implicitly deny women significant leadership positions.”³⁶ The quest for the “common consent of the company of the faithful” has divided the church and denominations; suggesting that consensus on the issue of the call to preach is not at all common.

The church has the power to decide what a legitimate call is and ordain it as a call to preach. The call is transcendent in the sense that it is from Almighty God, but because it is incarnate in the preacher and in the church, church leaders have the power to reject the calls they deem unworthy. As the one called seeks to interpret the mysterious divine summons, so too, the ecclesial authorities seek to judge the call story, based on their own biblical and theological interpretations of what constitutes a divine call and who can be ordained. Based on their interpretations, the rejection may be explicitly stated in theological or biblical language as “unbiblical” or “not in God’s will;” or it can be in terms of tradition, “unprecedented,” or in cultural (gender) terms of “impractical.” The call is a divine matter requiring theological language. But, it is also a human matter requiring story language. And finally, it is an institutional matter requiring judicial categories. Call then is not a static statement, but a dynamic interaction between theology, story, and canon. This ambiguity of the call experience, describes William Myers, “sets in motion an intense struggle within the callee that may be both internal and external.” Those called struggle with accepting the call to ministry for a variety of reasons. “However, there are instances when a specific aspect of conflict (e.g. gender

³⁶ Cynthia M. Campbell, “It Takes a Village,” Lloyd-Sidle, *Celebrating Our Call : Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women*, 38. Note: the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) does not ordain women into the preaching ministry of the church.

for women) becomes the main reason for resistance.”³⁷ In the case of women expressing their divine call in story language, the judicial function has historically proven more powerful and allowed churches to exclude the “other” they deem undesirable.³⁸ Many times women have no choice but to leave their local churches or denominations—“they have no place that will accept them for who they are.”³⁹ Call stories have been used by the church for centuries as key evidence in the process of legitimization. And yet, gender can easily negate the value of the call story.

Despite the ambiguity of the nature of call (theological, story, judicial), William Willimon and Richard Lischer define call as that which is central to the Old and New Testaments and presented to Christian disciples as a summons to a commission from God. They rightly put the emphasis on the theological aspect, claiming, “Those who are called are often unlikely prospects to be the special agents of God’s will—the outcasts, women, foreigners, enemies, youth—but God’s choice of the unlikely demonstrates the power of God over the assumptions and expectations of the world.”⁴⁰ While history—even the history of preaching—has been written primarily from a white male perspective and perpetuated by a position of power and privilege, call by definition includes mystery and divinity, which is not under the control of humanity. For those being called, especially those on the margins, the call of God is more powerful even than cultural

³⁷ William H. Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No : Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.

Trenton, N.J.: W.B. Eerdmans ; Africa World Press, 1994), 37.

³⁸ “If an easily identifiable group in society is not recognized in historical records, then that group of persons is thought of as ‘other,’ and comes to accept the second-class, not-quite-human role because they know little or nothing about their past. Many women today have come to the conclusion that this is exactly what has happened to women.” Anne McGrew Bennette, *From Woman-Pain to Woman-Vision: Writings in Feminist Theology*, Edited by Mary E. Hunt (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 59.

³⁹ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No : Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry*, 175.

⁴⁰ “Call” in William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 59.

mores of gender, class, and race. The call is such a compelling summons that the one called has no other choice but to preach. But, that is just the problem: despite “a compelling, urgent summons,” many women have not had the choice to preach; the choice has been made for them by ecclesiastical authorities.

The Gender Gap between “Inward” Inspired Call and “Outward” Institutional Call

Lucille Abernathy received the call from God, which she describes as “a voice within you that you hear.” Upon receiving the inward call as a divine summons to preach, she went to her pastor to begin the process of a sanctioned outward call. But, when she told her pastor her call story, he said, “Well you better be quiet about this, because you don’t know what you are talking about.” At first, she was discouraged, but the call compelled her to try again to seek ecclesial endorsement. But this time he said, “Well, you can be a teacher or a counselor, but God didn’t call you to preach.” A letter from a male pastor confirmed her suspicions: “A lot of men don’t believe that God does call women.”⁴¹ She kept the letter as a validation that God really does call women, even if the church does not. In Lucille Abernathy’s call story, we encounter a clash between the individual’s interpretation of call and that of the church’s interpretation. And more often than not, the institutional call has the power to silence the voice of the women called.

Lucille Abernathy’s story is just one of the African American call stories recorded by William Myers in *God’s Yes was Louder than My No*, in which he provides critical analysis of call stories, noting the gender divide: “For men, usually there is great joy in the church because one of its sons has been called by God ... For women, the reason for

⁴¹ Myers, *God’s Yes Was Louder Than My No : Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry*, 161.

the rejection by the congregation is obvious, as noted by Lucille Abernathy—“they were so programmed to believe that God did not call women that they could not accept the fact that he called me.”⁴² Myers does not simply report the call stories; he critically analyzes them. The more we know about the various aspects of call, the more we can understand this clash between the self-understanding of divine inward call and the church’s understanding of a valid outward call. In order to do so, Myers argues, we must critically and carefully attempt to disentangle as many aspects as we can. Otherwise, Myers warns, “we will be left with the consequences of myriad unsubstantiated subjective conclusions, and with all ‘doing what is right in their own eyes’.”⁴³ Without critical inquiry, in general, the assumed understanding is that the call to preach is for men, not women.

Few debates divide the contemporary church more than the issue of call. The question of who can be called to preach segregates denominations and divides people within denominations. Debates sabotage theological discussions and mission commitments. Individuals whose gifts are denied are frustrated or leaving the church. Churches suffer from the lack of talents. Yet, curiously, little homiletic attention has been paid to the issue of call. The call to preach has been explored through anecdotal stories—stories of struggle for some and celebration for others. Neither is sufficient for critical examination of such a divisive and essential issue. Because the practice of call has not been subjected to critical inquiry, it has taken on power. Power lies in the institutional narrative and approved stories of call. Power lies in the discordant debates, equally in the stifling silence. Power lies hidden in the crevices of the question of who can be called to preach.

⁴² Ibid., 169.

⁴³ William H. Myers, "Disentangling the Call to Preach : Certainty, Ambiguity, Mystery," in *Sharing Heaven's Music* (Nashville: Abingdon Pr, 1995), 34.

The response, “God did not call you to preach” did not come from deep theological reflection or biblical exegesis or a careful consideration of the veracity of Lucille’s story, but a standard response to women’s call to preach: “they were so programmed to believe that God did not call women that they could not accept the fact that he called me.” Historically, when women have claimed a call to preach, they have encountered resistance in the form of institutionalized and conventional rhetoric: “God did not call you to preach” and “Women cannot be pastors.” This phenomenon of “programming” and “doing what is right in their own eye,” and its relationship to this conventional rhetoric of call are precisely what need to be critically examined.

Critical Examination of the Rhetoric of the Call to Preach

The best place to begin a critical inquiry of a woman’s call to preach is out of the experience of being a woman and in that liminal space, encountering the power of the institutionalized rhetoric to deny, define, and dictate their call. Some women who are bold enough to claim their call feel alone in seeking to justify their preaching, making arguments that have never been made before. In truth, there is a rich history of female preaching pioneers. But sadly, it is not a history that is often told; but it should be, argues church historian Jane Dempsey Douglas: “Remembering the women who have given leadership in our churches is an important step in gathering the courage today to press for full freedom for women to use their gifts in the church’s life. There have been such women in all our churches, though till recently their stories were seldom told.”⁴⁴

Historian Catherine Brekus recovered the stories of hundreds of female preachers in

⁴⁴ Jane Dempsey Douglass, “Glimpses of Reformed Women Leaders from Our History,” World Alliance of Reformed Churches, website: www.warc, accessed March 4, 2011.

Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America. The women commonly testify that their call transcended the struggles of history; through their encounter with the mysterious divine, “they genuinely believed that God had inspired them to preach.”⁴⁵ Despite their tenacious faith in their inspired call detailed in their call stories, the path to ecclesial authority and access to the pulpit were blocked more often than not. And yet, convinced of the authenticity of their divine summons, they sought to convince others of the veracity of their call.

In order to critically examine this place where women stand resisting the programmed response, “God did not call you to preach,” and seeking to make their claim to call, hermeneutics is necessary—how women have read and interpreted the texts of authority from their perspective, in order to examine critically and persuade others of the veracity of their claims. Feminist hermeneutics has examined the issues surrounding women in this place, including experience, social location, biblical text, and tradition. The work of social and practice theorists inform the issue with their examination and deconstruction of such social phenomenon.

Over the centuries, women who have experienced this call have found other outlets for proclamation. Women have been forced to utilize creative methods of resistance or accommodation in order to answer their call to preach. Women called to preach have had to overcome institutional obstacles in their quest for endorsement of their inward call. This project offers interpretations revealed in women’s narratives in order to open up another world of possibilities, which imagines a place for women

⁴⁵ Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 17.

preachers. Through a hermeneutical method, I recover women's call narratives in order to reclaim rhetorical devices and re-imagine creative scripts for future practice.

“In homiletics there is little scholarship about women and preaching.”⁴⁶

Christine Smith stated the obvious oversight in homiletics scholarship in her 1989 text *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*. Smith succinctly named the problem, which I am calling a “narrative of neglect” of women's preaching. But in the last twenty-plus years, there has been more scholarship on women and preaching.

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, setting forth a theory of hermeneutics for feminist scholars, articulates the focus of this scholarship: “Feminist scholars and activists in religion have developed new ways of interpreting the bible (and other culturally influential texts) in order to prevent biblical knowledge from being produced in the interest of domination and injustice.”⁴⁷ Within biblical studies, this has involved close exegesis, but also analysis of contexts in which the text lives and moves and has its authority to shape women's lives. “Becoming a feminist interpreter means shifting your focus from biblical interpretation construed as an ever better explanation of the text,” argues Schüssler Fiorenza, “to biblical interpretation as a tool for becoming conscious of structures of domination and for articulating visions of radical democracy that are inscribed in our own experience as well as in that of texts.”⁴⁸ In other words, feminist interpreters of texts, whether biblical or other historical texts, wear different lenses, as they move back and forth from text and culture, women's experience and tradition—keeping an eye out for

⁴⁶ Christine M. Smith, *Weaving the Sermon : Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/J. Knox Press, 1989), 8.

⁴⁷ Homiletics needs more descriptions of women's preaching experiences, recovery of female preaching pioneers, analysis of women's ways of learning and communicating, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

narratives of domination, and voicing alternative narratives of liberation. After all, Fiorenza reminds us, “Religious texts are rhetorical texts, produced in and by particular historical debates and struggles.”⁴⁹ Therefore, feminist scholars have a part to play in the struggle and debate as religious rhetoric is interpreted and re-interpreted, formed and re-formed. At its best, feminist textual interpretation “engages in an emancipatory rhetorical process that argues for the integrity and individuality of interpretive discourses as well as for the primacy of the contemporary starting point for feminist interpretation;” this process involves “deconstruction and reconstruction, critique and retrieval.”⁵⁰ In the last twenty-five years, feminist scholars have engaged rigorously in a rhetorical process that privileges individual interpretation, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

In her book *Wisdom Ways*, Schüssler Fiorenza uses the metaphor of Wisdom’s dance to describe a method of feminist critical analysis. She opens the metaphorical circle wide: “Whether one thinks of the emancipatory interpretive process as baking bread or walking in the way of Wisdom, as a hearty “stew” or a joyful “dance,” crucial hermeneutical ingredients, spices, or moves in a critical process of interpretation and rhetorical analysis are: hermeneutics of experience, domination and social location, suspicion, critical evaluation, creative imagination, re-membering and reconstruction, and transformative action for change.”⁵¹ In what follows, I utilize Schüssler Fiorenza’s hermeneutical framework in order to locate the scholarly works on female preaching as part of this ongoing “dance.” In this project, I seek to enter into the dance, and join in the generative conversation that has been going on and will continue to go on. It is my hope that even as I rely on the critical moves previously made by feminist and womanist

⁴⁹ Ibid., 168.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 169.

⁵¹ Ibid., 167.

scholars, my contribution on women's call to preach will extend the conversation and enliven the dance.

Heremeneutics of Experience

Critical feminist scholarship begins with a hermeneutics of experience.

“Recognizing that wo/men’s perspectives and experiences had not been included in the articulation of Western culture or Christian theology,” explains Schüssler Fiorenza, “feminist scholars sought to listen to and explore wo/men’s experiences of oppression and liberation.”⁵² Experience, by nature, is individual. No universal woman’s experience exists: it varies by race, class, culture, age, and ethnicity. One’s particular socio-political location shapes a woman’s experience. Still, all women share a common experience of being excluded and silenced based on gender. Feminist scholarship begins by naming the common experience of silence and exclusion as well as individual experiences of the Divine. Experience, claims Schüssler Fiorenza, “is a theological entry or starting point.”⁵³ In this essay, I define the entry into this critical process as the experience of the call *to preach*. The experience of this call—and the desire to claim one’s call despite denunciation—is the theological entryway into the hermeneutical circle, the way to begin the dance, to narrate the story, and to claim the call to preach.

In *Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, Smith articulates the importance of experience as it shapes a woman’s worldview and her preaching in particular ways. Even though Smith recognizes that women with different ethnic and

⁵² Ibid., 169. Wo/men is used as a fragmented category to indicate that wo/men are not a unitary group with one nature or essence in common. Also used as a “thinking twice” mechanism to make men deliberate as to if they are included in term. See p. 58.

⁵³ Ibid., 196.

cultural identities will have diverse experiences, she maintains, “It is the reality of female experience and all of its particularities that provide the basic self-identity out of which women weave their preaching creation.”⁵⁴ A woman’s experience is not to be ignored, but explored, incorporated, and embodied in women’s preaching. Smith argues that preaching in a feminist perspective is a poignant tapestry of personal and prophetic, individual and communal, faithful and revolutionary, experiential and critical. Smith’s seminal work sheds light on the “narrative of neglect” and in so doing, begins to unravel the assumed dominant narrative of call.

Dominant Narrative as Habitus and Doxa

The development of this dominant narrative of call is not the result of an ecclesiastical event which arose from a theological treatise, as much as a complex social phenomenon. According to French anthropologist and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, the perceptions of Choi, Moon Young’s young daughter and Lucille Abernathy’s pastor are shaped by their *habitus*.⁵⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, critically examined the world of the assumed. *Habitus* has the power to structure and regulate one’s perception of oneself and one’s world, without the necessity of external rules and imposing structures. Without a “conductor,” still a certain worldview is “orchestrated,” thus producing and reinforcing a group’s commonsense world, separating

⁵⁴ Smith, *Weaving the Sermon : Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, 40.

⁵⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology ; (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72. Habitus is defined as “systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the production of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them, and being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.”

and differentiating groups or individuals from one another. Habitus is that which is assumed natural and ahistorical, but in reality has a historical process and reason for coming into being, shaped by social context. Individuals are more often than not unaware of the habitus, thus continually unconsciously reinforcing it. The habitus that orchestrates a situation in which women are not called to preach is firmly entrenched in the church. Sometimes it is explicit, as in the case of Lucille Abernathy: “God did not call you to preach; and “Men don’t believe that God does call women.” Other times, it is more subtle, as in the case of Joanna Adams, who attended a seminary where male students said to her: “Joanna, we pray every day that you will see the light.”⁵⁶ Usually it is innocent and unexamined, as in the case of Moon, Choi Young’s daughter: “Mommy, you cannot be a pastor!”

As another aspect of his theory of practice, Bourdieu describes *doxa*—that which is undiscussed in “the universe of that which is taken for granted.”⁵⁷ Doxa includes practical knowledge, not in the form of propositions that everyone has agreed to, but rather communicated unconsciously as a code. “Tradition is silent,” Bourdieu claims, it does not need to be spoken in order to have much power and influence, especially in the formation of children.⁵⁸ For example, while Moon, Choi Young’s young daughter was likely never told “girls cannot be pastors,” she was most certainly influenced by things like, “you are so pretty,” or “now sit quietly and be good,” or “girls, come help get the food ready.” Even more so, she was formed by the unspoken messages she received by

⁵⁶ Joanna M. Adams, “Generation to Generation,” in Lloyd-Sidle, *Celebrating Our Call : Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women*, 14. It is ironic, humorous even, that this one male student who prayed for Joanna to see the light, i.e. leave the seminary, ended up dropping out of seminary, while she went on to graduate with honors.

⁵⁷ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 170.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

seeing only men as pastors. The concept that women should not be pastors was likely not ever named, but still the silent tradition communicated loudly and clearly to the young girl. Bourdieu describes doxa as that which resides in the realm of the undiscussed or undisputed; it is that which is taken for granted and accepted without question by all. It is where the natural and social worlds appear as self-evident. Doxa is common belief: “what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying.”⁵⁹ Once something is questioned, discussed and argued about, it moves into the realm of opinion. There, it is classified as either orthodoxy (the opinion that adheres to the traditional and accepted established belief) or heterodoxy (false teaching, i.e. not orthodox). Orthodoxy exerts its power in an attempt to bring about the unanimity of doxa, but cannot succeed, because doxa necessarily goes *without* saying. Once doxa is named and brought to consciousness, it loses its power. The entrance to the pulpit is policed by the silent tradition of male preachers. To speak “women cannot be preachers” undermines the staying power of tradition, while silence reinforces it.

Christine Smith initiated the essential work of naming the experience of female preaching, which challenged the unspoken assumption that women cannot preach and the habitual practice of not ordaining women. Over the nearly twenty-five years that followed Smith’s work, several female history scholars explored the virtually untapped resource of the historical witness of women preachers. They discovered the “narrative of neglect” that included a rich tradition of women preachers.

In 1998, Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker broke new ground with the collection of essays in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, expanding the research of women preachers and women preaching.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

“Although exemplary women have received increased scholarly attention in the last ten to fifteen years,” Kienzle and Walker claim, “their preaching and sermons generally have not been the focus of research. Many women have been studied more for their political campaigns than for their preaching and religious vision.” Therefore, Kienzle and Walker’s work is an important contribution to the field: “This volume is concerned with individual women but equally with the movements that fostered women’s preaching and with placing women preachers within the history of Christianity.”⁶⁰ That is to say, women preachers are not an exception to, but are in fact part of the history of preaching.⁶¹ In the volume’s first essay, “Reinstating Women into the Tradition,” Elaine J. Lawless engages in reporting and reconstructing history. “At least for the women in my field studies, I know what they are preaching, and I can share that with my readers;” however, Lawless explains, “What I do have to reconstruct and hypothesize is how it may reflect back upon the prejudices and discrimination, the denial and persecution, of other women who dared to claim the pulpit before them.”⁶² Although Kienzle and Walker’s project spans the globe and encompasses twenty centuries of church history, they understand that much of the story of women preaching has been forgotten, overlooked, or intentionally erased. By examining women’s experiences of preaching, Kienzle and Walker greatly expand and enhance the historical record of preaching.

The experience of white women, of course, is not representative for all women.

Womanist scholar Bettye Collier-Thomas specifically acknowledged the significance of

⁶⁰ Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), xvi.

⁶¹ Women preachers are often treated as an exception to the rule, an anomaly, featured in a separate chapter entitled, “Women Preachers,” in O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004).

⁶² Kienzle and Walker, eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, 2.

African American women in the discourse on religious tradition and authority, which has been traditionally defined as male history. In her 1998 book *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, Collier-Thomas claimed, “The voices of these preaching women are representative of a great American tradition heretofore largely unknown and untapped. To both men and women, these powerful sermons bring messages of hope and faith that God hears and answers prayers.”⁶³ *Daughters of Thunder* tells the story of black women preachers, including Julia A. Foote, Florence Spearing Randolph, and Ida B. Robinson; and perhaps more importantly, Collier-Thomas allows them to speak words of proclamation in their own voice. This collection of black women’s sermons adds a significant dimension to the historical record, thus making it clear that the call of women to preach stretched across race, class, denomination, and geography.

In the same year, historian Catherine Brekus published a record of women preaching, aptly describing women’s different experiences of God’s call to preach, thereby expanding feminist scholarship from the perspective of a singular woman to that of a wide range of women. In *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America*, Catherine Brekus wrote an encyclopedic account of female preachers in America between 1740 and 1845 who have essentially vanished from our history. In recovering the histories of female evangelists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Brekus reminds us that “the struggle over women’s religious leadership stretches deep into the American past.”⁶⁴ With robust research, Brekus provides a rich resource that records the presence of female preachers in America. Just as importantly, perhaps, this volume gives

⁶³ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Pub, 1998), 1.

⁶⁴ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 19.

witness to the real struggles women had to overcome in order to preach. Brekus describes the multi-faceted generative contribution of *Strangers and Pilgrims*, ranging from historical to hermeneutical:

This book is about Harriet Livermore and all of the other female evangelists, both white and black, who tried to forge a tradition of female religious leadership in early America. It is about women's refusal to heed the words of Paul, "Let your women keep silence in churches," despite clerical opposition, public ridicule, and their own fears of appearing radical or deviant.

In her historical recovery project, Brekus tells the story of hundreds of women who create a lasting tradition of female preaching, ranging from theological to rhetorical:

It is about women's theological creativity in defending their right to preach. Most of all, it is about the importance of remembering a group of forgotten 'pilgrims' who force us to question many of our assumptions about the history of women and the history of religion in America.⁶⁵

By recovering a historical record testifying to the presence and preponderance of female preachers, Brekus attends to this narrative of neglect. We learn that Antoinette Brown Blackwell was the first woman ordained to preach in the Protestant church 1853; but we also learn the bittersweet reality that a precedent of female preaching does not necessarily translate into an ongoing practice. *Strangers and Pilgrims* teaches an important lesson: "history is rarely a record of either absolute progress or absolute decline; it takes unexpected twists and turns ... the history of female preaching has been characterized not by upward progress, but by discontinuity and reinvention."⁶⁶ Just as women inherit this rich history of preaching pioneers, so too, they have to make their own history. But, first they have to know the history—dominant and neglected narrative alike. Brekus spoke of the "power of historical memory"—not merely to report history, but to change it.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 339.

Scholars like Brekus, Collier-Thomas, Kienzle and Walker have recovered a lost historical witness of female preaching and preachers; the significance of having a more accurate historical account of preaching, which includes women, cannot be underestimated. This narrative no longer suffers from neglect, as we now know the names of women preachers: Arnaude de Lamothe,⁶⁷ Antoinette Micolon,⁶⁸ Baby Suggs,⁶⁹ Maria Stewart,⁷⁰ Jemima Wilkinson,⁷¹ Abigail Hoag Roberts,⁷² and Harriet Livermore,⁷³ Julia A. J. Foote,⁷⁴ and Ida B. Robinson.⁷⁵ It is important to know that scores of women have preached throughout America, and that African-American women were among the earliest preachers. While recovering the history of female preaching is a

⁶⁷ Anne Brenon, "The Voice of the Good Women: An Essay on the Pastoral and Sacerdotal Role of Women in the Cathar Church" in Kienzle and Walker, eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, 128. Arnaude de Lamothe was a Cathar woman, of the order of Good Women, was obedient to her vows to go out into the world and preach, until she was thrown into a Toulouse prison and kept until she recanted.

⁶⁸ Linda Lierheimer, "Preaching or Teaching? Defining the Ursuline Mission in Seventeenth-Century France" in *Ibid.*, 218. In the 17th c. French Ursuline church, Antoinette Micolon learned from her priest to preach to a large crowd assembled every Sunday in a large poultry yard... "it seemed God put the words in her mouth, so appropriate and effective were they for the salvation of these poor peasant women."

⁶⁹ Judylyn S. Ryan, "Spirituality and/as Ideology in Black Women's Literature: The Preaching of Maria W. Stewart and Baby Suggs, Holy" in *Ibid.*, 279. Baby Suggs, an enslaved illiterate black woman, preached to the spiritual and psychological needs of an enslaved population.

⁷⁰ Judylyn S. Ryan, "Spirituality and/as Ideology in Black Women's Literature: The Preaching of Maria W. Stewart and Baby Suggs, Holy" in *Ibid.* Maria Stewart's preaching and writing critiqued the political, economic, and social conditions suffered by African Americans, and called women to follow her example: "that God at this eventful period should raise up your own females to strive, by their example both in public and private, to assist those who are endeavoring to stop the strong current of prejudice that flows so profusely against us at present."

⁷¹ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 81-2. In 1783, Jemima Wilkinson claimed that she had received a divine revelation and as a prophet sent by God to redeem the world; and she preached to large crowds, mixed with praise and contempt.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 231. Abigail Hoag Roberts (1791-1841) converted countless numbers of people, as remembered by a clergyman: "Many thousands have listened with breathless attention to the heavenly story, as it fell from her lips, and many hundreds will date their religious experience from the time they heard her preach."

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1. Harriet Livermore preached to the U.S. Congress on January 1827.

⁷⁴ Julia A. J. Foote, "A 'Threshing' Sermon" in Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 65. Julia A. J. Foote ignored the gender conventions of the 1850s and insisted on her right to preach: "Now let me be crucified, and this work of the devil, inbred sin, put to death, that Christ may live and reign in me without a rival."

⁷⁵ Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Minister and Feminist Reformer: The Life of Florence Spearing Randolph," in *This Far by Faith* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 194. Ida B. Robinson began as a street evangelist and became a holiness preacher. In 1925, as elected a bishop in the Pentecostal church, she ordained women to the preaching ministry throughout the United States.

significant contribution to the historical record, for women whose call is challenged today, it is not enough to know that women preached. While this is an important contribution to the scholarship of women preachers in history, women today struggling with their calls need to know more than the fact that women have preached or even how they preached. In order to answer their calls to preach, in spite of the obstacles, women also need examples of how women have wrestled with, articulated, and answered their calls. What is needed, at this juncture, is a concise and focused exploration of the call to preach, combining some of the excellent scholarship of other works.

The history of women being called and having to face resistance has been told. Those who claimed a call to preach have told powerful stories of their call, their preaching, and how they faced and overcame resistance to their call. These stories do not just offer a handful of exceptional women; rather the volumes that have been published have given a critical mass of stories that now can be examined critically and analyzed thoroughly. What is proposed here is a modest addition to this history of women's experience with preaching, a history of the rhetoric whereby some of these women defended and claimed the call to preach. It is the hermeneutics of *this* experience that presents itself as our focus here.

Experience, for women preachers, serves “as an authentic avenue for acquiring knowledge of God,” maintains Elaine Lawless; therefore, “experience, theirs and others, is hermeneutical.”⁷⁶ Reading the bible, tradition, and the dominant narrative through the lenses of one's own experience is a powerful tool of interpretation—in unmasking habitus and naming doxa—and a key aspect in claiming voice, exercising agency, and

⁷⁶ Lawless, Elaine, “Weaving Narrative Texts: The Artistry of Women's Sermons” *Journal of Folklore Research* 34 (1997), 27.

constructing an alternative narrative of call. As we will see, this practice of claiming personal experience is operative in the writings of the women examined herein. All of the women use their own experience of call to challenge the conventional and institutionalized narrative and to re-script their own narrative of call.

Hermeneutics of Domination and Social Location

A critical method of interpretation toward liberation does not only attend to the experience of women concerning their call, but also to how their call has been shaped by their social, cultural and religious location. A hermeneutics of domination allows critical reflection on the socially assigned categories that dominate identity formation, as well as the choices made within the social context to construct individual identities. According to Schüssler Fiorenza, a hermeneutics of domination and social location makes it possible “to examine how we as individuals act in specific situations, how we negotiate our lived experience, and how we access cultural knowledge such as the bible to construct individual expressions of self within socially defined categories.”⁷⁷ Feminist and womanist homileticians employ a critical analysis of domination and social location, highlighting the value of women’s experience, as well as the power of the cultural context to shape the construction of individual and communal narratives.

In her 1997 work *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Nora Tubbs Tisdale claims that “congregations, too, are communities that embody distinctive worldviews, values and lifestyles.”⁷⁸ Tisdale argues for the importance of the preacher attending to the community’s worldview in understanding the theology operative in the congregation.

⁷⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 175.

⁷⁸ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Fortress Resources for Preaching (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 15.

In fact, “the preacher as ‘practical theologian’ must also bring the worlds of text and context together in one creative and imaginative act of theological construction we call the sermon,” Tisdale explains, and concludes, “In preaching, then, theology is created.”⁷⁹ Tisdale proposes an interpretive (hermeneutical) methodology by which the preacher gives shape to the sermon. It requires of the pastor “skill in interpreting the texts of the Christian tradition, skill in interpreting the texts of congregational life and activity, and skill in bringing the two worlds together in seriously imaginable and transformative ways for a local community of faith.”⁸⁰ Using the metaphor of a circle dance, Tisdale calls preachers to “enflesh the gospel in sermons which are—in their theology, language, and form—both more fitting and more transformative for local communities of faith,” and ultimately, to “encourage others to join the circle and to participate with their whole beings in the gospel’s liberating dance.”⁸¹ Tisdale’s attention to the contextual exegesis of a congregation is significant for both men and women in understanding the cultural and conventional codes. Her hermeneutical method is a powerful tool for analyzing a group’s dominant narrative, which contains the operative theology. Once the dominant narrative is described, then it can be further formed or reformed by preaching. Both the dominant narrative and the sermonic narrative exercise significant power in a congregation.

Power

French postmodern theorist Michel Foucault was influential in shaping understandings of power. He offered critical analyses of power configurations—in the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 56.

⁸¹ Ibid., 143.

histories of the past and of those persisting in the present—in which “the whole society has become ‘carceral’, and there is no outside.”⁸² Using the image of a prison security panopticon, Foucault critiques the controlling power of society: “Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.”⁸³ Religious institutions have functioned as a ‘regime of truth’ with the power to say what is true. Operating as the mechanism to distinguish true and false statements, ecclesiastical denominations verify true statements of inward call and grant the power and authority of ordination to preach; but they also have power to deny false statements (“God did not call you, a woman, to preach”). This power is found in material places of the ecclesial institution, especially in symbols such as the pulpit. In *Sacred Power, Sacred Space*, Jeanne Kilde examines power that resides in and is reinforced by church architecture. Kilde concludes, “As Christianity institutionalizes, it did in fact suppress women’s religious power, eliminating them from the clergy despite the fact that prior to the establishment of institutionalized offices, women were found in the highest leadership positions.”⁸⁴ Throughout church history, the pulpit became a symbol of power which women were forbidden to enter.

But, this power is not just in material places like the ecclesial institution; rather, argues Foucault, ‘power is everywhere’—diffuse and embodied in discourse and

⁸² David Hoy, "Power, Repression, Progress," in Michel Foucault and David Couzens Hoy, *Foucault : A Critical Reader* (Oxford, UK ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1986), 138.

⁸³ Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 73.

⁸⁴ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space : An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31.

‘regimes of truth.’⁸⁵ Power’s “key agencies are not clearly identifiable,” and further, “the *modus operandi* is often partly secret.”⁸⁶ Often these ‘regimes of truth’ reveal their power only when their ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions are challenged. In *The Gendered Pulpit*, Roxanne Mountford examines the pulpit as the embodiment of clerical male authority. According to Mountford, the pulpit is not a neutral, but a powerful place: “Each time we enter a traditional pulpit, we encounter a much deeper reality than meets the eye. We are surrounded by layers of expectation and tradition.”⁸⁷ In her study, Mountford explores the complex relationship of gender and rhetorical spaces in preaching and the role of rhetoric as the disposition of power. This power is embodied in the narrative that has been inscribed in the texts and practices and rituals of the church throughout the centuries (including theological and ecclesial documents and sermons). In *The Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England*, Emory Elliott traces the exchange of one dominant archetype—an angry wrathful Father God to a gentle loving brother in Jesus Christ—which helped to shape the Puritan unconsciousness. In fact, claims Elliott, “through their sermons, the ministers acted as the literary artists of their day.”⁸⁸ Homiletical rhetoric was powerful enough to shape understandings of God, just as repeated ritual performances of preaching have had the power to shape the cultural convention of who can speak for God. This, of course, has an impact of the way that printed history remembers the homiletical past. In *the Victorian Pulpit*, for instance, Robert Ellison features the most popular and respected pulpiteers of the time—Charles

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). Foucault and Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*.

⁸⁶ Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in Foucault and Hoy, *Foucault : A Critical Reader*, 74.

⁸⁷ Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit : Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 39.

⁸⁸ Emory Elliott, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 14.

Haddon Spurgeon, John Henry Newman, George MacDonald—all men! The absence of women in the pulpit and in print has reinforced the Christian code of the male preacher.⁸⁹

Ecclesiastical denominations and individual churches exercise power over the outward call to preach. But this power is not just institutionalized; it is an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon. As the narrative and norms become so embedded in our bodies and practices without our awareness, we behave in expected ways, discipline ourselves, and more importantly, discipline one another.

This power is embodied in the narrative that has been inscribed in the texts and practices and rituals of the church throughout the centuries (theological and ecclesial documents, sermons). Power lies hidden in the halls of tradition and in the canons of the church's ordination standards. Power is not just in institutions. It is in the discourse of sermons and in the bodies of preachers. Power lies in the often unspoken, but accepted understanding that men are preachers and women are not.

Call is a locus of power. Power lies hidden in the crevices of the question of who can be called to preach. Foucault enables us to see the call to preach as a locus of power, operating both as universal surveillance as well as resistance and transformation. For Foucault, power is not something that is possessed, but rather, something that is exercised. According to Foucault scholar David Hoy, "This implies that power is not a property, possession, or privilege. Power is not simply what the dominant class has and the oppressed lack. Power, Foucault prefers to say, is a strategy, and the dominated are as much a part of the network of power relations and the particular social matrix as the

⁸⁹ Robert H. Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit : Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Selinsgrove London: Susquehanna University Press ; Associated University Presses, 1998).

dominating.”⁹⁰ Since power is not set, but rather is in flux, continually being redefined and renegotiated, we can imagine how to fight oppression, or better, how to exercise one’s individual power toward liberation and claim one’s call to preach.

The essential vehicle through which knowledge is constituted and power is exercised is discourse. Foucault invites us to detect the diffusion and embodiment of power in discourse and knowledge as “discursive rather than purely coercive, and as constituting agency.”⁹¹ Discourse is a potential context of resistance and power, allowing one to ‘evade, subvert, or contest strategies of power.’⁹² “Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart.”⁹³ Power is not just an abstract theory. It has bodies and legs and moves around in material spaces in which we find ourselves. Power is most certainly within institutions, and in this case, in the church, which has the power to ordain preachers.

At the same time, however, power is at work beyond the walls of the church and the pages of the canon. In fact, argues Foucault, “there is no power without resistances.”⁹⁴ Foucault invites us to imagine power differently—to imagine what resistance is needed to instate a new order, and to claim agency and engage in a new discourse. Therein lies the power for change.

⁹⁰ David C. Hoy, "Power, Repression, Progress" in Foucault and Hoy, *Foucault : A Critical Reader*, 134. Foucault's view differs from Steven Lukes and the Frankfurt notion of power as domination.

⁹¹ John Gaventa, *Power after Lukes: a Review of the Literature*, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2003, 3.

⁹²John Gaventa, “Power after Lukes: An overview of theories of power since Lukes and their application to development.” http://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/power_after_lukes.pdf, accessed 4-4-13.

⁹³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 101.

⁹⁴ Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth" in Foucault and Hoy, *Foucault : A Critical Reader*, 91.

Homileticians understand what Foucault is talking about. Feminist homileticians have encouraged women to preach in ways that resist dominant discourses of power. In *Preaching as Local Theology*, Nora Tubbs Tisdale provides a method for understanding the congregational narrative, and in so doing, uncovering the power inscribed therein. In her second book, *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, Tisdale challenges those conventional forces, calling for sermons that are “transformative to local communities of faith.” Prophetic preaching, Tisdale argues, has seven hallmarks:

1. Rooted in the biblical witness;
2. Countercultural and challenges the status quo;
3. Concerned with the evils and shortcomings of the present social order;
4. Names what is not of God in the present and the new reality God will bring to pass in the future;
5. Offers hope and promise of liberation to God’s oppressed people;
6. Incites courage and empowers hearers to work to change social order;
7. Requires of the preacher imagination, conviction, and courage to speak words from God along with honesty and humility and a strong reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁵

Tisdale challenges preachers today to preach prophetic sermons toward transformation of the taken-for-granted reality. For example, in her sermon “Justice or Just Us?” Teresa Fry Brown interrupts the dominant narrative with prophetic words:

Denominational elitism signifying God’s favor for some and disdain for others.
Militaristic budgetary priorities while millions of children go to bed hungry.
Recidivism of gender attitudes seeking the return of Victorian values and the rebuilding of man’s castle.
Generational discrimination evidenced in media presentations of youth culture and the expendability of elders.
Death from diseases only “those people” contract
Are we doing justice or just us?⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching : A Pastoral Approach*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 10.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

Fry Brown names the shortcomings of the current social order: “Recidivism of gender attitudes seeking the return of Victorian values and the rebuilding of man’s castle.”

Then, she challenges the status quo and empowers listeners to work for change: “Are we doing justice or *just us*?”

Tisdale urges prophetic preachers of today to envision and live in a world as God intends it. In both of her books, Tisdale reminds the field of homiletics that preaching is contextual and fitting, but also prophetic and transformative; and she calls preachers to engage in local theology that fits and global theology that convicts.

For these, and other feminist homileticians, prophetic preaching names what is not of God in the present time along with the new reality God will bring to pass in the future. In homiletical language, this involves both words of Scripture and words of culture, as told through the words of the preacher. In a discussion on women’s ways of preaching, Tisdale notes, “Through the telling of their own stories, women keep the gospel close to the ground, making very local connections between the biblical story and our lived lives.”⁹⁷ While women do not always use personal stories, when wrapped in theological and rhetorical language, they have proved effective in validating their calls to preach and communicating the gospel truth. In *Women Preaching Revolution*, Elaine Lawless describes the connection between women’s personal experiences, cultural awareness and prophetic preaching: “The stories of the women authenticate the immediacy of an immanent God prepared and willing to enter into relationship with them

⁹⁷ Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, “Women’s Ways of Communicating: A New Blessing for Preaching,” in E. Jane Dempsey Douglass and James F. Kay, *Women, Gender, and Christian Community*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 114.

and with all other humans, in mutual and collective connection *in spite of differences*.⁹⁸ Both Lawless and Tisdale create space for the “other” by attending to the cultural context. With a critical analysis of domination and social location, the dominant narrative can be named and de-constructed. And, with “imagination, conviction, and courage to speak words from God along with honesty and humility and a strong reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit,”⁹⁹ women construct individual and communal call narratives of liberation. Reading the bible, tradition, and the dominant narrative through the lenses of one’s social location and cultural context are powerful tools of interpretation, a key aspect in claiming voice, exercising agency, and constructing an alternative narrative of call.

“The true representation of power is not of a big man beating a smaller man or a woman,” argues Carolyn Heilbrun in *Writing a Woman’s Life*; rather, “Power is the ability to take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter. This is true in the Pentagon, in marriage, in friendship, and in politics.”¹⁰⁰ This is also true in the church.

“God did not call you to preach.” We can now understand that the pastor’s statement to Louise Abernathy did not just reveal his individual gender bias or discrimination, but rather the work of structuring and orchestrating *habitus* and undiscussed *doxa* (Bourdieu), and diffuse and embodied power (Foucault). It is possible, however, to see at least some opportunity for creative change within discourse. As

⁹⁸ Elaine J. Lawless, *Women Preaching Revolution : Calling for Connection in a Disconnected Time* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 97.

⁹⁹ Tisdale, *Prophetic Preaching : A Pastoral Approach*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1988), 18.

Foucault points out, power is a ‘regime of truth’ that is in flux, continually being renegotiated, redefined or re-interpreted.

As we will see, many of these same rhetorical practices are operative in the speeches and writings of the women examined in this essay, as they sought to resist the prevailing discourses regarding the call to preach. All of the women were well aware of their social location and within their particular context, they sought to challenge issues of power and domination. The writings of women in this essay name the dominant narrative powerfully at work in their particular context and then begin to de-construct it and imagine and articulate an alternative narrative.

Hermeneutics of Suspicion

The reverential way of reading the Bible with respect and acceptance of the Word of God often, unwittingly, translates into repressive interpretations. “Instead of cultivating a hermeneutic of appreciation and consent,” Schüssler Fiorenza argues, “a critical feminist interpretation for liberation develops a hermeneutic of suspicion that places on all biblical texts the warning ‘Caution—could be dangerous to your health and survival.’”¹⁰¹ Such a hermeneutic involves de-struction of the accepted, taken-for-granted reading in order to allow for a critical construction of a liberating interpretation.

Feminist homileticians, for instance, argue for the value of women’s experience and cultural context, as well as the central importance of biblical interpretation. As we will see, as women argued for the legitimacy of their call, biblical interpretations began to change. In an evocative book that addresses homiletical issues of authority, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Letty Russell claims, “the Word of God is not identical with

¹⁰¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 175.

the biblical texts.” Finding the Word of God requires suspicion of the traditional interpretations and critical examination of the Biblical text. And since the scriptural and church traditions are constantly in need of critique and new interpretations, Russell argues “this liberation is an ongoing process expressed in the already/not yet dynamic of God’s action of New Creation.”¹⁰² This dynamic process of navigating the tension between the “already and not yet” reality begins with a raised feminist consciousness. In her article, “Feminist Consciousness in Historical Perspective,” Barbara Brown Zikmund defines this feminist critical consciousness: “As women have become more self-conscious about themselves, their relationship to authority, especially religious authority, has changed. Today, Christian and Jewish women have new understandings of their place in religious communities and their relationship to scripture.”¹⁰³ One new understanding for women is their relationship to scripture as critical feminist interpreters. This new relationship to scripture begins to take shape as early as the nineteenth century.

As Sandra M. Schneiders, in *The Revelatory Text*, reminds us: “the text is not ‘neutral’ or the interpreter ‘objective.’”¹⁰⁴ In other words, the biblical text was written and has been interpreted with a patriarchal bias. “Women in the biblical text are often marginalized when they are not omitted entirely, pornographically reduced to their sexuality, demonized, or trivialized.”¹⁰⁵ The biblical account is a distorted record, further tainted by distorted readings of those in power—in this case, the white male biblical scholars, pastors, and homileticians. Women need to be involved in this process of

¹⁰² Letty M. Russell, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 17.

¹⁰³ Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Feminist Consciousness in Historical Perspective” in *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Sandra Marie Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text : Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 1st ed. ([San Francisco]: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 182.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

critical examination and interpretation of Scripture. Schneiders identifies for women a “hermeneutical advantage,” which allows them “to see from the margins of social reality, what is second nature to those who are the beneficiaries of the social system.”¹⁰⁶ With such a hermeneutical advantage, feminist interpreters are able to “extract from the biblical text the ‘secrets’ about women that are hidden beneath its androcentric surface, especially the hidden history of women, which has been largely obscured and distorted, if not erased altogether, by male control of the tradition.”¹⁰⁷ Sometimes this involves simply pointing to those elements of the text that have largely gone unnoticed. This is not as simple as it sounds, as any challenge to the traditional patriarchal interpretation has been met with resistance.

Interpretation

Paul Ricoeur, in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, defines discourse as the “relation between event and meaning;” in fact, he claims that “it is in the linguistics of discourse that the event and meaning are articulated.”¹⁰⁸ However, the event experienced by one person cannot be perfectly translated to another. Ricoeur carefully explains, “My experience cannot directly become your experience. Yet, something is transferred from one sphere of life to another. This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning. Here is the miracle. The experience as experienced, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public.”¹⁰⁹

When this concept is applied to the phenomenon of call, it is enlightening. The event of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 183.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 185.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory : Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 9,12.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 16.

the divine summons to preach that one experiences in private cannot be translated perfectly to another. In discourse, however, the one called interprets it and thus provides meaning that has the potential to change public discourse.

Call has been re-interpreted throughout church history. Since no clarity or consistency is found in the Bible, especially about just who can be called by God, many different interpretations have been made. Interpretations of call and standards of ordination are often in one's mind; they go unspoken, thus unexamined. No written rubric exists to judge fairly; no expectations of what is needed to pass are clearly stated. Without transparency, there is subjectivity. Without theological categories, other criteria is used to exclude, whether spoken (church canon) or not ("what goes without saying comes without saying"). Despite the number of different interpretations within the biblical text and throughout church history, one interpretation became dominant within public discourse—"God did not call you, a woman, to preach." Whether spoken in church canon or unspoken in cultural convention, this interpretation has become powerful and continues to prevent women from answering their call to preach today. There is power in interpretation.

Hermeneutics is the theory of textual interpretation and the method proper to the recovery of meaning. In search of meaning, Ricoeur discounts the intention of the author and the historical situation and cultural phenomena of the original readers (which is purportedly hidden behind the text). Instead, Ricoeur argues that "what has to be appropriated is the meaning of the text itself, conceived in a dynamic way as the direction of thought opened up by the text."¹¹⁰ That is to say, when one allows the text to open up in front of itself, a world of meaning is projected, new meanings are disclosed, and the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 92.

reader perceives new ways of knowing oneself. Hermeneutics is not a science of proof and possession of the correct interpretation; in contrast, it “implies a moment of dispossession of the ego” to allow the “disclosing power of the text as distinct from any kind of ostensive reference;” and further, in the process of new understanding of the meaning of text, “one also initiates a new self-understanding.”¹¹¹ The text insists on its own interpretation, depending on the hermeneutics of the reader. After all, the biblical text lends itself to multiple interpretations. Should we think otherwise, narrative theorist Rick Altman reminds us: “Speaking in parables rather than pronouncing laws, Jesus lays a heavy responsibility on his listeners to provide their own interpretation of his words.”¹¹² That is to say, interpretation is not about possessing the right meaning to control and preserve in tradition, but rather to allow the text to reveal its power of world disclosure; to allow the reader to know oneself better and imagine another way of being and doing.

In the face of patriarchal interpretation and resistance, many feminists have given up on the Bible and on church, and many women have given up on their call to preach. In this context, Old Testament scholar Katharine Doob Sakenfeld urges feminists to “find some understanding of how women’s rejected history and untold story can be regarded as authoritative.”¹¹³ In *Bearing Fruit in Due Season: Feminist Hermeneutics and the Bible in Worship*, Elizabeth Smith presents Sakenfeld’s method of feminist interpretation as “authority in community,” that is, “If ‘community’ is understood as being composed of many groups, locating authority in community means that the dominant group at any given period is not necessarily right.” Further, she argues that “an essential step in the

¹¹¹ Ibid., 94. Hans Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, describes this as a dialogical process leading to “fusion of horizons.” Rudolf Bultmann describes as “hermeneutical circle.”

¹¹² Rick Altman, *A Theory of Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 335.

¹¹³ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Feminist uses of Biblical Materials” in Russell, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 64.

community's questioning of its own interpretive assumptions is taken when interpreters are encouraged to pay attention to sections of the community—women, for example—whose voices have been silent, or silenced, in the past and in the present.”¹¹⁴ Feminist interpreters have sought to create such a community of authority—to join together in partnership with one another and with God in the mending of creation. Rather than being divided over the dilemma of choice between faithfulness to the teaching of scripture or to our own integrity as human beings, Letty Russell re-imagines this community of authority as a spectrum. “For in a rainbow spectrum of faithful witnesses there will never be the possibility of such a choice.”¹¹⁵ In other words, feminist interpretation seeks to be both faithful to the biblical text and to the individual, living in dynamic tension between the already/not yet of God's new Creation. This hermeneutics of suspicion, when applied to the dominant narrative of call, uncovers stories and voices in the biblical text that challenge traditional authoritative interpretations that silence women and deny their call.

Reading the bible, tradition, and the dominant narrative through the lenses of suspicion are powerful tools of interpretation, a key aspect in claiming voice, exercising agency, and constructing an alternative narrative of call. As we will see, each of the women in this project necessarily employed a hermeneutics of suspicion in reading both Scripture and the cultural “text” of convention. They de-construct the dominant narrative and take their place in front of the text, allowing the texts to open up new meanings to them and through them. Their interpretations, which they believed to be just as authoritative as the conventional interpretations, were the basis of claiming their calls to preach.

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth J. Smith, *Bearing Fruit in Due Season : Feminist Hermeneutics and the Bible in Worship* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999), 37.

¹¹⁵ Russell, *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, 146.

Hermeneutics of Critical Evaluation

After employing a hermeneutics of suspicion, a hermeneutics of critical evaluation is necessary in order to appropriate only those texts that have undergone the scrutiny of suspicion toward liberation in particular social locations. “A hermeneutics of critical evaluation,” claims Schüssler Fiorenza, “seeks to adjudicate the oppressive tendencies as well as the liberating possibilities inscribed in biblical texts, their function in contemporary struggles for liberation, and their ‘resonance’ with wo/men’s experience.”¹¹⁶ A biblical text should not be branded as either “oppressive” and therefore discarded from the canon or “liberating” and therefore preserved. An ongoing critical evaluation is necessary. Female homileticians have established the essential role of women’s experience, cultural context, and biblical interpretation in developing a feminist critical consciousness. However, no matter how well women know themselves, understand the culture, or interpret the bible, unless they have a voice, they have no power to resist and reform tradition.

In 1999, Mary Lin Hudson and Mary Donovan Turner wrote in *Saved From Silence: Finding Women’s Voice in Preaching*: “Within the world of feminist, womanist, and mujerista thought, almost every use of the metaphor of voice is related to woman’s coming to terms with herself in light of the oppressive structures around her.”¹¹⁷ The human voice is an instrument of power and authority. One who has voice is recognized by oneself and others as one who has value and is thus accorded the right to speak.

¹¹⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 177.

¹¹⁷ Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson, *Saved from Silence : Finding Women's Voice in Preaching* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1999), 14.

Turner and Hudson use voice as metaphor to describe “the process by which one can come to define oneself, rather than being at the mercy of the system.”¹¹⁸ Voice becomes an instrument capable of transforming oppressive structures, joining with the prophets throughout the ages calling for justice and reform. “Voice subverts. Voice transforms. As we shall see, the metaphor opens a new possibility for understanding revelation, liberation, memory, longing, and justice. What could be more crucial for the study of preaching!”¹¹⁹

Not only do Turner and Hudson explore the richness of voice as a metaphor and an instrument of power and proclamation, but they also offer an innovative analysis of the theology of voice as emerging: “By concentrating on ‘voice’ as the locus of God’s agency and being, this theology of preaching shifts its emphasis from the more rigid and singular Word of God (as evidenced in the Reformers and Karl Barth) to an event of dialogue between the text and diverse voices that know of different life contexts, understandings, and experiences.”¹²⁰ While “Word” implies a God who has spoken once and for all and suggests that revelations are frozen in time and in text, a metaphor of “voice,” argue Turner and Hudson, “suggests that the Holy Spirit still speaks, gives voice to ongoing revelation in the lives of many who have been silenced, often in the name of the very God who is thus represented.”¹²¹ Turner and Hudson construct an emerging theology of voice for preaching in which the preacher is attentive not only to the text, but also to the revelations borne of personal and communal experiences in the world.

Following in the footsteps of women in history who have used their voices as a locus of

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 54.

¹²¹ Ibid., 55.

revelation and transformation, Turner and Hudson invite women on the journey from silence to voice: to exercise authority, engage in persuasive rhetoric, and claim the power to preach.

Rhetoric

History, according to Hayden White, is “essentially a rhetorical activity in which past memory is ‘told’ and ‘retold’ in alternative ways, ways that may be intentional but that also take into account the vested interests of the narrating community.”¹²² While this history becomes a “given” or “truth,” in *Cadences of Home*, Walter Brueggemann uses the metaphor of exile to talk about the church in a postmodern world, in which the taken-for-granted reality (e.g. consumer capitalism or male hegemony) is really just a rhetorical construct. Brueggemann identifies the problem in hermeneutical terms: one version of the truth is no longer sustainable in an ever-diverse interpreting community. The pluralism of the interpreting community is suspect of “one” or “our” truth, wondering who is “our” and critical of conventional authority that claims to speak for all. The old givens of white, male, Western, colonial advantage no longer hold. Historical criticism has proven to be a “handmaiden of certain kinds of power,” including hegemony, absolutism, and tradition.¹²³ The polyvalence of the biblical text is open to many meanings, all legitimate and faithful. Further, Brueggemann claims, “there are always rival and competing texts, in the face of which the biblical text may be countertext that does not primarily describe but that subversively ‘re-describes’ reality.”¹²⁴ Even

¹²² Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home : Preaching among Exiles*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 34.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

though “the scripting tradition exercises an incredible and pervasive hegemony among us,” the biblical text has the power to challenge traditional interpretations and re-interpret reality.¹²⁵ “God did not call you to preach” can be challenged by biblical stories of female preachers and an inclusive interpretation of call. Within any larger field of discourse, rhetoric is continually constructed and de-constructed and re-constructed.

Despite his eagerness to challenge hegemonic interpretation, Brueggemann is wise to realize that human transformation does not happen through didacticism or certitude, but rather through “the playful entertainment of another scripting of reality that may subvert the old given text, and lead to the embrace of an alternative text and its redescription of reality.”¹²⁶ This “re-scripting of reality” is possible through a story that dares to re-imagine and re-describe. Preaching has the power to offer an alternative script which conflicts with the conventional construal of reality. Sermons can unlock the hegemony of church tradition by re-imagining reality according to the biblical script. Because reality itself has a narrative quality, Brueggeman claims, “This dramatic rendering of imagination has as its quintessential mode narrative, the telling of a story and the subsequent living of that story.”¹²⁷ Through narrative, reality is constituted and worlds are constructed.

A hermeneutics of critical evaluation allows one to see the oppressive tendencies as well as the liberating possibilities inscribed in biblical texts, and to give voice to their contemporary struggles for liberation. Often for women, this has been possible through narratives that re-script elements within a dominant discourse. In “A Match Made in Heaven: The Intersection of Gender and Narrative Preaching,” Beverly Zink-Sawyer

¹²⁵ Ibid., 27.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 33.

argues, “Narrative has served as the primary way in which women have ‘feminized sacred space’ and claimed their right to the authority of the pulpit.”¹²⁸ While recognizing that men have used story in preaching, “with ready access to the pulpit throughout Christian history, men have not had to rely on narrative to legitimate their right to proclaim the word. They stand in pulpits with the assumed authority of twenty centuries of Christian proclamation.”¹²⁹ Since women have not been historically granted ecclesial authority to preach nor had such ready access to the pulpit, women have used narrative differently. “The way women claim the authority to be heard is by means of authentic witness to the truth of the gospel, witness best conveyed through story,” claiming voice and authority in the form of: “We, also, have seen and experienced the good news and we, too, have testimony worth hearing.”¹³⁰ Women and men are called by the same Spirit, to do the same ministry of preaching. “The God-given authority to proclaim the gospel is the same for men and women,” Zink-Sawyer concludes, “but the human path to that authority is often different for women.”¹³¹ With attention to women’s narratives, we hear their voices more loudly and their claims to preach more clearly.

The hermeneutics of critical evaluation gives voice to oppressive tendencies as well as liberating possibilities. And for women, this is often in the form of narrative. *Saved from Silence* ends with sermons that embody the metaphor of voice and invite women to begin to write and speak their own narrative of call. In “I Dream a World,” Mary Lin Hudson preached:

¹²⁸ Beverly Zink-Sawyer, "A Match Made in Heaven: The Intersection of Gender and Narrative Preaching," in Mike Graves, David J. Schlafer, and Eugene L. Lowry, *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching? : Essays in Honor of Eugene L. Lowry* (Saint Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2008), 49.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Beverly Zink-Sawyer, "A Match Made in Heaven: The Intersection of Gender and Narrative Preaching," in Ibid., 50.

What about you? Have your eyes beheld the glory of the coming of the Lord? What do you dream of? What vision keeps you moving ahead, struggling and singing, suffering and shouting? What longing sings out from the depth of your soul?

Hold fast to your visions. Keep on dreaming dreams. Let us move ahead into new creation and live toward the coming day of God's glorious peace.¹³²

Such poignant yet playful rhetoric imagines a new reality, initiates transformation of convention, and invites all of God's people to say, "Amen and Amen!"

The hermeneutical lens of critical evaluation is a powerful tool for women called to preach. As we will see, the featured women in this essay read the bible, explore tradition, and examine the dominant narratives through the hermeneutical lens of critical evaluation. In seeking to silence oppressive tendencies, they give voice to the liberating possibilities inscribed in these narratives. They exercise agency in their struggle for liberation by rescripting reality and constructing an alternative narrative of call.

Hermeneutics of Re-membering and Reconstruction

A hermeneutics of re-membering and reconstruction reveals the work of "making the subordinated and marginalized 'others' visible, and their repressed arguments and silences 'audible' again."¹³³ Historical recovery work does not provide a mirror into the past; rather it is "narrative-laden and amounts to a remaking and retelling of reality."¹³⁴ Therefore, a hermeneutics of re-membering is necessary for deconstruction as well as reconstruction. Given that history is lacking in women's presence and voices, Schüssler Firoenza calls feminist scholars to the important task of rhetorical and historical re-constructive work. Employing a hermeneutics of re-membering and reconstruction,

¹³² Turner and Hudson, *Saved from Silence : Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*, 119.

¹³³ Schüssler Firoenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 183.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 184.

several feminist scholars have made a significant contribution to the field of homiletics in the form of a historical and theological witness from the practice of claiming call and preaching.

With the publication of her book *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen*, Beverly Zink-Sawyer narrowed the gap in the history of preaching in America by attending to the earliest pioneers in the ordination of women to the ministry of proclamation. Through the stories of three nineteenth-century American women who claimed their calls to preach and then went on to advocate for women's rights in the public sphere as suffragists, Zink-Sawyer traces the journey from the formation of inward call to the ordination of outward call, and from the work of pastoral ministry to the work of public reformation. In so doing, she illustrates the power of the connection between religious and political beliefs; in addition, she "provides a model for the kind of constructive public discourse and advocacy for reform that can arise from deeply held convictions, even religious convictions."¹³⁵ Suffragists worked for women's right to vote, but also for "the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit."¹³⁶ As a student at Oberlin as well as a suffragist, Antoinette Brown Blackwell made a persuasive biblical defense of her claim to the sacred space of the pulpit and a public role in the church; she was ordained in 1853.¹³⁷ Employing the rhetoric of women's nature and the suitability for ministry, Olympia Brown argued convincingly for the emancipation of women—in

¹³⁵ Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists : Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen*, 26.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

the political as well as the ecclesiastical realm; she was ordained in 1863.¹³⁸ After Anna Howard Shaw fought for “human—and especially ecclesiastical—recognition of what she believed she was called by God to do,” she was ordained in 1880.¹³⁹ The accomplishments of these three women cannot be underestimated; neither can their potential influence on women today. This is Zink-Sawyer’s hope, as she expresses in the Preface of the book, “I thank and celebrate the three brave and faithful women of this book who claimed their calls from God, enabling me and countless other women of faith to do the same.”¹⁴⁰ For women who struggle to answer their call to preach, this book is an invaluable reminder that they are not alone, but in fact, walk a path of resistance that has been forged by courageous female preaching pioneers.

In *Women Preaching: Theology and Practice Through the Ages*, Eunjoo Mary Kim acknowledges the significant contribution of female historians who have recognized the gaps in the history of preaching and have recovered information about women preachers long forgotten toward the goal of creating an “enduring tradition that maintains the equality of women’s proclamation.”¹⁴¹ From Eunjoo Kim, we learn the stories of Hildegard of Bingen and St. Catherine of Siena, Duk Ji Choi¹⁴² and Sor Juana Ines del la Cruz.¹⁴³ From women’s historical struggles of call—from the early to modern era—Kim reveals that “the Spirit of God has constantly invited women preachers in many different

¹³⁸ Ibid., 96.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 116.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., x.

¹⁴¹ Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Women Preaching : Theology and Practice through the Ages* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2004), xi.

¹⁴² Ibid. Duk Ji Choi was arrested by Japanese police in 1942, but then offered release from prison under the condition that she would no longer preacher the Christian gospel; she refused, saying that she could not help but proclaim the gospel truth.

¹⁴³ Ibid. Hildegard of Bingen preached with full authority both inside and outside medieval monasteries. Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz wrote poems, letters and writings that she recited in cathedrals and other public spheres as sermons.

ways across time and space to work as agents of reconciliation and transformation.”¹⁴⁴ Kim’s theology of preaching from a woman’s perspective involves being agents of reconciliation and transformation and encompasses three theological themes. First, preaching as a voice from the margins of society is the “place where suffering and pain are severely experienced,” but also the ‘creative core’ from which we experience most profoundly “where the Spirit of God is at work in transforming the world.”¹⁴⁵ Second, preaching is a cross-cultural conversation in which woman’s experience is not general, but is contextual and created: “Women preachers have spoken the truth from their particular experiences and provided alternative visions for the future of their particular communities.”¹⁴⁶ Third, preaching describes the wholeness of God: In this postmodern world, in which truth claims are merely fragments that have been conditioned in our particular social locations, Kim proposes “the process of truth-creating as an ongoing conversation, rather than searching for foundations of truth within the limits of reason.”¹⁴⁷ Preaching from a woman’s perspective speaks the truth of the wholeness of God—Shalom, peace—even in the midst of pain and suffering. Kim claims, “Preaching from woman’s perspective is a revelatory act.”¹⁴⁸ This theology of preaching, informed and shaped by women’s historical perspectives, is a dynamic process of locating oneself in a specific context, transcending boundaries across contexts, and ultimately, liberating all contexts in God’s Shalom. Kim identifies that what is missing from the corpus of recently published homiletics books is a theological reflection on the tradition of women’s preaching, and with her work, helps to wrestle the theology of preaching from a

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 157.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

patriarchal perspective.¹⁴⁹ By offering a theological reflection on the experiences of women preachers, Kim's work promises to be constructive for a new generation of women called from the margins to the ministry of proclamation.

Anna Carter Florence's project is driven by truth-telling, beginning with the realization that homiletics had not been telling the truth: "These historical writings were there; they were accessible; they were plentiful! So why did the fields of homiletics and feminist homiletics act like these women never existed?!"¹⁵⁰ In *Preaching as Testimony*, Carter Florence goes about "waking up" that which has been hidden: waking up the stories of testimony from historical women from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries; then, waking up the secrets of the truth and power of testimony as God-talk; and finally, waking up the preachers in practicing and embodying testimony. Testimony is a "narration of events and confession of belief" in which the "preacher tells what she has seen and heard in the biblical text and in life, and then confesses what she believes about it."¹⁵¹ Carter Florence acquaints us with three women from early American history whose call to preach was not ordained by the church, but who nevertheless preached truth as they saw it. By shifting away from the authority of the ordained office to the one who testifies, Carter Florence challenges our assumptions about what it is to preach and what it takes to become a preacher. Carter Florence argues that "preaching in the testimony tradition provides a historical, biblical, theological, and homiletical memory of women's preaching: in short, a women's preaching tradition."¹⁵² This tradition places high value

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. Homiletics needs more descriptions of women's preaching experiences, recovery of female preaching pioneers, analysis of women's ways of learning and communicating, construction of new concepts of authority and leadership, and the practice of teaching informed by feminist pedagogies.

¹⁵⁰ Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), xix.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., xiii.

¹⁵² Ibid., xxvi.

on voices from the margins, speaking of their experience, creatively engaging the text, and embodying the Word proclaimed. Through careful examination of historical accounts of Anne Hutchinson,¹⁵³ the journal of Sarah Osborn,¹⁵⁴ and the autobiography of Jarena Lee,¹⁵⁵ Carter Florence brings to life three models of testimony preachers from whom she gleans practices for preaching today.

Since Christine Smith's 1989 challenge of the lack of homiletic scholarship on women, female scholars have done a great service in recovering a lost historical witness of female preaching and preachers. Through their re-membering and reconstruction work, Beverly Zink-Sawyer, Eunjoo Mary Kim, and Anna Carter Florence made a significant contribution to the historical record and the theological canon.

Each of these feminist scholars of preaching realizes, in their own way, that the historical witness does not automatically translate into a contemporary practice. While it is important, it is not enough for women today whose calls to preach are questioned to know that some of the first women ordained as preachers in the church became suffragists. While it is significant, it is not enough for women today whose calls are challenged to know that preaching from a woman's perspective involves a theology from the margins toward the wholeness of God. While it is generative, it is not enough for women today whose calls are denied to know the practice of testimony, saying what you believe to be true. In recovering this "narrative of neglect," female historians have taught us the truth that there is a historical tradition of women preachers. This historical

¹⁵³ Ibid. Anne Hutchinson preached to crowds of men and women before she was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637 and excommunicated from the church in 1638.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. Sarah Osborn did not have biblical commentaries to inform her sermons, so she decided to write her own, beginning in 1764.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. Jarena Lee heard God call her to preach, and despite being denied a preaching license by the church, she had a long and fruitful preaching ministry.

tradition had to be invented by the women as they went about trying to preach; likewise, this tradition has to be re-invented today.¹⁵⁶

Narrative

One way to reinvent this tradition today is through narrative. Narrative is the telling of a story and the living of that story. “Men have had every advantage in telling us their story,” writes Anne Elliott in *Persuasion*; “Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands.”¹⁵⁷ The trouble is that even if one has managed to wrestle the pen, the telling of the story does not always lead to the living of that story. “Power consists to a large extent in deciding what stories will be told,” claims Carolyn Heilbrun in *Writing a Woman’s Life*; “and male power has made certain stories unthinkable.”¹⁵⁸ For women, a gap has existed between the telling of the story of call and the living of that story of a realized call in an ecclesial context. Those who have the power of narrative have interpreted call and defined the limits of inclusion; men have power to voice their story and have it legitimized. In essence, “Women are trapped in a script they did not write,” argues Carolyn Heilbrun in *Writing a Woman’s Life*, and “they see the absence of any narrative that could take the women past their moment of

¹⁵⁶ Following the example of Beverly Zink-Sawyer, I examine the lives of remarkable women in the nineteenth century who argued for their call to preach. Even though their religious convictions informed their decisions, ultimately, the story Zink-Sawyer tells is of dramatic resistance to the point of leaving the church pulpit for a public platform. What is different about my work is that I tell the stories of women who were committed to the church, those who tried to get into the sacred space of the pulpit; and once there, they stayed, and tried to make changes from within. In the example of Eunjoo Mary Kim, I draw theological themes from the lives of historical women. What is different about my work, is that rather than forming a woman’s perspective on preaching on the experiences of women or developing a theology of preaching, I conduct a rhetorical analysis of their writings in service to a more robust hermeneutic of call. In the example of Anna Carter Florence, I observe the practices of women preachers. What is different is that I am seeking to “wake up” a rhetorical tradition for those women who want to speak truth and preach—not outside, but within the ecclesiastical structures.

¹⁵⁷ Anne Elliott, *Persuasion* in Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), 43.

¹⁵⁸ Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life*, 44.

revelations and support their bid for freedom from the assigned script.”¹⁵⁹ While women have been able to write their own scripts in many fields today, they are still under the power of an assigned ecclesial script.

Women find themselves in a liminal place betwixt and between the already-received divine call and the not-yet realized ecclesial call. Examination of the liminal place is generative, in search of a way to navigate this place of struggle, in order to bridge the inward and outward call to preach. For men, the story of call may be enough, but women need to say more, or say it differently, with the purpose to persuade others of the veracity of their divine summons. Those whose call stories hit the institutional wall need to interpret their call experience using rhetorical devices that speak to their audience. Heilbrun names the reality in which women find themselves: “We know we are without a text, and must discover one.”¹⁶⁰ It is not about making up stories to live by, clarifies Heilbrun, “we can only retell and live by stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts.”¹⁶¹ In this liminal place, women seek to find a text to connect their experience of the inward call and the sanction of the outward call.

Discovering an alternative script calls forth from women their story—not merely as imaginative communication. Feminist scholar Christine Smith recognizes the power of story and narrative: “Story and narrative theology represent a powerful and important way of naming reality for women, a reality that was not always valued or even heard.”¹⁶² Narrating this reality, distinct from “outside structures, or rights, or privileges,” has to do with the “quality of naming and witnessing that is born from within the lives and souls of

¹⁵⁹ ———, *Writing a Woman's Life*, 42.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶¹ ———, *Writing a Woman's Life*, 37.

¹⁶² Smith, *Weaving the Sermon : Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, 14.

faithful women.”¹⁶³ Stories and texts of faithful women claiming call have not been adequately preserved or explored, but neglected. The lack of a significant corpus of texts of women called to preach reinforces the dominant narrative and maintains the distance between inward and outward call.

Narrative of Call

In *God's Yes was Louder than My No*, William Myers explores this liminal space between divine and ecclesial call and how the space has been traveled by African Americans called to preach. First, he explores this ambiguity of call by broadening the definition, separating and clearly delineating its different aspects. “Call is first and foremost a story—an oral accounting—about a human-divine encounter;” furthermore, claims William Myers, “the call is equally a narrative.”¹⁶⁴ A call story is “the narrator’s retrospective attempt to articulate a divine mission—a call to ministry.” However, a narrative is structured with one main purpose: “to persuade the hearer of the veracity of the story.”¹⁶⁵ Myers makes a generative distinction: Call stories and call narratives are not necessarily the same. While a call story simply tells of an experience of divine call, the narrative has a greater purpose. Myers explains, “In order for the narrator to accomplish his or her purpose—persuade the hearer to believe the story—he or she needs to select, arrange, and modify the story. Modification does not mean falsification. It may simply mean a change in sequence of events, length, time, details, interpretation, or emphasis of the story.”¹⁶⁶ If call is both story (what is said) and narrative (how it is told),

¹⁶³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁶⁴ Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No : Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry*, 17, 69.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 69.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

then attention is needed on how the story is interpreted in order to convince others of its validity. So call—both personal and corporate—is a hermeneutical matter.

In “Disentangling the Call to Preach: Certainty, Ambiguity, Mystery” in *Sharing Heaven’s Music*, William Myers seeks to find a more inclusive understanding of call through narratives—“subjective retrospective interpretations of call as the point of departure for a discussion of call to ministry.”¹⁶⁷ Rather than beginning with Scripture and tradition’s institutional narrative, Myers proposes another hermeneutical point of departure in assessing the authenticity of call. He observes that in all accounts of a call from God, both biblical and extrabiblical, male and female, “People ultimately accepted a call to ministry because they became convinced of its authenticity. They believed in a process that began as a divine-human encounter and continued as a human-human encounter among a community of believers.”¹⁶⁸ Myers suggests, “What the individual has to say about self-authenticating aspects of the existential encounter with the divine, what the corporate body has to say about its experiential encounter with the one called, as well as how it assesses the person’s story—these together make up the point of departure. Indeed, each of these components is central to confirmation and ordination, and without them the process is truncated.”¹⁶⁹ In reality, these components of an individual’s story of divine summons and the church’s assessment of the story have been used throughout the history of the church as key evidence in the process of legitimization. Myers articulates a provocative challenge to the church:

If call narratives have served as the starting point and as key data for confirmation of men, then why not for women as well? If one factor, like gender, can negate the value of call narratives, then why not other factors,

¹⁶⁷ _____, “Disentangling the Call to Preach : Certainty, Ambiguity, Mystery,” 8.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 51.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

like lack of seminary training? Does not the negation of call narratives on the basis of gender alone undermine the value of call narratives in the church for all? Shall we go back into the annals of history and expunge all calls that relied on a call narrative as legitimizing evidence of a call? Whose shall we start with? How about Paul?¹⁷⁰

Indeed, if call narratives have served as the starting point and as key data for confirmation of men, then why not for women as well?

This work traces the history of call through the nineteenth century, at a time when the question of women's call to preach, although seemingly fixed by cultural convention, was being raised by some courageous women in different settings, through different genres, and to different effect. As we will see, the hermeneutical lens of re-membering and reconstruction is a powerful tool for interpreting the bible, tradition, and the dominant narrative, and a key aspect in claiming voice, exercising agency, and constructing an alternative narrative of call. In the liminal place between inward and outward call in which women find themselves is the place to find voice (prophetic rhetorical voice), claim agency, re-interpret authoritative texts, construct narrative, and claim call. This is the place for discourse (that undermines and exposes power, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart) in the form of call narratives. This is the place for women's creative imagination.

Hermeneutics of Creative Imagination

Homiletician David Buttrick challenged preachers to imagine themselves as divine spokespersons: "We do not preach for any reason except that God has called us and seeks to use our voices for the liberation of humanity. So when we preach God's redemptive word, guess what? Our voices, our piping, little sin-struck, frightened,

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

underpaid, hesitant voices just happen to be the voice of God. Imagine that—please, oh please, imagine that!”¹⁷¹ The trouble is that many women who have been shaped by gendered cultural convention are simply not able to imagine that they could speak for God. Despite having experienced a divine call to preach, many women, including myself, could not imagine what that looked like without models, stories, or examples of female preachers. And so, women often accept the church’s interpretation of their call—to become a nun, teach children, or sing in the choir. While women cannot easily imagine their voice being the voice of God, ecclesial authorities understand fully the power and authority of the preacher; hence the resistance to a woman’s call to preach.

Interpretation is formed and informed based on one’s vision, perspective, or, as Hans-Georg Gadamer suggested “horizon.” As derived from the Greek term *oros*, meaning a “limit” or “boundary,” “horizon” is defined as “beyond which one cannot see, perceive or understand, thus narrowing one’s point of view.”¹⁷² In biblical interpretation, Gadamer’s concept of “fusion of horizons” is illustrative. A “fusion of horizons” does not imply a blending or amalgamation of beliefs, but rather, “to understand the context of what is said [or written] from the perspective of a horizon that is not one’s own.”¹⁷³ This process that opens up a “dynamic space of interaction between two horizons” allows a new “hermeneutical consciousness” to re-examine what was questionable or unimaginable from one point of view. We begin reading a text from our own interests, but if we read it again, the text under consideration opens itself up to questions and the reader is invited into a dialogue with the text. A dialogue is what allows the text to move

¹⁷¹ David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice : The Liberation of Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 32.

¹⁷² Bradley H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 177-8.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 192.

from a historic relic to a living word. This dialectic reflection is what has led us to “a fusion or adjustment of the horizons of the text and ours. The text has succeeded in disclosing the vast profundity of its vision to us.”¹⁷⁴ Gadamer argued that the human imagination has a hermeneutical function in biblical interpretation in fusing the present horizon of the biblical interpreter with the past horizon of the biblical text. The human imagination, posits Gadamer, does not ask ‘What did this text mean in its original historical setting?’ but rather, ‘Where does this text take us?’ This later question does not seek one conventional authoritative interpretation, but an ongoing, open-ended process. In Gadamer’s view, “it is imagination that is the decisive function of the scholar.”¹⁷⁵

A hermeneutics of creative imagination, as defined by Schüssler Fiorenza is that which critically analyzes that space in which “boundaries are crossed, possibilities are explored, and time becomes relativized,”... so as to allow one to “dream a different world of justice” and envision liberation.¹⁷⁶ A creative imagination is able to conceive of change, envision how situations can be altered, and tell a story that fills in the gaps in history and charts a different course for the future.

“Call the Question”

This project, “Call the Question,” is a work of creative imagination in which “boundaries are crossed, possibilities are explored, time is relativized,” and liberation is envisioned. I begin by telling the stories of some pioneering American women who lived during the nineteenth century—a time when Victorian ideas about “a woman’s proper

¹⁷⁴ Luis Alonso Schökel, José María Bravo, and Brook W. R. Pearson, *A Manual of Hermeneutics*, Biblical Seminar ; (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 70.

¹⁷⁵ McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 193.

¹⁷⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 179.

place” were coupled with a re-prioritized religious belief of “decency and order” to prohibit women from most public speaking, including preaching. The changing intellectual, economic, social and religious realities of nineteenth-century America created a space in which these women could rhetorically challenge the prevailing understandings of a woman’s place. The question of a woman’s role in religion was addressed in various contexts: within itinerant preachers’ exhortations and private prayer meetings, at revivals and women’s rights conventions, in theological schools and churches. The question of women’s call to preach was addressed by women of different racial and social backgrounds, denominations, and geographic locations, in their written and spoken rhetoric.

With four case studies, I introduce the reader to women who imagined their voices could speak a word of change, even a word from God: Jarena Lee, Frances Willard, Louisa Woosley, and Florence Spearing Randolph. Through their rhetoric, they dream a different world of justice and argue their case in such a way as to gain a hearing. These women challenged the cultural conceptions limiting women’s public voice—to make claim to sacred pulpit places, to engage in sacred persuasive speech, and to preach as ordained ministers of the sacred office. Jarena Lee defended her personal experience of divine call as legitimate. From a public platform, Frances Willard argued that the call to preach is in a woman’s nature and role in society. Louisa Woosley interpreted the Bible as endorsing women’s call to preach. Florence Spearing Randolph preached an inclusive call wrapped in traditional theological language. Each of these four women represents a typical woman of the nineteenth century who occupied a specific cultural context; together they typify the cohorts of their generation. They are from the north and

the south; they are black and white; rich and some poor; they are formally educated and not; they have access to different types and platforms of writing and speech and are constrained by different types of authority. The women chosen for this project are diverse in many ways, but they share the same commitment to their own call and to the church. This neglected narrative of preaching pioneers is best recovered by hearing the women speak in their own words.

- Jarena Lee, member of the African Methodist Episcopal church in Philadelphia, appealed to the authority of personal experience of divine summons to affirm her call to preach. In her spiritual autobiography (1836), Lee testified: *To my utter surprise there seemed to sound a voice which I thought I distinctly heard, and most certainly understood, which said to me, "Go preach the Gospel!"*¹⁷⁷
- Frances E. Willard, professor at Northwestern University in Illinois who later served as President and national spokesperson of the Women's Christian's Temperance Union, appealed to the authority of cultural conventions of a woman's place. In her book *Woman in the Pulpit* (1888), Willard provided women preachers with a public platform to defend their calls to preach: *The strongest argument in favor of a woman minister is found in woman herself, in her sympathetic and intuitional nature, in her high moral sense, in her deep and fervent religious spirit.*¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* (Philadelphia: Jarena Lee, 1836) in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, Edited by William L. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 35.

¹⁷⁸ Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit*, (Boston, MA: D. Lothrop Company, 1888), 97.

- Louisa M. Woosley, Kentucky housewife with frontier toughness and evangelical faith, appealed to the authority of Scripture in order to defend her call as the first woman ordained in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In her Biblical exegesis (1891), Woosley prophesied: *no matter what women-gaggers may say ... To all who have studied the Bible, and have no pet theory to support, this truth is as clear as a sunbeam ... it is evident that women are to take part in the gospel ministry.*¹⁷⁹
- Florence Spearing Randolph, ordained and installed pastor of Wallace Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Summit, New Jersey appealed to the authority of the church office to affirm her—and all women’s—call to preach. In her sermon “Antipathy to Women Preachers” (1930), Randolph preached: *But God, with who, there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, in His wonderful plan of salvation has called and chosen men and women according to His divine will as laborers together with Him for the salvation of the world.*¹⁸⁰

Individually and collectively, they answered their call to preach and composed a compelling rhetoric of women’s call to preach.

Despite my own historical recovery work in “Call the Question,” it is not enough to know that Jarena Lee was given permission to be a traveling exhorter in 1819; it is not enough to know that Frances Willard wrote *Woman in the Pulpit* in 1888; it is not enough

¹⁷⁹ Louisa M. Woosley, *Shall Women Preach? Or The Question Answered* (Caneyville, KY, 1891; reprinted Memphis, TN: Frontier Press, 1989), 70.

¹⁸⁰ Florence Spearing Randolph, “Antipathy to Women Preachers,” in Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 127.

to know that Louisa Woosley was the first woman ordained in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1889 and that within her forty-five years of ministry, she preached 7,925 sermons; it is not enough to know that Florence Spearing Randolph served as the installed pastor of a church for twenty-one years, from 1925 to 1946. It is not enough to know that women make up a significant part of the history of preaching in America. The ordination of one woman, so it seems, may establish a precedent, but not necessarily an ongoing practice. Women who want to become ordained to preach within the church today have to know not just *that*, but also *how these women made their case in order to claim—over and over again—their own call to preach*. Therefore, women have to re-cover historical record, re-imagine theological rationale, re-claim rhetorical strategies, and re-establish practices of calling the question of women’s preaching. The significance of my project is, I hope, not limited to the recovery of a record of historical women who claimed their call and preached; nor is it bound by a theology of preaching from a woman’s perspective or practice. I do not want to limit my scope to the discovery *that* women have claimed their call to preach, or that they *should*, but more precisely in order to learn *how* they did so and, therefore, to imaginatively project a horizon in which we today might do the same.

I seek to tell a story—a neglected narrative of women’s call to preach. I am not telling a story that seeks to defend the right of women to preach, and I am not asking the question “Shall women preach?” in an effort to write another apologetic for women preaching. Ella Mitchell, in *Women: To Preach or Not to Preach*, along with twenty-one black preachers, have already answered a definitive “yes” and strive to “establish a Christian (biblically grounded) documentation for the fact that women have been and are

called by God to preach.”¹⁸¹ Nor am I telling the story by asking “how shall women preach?” in an attempt to identify a specific “woman’s way” of preaching; in *Weaving the Sermon*, Christine Smith has already done the work of bringing feminist theology, psychology, and spirituality into the field of homiletics, arguing that “there is some qualitative distinctiveness surrounding the preaching of feminist women,” including the use of more images, stories, and personal experiences in sermons.¹⁸² Feminist scholars have clearly established that women have defended the right to preach and that women have preached in their own way. And yet, women today still struggle with the ability to answer their call to preach.

My project approaches women’s preaching from another perspective. While there are clearly overlapping themes, at the heart of this work is the call to preach. I critically explore the question: “How did women call the question; that is, how rhetorically did they narrate their story to preach, so as to publicly claim and exercise their call to preach, and call other women to do the same?” And what can we learn about claiming our call at the intersection between their horizon of generating new meaning, and our own.

Along the way, many questions will be explored: How did these women who preached interpret divine call and how did they articulate their call through a constructed narrative? How did they use their voices rhetorically, persuasively, contextually, biblically, theologically, and homiletically? How did they call other women to exercise their agency? How do we hear them? How do we let them speak a word of voice, agency, and interpretation? How do their voices help us today to re-claim agency, re-cover voice, re-narrate call story, and re-script roles in the church?

¹⁸¹ Ella Pearson Mitchell, *Women : To Preach or Not to Preach : 21 Outstanding Black Preachers Say Yes!* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1991), 15.

¹⁸² Smith, *Weaving the Sermon : Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, 9.

My project seeks to discover new narratives, and to recover old narratives with new ways of understanding them: my work explores the liminal space between inward divine call and outward institutional call, in which a woman's personal story is often found wanting, but a call narrative has power to bridge the gap. I critically examine call narratives written from a place of betwixt and between in order to understand how call narratives function as an exercise of interpretation, expression of agency, and embodiment of voice, as well as how call can be re-interpreted through hermeneutical lenses of experience of God, cultural context, Bible, and tradition.

The Hermeneutics of Experience, Domination and Social Location, Suspicion, Critical Evaluation, and Re-membering and Reconstruction provide lenses through which to analyze how the four women began to name and understand what they had experienced as a call to preach. Naming their call as such is only the beginning, serving as an entryway into the hermeneutical dance of feminist interpretation. What is needed is a process of de-construction and re-construction of the call and the conventional containers of call—experience, culture, Bible, and church tradition. The four women in this study engaged in an emancipatory rhetorical process, seeking to liberate not only their calls, but also that which contained and constrained their calls. It is my hope that even as I rely on the critical moves previously made by feminist scholars, I will contribute something that extends the conversation, enlivens the hermeneutical dance, and re-interprets the narrative of call. By critically analyzing how each woman applied the hermeneutical lenses to the bible, tradition, and the dominant narrative, I seek to understand how the women interpreted their call to preach, thus claiming voice, exercising agency, and constructing an alternative narrative of call.

A hermeneutics of experience allows us to critically examine all of the four women of this study, but particularly Jarena Lee's experience of the voice of God and how she found her voice, first in a private journal, and eventually as an itinerant preacher. A hermeneutics of domination and social location permits a critical examination of all of the call narratives, but particularly Frances Willard's denied call to ministry and the choices she made within socially defined categories (Cult of True Woman) to construct expressions of women and to negotiate a lived experience of call for herself and other women. A hermeneutics of suspicion is utilized by all of the women, but especially by Louisa Woosley in reading the whole Bible in a spirit of discernment, and finding evidence to corroborate her call to preach. A hermeneutics of critical evaluation allows us to perceive in Florence Spearing Randolph's sermons evidence of "adjudicating the oppressive tendencies as well as the liberating possibilities inscribed in biblical texts" as she sought to claim her call to preach a word telling the truth of both women's struggle and liberation.

A hermeneutics of creative imagination brings to light the ways in which Jarena Lee, Frances Willard, Louisa Woosley, and Florence Spearing Randolph utilized rhetoric in order to transform established and routine understandings of women's call to preach. I use all of the hermeneutics in an overall reading of the call narratives toward a creative imagination of how to claim call, voice, agency, and interpretation within a specific cultural and religious context. Within that frame, I utilize methods that will allow me to critically examine the particular ways in which women interpreted their call through hermeneutics of experience, social location, bible, tradition, and creative imagination, with attention to the particular authorities and dominant narratives contained in specific

contexts in order to re-interpret call in light of all of these aspects. Individually and collectively, they told the truth of their call and preached. But how?

“Truth cannot walk on its own legs,” argues rhetoric scholar Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, “it must be carried by people to other people. It must be made effective through language, through argument and appeal.”¹⁸³ In order to understand how these women claimed the truth of their call at a time when they were not permitted to do so, I explore how they utilized narrative strategy in order to make claim to sacred pulpit places, engage in sacred persuasive speech, and preach as ordained ministers of the sacred office. I explore how they wrapped their call stories in theological language and rhetorical devices and framed them in contextual authorities. I explore how they utilized language, argument, and appeal, and exercised hermeneutics, voice, and agency. I analyze the writing of these women—including distinct genres of autobiographical journal, speech, book, biblical exegesis, and sermon. My project explores the question “How did women publicly claim their call to preach?” in order to prove veracity and exercise power; it also unwraps the theological language and rhetorical strategies in order to examine how these women narrated their call—for themselves and for other women.

Recovering a lost history of women preachers reveals the truth, that there is a rich historical tradition of women preachers and a deep theological witness of women who struggled to overcome prohibitions on their preaching. The significance of this project is not limited to the knowledge that women in history claimed their call and preached. The importance for contemporary homiletics is not just *that* these women claimed their call to preach, but precisely *how* they did so. Truly, women today stand in a great cloud of witnesses—on the path of preaching pioneers. But women today have to know how to

¹⁸³ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Pub. Co., 1982), 3.

speak to the powers preventing their preaching. As women have done for centuries, they must re-invent their own history toward the transformation of current practices and the renewal of future hope. As feminist scholars remind us, “Even as a strategy for promoting feminism, separation neglects the need to transform the order not only for ourselves, but for others: for the dead and those who have suffered, the living who do not yet speak, and those not yet born who will have voices to speak.”¹⁸⁴ Toward that end, I seek to re-claim rhetorical strategies and re-establish practices of calling the question of women’s preaching—for women today and for all of those who will come after them.

Methodological Scope

The method of this project is hermeneutical; that is, it assumes events (inward call) and writing (biblical text) that are separated from their original event (divine summons) and thus require interpretation. With the power of interpretation under the control of the dominant narrative, interruption of that narrative is necessary through re-interpretation that navigates cultural mores and ecclesial canon. Within that larger hermeneutic method, I seek to actualize three methodological movements.

Part I(Stasis)

The stasis is examined through the historical description of the hegemonic interpretation of the primary text (bible) of call in Western church traditions, which is inscribed in theological and ecclesial documents, sermons, ordination practices, etc., and therefore functions as the dominant narrative defining who is called to preach. Chapter 2 traces the development of the interpretation of the biblical texts on call that has been

¹⁸⁴ Rebecca S. Chopp, *The Power to Speak : Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 6.

preserved as tradition and, through theological trope, has projected a world of resistance and denial to female preachers. Further, Chapter 2 problematizes the narrative of the call of male preachers, highlighting how, despite the presence of preaching women in the history of the church, the conventional narrative of male preachers developed and became normative and dominant.

Part 2 (Destabilization)

The stasis is destabilized through the de-construction of the dominant narrative by four nineteenth-century women who re-interpreted this expansive historical tradition through their call narratives. Call narratives are re-examined to understand how they constructed arguments that allowed them to traverse the liminal space between inward and outward call. This part of the project deconstructs the institutional narrative that interprets text and tradition in such a way as to deny women's call to preach and begins to re-construct the narrative to include women preachers. In Chapters 3-6, I critically examine the rhetorical witness contained within the call narratives of four nineteenth-century women: Jarena Lee, Francis Willard, Louisa Woosley, and Florence Spearing Randolph.

Part 3 (Resolution)

The de-stabilization of the stasis is resolved through the on-going interpretive work of these alternative narratives, which involves "re-inhabiting" the dominant narrative structures, "gra(ph)fting" aspects of women's call narratives onto the dominant one, and "re-writing" or "re-scripting" an alternative reality. These hermeneutical

practices become models for student practices of interpretation in which they pursue similar historical interpretive textual trajectories and rhetorical strategies in critically examining and constructing call narratives. Chapter 7 employs creative re-imagination of this recovered historical witness of call narratives to allow us to re-visit the liminal space in which women and others reside today, re-examine texts, re-interpret texts for sermons, re-construct narrative arguments, re-frame social location, re-script call narrative, and reform place of call in the homiletics classroom.

In order to re-frame the area of analysis (between divine inward call and institutional outward call to preach), I use feminist hermeneutics. I seek to extend the good work of the scholars, who have covered much ground and brought important issues to light. Using their hermeneutical methods, I focus on women's claims to preach through their call narratives. By critically analyzing how each woman applied the hermeneutical lenses to the bible, tradition, and the dominant narrative, I seek to understand how the women interpreted their call to preach, claimed voice, exercised agency, and constructed an alternative narrative of call. I utilize the feminist hermeneutics of experience, domination and social location, suspicion, critical evaluation, and creative imagination. On the whole, my project is one of transformative action for change.

Hermeneutics of Transformative Action for Change

The steps in this hermeneutical "dance" are not methodical, successive steps of inquiry that start with one hermeneutic and move systematically through the circle and arrive successfully and definitively at transformation and change, and then exit the circle.

Rather, argues Schüssler Fiorenza, “they must be understood as interpretive moves or hermeneutical movements that interact with each other simultaneously in the process of ‘meaning making’ out of a particular biblical or any other cultural text in the context of the globalization of inequality.”¹⁸⁵ While all of these four women entered the hermeneutical circle by way of their call to preach, each one moved in different directions, utilizing different hermeneutics depending on their experience of oppression and whatever strategies of liberation were most available in their particular social location. Ultimately, however, they all worked toward a hermeneutic of transformation and change. The goal of the critical interpretive process or “hermeneutical dance” is a hermeneutics of transformation and change. Within a social reality of domination and women’s confrontation with injustice and call denial, a hermeneutics of transformation and change “explores avenues and possibilities for changing and transforming relations of domination inscribed in texts, traditions, and everyday life.”¹⁸⁶ If the hermeneutics of experience of call is the theological entryway to this feminist critical interpretive process, then the hermeneutics of transformation and change is the climax. Although it is the goal to change structures of domination, it is not the end. Once a woman is able to claim her call to preach, she will still have to continue this dance of liberation throughout her ministry—some days needing to employ the hermeneutics of suspicion, and other days, the hermeneutics of domination and social location. And as she “dances” toward transformation, she embodies the critical process and models the steps of liberation.

¹⁸⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 167.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

Thesis

These four representative women, although different in rhetorical form and literary approach, all accomplished three things: 1) they named the issue of women's call to preach; 2) they engaged the debate by de-constructing the conventional answer ("no") based on various authorities, and then re-constructing the argument that allows women to authoritatively and faithfully claim their call to preach ("yes"); and 3) they 'called the question' to end the debate. In contextual description and critical analysis, I narrate how the women were able to challenge the cultural conceptions limiting women's public voice and to engage the question of women's call with thoughtful, theological answers; and how they, in parliamentary effect, 'called the question' and ended the debate over female preaching.¹⁸⁷ "Calling the question" is a parliamentary procedure that can be used if one thinks the debate has dragged on for longer than is warranted. The motion to call the question is itself not debatable. If two-thirds of those voting agree that the discussion should have died some time ago, they will support the call. Then, and only then, will the vote be taken on the question itself. This parliamentary maneuver is an effective way to shut down windy speakers who insist on prolonging a discussion when a clear consensus has already been reached. My project "Call the Question" seeks to do just that: reclaim women's voices as a way to alter the status quo narrative that silences women and prohibits their preaching, and to give women today the resources to argue persuasively to end the ongoing and unnecessary debate of women's call to preach.

Through call narratives, these historical women challenged the prevailing interpretation of their call and effectively changed ecclesiastical denial to sanction. With

¹⁸⁷ "Calling the question" is a parliamentary procedure used when the debate has dragged on for longer than is warranted.

attention to four diverse women's narratives of the nineteenth century, we can recover a valuable historical witness, re-imagine biblical and theological interpretations, re-claim rhetorical strategies and the power of narrative interpretation, and re-establish practices of calling the question of women's call to preach, and re-script call narratives for women today.

Conclusion—Looking Back and Looking Forward

In the twentieth century, claims Reformed theologian Daniel Migliore, “the most important development in Christian ministry is the recognition that the Spirit of God extends the call to ministry of Word and Sacrament to women as well as men. This will no doubt be a tension among churches for years to come.”¹⁸⁸ Even in traditions with theological confessions conducive to an inclusive call to preach, churches still debate the merits of the claims of women to preach today. Their practices are in search of a theology. Migliore names the gravity of the problem:

From a Reformed perspective, it must be stated clearly that the continued exclusion of women from the ministry of Word and Sacrament by some churches under the pretext that God is masculine, or that Jesus chose only male apostles, or that only a male can properly represent the person and work of Christ to the people of God is a great scandal to the Gospel, a denial of the freedom of the Spirit to work in new and surprising ways among the people of God, and an increasing impoverishment of the church and its mission today.¹⁸⁹

The denial of women's calls to preach, although prevalent in churches—even some Reformed contexts—is a “scandal to the Gospel” and nothing less than a practice in search of a theology. Women called to preach today must be aware of the dominant

¹⁸⁸ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 230.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

narrative operative in ecclesiastical contexts, while seeking to re-interpret, re-imagine, and re-script their call narratives.

In a recent meeting of Field Education Supervisors at Vanderbilt University, one male pastor shared that his female student was capable and qualified, gifted and obviously called to ministry in the church. The problem, in his judgment, was that she seems to be unnecessarily concerned with being a woman in ministry and is troubled by the issues around her gender. In all of their sessions, he complained, all she wants to talk about is strategies for handling different situations that have presented or may present themselves because of her gender. In frustration, he said, “I just want to tell her that she will be fine. You are gifted, called, and capable; you won’t have problems being a woman in the church. Don’t worry so much.” He asked the rest of the supervisors, “Is that okay that I tell her that?” After a pregnant pause, one seasoned female pastor spoke wisdom: “You would be telling her an untruth.” My “Call the Question” project is an attempt to tell the truth about the call of women to preach—the history and theology, rhetoric and practice, the struggle and the success, and the necessary work of interpretation and re-interpretation through call narratives.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY AND THEOLOGY OF CALL: TEXT, TRADITION, AND TROPE

The absence of women preachers is truly a gap in the historical record that desperately needs to be filled. Putting preaching women back in their place changes our understanding of the Awakenings and their meaning for and empowerment of ordinary Americans.
~Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*

Introduction

Although the Bible does not offer a definitive word on the call to preach, the biblical interpretation of call in Western church traditions has been preserved as the dominant narrative. This narrative of call has been written from a white male perspective and perpetuated by a position of power and privilege. Inscribed in theological and ecclesial documents, sermons, and ordination practices, this hegemonic narrative has defined the limits of call.

The concept of call—to ministry and to preaching—has a long and varied history, marked by changes in how questions of call are answered: What is one called to do? Where is one called to go? Who is called? How is one called? As the cultural and ecclesial contexts have changed throughout the centuries, so have both the church's theology of call and the practice of ordination, especially in regard to the question of women.

In the history of the church, call experienced by women has been problematic. Even when women received a divine inward call, it has not always been validated as an

outward call; therefore, women have not been permitted to answer their call to preach with ecclesiastical authority. But this has not always been the case. In *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West*, theologian and church historian Gary Macy asserts, "The fact that women were ordained for the first twelve hundred years of Christianity will surprise many people."¹⁹⁰

In an attempt to narrate the history of call, this chapter will attend to three aspects: text, tradition, and trope. First, it will examine the text: how the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament define call; second, it will explore the theological tradition: how call has been interpreted and articulated throughout the history of the church, beginning in the time of Jesus and leading up to and including the nineteenth century, in theological doctrines of call and vocation, and in ecclesial practice and social convention; and finally, it will uncover trope: how women's call has been shaped by the rhetorical and homiletical witness of the church.

Text: Inspired Call

The themes of call and vocation are deeply woven into the fabric of the biblical witness. As noted by theologian Daniel Migliore, "God calls Abraham, chooses the people of Israel, summons the prophets, sends Jesus of Nazareth, and commissions the followers of Jesus for service in the world."¹⁹¹ From the beginning of Christianity, the concept of 'call' has been fundamental to faith and essential to discipleship. Throughout the Bible, in both testaments, the concept of call is central, offering inclusive and

¹⁹⁰ Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination : Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), vii.

¹⁹¹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 183.

expansive answers to the questions of call: How is one called? What is one called to do? Where is one called to go? Who is called?

Old Testament

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.
(Isaiah 43:1)

The Hebrew word קָרָא *qara*, translated as “call,” does not have one meaning or refer to a singular experience or event; rather, it has a number of different translations and recipients.¹⁹² The biblical meaning of ‘call’ is further nuanced by examining the multiple translations of *qara*.

How is one called?

The call (*qara*) can be in the form of a cry or the utterance of a loud sound, as in the case of the call of Isaiah, when in the temple he sees the Lord sitting on a throne and hears seraphs calling: “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.*” *The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: “Woe is me!” I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the lord of hosts!”* (Isaiah 6:1-5). Or, *qara* can mean a calling out to someone, such that the one called hears a divine voice. In the garden, Adam heard a voice: *But the Lord God called to man and said to him, “Where are you?”* (Gen. 3:9). And, as Moses was walking, *God*

¹⁹² Francis Brown, S. R. Diver, and Charles A. Briggs, ed. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 49.

called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” (Ex. 3:4).¹⁹³ In these three examples of Isaiah, Adam and Moses, the source of the call is God or divine messengers; and the response of the mere mortals is awe and fear.

Qara can also be translated as call, with the nuance of naming God’s people:

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine (Isaiah 43: 1).

God also names individuals:

God said to Abraham, “No longer shall your name be Abram, for your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations...As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her (Genesis 17:5, 15-17).

Here we see that with God’s naming comes claiming and blessing. But, God is not the only one naming; sometimes people name God, as in this first instance in the Hebrew

Scriptures:

The angel of the Lord found Hagar by a spring of water in the wilderness... and the angel of the Lord said to her, “Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction”... So she named the Lord who spoke to her, “You are El-roi,” for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” (Genesis 16:7, 11, 13).

In this story, God names Ishmael and promises blessing; and in response, Hagar names God El-roi (the God of seeing). Through naming, God enters into a relationship with God’s people, as a nation and as individuals.

What is one called to do?

Biblical accounts in the Old Testament also reveal the nature of call as an invitation or summons and a commissioning to do God’s work. This summoning call can

¹⁹³ Anderson, Metzger, and Murphy, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, 96.

be individual: *God called to Moses out of a burning bush to do the work of exodus, “to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8).* This call can be communal: *“I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness... I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind” (Isaiah 42:6).* This invitational call can even be comforting and connected to salvation: *“Do not fear, for I am with you; ... everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (Isaiah 43:5,7).* But this commissioning call is not always clear:

The Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” ... and he ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But Eli said, “I did not call you.” ... Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:4-5, 10).

However, divine call is not just a command delivered from on high; God invites a human response of faithfulness and encourages a plea for help: *“Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).*

Where is one called to go?

Call goes both ways—from God to people and from people to God. It is the way of divine-human communication. But it is also a way that humans communicate with others, especially in a formal decree or a prophecy, always with a sense of power and urgency. In both cases, the call designates a place to which one is called to deliver a divine word of judgment or blessing. This call can be in the form of a king’s order: *Then David called one of the young men and said, “Come here and strike him down.”*

(2 Sam 1:15). This call can also refer to a king's order—one that should never be challenged:

Then Esther spoke: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days." After talking with Mordecai, she says, "I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:11, 16).

This call can mean a reading aloud of a sacred text, decree or prophecy: *So the priests went to the prophetess Huldah ... She declared to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Tell the man who sent you to me, Thus says the Lord, I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read" (2 Kings 22:14-15).* This call can denote a proclamation of peace: *Then the whole congregation sent word to the Benjaminites who were at the rock of Rimmon, and proclaimed peace to them (Judges 21:13).* This call can be an invitation to worship: *For there shall be a day when sentinels will call in the hill country of Ephraim: "Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God" (Jeremiah 31:6).* This call can even take the form of a call to repentance: *Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Ninevah shall be overthrown!" And the people of Ninevah believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth (Jonah 3:4-5).* Despite Jonah's resistance, God called him to go to Ninevah. In these cases, call is the form or content of the message that one human being delivers to others, in the name of God and with the words of God.

Who is called?

While there is no Hebrew word translated as “preach” (note the exception: Qoheleth, the preacher, who shares wisdom), the word commonly used to indicate speaking a word for God is נִבֵּא (nibeh) meaning “to prophesy,” or נְבוּאָה (nevu'ah), meaning “prophecy.” While God called Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage to freedom, Moses did not have the ability to speak God’s word or deliver God’s message; therefore: *The Lord said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land”* (Exodus 7:1-2). Here it is evident that some are called to lead and others called to proclaim; further, we see that some resist the call to proclaim and still God provides a way for God’s word to be heard. In order for God’s word to be heard for all time, God promises to send the Spirit, as prophesied by Joel: *“Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit”* (Joel 2:28-29; for Joel, this meant all Jews; Acts 2:17; for Peter it meant all the nations). This prophecy reveals God’s intentions that God’s spirit is poured out on all—sons and daughters, old and young, slaves and free, men and women, all of God’s people—in order that they might speak God’s word and testify to God’s faithfulness to all generations.

Within the communal call of the nation of Israel, God called individuals to special duties. While some struggled with understanding the call (Samuel) or accepting the call (Moses), others responded decisively. God called Abram, saying, *“Go from your country*

*and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" ... So Abram went, as the Lord had told him (Genesis 12:1,4). As noted by theologian W.R. Forrester in *Christian Vocation*, "Abraham was the first man with a definite, explicit sense of vocation. 'Faith' ever afterwards was a response to a "call from God, a personal relationship involving responsibility on both sides."¹⁹⁴ A faithful response consisted of a wholehearted devotion of life and service. Theologian Douglas Schuurman notes, "The fitting and spontaneous response to God's grace and mercy is to devote one's whole life to God and God's mission in the world."¹⁹⁵ That is to say, God's call comes with the expectation of a faithful response—to do what one is called to do.*

Summary

As noted in these Old Testament texts, the word translated as "call" has multiple meanings in Hebrew. The Old Testament provides a range of answers for the key questions: How is one called? Calls come from a burning bush, from heavenly messengers, from the Lord God, but also through human prophets. What are the called asked to do? To deliver people from slavery, to go, to do, to be a light to the nations, to proclaim a word of repentance. Where are people called? Esther heard the call of her people to go to the King; Huldah was called upon to interpret divine judgment; Jonah was called to go to Ninevah. Who are called? Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, men and women, sons and daughters, slaves and free, all flesh are called and expected to respond. In

¹⁹⁴ W. R. Forrester, *Christian Vocation: Studies in Faith and Work* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 23.

¹⁹⁵ Douglas James Schuurman, *Vocation : Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), 21.

essence, the Old Testament demonstrates that call comes in varied forms to a diverse group of people to do many different things.

New Testament

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are (1 John 3:1).

Definition

In the New Testament, the Greek word *καλέω*, meaning “to call,” has multiple nuances that give depth and breadth to the concept of call.¹⁹⁶ From its principle words of *kalein* (call), *klesis* (calling), and *kletos* (called), there are three types of use: “to call by name,” “to call upon,” and “to invite or summons.”

In some instances, *καλέω* is translated as “to call by name”: *On the eighth day, they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John” (Luke 1:60).* The name John means “YHWH is gracious,” and is an appropriate name given by his mother of advanced age who was surprised and grateful for this God-given gift of a son. Names have great significance in defining both identity and purpose. According to New Testament scholars William Arndt and Wilbur Gingrich, “very often the emphasis is to be placed less on the fact that the name is such and such, than on the fact that the bearer of the name actually is what the name says about him. The passive *be named* thus approaches closely the

¹⁹⁶ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature; a Translation and Adaptation of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch Zu Den Schriften Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur, 4th Rev. And Augm. Ed., 1952* (Chicago,: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 399.

meaning *to be*, and it must be left to the feeling of the interpreter whether this translation is to be attempted in any individual case.”¹⁹⁷ This is most clearly illustrated in the story of the Annunciation, in which Jesus’ name reveals what he is to be: *In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph ... the virgin’s name was Mary ... “Now you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:26-27, 31-32).* From the very beginning, Jesus is named both human and divine.

Other times, “call” has the nuance of “to call upon.” In the book of Acts, the early church is exhorted to salvation with these words: *“Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).* However, the apostle Paul recognizes that this action of “calling upon the Lord” is not as simple as it sounds. Therefore, he advocates for the necessity of one who proclaims Jesus Christ, so that others can respond by calling upon him: *“But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?” (Rom 10:14).*

In other instances throughout the New Testament, καλέω has the meaning of “to invite or summon.” Jesus invokes this word when giving practical instructions about invitations to banquets and meals. *He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come (Matt 22:3); “If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question o the ground of conscience” (1 Cor 10:27).* Jesus broadens the scope of the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

invitation beyond meals, to include his ministry: *“For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners”* (Matt 9:13). And the invitation is extended even further into the eschatological realm: *And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb”* (Rev. 19:9).

The Greek word *kalein* can be translated as “to name” or also “to invite” (into relationship with). According to Biblical scholar Schuurman, “These two meanings are not entirely separate, because in the Bible one’s name frequently sums up the divinely given purpose or identity to which God calls that person.”¹⁹⁸ At the beginning of his ministry, in each of the Gospels, Jesus called out to his disciples to leave their work and follow him:

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew casting nets in the sea—for they were fishermen ... He saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them (Matthew 4:18, 21); and Jesus said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people” (Mark 1:17); when they brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him (Luke 5:11); two of John’s disciples, Simon Peter and Andrew followed Jesus, saying “We have found the Messiah” (John 1:41).

Jesus called his disciples to follow him in being a messenger and healer for the sake of God’s kingdom. In so doing, Jesus named them disciples and summoned them to work alongside him.

The disciples immediately put down their nets and answered Jesus’ call to follow. But, at other times in the New Testament, the response is not always immediate, and not always accepting, as in the case of this parable Jesus shared: *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves*

¹⁹⁸ Schuurman, *Vocation : Discerning Our Callings in Life*, 18.

to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come”

(Matthew 22:2-3). And so we see that the call is not irresistible; human beings do have the choice to accept or reject the invitation from Jesus to follow.

How is one called?

This invitational call can be a direct summons from on high. It can come from a king: *Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage”* (Matthew 2:7-8). Or the call can be a summons from God:

This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “out of Egypt I have called my son” (Luke 2:15). In this case, the order of God trumps the evil intention of Herod to harm the newborn baby Jesus. This call can also be a summons from one Christian to another or a community of faith, as in the case of Timothy’s exhortation: *But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses* (1 Timothy 6:11-12).

What is one called to do?

Elsewhere in the New Testament, *klesis* (calling) is a way of life to which one is called by God. It is a holy calling: *Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the*

power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1:8-9). A call is not something we can earn by good works; it is a gift of God's grace, given to everyone.

This calling requires a response from each member of the body of Christ, encourages Paul:

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all ... but each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift ... the gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13).

As Paul describes these various gifts given, he also notes that each gift has importance in the community of faith. The calling to a particular office of the church, especially as a priest, is validated only by God, as noted in Hebrews: *Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins and one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was (Hebrews 5:1, 4).* Some commissioned by Christ for this holy calling are to baptize and teach: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28).*

Others are called to preach: *A bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless ... he must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it (Titus 1:7,9).*

Where is one called to go?

In the New Testament, call is not a static event; rather it is a dynamic summons and requires movement. The call can be in the form of an invitation to move from one place to another, as in the case of the parable of the great dinner: *When you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say, 'Friend, move up higher' ... For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.* (Luke 14:10-11). Sometimes the movement called for is more spiritual and ethical, as in the letters to the churches: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:9); *As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory* (1 Thessalonians 2:12). And even when the word *kalein* is not used, the central thrust of the gospel is that Jesus calls his disciples to go forth in his name: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19).

Who is called?

In the New Testament, some are called in a general sense, as people of God, as part of the body of Christ. But some are called in a special sense, to specific duties. For example, the apostle Paul explains that all are called to be the body of Christ, and that

there are a variety of gifts, which everyone must exercise as they are able. In fact, Paul exhorts everyone to find their gifts and calling, and to use them: *“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good”* (1 Corinthians 12:7). In his letters to the churches, Paul uses “calling” and “gifts” interchangeably; in doing so, he proposes that the “gifts” of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers used in specific offices and services of the church are also “callings” (see Ephesians 4:11; 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:3-9). Paul firmly exhorts individual members of the body of Christ to discern the gifts each has been given by the Spirit, as well as to “consider your own call;” that is, discern the best way to use those gifts to meet the needs of the whole body. “Callings in this context do not refer to a special kind of life—say, a celibate one—but to functions, offices, or services that make use of gifts to contribute to the common good of the church,” notes W. R. Forrester, “they are not the same as the call to be a Christian, but they do designate specific ways members of the church express their response to that call.”¹⁹⁹ All members of Christian churches are invited to be open to God’s call and encouraged to respond faithfully.

Other times the divine call is for a specific person for a specific purpose. The Bible witnesses that certain individuals are called to be bearers of God’s word. A young virgin named Mary found favor with God and was called to bear the Son of God, *of whose kingdom there will be no end* (Luke 1:26-38). In the case of the conversion and call of Paul, *the Lord said, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before the people of Israel”* (Acts 9:15). Priscilla and her husband Aquila answered the call to work as partners with Paul in spreading the gospel; they took

¹⁹⁹ Forrester, *Christian Vocation: Studies in Faith and Work*, 29.

Apollos aside and “*explained the Way of God to him more accurately*” (Acts 18:26). As with Mary, Paul, Priscilla and Aquila and others throughout the New Testament, those called are often unlikely prospects to be chosen as bearers of God’s word, including: the outcast, the poor, women, foreigners, enemies, and youth. But, as interpreted by William Willimon, “God’s choice of the unlikely demonstrates the power of God over the assumptions and expectations of the world.”²⁰⁰ In fact, women were among those who followed Jesus from Galilee, and watched his crucifixion on Golgotha; they were the first to encounter the risen Christ. Homiletics scholar Eunjoon Mary Kim notes, “Against all expectations, they became the first witnesses of his rising from the dead;” and as such, “they were instructed to “go and tell” the resurrection of the crucified Jesus to his male disciples.”²⁰¹ Despite the world’s resistance, God’s call is persistent and powerful, and it demands faithfulness. Paul exhorts each and every member of the church of Corinth: *Let each of you lead the life that the Lord has assigned, to which God called you* (1 Corinthians 7:17).

Summary

As noted in these New Testament texts, the word translated as “call” has multiple meanings in Greek. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament answers the key questions with a variety of answers: How is one called? Calls come from heavenly messengers, from the Lord God, from Jesus, but also through human prophets and preachers. What are the called asked to do? They are called to suffer for the gospel, to make use of gifts for the good of the church, to lead a life worthy of the calling. Where

²⁰⁰ Willimon and Lischer, *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 59.

²⁰¹ Kim, *Women Preaching : Theology and Practice through the Ages*, 28.

are they called to go? Some are called to move toward a humble place at the table; others are called to move from darkness to light; Jesus calls all disciples to go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. Who are called? Mary, Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, men and women, the poor, outcasts, youth, all of God's people, all members of the body of Christ. God's call goes beyond cultural conventions of gender, race, and class. In essence, the New Testament demonstrates that call comes in varied forms to a diverse group of people to do many different things.

Conclusion of Text

Throughout the Bible, call narratives are not always captured by the use of *qara* or *klesis*, but they share common elements. In *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No*, New Testament scholar William Myers references N. Habel's six basic parts to the structure of call narratives:

1. *The divine confrontation* creates a sense of *mysterium tremendum* in the recipient. "The call, therefore, appears as a disruptive experience for which there has been no obvious preparation. The call marks the initial interruption of God in the life of the individual."
2. *The introductory word* may express personal relationship, usually in the form of reassurance: "Do not fear."
3. *The commission* is specific and demanding. Commissions differ, but they always leave the one called with an awesome responsibility and a feeling of inadequacy for the task.
4. *The objection* is primarily an admission of one's inability (Moses was poor in speech; Jeremiah was too young); secondarily, a fear of people's response to the message.
5. *The reassurance* is offered to calm fears and reassure the one called that God will be with them, thereby legitimizing the commission and granting power to complete the mission.
6. *The sign* is a tangible sign requested by the one called to equip them for the mission (For Moses, a staff and the name of God, "I AM;" for Mary, the Holy Spirit).²⁰²

²⁰² Myers, *God's Yes Was Louder Than My No : Rethinking the African American Call to Ministry*, 196-7.

Such a form-critical analysis yields even larger numbers of call narratives in the New Testament.

Often in the Bible, the call is communal and expansive in scope. At the birth of the church, Peter preaches that the prophecy has come true, that God says, “*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.*” Paul says that all flesh, that is, everyone, including sons and daughters, men and women, will prophesy. The word *prophesy* meant speaking on God’s behalf, as a divine messenger—later interpreted as *preaching*. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *qahal* refers to the people God has called together for service. In the Septuagint²⁰³ *qahal* is translated into the Greek *ekklesia*: *ek* (from, out of) and *klesia* (klesis, calling) together define the church as the assembly of “called out ones.” In the New Testament and beyond, the *ekklesia* becomes the church. Schuurman applies this to the call of the Bible: “Israel and the church are a people called out of the world by God to serve God in the world . . . Put in general terms, the purpose of God’s call is for the people of God to worship God, and to participate in God’s creative and redemptive purposes for the world, to enjoy, to hope for, pray for, and work toward God’s shalom.”²⁰⁴ In both testaments, the call net is cast widely: all of God’s people are called out to work together in the world.

²⁰³ The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, composed around 200 BCE.

²⁰⁴ Schuurman, *Vocation : Discerning Our Callings in Life*, 18.

Tradition: Interpreted and Institutionalized Call

*... vocation or calling is a certain kind of life ordained
and imposed on man by God for the common good.*
~William Perkins, 'A Treatise of the Vocations'

The concept of call, although central in the Bible, was interpreted differently throughout the history of the church; thus, we see the development of a tradition that is based upon different theologies of call and vocation and a diversity of faithful responses to the divine call. The definition of 'call' in the Bible (even as the words are hard to limit to one definition) is wide-ranging, without limiting who are called or what they are to do. After the early centuries, divine call changed significantly through the most significant periods in church history, including: early, medieval, reformation, and revival. As the church is institutionalized, the definition of call becomes more limited, followed by a restricted understanding of what call entails and who can do what. The interpretation of the Bible becomes more limited; the narrative more dictated and controlled. This move from expansive to exclusive begins with the separation of monastic life from ordinary life; then with the division of clergy and laypeople; and finally, with the discrimination between men and women. With attention to one question for each historical period, we can trace the development of the call narrative, from gender-inclusive to gender-exclusive. Throughout the history of the church, women have written a narrative of call, sometimes alongside male preachers, and at other times as an interruption to the dominant narrative.

The Early Church Period: Call to Sacrifice

Where is one called to go?

In the early church, call focused on a sacrificial life. Beginning with the Emperor Nero in 64 A.D., Roman authorities persecuted Christians for centuries. As disciples of Jesus, Christians understood their call to be a martyr, which meant a “witness” for their faith. In the second century, the word “martyr” took on greater significance in the face of persecutions: it referred to those who actually died for their faith. “A call to follow Christ only rarely ended in martyrdom, but the possibility was something any Christian had at least to consider.”²⁰⁵ Whether or not it came to pass, if called to do so, Christians stood ready and willing to sacrifice their lives for their faith.

In *The Martyrdom of Perpetua*, one of the earliest reliable accounts of martyrdom, two North African Christian women named Perpetua and Felicitas, along with three Christian converts, were put to death on March 7, A.D. 203. Perpetua narrates her imprisonment and execution, and her journal is supplemented by eyewitness accounts of startling descriptions: “Perpetua, however, had yet to taste more pain. She screamed as she was struck on the bone; then she took the trembling hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat. It was as though so great a woman, feared as she was by the unclean spirit, could not be dispatched unless she herself were willing.”²⁰⁶ Even though Felicitas was pregnant, she felt the call so strongly that she was willing to die for her faith: “And so, two days before the contest, they poured forth a prayer to the Lord in one

²⁰⁵ William C. Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 26.

²⁰⁶ Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford,: Clarendon Press, 1972), 131.

torrent of common grief. And immediately after their prayer the birth pains came upon her . . . And she gave birth to a girl; and one of her sisters brought her up as her own daughter.”²⁰⁷ Perpetua and Felicitas were women who showed extraordinary courage in the face of death—sacrificing maternity for martyrdom. As noted by the narrator: “Felicity, glad that she had safely given birth so that now she could fight the beasts, going from one blood bath to another, from the midwife to the gladiator, ready to wash after childbirth in a second baptism.”²⁰⁸ Martyrs understood their death as a rebirth, a baptism in blood in which they would be raised from the dead with Christ.

The Martyrdom of Perpetua, called “the most beautiful as well as the most undisputed” of all Christian martyr-records, “testifies to the power of God’s call and the faithfulness of God’s people over and against the threat of the Roman Emperor’s punishment.”²⁰⁹ The account of Perpetua’s martyrdom ends with a recognition of these martyrs’ faith and heroism: “Ah, most valiant and blessed martyrs! Truly you are called and chosen for the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord! And any man who exalts, honors, and worships his glory should read for the consolidation of the Church these new deeds of heroism which are no less significant than the tales of old.”²¹⁰

The influence of *The Martyrdom of Perpetua* is expansive: “this little book—the authenticity of which is virtually unchallenged—has since become a classic, not only in Christian and Latin letters, but in feminist literature as well, since Perpetua’s acts defied the social mores of her time.”²¹¹ *The Martyrdom of Perpetua* bears witness to the fact

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 123.

²⁰⁸ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion : The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 138.

²⁰⁹ William Farina, *Perpetua of Carthage : Portrait of a Third-Century Martyr* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2009), 4. Note that it is likely that the eyewitness who later authored the book was Tertullian.

²¹⁰ Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 131.

²¹¹ Farina, *Perpetua of Carthage : Portrait of a Third-Century Martyr*, 2.

that in the early church, women, as well as men, were called as disciples of Jesus Christ, and answered the call as martyrs for their faith. The call led them into dangerous arenas and even to their death.

In the year 313 A.D., Emperor Constantine, along with Emperor Licinius, issued the Edict of Milan, which ended persecutions and promised freedom of religion to Christians.²¹² With Constantine's decree, Christianity became the official religion of the empire. While some Christians enjoyed the newfound safety and security, others felt that it was now too easy to be a Christian. Without suffering like Christ, the practice of faith lacked authenticity, and so they sought to pursue a more demanding Christian life and difficult vocation. They discovered a way to answer their call to suffer with Christ in the desert. Antony the Great, called "The Father of Monks," heard the Gospel read in church—"Go, sell all that you have and give to the poor and come"—as a literal call to a life of asceticism. As a spiritual guide, Antony exhorted his followers: "Hate the world and all that is in it. Hate all peace that comes from the flesh. Renounce this life, so that you may be alive to God."²¹³ His life, as described by Athanasius in *The Life of Antony*, served to circulate the ideals of monasticism throughout the Christian world.

Many Christians, both men and women, renounced their worldly goods and followed Antony into the desert to live an ascetic life. In addition to 'desert fathers' like Antony, there were 'desert mothers' living as ascetics. In the early church, "women were in positions of leadership, preaching, teaching, and living as ascetics."²¹⁴ Desert mothers

²¹² Michael David Coogan, *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 566.

²¹³ Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers : The Alphabetical Collection* (London: Mowbrays, 1975), 8.

²¹⁴ Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers : Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 7.

like Amma Sarah were aware of social conventions, which were reflected in references to her as “a mere woman,” and yet, she responded, “According to nature I am a woman, but not according to my thoughts.”²¹⁵ Appealing to the dualistic thinking that separated body from mind, Amma Sarah claimed her call to renounce her feminine body, and embrace her ‘masculine’ mind and spirit. Another desert mother, Amma Matrona understood deeply the power of God’s call and the tension between living a solitary or communal life: “It is better to live in a crowd and want to live a solitary life than to live a solitary life but all the time be longing for company.”²¹⁶ Although the desert mothers were committed to their ascetic lives, they had a deep appreciation for and summoned followers to live in the tension between the secular and sacred calls to faithfulness. The writings from the desert testify to the fact that both women and men answered the call to live an ascetic life, either in body or in spirit.

Most Christians did not go into the desert; instead, they sought to answer the call to discipleship by practicing the ascetic ideal in a monastery or by living faithful lives at home. Macrina, in her brother Gregory of Nyssa’s fourth century account *Life of Macrina*, not only engaged her brothers in philosophical and theological conversations, but also modeled a life of faithful devotion. Gregory writes of his sister: “She went through each part of the Psalm at its special time, when getting up, when engaging in work, when resting, when she took her meals, when she arose from the table, when she went to bed or arose for prayers; always she had the Psalms with her like a good traveling companion, nor forsaking them for a moment.”²¹⁷ Macrina led her brother Basil of

²¹⁵ Ibid., 39.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

²¹⁷ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, Message of the Fathers of the Church V. 13 (Wilmington, Del.: M. Glazier, 1983), 238.

Caesarea to renounce worldly and religious fame for the Christian monastic life, guided by the practices of community life, liturgical prayer, and manual labor. In *Life of Macrina*, Gregory describes a double monastery, in which his brother Peter of Sebaste presided over the men, and his sister Macrina led the women. Macrina demonstrated how many Christians sought to answer the call to discipleship—not through martyrdom or desert asceticism—but through daily spiritual individual practices at home and communal practices in monasteries. In addition, Macrina gives witness to the fact that women in the early church answered the call to holiness both as individuals and as leaders.

In the early centuries, Christians sought to follow in the way of Jesus Christ and the life to which the apostle Paul called them to live their faith. Paul warned against idleness and exhorted Christians to work. “He did not distinguish between physical and spiritual work,” claims church historian Paul Marshall; in fact, Paul “used the same term to refer to the labour by which he earned a living as to his apostolic service.”²¹⁸ Pauline views influenced the early church’s positive view of work, without division or judgment between temporal and spiritual work. Gradually, however, church fathers began to draw less on biblical teachings and more on Greek and Roman models in its understanding of call.

In the early fourth century, theologians identified two separate lives in response to call. Eusebius claimed, “Two ways of life were thus given by the law of Christ to His Church. The one is above nature, and beyond common human living... permanently separate from the common customary life of mankind, it devotes itself to the service of God alone ... Such then is the perfect form of the Christian life.” The other, Eusebius

²¹⁸ Paul A. Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke* (Toronto Ont. ; Buffalo N.Y.: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 16.

describes as “more human, permits man to join in pure nuptials, and to produce children ... it allows them to have minds for farming, fur trade, and the other more secular interests as well as for religion ... a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to them.”²¹⁹ With further separation of terms, Augustine began to shape a doctrine of call and vocation. The ‘active life’ (via activa) took in almost every kind of work, including studying, preaching, and teaching; in contrast, the ‘contemplative life’ (via contemplativa) was marked by reflection and meditation upon God and His truth. “While both kinds of life were good, the contemplative life was of a higher order.”²²⁰ This division of call, claimed Marshall, “shaped much of subsequent Christian thinking”²²¹ Call became subject to social division and cultural contextualization: those who pray (priests, nuns, monks); those who fight (soldiers); and those who work at home (peasants).

In the early church, the call to follow Jesus was understood as a call to all disciples to live a life of sacrifice and faithfulness, practiced in a variety of ways—martyrdom and asceticism—and in a variety of places—arenas, deserts, and monasteries. But even as divisions were made in the ways in which call was understood, and the places where it was answered, still women and men of the early church responded similarly to the call. In fact, as many commentators have pointed out, “Women were especially attracted to the new faith right from the beginning and ... used Christianity as an expression of what nowadays would be called feminist equality.”²²² From various accounts, the inclusive call of the early church, without regard to gender, is documented.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

²²⁰ Ibid., 19.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Farina, *Perpetua of Carthage : Portrait of a Third-Century Martyr*, 3.

In various ways, both men and women of the early church answered the call to live faithful lives.

Monastic/Medieval Period: Call to a Religious Life

What is one called to do?

In the monastic church, call became focused on purity and union with God, as most perfectly represented in a monastic ideal: a disciplined religious communal life bound by vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. In the Middle Ages, a faithful response to God's call was marked by withdrawal from society to immerse oneself in prayer, contemplation, and liturgy. In medieval Christianity, this monastic ideal was considered the one true and highest Christian calling. In fact, a semantic change occurs, so that, "the term 'calling' or 'vocation' was used only to refer to a priestly or monastic calling."²²³ For Christians engaged in other professions, theirs was no longer considered a "calling" but work. Medieval people would not talk about other kinds of callings; rather "to have a vocation meant to be on the way to becoming a monk, nun, friar, or priest."²²⁴

For men, this calling took the form of a monastic life in preparation to become a monk or a priest. Medieval monasteries throughout Europe were regulated by a monastic rule, the *Regula Monachorum*, penned by Benedict of Nursia around the year 529 at the start of a monastery at Monte Cassion (later called the Benedictines). The Benedictine Rule was designed to order and structure monastic life that was characterized by a cloistered communal life and spiritual discipline. The communal prayer of the hours was

²²³ Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*, 22.

²²⁴ Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 112.

called Opus Dei, literally, “God’s work.”²²⁵ The Rule of St. Benedict exhorts monks to open their eyes to the “Divine light” and hear the “Divine voice, calling and exhorting” them. Monks were reminded not to harden their hearts, but to hear the Divine call daily. Some monks heard the call to be an abbot, or leader of the monastery. The Benedictine Rule reminds them: “To be qualified to govern a monastery an abbot should always remember what he is called (Abba=Father) and carry out his high calling in his everyday life. In a monastery he is Christ’s representative, called by His name.”²²⁶ Through prayer and contemplation, monks and abbots sought to be true representatives of Christ who called them.

For medieval women, the call took various forms. At the beginning of monasticism, some women entered the cloistered life.²²⁷ A religious historian notes that Augustine wrote both a masculine and a feminine version of his simple rule. Initially, there was opposition to women’s orders, but by the end of the thirteenth century, monasteries for women in some regions outnumbered those for men, in which “they observed the same liturgical offices as monks.”²²⁸ Convents for nuns were just as important as monasteries. In fact, “these communities of women were in some ways more remarkable, for, in patriarchal society, they allowed women to advance to positions of significant leadership.” In some cases, “the abbesses of great convents were the most powerful women in medieval Europe, and nuns were the most important women

²²⁵ Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints : Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 60.

²²⁶ Benedict, Anthony C. Meisel, and M. L. Del Mastro, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 1st ed., An Image Book Original (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1975), Prologue.

²²⁷ Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*. Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession : Religious Women in Medieval France*, Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Miriam Schmitt and Linda Kulzer, *Medieval Women Monastics : Wisdom's Wellsprings* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996).

²²⁸ E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors : A History of the Christian Clergy in America*, Pulpit & Pew (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007), 18.

writers.”²²⁹ Hildegard of Bingen was a Benedictine abbess who founded the monasteries of Rupertsberg (1150) and Eibingen (1165). In addition, Bingen wrote liturgical songs and poems, as well as theological and medicinal texts; later, she was named a Saint and a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church.

By the twelfth century, monastic communities were not only places of contemplation, but scholasticism as well. In fact, monasteries were the only place to study and read preserved copies of classical works and writings of the church fathers. The monastic rule requiring cloistered piety was supplemented by scholasticism requiring learning in universities with authoritative texts. Mysticism outside the cloistered environment became more academic in nature. The monastic orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans stressed study in preparation to preach, as part of the liturgy.

The beginning of the thirteenth century marked the development of a different kind of order, replacing contemplative monks with active friars. Modeling a life of poverty and sacrifice, Francis of Assisi brought mysticism from the monasteries and academia to the streets. Franciscans lived a life of active faith—thus they were never called monks, but friars—devoting themselves to caring for the sick and suffering of the world. The Franciscan emphasis was not on academia or on a daily monastic schedule, but on the ordinary living of one’s faith. Francis is credited with capturing the Franciscan spirit as “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary use words.” One Franciscan named Dominic was called to use words, and so founded the Order of Preachers to equip educated preachers go out into the world and convert people to the church. This Order of Preachers was a clear indication that “both the founder and his contemporaries regarded

²²⁹ Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 111.

preaching as their main purpose.”²³⁰ Dominicans went beyond the protected walls of the monasteries to preach in the streets. The Franciscan and Dominican orders were engaged in more ordinary work in the world, yet they were still bound by communal rules of poverty, chastity and obedience. The call to the contemplative life became more active.

Both the Franciscan and Dominican communities included orders of men as well as women. In the Netherlands, Christians sought a balance between lay and religious life. “The Beguines (women) and Beghards (men) lived in communities and devoted themselves to prayer and charity. But they held regular jobs, kept some private property, took no permanent vows, and could leave the community and get married if they wished.”²³¹ Mechthild von Magdeburg was born into a noble family, but committed herself to an austere life as a member of a Beguine community. She wrote down visions and produced a book in which she described her ideal of religious leaders as those who dedicate themselves to knowing God and God’s word in daily prayer and contemplation: “Whoever wants to follow God in faithful toil should not stand quietly. He should often rouse himself ... He should lament and praise and pray day and night ... Aimless activity is a very harmful trait for us. Bad habits harm us everywhere. Earthly desires blot out in us the holy word of God.”²³² Mechthild von Magdeburg is remembered as a great medieval mystic who experienced God’s call in visions and instructed others in the way of faithful obedience.

²³⁰ Ralph Francis Bennett, *The Early Dominicans; Studies in Thirteenth-Century Dominican History*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (New York,: Russell & Russell, 1971), 31.

²³¹ Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 110.

²³² Frank J. Tobin, *Mechthild Von Magdeburg : A Medieval Mystic in Modern Eyes*, 1st ed., Literary Criticism in Perspective (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1995), 112. Mechthild wrote and published her book in the year 1269.

Beyond the walls of the convents, women sought ways of responding to God's call to holiness. Christine de Pisan was a widow with three children who turned to writing, eventually becoming one of few professional authors in the Middle Ages, and Europe's first professional female writer. Her book *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, written in 1405, was described by one scholar as "part etiquette book, part survival manual...written for women who had to live from day to day in the world as it was." Here she helps women cope with situations in which they find themselves; in other writings, she protested the mistreatment of women in society. De Pisan depicts two paths to follow in response to God's call, both of which lead to heaven. "The contemplative life is a manner and condition of serving God in which a person so ardently desires Our Lord that she entirely forgets everyone else—father, mother, children, and even herself—for a very great and passionate concentration on her Creator ... Of this holy and most exalted life I am not worthy to speak." While she does not consider herself worthy to speak of the holy life, she speaks with acumen of another way of serving God: "The active life means that the person who wishes to follow it will be so charitable that, if she could, she would render service to everyone for the love of God. She goes around to the hospitals, visiting the sick and the poor, according to her ability, and helps them at her own expense and physical effort for the love of God ... She loves her neighbors' welfare as much as her own."²³³ Christine de Pisan pronounces that both paths are respectable ways of living the call of God; one not higher than the other. For those not on the monastic contemplative path, the active life is a way to love God while loving others.

²³³ Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 181. See Christine de Pisan, *Treasure of the City of Ladies or The Book of the Three Virtues*, translated with an introduction by Sarah Lawson (New York: Penguin, 1985).

Eventually, monasticism and scholasticism led to the institutionalism of call. Canonical orders authorized priests to serve local congregations and cathedrals. Devout men and women both answered the call and preached throughout the first eleven centuries—up until 1140 when canon law prohibited women from “handling sacred objects, vestments, and incense, and the consecrated host.”²³⁴ The monastic orders of the Cathars and Waldensians challenged the church to give women back the right to preach. The result of their efforts was positive: preaching was open to all; qualifications were based on an apostolic life of poverty; and no ordination was required. Both men and women, lay and religious preached—that is, until 1234, when Pope Gregory IX legally forbade laypeople from preaching. The Pope’s orders permitted laypeople to exhort and morally instruct, but only clerics were allowed to read the word of God publicly and to interpret it. Ordination had become a formalized call to the priesthood. According to the church council, the priest was made ‘holy and worthy of honor.’ Peter Lombard spelled out the theological implications of this rite which made the priest ‘holy and worthy of honor’: ordination became a sacrament, and it conveyed ‘a spiritual power and office’ that elevated clergy above the laity.²³⁵ The call to pray or preach, once open to all, including women, was now subject to church doctrine and rite, excluding women.

Some opposed this church law, arguing that given the number of women prophets and deaconesses, the New Testament warranted the ordination of women. Others argued in favor of the law, citing the absence of a woman among Jesus’ twelve apostles and Paul’s epistle that called for women to be silent in the church. Despite Scriptural

²³⁴ Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen : Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 54.

²³⁵ Johannes Gratian, teacher of theology at the monastery of Saints Nabor and Felix, to address matters of practical theology, composed the work *Decretum Gratiani*. Holifield, *God's Ambassadors : A History of the Christian Clergy in America*, 14.

evidence and early monastic church practices to the contrary, church law maintained that women were not permitted to be clerics or to preach. This law prohibiting laymen and all women from answering God's call to ordained religious life was informed not only by theological texts, but by sociological contexts as well. The Pope's declaration was not just about religion; it also reflected the hierarchy of the feudal system, thus reinforcing the social scale. Since women lacked social power and authority, they were not permitted to be clerics and were excluded from preaching. Based on women's experience of call and gift of proclamation, some exceptions were granted: "In place of the right to preach, a certain right to speak authoritatively might be recognized for women who had the special gift of prophecy."²³⁶ But for the most part, the natural law of gender trumped both Scriptural witness and early church tradition: the church maintained that virginity and celibacy were considered women's highest calling. In *God's Holy Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Church in America*, E. Brooks Holifield claims, "The fluid practices and definitions of the early church permanently affected—and complicated—the attempt to define ministry"²³⁷—especially in regard to women's call to and practice of ordained ministry. The concept of "call," once encompassing all ways of serving God, had become limited to monks and priest, and was now further restricted by gender.

In "The Ordination of Women and the Force of Tradition," Gilbert Ostdiek notes that although the practice of women preachers is found in Christian tradition, "it has not been accepted as an 'orthodox' part of our received tradition." This history of factual exclusion—that is, the exclusion of women from ordination to the priesthood and episcopate within the Roman Catholic Church is an acknowledged fact, and—"is at the

²³⁶ Kienzle and Walker, eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*. See Nicole Beriou, "The Right of Women to Give Religious Instruction in the Thirteenth Century," 139.

²³⁷ Holifield, *God's Ambassadors : A History of the Christian Clergy in America*, 13.

heart of the ‘unchanging tradition’ cited by those who wish to see the *status quo* maintained.”²³⁸ The hegemonic narrative became inscribed in church documents, practices, and rituals; thereby defining who is called—and who is not called—to preach in the church.

The restrictions against women are assumed as part of the ‘unchanging tradition’ of the church, beginning in the writings of some of the early church fathers. Their remarks are often cited as part of the ‘unchanging tradition’ and are deemed as authoritative evidence for forbidding women access to the ordained ministry. The early church fathers’ writings against women simply reflected the social convention of their time, not the traditional biblical interpretation or religious practice. As noted by Carolyn Osiek in *Women and Priesthood*, “Tertullian could call women ‘the devil’s gateway;’ Origen could declare shameful whatever a woman said in the assembly, ‘even if it be marvelous and holy, it still comes from the mouth of a woman;’ Epiphanius could say that ‘the female sex is easily mistaken, fallible, and poor in intelligence.’”²³⁹ These blatant misogynist statements were informed by cultural assumptions on the inferiority of women. This inherited tradition reflects the historical context in which it was conceived. Osiek challenges, “to understand Tradition as that which dictates limits for present and future Christian life is to make of it our plaything and our instrument to try to control the Spirit. Rather, Tradition is that solid base upon which the living experience of Christians builds.” Osiek encourages believers of every age to follow in the apostolic generation in adapting Tradition to new situations. “Christian history and tradition can show how those

²³⁸ Carroll Stuhlmueller, ed. *Women and Priesthood: Future Directions, A Call to Dialogue* from the Faculty of Catholic Theological Union at Chicago (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1978), 86.

²³⁹ Carolyn Osiek, “The Ministry and Ordination of Women According to the Early Church Fathers,” in *Women and Priesthood*, ed. Carroll Stuhlmueller (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1978), 68.

before us have dealt with diversity and change by creating and adapting structure and practices according to circumstances in which they found themselves while yet remaining loyal to the faith given them in Jesus Christ. We are not observers of that history. We are part of it.”²⁴⁰ The definitive word on call was not written down, preserved, and passed down without change. It is continually being written and re-written, interpreted and re-interpreted throughout the history of the church. Ironically, the assumed ‘unchanging tradition’ of male preachers has changed from the early and medieval tradition of both men and women preaching.

In the medieval church, the content of call changed. Call became focused on a disciplined religious communal life; a faithful response to God’s call was marked by withdrawal from society to immerse oneself in prayer, contemplation, and liturgy. Nevertheless, those not called to a monastic life, both men and women, sought to answer the call to live faithful lives. In contrast to the inaccurate ‘unchanging tradition’ that is preserved in the dominant narrative, women of the middle ages were abbesses, leaders, writers, mystics, respected advisers to the church, deaconesses, and preachers. Women were called to both the active and contemplative life; and, with ecclesial authority, they answered their calls by praying and leading in monastic communities, preaching and healing on the streets, and writing at home. Benedict and others exhorted that the call to follow Christ must be answered; the one called cannot be idle. And yet, this was the time that opposition to women’s call increased and women were forbidden to participate in certain vocations. As the church became institutionalized—so too did the call.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Holifield, *God's Ambassadors : A History of the Christian Clergy in America*, 12-14.

Although the concept of call changed significantly in the Middle Ages, equating a “calling” with “holy priesthood,” still some voices in the church directed all Christians to answer their call. The *Imitation of Christ*, (published around 1420) probably written by Thomas à Kempis is one of the most famous devotional works that seeks to imagine how an ordinary Christian can lead a “religious” life, with exhortations such as: “He who follows Me, says Christ our Savior, walks not in darkness, for he will have the light of life.”²⁴² Readers are invited to imitate Christ by living their calling: “How sad and painful to see any who are disorderly and fail to live up to their calling. How harmful it is, if they neglect the true purpose of their vocation ... Remember your avowed purpose and keep ever before you the likeness of Christ crucified.”²⁴³ For some, the spirit and nature of call continued to transcend institutional doctrine and challenge the dominant interpreted narrative.

The Reformation Period: Priesthood of all Believers—Every Work a Calling

Let every man abide in that calling, wherein he was called
~Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 7:20)

Who is called?

In the Middle Ages, the language of “call” was largely restricted to monastic and clerical positions. The question of *what* one was called to do was answered definitively by the Roman Church in restricting the word “call” to denote only the high holy call of religious vocation. During the sixteenth-century, Protestant Reformers like Martin

²⁴² Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 197.

²⁴³ Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (www.ReadHowYouWant.com, 2006), 78.

Luther, John Calvin, William Perkins, and Erasmus of Rotterdam asked the question of *who* can be called and answered it in such a way as to extend the meaning of divine call beyond the walls of the monastery and into the world, beyond priestly ordination to include all of human life and work. “The centre of gravity was shifted from an other-worldliness that showed itself in a ‘cloistered and sequestered virtue,’” William Forrester observed, “to the wholesome disciplines of household and market-place.”²⁴⁴ For the Protestants, noted Paul Marshall, “all work had the same spiritual value and was epitomized in shoes, dishes, and ploughs—preaching and cobbling were spiritual equals.”²⁴⁵

Martin Luther: Priesthood of all believers

Martin Luther sought to reform the church’s theology of call and doctrine of vocation. According to Luther scholar Gustaf Wingren, “Luther’s doctrine presupposes that the monastic ideal has already been overthrown from within.”²⁴⁶ Luther rejected the presumption that there was something inherently special or spiritual about the priestly call and vocation. Luther effectively expanded the definition of *vocatio* (vocation) to include: 1) *vocatio generalis*: the proclamation of the gospel through which humans are called to be children of God; 2) *vocatio specialis*: the work or occupation (e.g. farmer, craftsman) to which one was called; and 3) *vocatio mediata*: the call to the office (or action) of preaching.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ W. R. Forrester, *Christian Vocation; Studies in Faith and Work, Being the Cunningham Lectures, 1950, in New College, Edinburgh* (New York, : Scribner, 1953), 146.

²⁴⁵ Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*, 98.

²⁴⁶ Gustaf Wingren, *The Christian's Calling* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), viii.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

Luther described the first type of call, by which all humans are called to be children of God. At baptism, every Christian receives the *vocatio generalis*, “a spiritual or invisible vocation by which he is ‘born and called’ to the universal priesthood.”²⁴⁸ In order to illustrate his point, Luther drew a parallel between the work of monks and maids: “It looks like a great thing when a monk renounces everything and goes into a cloister, carries on a life of asceticism, fasts, watches, prays, etc. . . . On the other hand, it looks like a small thing when a maid cooks and cleans and does other housework. But because God’s command is there, even such a small work must be praised as a service of God far surpassing the holiness and asceticism of all monks and nuns.”²⁴⁹ Luther argued against the common perception that there was something ‘low’ about the calling of a maid and something ‘high and holy’ about the calling of a monk. Based on his study of Scripture, he understood that “every Christian, whether a priest, a monk, a king or a housemaid, being called into the service of God, may look at the work he or she is doing as a divine calling or vocation. It does not matter what you do, provided that whatever you do is done as a divine service to the glory of God.”²⁵⁰ Forrester captures this radical departure from tradition: “In deposing the monk from his former position as the ideal of a Christian man, and putting the good householder in his place, it changed the whole emphasis of Christian ethics, and gave a new start to the history of Europe.” In fact, he claimed, “Luther’s rediscovery of the Biblical meaning of ‘vocation’ or ‘calling’ had revolutionary

²⁴⁸ Richard M. Douglas, "Talent and Vocation in Humanist and Protestant Thought," in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E. H. Harbison*, ed. Theodore K. and Jerrold E. Seigel Rabb (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 287.

²⁴⁹ Forrester, *Christian Vocation; Studies in Faith and Work, Being the Cunningham Lectures, 1950*, in *New College, Edinburgh*, 148.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

consequences.”²⁵¹ First and foremost, Luther insisted that everyone is called equally beloved by God; therefore, each and every one of God’s children, no matter who they are, is a member of the priesthood of all believers.

Secondly, Luther claimed that each person has a particular vocation to which they are called. In the second type of call, Luther explained that every Christian receives a *vocatio specialis*, “an external and visible vocation beyond baptism to a concrete office, in which one is called to be a pastor, magistrate, teacher, husband, or father.”²⁵² Luther argued that priests and monks were not superior or set apart from others; they just had a particular job or office. He wrote: “There is really no difference between laymen and priests, princes and bishops, ‘spirituals’ and ‘temporals,’ as they call them, except that of office and work, but not of ‘estate;’ for they are all of the same estate—true priests, bishops and popes—though they are not all engaged in the same work, just as all priests and monks have not the same work.”²⁵³

Reformer Martin Luther challenged the medieval doctrine that only the monk and the priest had a divine vocation, arguing that even the layman had a divinely ordained vocation. Through the introduction of a novel translation of the German word *beruf*, Luther “took a word previously used only for a priestly or monastic calling and applied it to all worldly duties.”²⁵⁴ In so doing, Luther stretched the boundaries of call to include all work done by all people. In essence, Luther “appropriated the religious aura which

²⁵¹ Ibid., 154. By elevating work to the level of divine calling, Reformers gave birth to the Protestant work ethic in which Max Weber further espoused the high spiritual and economic value of work, along with the inherent Christian responsibility to work.

²⁵² Douglas, "Talent and Vocation in Humanist and Protestant Thought," 287.

²⁵³ Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 212.

²⁵⁴ Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*, 23.

surrounded the clerical vocations and permeated all worldly tasks with it.”²⁵⁵ The result: All men and women were considered priests and all work was a divine calling.

Call and vocation, for Luther, were not confined to one occupation; rather a person could answer more than one call and occupy several offices, including roles in the family (e.g. father, mother, son, daughter). In fact, Luther challenged the monastic ideal of chastity and virginity, insisting that God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply” must be carried out. “God implanted this in human beings, that there must be man and a woman, and without the other neither can bring forth fruit.”²⁵⁶ Although Luther elevated the status of work, he was careful not to slip into ‘works righteousness’ in which people earn their way into heaven; rather he clearly articulated the purpose of one’s vocation: “So vocation belongs to this world, not to heaven; it is directed toward one’s neighbor, not toward God ... In his vocation one is not reaching up to God, but rather bends oneself down toward the world. When one does that, God’s creative work is carried on. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does. It is faith that God wants. Faith ascends to heaven”²⁵⁷ Protestant reformers put the practical and ‘secular’ work alongside the contemplative and ‘sacred’ aspects of the spiritual life. In effect, reformers expanded the idea of vocation and call to include the calling of one’s job and one’s family responsibilities. The consequence was that all work was elevated to the level of divine calling. “All work in the world, not just some particular offices, was understood as immediately divinely appointed; one was called to it.”²⁵⁸ Further, and most

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Susan C. Karant-Nunn and Merry E. Wiesner, *Luther on Women : A Sourcebook* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.

²⁵⁷ Wingren, *The Christian's Calling*, 10.

²⁵⁸ Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*, 23.

importantly, every Christian had a vocation by which to respond to God's calling in their life.

The third type of call, according to Luther, is *vocatio mediata*: the call to the office (or action) of preaching.²⁵⁹ Although Luther argued that "there was nothing especially spiritual about the traditional priestly estate ... the estate of a priest is nothing else in Christendom than an office," still he identified the call to the office of preacher as a particular duty given by God and that required a special process of confirmation.²⁶⁰ Some are called by God to the office of preacher; in addition, the external vocation of pastor, necessary for the public ministration of the sacraments and the Word, is "an office to which one is called by a *mandatum divinum* through a specific congregation ... into which nobody could 'sneak' or 'intrude'; he must be called to it by the explicit order of Christ, mediated through men, in what Luther called *vocatio mediata*."²⁶¹ Luther issued a stern warning against false preachers (i.e. those not called):

No one should let them in or listen to them, even if they were to preach the pure Gospel, nay, even if they were angels from heaven and all Gabriels at that! For it is of God's will that nothing be done as a result of one's own choice or decision, but everything as a consequence of a command or a call. That is especially true of preaching ... Let everyone then, remember this: If he wants to preach or teach, let him give proof of the call or command which drives or compels him to it, or else be silent.²⁶²

Luther elevated the value of preaching to the level of requiring proof of call. He was clear on how one was called: the call to preach was ordained by God, but mediated by humanity.

²⁵⁹ Wingren, *The Christian's Calling*, 1.

²⁶⁰ Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*, 23.

²⁶¹ Douglas, "Talent and Vocation in Humanist and Protestant Thought," 288.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

In his theology of call and doctrine of vocation, Luther elevated and equalized the status of all people as the priesthood of all believers. Further, he elevated the value of work and insisted that all work was a divine calling. But, ironically, Luther restricted the boundaries of call when he referred to the call to preach, insisting that this particular call must be handled with more diligence, seemingly echoing the medieval church's elevation of the call of clergy.

John Calvin: All calls divine and ordained by God for good order of church

Who can be called? During the Reformation, call was being defined and re-defined. Protestant Reformers re-defined call as open to all, but ordained by God (and mediated by church). Later Reformers like Calvin made similar distinctions in the theological concept of call. Like Luther, Calvin opened up the divine calling to all (as a priesthood of all believers), and allowed that the call to preach was analogous to other calls to work. Calvin eschewed the contemplative life for the active life; in fact, his theology of call and vocation was aggressive and busy. He exhorted those called “to work, to perform, to develop, to progress, to change, to choose, to be active.”²⁶³ By virtue of their call, Calvin's followers were “unshackled to transform the world.”²⁶⁴ Calvin described a “general calling” which all Christians experience in preaching that invites them to a life of faith. He wrote: “There is a general call, by which God invites all equally to himself though the outward preaching of the word.”²⁶⁵ This general call to

²⁶³ Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*, 26.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁶⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.24.8. Placher notes, “Predestination, rightly understood, brings no shaking of faith but rather its best confirmation,” *Callings*, 238.

election is not in question; in fact, it is the calling to God's continuous favor through the course of life.

Secondly, Calvin described a "special calling" which is worked out in the hearts of the elect, to bring them to faith or to some particular vocation. As a response to this 'special calling' of all Christians, Calvin exhorted: "The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to his calling ... And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress his limits, he has named these various kinds of living 'callings.' Therefore each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander about throughout life."²⁶⁶ In other words, since the call is from God, one's calling should be embraced and not changed or abandoned at will, even if the call seems to be at odds with one's personal choice. Calvin himself was timid and preferred privacy, and yet, he confesses, "I considered myself placed in that station [Geneva] by God, like a sentinel at his post." Calvin stressed the utility of callings—that everyone should take care to work hard and bear fruit. Temporal vocation is a command of God placed on the Christian from outside, to be used for the employment of God rather than for the enjoyment of the individual. Calvin concludes: "From this will arise a single consolation: that no task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight."²⁶⁷

For some Christians, Calvin recognized, this "special" calling may take the form of a call to the office of preacher. He elevated the call to preaching and the divine originator of the call: "Those whom the Lord has destined for such high office, he first supplies with the arms required to fulfill it, that they may not come empty-handed and

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 3.10.6.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

unprepared.”²⁶⁸ This call to preach has two aspects. First, this “special” calling includes an inner call, which Calvin calls “secret call;” but, he does not discuss it further because it is such that “each minister is conscious before God, and which does not have the church as witness.”²⁶⁹ Calvin was not as much interested in an individual’s spiritual experience; rather, he was concerned that “all things should be done decently and in order” in the church, especially in the government and in the calling of a minister. Calvin quoted the gospel of Luke, *The Holy Spirit speaks to the apostles as they fast and pray: ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them’* (Acts 13:2), and interpreted as meaning, “What was the purpose of that setting apart and laying on of hands after the Holy Spirit attested his choice, except to preserve church discipline in designating ministers through men?”²⁷⁰ After the Holy Spirit moves one to experience a “secret call,” Calvin explained, ‘men’ must sanction the call to preach for the sake of good order and decency of the church. To the question of *who* is called, Calvin answered definitively: All are called to work and God does the calling; but the church ordains ministers and keeps order.

William Perkins: God ordains calls

During the Reformation, call and vocation were being defined and re-defined. Puritan theologian William Perkins defined vocation or calling as “a certain kind of life, ordained and imposed on man by God for the common good.” Although he used Calvin’s terms of general and special calling, Perkins defined them differently. “The general calling is that whereby a man is called out of the world to be a child of God, a

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.3.11.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.3.10.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.3.11.

member of Christ, and heir of the kingdom of Heaven.” The special calling is personal and is “the execution of a particular office ... the office of a Minister is to execute the duty of teaching his people.”²⁷¹ Perkins made clear that no matter what kind of calling, “God is the author and the beginnings of callings ... God imposes it on the man called...God ordains a calling.” Perkins asserted that everyone has a calling and responsibility to answer God’s call: “Let every man abide in that calling, where he is called.”²⁷² Luther, Calvin and Perkins all put the theological emphasis on the sovereignty of God to ordain calls and put the responsibility on humans to answer the call and remain in the vocation ordained by God.

Erasmus of Rotterdam: Human choice

The Reformers’ theology of call and vocation contrasted with the Humanists’ philosophy of human choice espoused by Erasmus. Humanists defended a principle of utility in which individuals chose a vocation based on their self-interests and the good of the commonwealth. Erasmus described the deliberate human choice of a particular way of life (*genus vitae*) and the private determination of a career consistent with one’s own nature, aptitude, and constitution. In contrast, Calvin described a calling (*vocatio*) from God, mediated through men according to God’s will, but against his own nature and inclination. “Erasmus argued from the irreversibility of his own unique character, Calvin from the irresistibility of a divine command ... The contrast therefore rests on the difference between the humanists’ *eligere* and the reformers’ *vocari*—between choosing

²⁷¹ See William Perkins, "A Treatise of the Vocations" in Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 265.

²⁷² Ibid. Note that Perkins' exhortation comes from 1 Cor. 7:20.

and being called.”²⁷³ Both humanists and reformers end up in a similar place—with a specific vocation and way of life. The difference is in how they get there: one by human choice and the other by accepting divine call.

The humanists’ philosophy of choice challenged the Reformers to further define their theology of call. The Reformers’ theology was marked by their answer to the question of what people do when they accept their call and lot in life. With Luther’s radical interpretation of the meaning of calling (*beruf*) applied equally to all work and every office, he denied the exclusive claim of a vocation to the clergy, and at the same time, he denied the subjective choice of one’s calling to the Christian layman. In Luther’s theological formulation of the issue, “the determination of one’s proper office belongs not to man but to God.” That is to say, “A Christian does not select what he will do ... every one should await what is commanded of him and take heed of his calling.”²⁷⁴ Therefore, Luther exhorts Christians, that whatever their calling, to remain in it: “Do not follow your own counsels and desires ,... continue in the definite work given you and commanded by God.”²⁷⁵ Later Reformers like Calvin stressed that one should remain in one’s calling for the sake of good order, but did not regard this as a steadfast rule. For Calvin, “a Christian might with ‘proper reason,’ change a calling and choose another.”²⁷⁶

There was a curious change from the Reformers’ exclusive emphasis on God’s will to allowing human choice and fitness for call, even “preference” and “natural ingenuity” and “inclination.” When humans were allowed input into the divine call,

²⁷³ Douglas, "Talent and Vocation in Humanist and Protestant Thought," 261.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 262.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 290-3.

²⁷⁶ Marshall, *A Kind of Life Imposed on Man : Vocation and Social Order from Tyndale to Locke*, 25.

those in authority claimed the power to define the fitness and natural ingenuity not just for themselves, but for all others.

Luther and Calvin both argued that an act of calling to a concrete office such as preaching is first and foremost ordained by God, but it is also necessarily mediated through the church. The Reformed position on who is called (theology of a priesthood of all believers) is theologically sound, but practically problematic: who speaks for God, but man. And when ‘man’ speaks, he often echoes social convention and popular perceptions. In some ways, the Reformed theology of call “became less an exposition of texts” and more a “divine warrant for the existing social order.”²⁷⁷ Paul Marshall made the astute observation that “Over time, the content of particular callings came less from God’s word which challenged social patterns and more from social patterns which themselves revealed God’s will.”²⁷⁸ Throughout the Reformation, the shadow side of the theology of the priesthood of all believers emerged. The call to freedom and inclusivity began to sound more like a sentence of subservience. The power of the Spirit to call and God to ordain became subject to the church’s doctrine and polity. Human nature, social convention, and church polity became more powerful than the theology of call. Whether the office of preaching was deemed a divine call or a human choice, it required the church’s sanction. So that, in the case of women, even though they were called by God to preach, they were now told that they were not fit to do so.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 10.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 53.

Women's Call to Preach

Upon closer scrutiny, we discover that Luther's theology of a priesthood of all believers seemingly does not mean "all believers." When Luther is writing in opposition to the Catholic notions of the priesthood, "he uses the examples of women's prophesying in the Old and New Testaments as a sign that the office of the priesthood has been extended to all believers."²⁷⁹ In interpreting the prophecy of Joel ("I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and daughters shall prophesy"),²⁸⁰ Luther preached, "Joel says here 'flesh;' this means all types of people without discrimination . . . Therefore this text truly sets up a new priesthood that does not depend so much on the person."²⁸¹ Luther acknowledged those on whom the Spirit had been poured, among them the four daughters of Philip who clearly and without question prophesied.²⁸² In other sermons and writings, he discussed the importance of the women who came to the tomb on Easter Sunday, particularly Mary Magdalene, whom he identified as an example of strong faith. Luther even allowed that "certain Biblical figures, such as Anna the prophetess and Mary Magdalene the preacher, were extraordinary."²⁸³ But, he admitted, such extraordinary women did not exist in his time—a time in which women were considered the treasure of the house. "Bearing children was to Luther's mind women's paramount function."²⁸⁴ Therefore, Luther decreed: women may "pray, sing, praise, and say 'Amen,' and read at home, teach each other, exhort, comfort, and interpret the Scriptures as best they can."²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ Karant-Nunn and Wiesner, *Luther on Women : A Sourcebook*, 58.

²⁸⁰ Joel 2:28-29

²⁸¹ Karant-Nunn and Wiesner, *Luther on Women : A Sourcebook*, 61.

²⁸² Acts 2:19

²⁸³ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 291.

²⁸⁴ Karant-Nunn and Wiesner, *Luther on Women : A Sourcebook*, 171.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

But, women are not to prophesy or preach. In writing on “Women’s Role” (1539), Luther draws the line in the ecclesial sand:

“In summary, it must be a competent and chosen man. Children, women, and other persons are not qualified for this office, even though they are able to hear God’s word, to receive baptism, the sacrament, absolutions, and are also true, holy Christians, as St. Peter says (1 Peter 3:7). Even nature and God’s creation makes this distinction, implying that women (much less children or fools) cannot and shall not occupy positions of sovereignty, as experience also suggests and as Moses says in Genesis 3:16, ‘You shall be subject to man.’ The gospel, however, does not abrogate this natural law, but confirms it as the ordinance and creation of God.”²⁸⁶

It seemed as if Luther turned away from his theology of priesthood of all believers and turned to natural law to warrant his claim of restricting women from preaching.

In *Luther on Women*, Susan Karant-Nunn argues that despite the inclusive theology of call and vocation, “The leaders of the Reformation sustained the old notion of the inferiority and domestic destiny of women. Through their use of the media, including the now ubiquitous sermon, they constructed a model of women and men that virtually every person encountered. By this means, the concept of the ideal mother and housekeeper gradually became available to every socioeconomic class. It is probable that generations subjected to this indoctrination accepted the general outlines of the ‘good wife’ and the ‘good husband.’”²⁸⁷

The Reformers’ inclusive nature of call continued to be limited as the church became more institutionalized and the need to order—even of the call of God—became paramount. Giving the order to ordain ministers to the church, in effect, put more power in the hands of men and less in the hands of women. In fact, references to women preachers during the period of the Reformation are extremely rare. Luther did allow in

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 75-6.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 13.

one treatise that under some exceptional circumstances, it would “be necessary for the women to preach,”²⁸⁸ but overall, he maintained that “women’s anatomy bespoke their destiny as mothers rather than thinkers. He describes woman’s broad hips as suited to giving birth”²⁸⁹ In the social context, we see how the priesthood of all believers morphed into the priesthood of all men. Within the priesthood of all believers, women had a specific role: “women are inclined toward mercy, for they are primarily created by God for this, that they should bear children, be compassionate, and bring joy and happiness to men.”²⁹⁰ Luther’s concern for good order in the church coincidentally paralleled perfectly the social convention of the time: “order, discipline, and respect demand that women keep silent when men speak.”²⁹¹ This became the dominant narrative of the Reformation: the priesthood of all male believers. “The truth is that nothing in the Reformation can be read as a genuine reversal of this negative antisexual, antifemale, antisensuality heritage,” argues historian Beverly W. Harrison; further, she asserts, “Nor did the Reformation strengthen women’s social roles in society. The Reformers and their followers did nothing to change women’s role in the church.”²⁹² The expansive theological concept of call, in the end, had practical and gendered restrictions.

Despite Luther’s clear prohibition of women from preaching, he did identify four factors that could justify women’s preaching and leadership; “She was widowed or unmarried, so that the issue of wifely obedience did not apply to her; she was advised by

²⁸⁸ Luther, “The Misuse of the Mass” as quoted by Paul Wesley Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, Atla Monograph Series No. 25 (Metuchen, N.J. Philadelphia: Scarecrow Press ; American Theological Library Association, 1991), 5.

²⁸⁹ Karant-Nunn and Wiesner, *Luther on Women : A Sourcebook*, 10.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁹¹ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 291.

²⁹² Beverly W. Harrison, “Human Sexuality and Mutuality” in Judith L. Weidman, *Christian Feminism : Visions of a New Humanity*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 105.

men, or her authority was given to her by a man; no men were present, or no men who were qualified were present; or she was called by God, often as a rebuke to men, and thus had a special gift.”²⁹³ Therefore, despite the gender exclusions put on the office of preaching by the Reformers, a significant exception was identified: the call to preach. If a woman was called by God, then her preaching could be justified.

Summary

The Reformation period was marked by a challenge to the institutional Roman Church’s doctrine and ritual, a move back to Scripture as the source of authority, and the preaching of a vocational theology of the priesthood of all believers—in which call is open to any and all believers. As the church was reformed and re-institutionalized as Protestant, its definition of what constitutes a call was expanded (to include all work), but its understanding of who is called became more restrictive, particularly in regard to gender. In the end, the Reformers sacrificed theological integrity and supported an institutionalization of call for the sake of good order. But, in allowing that a woman’s divine call might justify her office of preaching, they left the door to the pulpit open a crack, just enough to allow those who followed to open it further, just enough to invite women’s narratives of call to interrupt the dominant hegemonic narrative.

²⁹³ Karant-Nunn and Wiesner, *Luther on Women : A Sourcebook*, 58.

Revival: Inspired Spirit and Extraordinary Call

How is one called?

The Reformation significantly re-defined call, especially regarding the question of *who* can be called. The Reformed theology of a ‘priesthood of all believers’ expanded the scope of call beyond cloistered monastic or priestly vocation to include all work. However, the question of who can inhabit the office of preacher, for the most part, was answered in such a way as to exclude women, except in the case of women being called by God and the church to do so. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Revival movements expanded the experience of call even further into American society. Moving beyond Luther’s priesthood of all believers, it included everyone called by the Holy Spirit—men and women, black and white, rich and poor, lay and ordained, Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist. The call went beyond Calvin’s doctrine of predestination of an irresistible call from a sovereign God to include communal discernment and individual choice. The call became regulated less by doctrinal authority or theological formulations and directed more by the movement of the Holy Spirit and revival zeal.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century church in America experienced revival in various forms. A Methodist movement, marked by open-air itinerant preaching, reformed the established church from within by focusing on discipleship, religious instruction, and the morality of its members. The Great Awakenings, marked by powerful revival preaching and evangelism, gave less authority to institutional doctrine and ritual, and more credence to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the emotional

experience and personal commitment of listeners. The Social Gospel movement, marked less with creedal denominationalism and more by social justice, worked to transform the world for good. In these different contexts of revival, call had a distinct tenor from various preachers' voices. In order to understand the different ways the question of *how* one is called was addressed, a preacher from each of these revival movements will be examined: John Wesley, Charles Finney, and Reverdy Ransom.

John Wesley

After a disappointing missionary voyage to America, minister John Wesley (1703-1791) returned to his beloved Church of England. But, he found the church had become more institutional, with strict regulations on polity and practice. Wesley was particularly critical of the policy concerning who had the authority to preach. Despite his pastoral tenure, he was seen by the church as a social threat that disregarded institutions. On May 24, 1738, while hearing a reading of Martin Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, John Wesley had a personal conversion experience: "While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ I felt my heart was strangely warmed."²⁹⁴ Wesley's description suggests that he had not previously had such a spiritual and physical sensation. As a result of this poignant spiritual experience, he felt called and commissioned by God to inspire revival in the church. From that point on, Wesley's theology of call and practice of ministry was sustained by the authority of his personal experience of the Holy Spirit.

²⁹⁴ Fred Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life : The Heart Renewed in Love*, Theologians on the Christian Life, 55.

Wesley discovered that his beliefs concerning the authority of a personal experience of the Holy Spirit put him at odds with the clergy of the Church of England. Therefore, he founded the Methodist Society in England, and later the Methodist Church in America. In order for the Methodist movement to gain momentum and have greater reach across the American colonies, Wesley allowed non-ordained lay preachers to preach and celebrate sacraments. The authority of ordination, he believed, came from the Holy Spirit. But when he encountered significant pressure to toe the ecclesial line, he considered eliminating lay preachers from the Methodist Church. His mother Susanna Wesley, an important influence in his life and ministry, responded, “Take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is surely called of God to preach as you are.” John Wesley eventually agreed, saying “It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good.”²⁹⁵ And so he continued to permit and encourage lay preachers, ordaining them himself if need be.

Wesley’s beliefs had no doubt been formed by his mother’s religious convictions, not just concerning who can preach, but *how* one is called. Susanna Wesley challenged Calvinist theology, namely the doctrine of election, which she understood to mean that God has already pre-destined people to their place in heaven and on earth. Instead, she argued for the language of conversion and call. In a letter to her son John, Susanna Wesley wrote that all people can answer the call to discipleship: “That they might be conformed to the image of his Son, he called them to himself, by his external Word, the preaching of the gospel, and internally by his Holy Spirit. Which call they obeying [sic] by faith and repentance, he justifies them, absolves them from the guilt of all their sins,

²⁹⁵ “Susanna Wesley” by Frank Baker in *Women in Rosemary Skinner Keller, Louise L. Queen and Hilah F. Thomas, ed. Women in New Worlds, II vols., vol. II, Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 126.

and acknowledges them as just persons, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ. And having thus justified, he receives them to glory—to heaven.”²⁹⁶ The call comes from God through the Holy Spirit and through the preaching of ministers.

In addition to forming and re-forming John’s beliefs about the call and commission of lay preachers, Wesley’s mother also influenced his attitude concerning female preachers. After all, Susanna Wesley represents, in a limited way, the primary precursor of the early Methodist preachers. John clearly recognized his mother’s contribution in this sphere, commenting on the occasion of her death that “even she (as well as her father and grandfather, her husband and her three sons) had been, in her measure and degree, a preacher of righteousness.”²⁹⁷ Susanna Wesley, who held and voiced theological convictions and also served as an example of a woman who embodied and exhorted her faith, clearly influenced her son’s stance on women preaching. “His mother’s example did prepare him to incorporate women widely as workers and officers in the Methodist societies, not only as sick-visitors and band and class leaders, but even for a few, who were specially gifted and called, as preachers.”²⁹⁸

Initially, Wesley did not endorse the licensing of women to preach; instead, he “warmly supported their ‘labors’ in spreading the Methodist gospel across the British countryside.”²⁹⁹ However, observes historian Paul Wesley Chilcote, “The emphasis placed upon the value of the individual soul, the possibility of direct communion with God, and the reformers’ doctrine of the priesthood of all believers rekindled the desire of

²⁹⁶ Susanna Wesley and Charles Wallace, *Susanna Wesley : The Complete Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113. Letter was dated dated July 18, 1725, and addressed to her "Dear Jacky."

²⁹⁷ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 18.

²⁹⁸ James T. Baker, ed. *Religion in America: Primary Sources in U.S. History*, 2 vols., vol. I (Toronto, Canada: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006), 131.

²⁹⁹ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 133.

women to exercise their spiritual gifts”³⁰⁰ As women were inspired to use their spiritual gifts, some sought to respond to their own personal experience of call and exercise their spiritual gifts in the church, even in the pulpit.

Eventually, Wesley decided that his faith in the priesthood of all believers would allow that some women, such as Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, had a call, which Wesley agreed they could not disobey. As one of first Methodist preachers in England, Bosanquet wrote the first serious defense of women’s preaching in Methodism on the basis of her examination of Scripture; in particular, she noted Mary, the woman of Samaria, and Deborah, all of whom humbly and publicly proclaimed the Lord’s message. She argued that women were occasionally called by God to preach in extraordinary situations. John Wesley replied with this letter from Londonderry dated June 13, 1771:

My dear sister,

I think the strength of the cause rests there on your having an Extraordinary Call. So, I am persuaded, has every one of our Lay Preachers: otherwise I could not countenance his preaching at all. It is plain to me that the whole Work of God termed Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation of His providence.

John Wesley’s theology of ‘Extraordinary Call’ was predicated on the belief of God’s extraordinary providence, which overpowers the rules of church discipline:

Therefore I do not wonder if several things occur therein which do not fall under ordinary rules of discipline. St. Paul’s ordinary rule was, “I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation.” Yet in extraordinary cases he made a few exceptions; at Corinth, in particular.”³⁰¹

This letter is significant because it demonstrates how Wesley sought to give ecclesial authority to women’s personal experience of divine call. Wesley made it clear that when considering the merits of a call to preach, the church may need to set aside its rules and

³⁰⁰ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 5.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

be guided by the Spirit. Chicolte notes, “His acceptance of an ‘extraordinary call’ as a divine sanction for the boldly innovative actions of Mary Bosanquet and her circle was a difficult but momentous step for him to take.”³⁰² Acknowledging the ‘extraordinary call’ of women, Wesley applied the same rationale to the licensing of lay itinerants. He utilized such a rationale to encourage and endorse female preaching, “regardless of the revulsion of the Church or the State.”³⁰³ Wesley challenged social convention and ecclesial canon based on his belief in the power of the Holy Spirit to issue an ‘extraordinary call’ to women to preach. John Wesley allowed women to preach in England as early as the 1760s.

Despite John Wesley’s endorsement and licensing of English female preachers who had received a distinct call, Methodists in America were less tolerant of women preaching. This Methodist ‘theology of free will’ became popular in the wake of the American Revolution. Historian Catherine Brekus notes, “Instead of echoing the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and election, they preached a religion that conformed more closely to the values of republican culture; they insisted that men and women were free to choose their own spiritual destinies.”³⁰⁴ And yet, in eighteenth century America, women preachers encountered scorn, rejection, and abuse from church and society alike. John Wesley remained true to his theology of call that valued the Holy Spirit and personal experience, stating in no uncertain terms: “no one, including a woman, ought to be prohibited from doing God’s word in obedience to the inner call of her conscience.”³⁰⁵ As he witnessed women preaching, Wesley could not deny their

³⁰² Ibid., 144.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 132.

³⁰⁵ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 152.

extraordinary gifts. As he heard the stories of their powerful experiences of divine call, John Wesley wholeheartedly endorsed women as preachers of God's word.

Sarah Crosby (1729-1804) converted from Calvinist beliefs, and under Wesley's preaching answered her call, becoming the first female Methodist preacher (1761). In a letter to Elizabeth Hurrell, who also aspired to become a preacher, Sarah Crosby "describes the essential interrelationship between her religious experience and her call to preach."³⁰⁶ She ascribes the source of her religious experience and call as the Holy Spirit: "I hope my dear friend will be glad to hear that our Lord continues to pour out His Spirit amongst us ... I live in holy astonishment before my God, while He fills my soul with divine power." Crosby warns Hurrell about the ploy of the world to silence her voice, and at the same time, encourages her to allow God to empower her to preach boldly: "I hearkened *too much* to the voice which said, hold thy peace ... But He now forbids me to hide the light He gives under a bushel [Matt. 5:15-16]. And the more simply I witness for God, the more does He witness in my heart, and others too ... Glory be to His dear name forever. O let my mouth be fill'd with thy praise, while, all the day long I publish thy grace."³⁰⁷ As the first woman preacher authorized by Wesley, Crosby claims a significant place in the history of the Methodist tradition.

Although Wesley described women's call to preach as 'extraordinary,' that did not limit the number of women's calls that he authorized. Sarah Mallet Boyce, one of the most celebrated female preachers, described her call to preach in terms true to Methodist theology of the Holy Spirit and personal experience:

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 204.

³⁰⁷ Sarah Crosby, from her Letterbook, dated July 2, 1774 in Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Her Own Story : Autobiographical Portraits of Early Methodist Women* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 204.

The same Lord that opened my mouth and endued me with power [Luke 24:49], and gave me courage to speak his word has through his grace enabled me to continue to the present day. Neither earth nor hell has been able to stop my mouth.

Despite her powerful experience of call, Boyce wrote about the challenges faced when the voice of the people contrasted with the voice of the Spirit: “When I first travelled I followed Mr. Wesley’s counsel, which was to let the voice of the people be to me the voice of God and where I was sent for, to go, for the Lord had called me thither ... But the voice of the people was not the voice of some preachers.” However, she credits Wesley for endorsing her preaching by sending a note from the Conference reading:

We give the right hand of fellowship to Sarah Mallet, and have no objection to her being a preacher in our connection, so long as she preaches the Methodist doctrines, and attends to our discipline.

Reflecting further on Wesley’s endorsement, Boyce continues in her letter:

This was by the order of Mr. Wesley and the Conference of 1787 (Manchester).

I am glad some of our preachers see it right to encourage female preaching. I hope they will all ... think more on these words, “*quench not the Spirit*” [1 Thess. 5:19] ... then would they be more like Mr. Wesley, and I think more like Christ.³⁰⁸

According to Chilcote, “This note is probably the single most important piece of documentary evidence concerning the women preachers of early Methodism.”³⁰⁹ Indeed, it gives witness to the presence of preaching women in eighteenth century America and John Wesley’s endorsement. It also gives credence to the importance that women’s call narratives have played in the history of the church in effectively challenging the dominant narrative which prohibits female preaching.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 218.

³⁰⁹ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 195.

Most other clergy did not share Wesley's views and rejected his endorsement of female preaching. Ironically, as the Methodist theology of call became more spiritual and personal, allowing an expansive and inclusive interpretation of call, the institutional polity became more restrictive. In fact, in 1803, the Methodist Church voted to condemn women's preaching. "The Church does affirm belief in the essential equality of women and men, and in the liberation of females to exercise their spiritual gifts in mutual service with males, notes Rosemary Skinner Keller, in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*; however, equally clear are "attitudes which consign women to a sphere separate from men, often through the rationalization that woman's domestic world is of greater spiritual worth than the public world of men."³¹⁰ A woman was given ready access and encouragement to inhabit a domestic world, but she met with resistance and even prohibitions to embody the public persona of preacher.

Despite the restrictions, women still preached—inside or outside of the church walls, with or without the church's official endorsement. With great perseverance and patience, women eventually saw changes in the church's acceptance of their calls to preach. Chilcote notes, "An emphasis upon the conscience or inner spirit, coupled with a conviction of the present activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the individual, placed in opposition to the institutional church or the letter of the spiritual law as the final seat of authority, led to the eventual overruling of both scriptural and societal prohibitions regarding women."³¹¹

³¹⁰ Hilah F. Thomas, Rosemary Skinner Keller, and Women's History Project (United Methodist Church), *Women in New Worlds : Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), Volume II, 11-12.

³¹¹ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 6.

Call, for Wesley and for Methodists, was always inclusive in theology and eventually, even in practice. As noted by Methodism scholar Tim Macquiban in Douglas Meeks' edited volume *Our Calling to Fulfill*, "The call, then, is for individuals to repent and believe through inward holiness and for the people called Methodists to preach and witness and serve in outward and social holiness. It is a call for all, who are equal and known by name in the sight of God, whether Gentiles or Jews, rich or poor. For all are summoned to the gospel feast . . ." ³¹² Guided by his theology of the power of the Holy Spirit and personal experience, John Wesley led the charge to call all—women and men alike—to the gospel feast, even to the pulpit for gospel preaching.

Charles Finney

During the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, preachers exhorted lay people—men and women alike—to take responsibility for their spiritual lives and to assume power in their churches. Revivals preached conversion as well as the free will of the individual. Preachers such as Jonathan Edwards, named laypeople divine instruments: all were called to be bearers of the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. The authority to preach, they maintained, was not earned by formal theological training or social status; it resulted from the experience of conversion and call. The authority of the preacher depended, not on the official sanction of the church, but on God, who spoke to them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This egalitarian sense of call undermined clerical authority and opened the way to the pulpit for those lacking in

³¹² Tim Macquiban, "Work on Earth and Rest in Heaven: Toward a Theology of Vocation in the Writings of Charles Wesley," in M. Douglas Meeks, *Our Calling to Fulfill : Wesleyan Views of the Church in Mission* (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 2009), 53.

political, intellectual, economic, social, and ecclesial power, including both women and blacks.

In the Second Great Awakening of the nineteenth century, preacher Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) called both men and women to labor in the harvest of gospel preaching. While they did not understand why they were called, and claimed they were unworthy, Finney insisted that they become vessels of the divine. Experiences of the call ranged from a mild serenity to hearing God speak. While men tended to downplay the supernatural, women insisted on experiences of call through dreams (Elleanor Knight and Nancy Towle), visions (Julia Foote saw an angel carrying a scroll inscribed with “Thee have I chosen to preach my Gospel without delay”), and divine voices (Zilphaw Elaw and Jarena Lee each heard a divine summons).³¹³ All reported their calls to be immediate and beyond their control. The individual who is called to preach is summoned by God and compelled by the Holy Spirit. The preacher, man or woman, has no choice but to succumb to the divine call and to proclaim the gospel.

Finney himself experienced the call to preach and wrestled with how to respond. Initially he resisted it: “A long time I had a secret conviction that I should be a minister, though my heart repelled it. In fact, my conversion turned very much upon my giving up this contest with God, and subduing this repellency of feeling against God’s call.”³¹⁴ Eventually, he accepted God’s call to preach, but he rejected formal ministerial educational. As a candidate for ministry under the care of the Oneida Presbytery (NY), Finney rejected their offer to support his theological studies at Princeton Theological Seminary: “I plainly told them that I would not put myself under such an influence as

³¹³Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 183.

³¹⁴David L. Weddle, *The Law as Gospel : Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finney*, Studies in Evangelicalism No. 6 (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 100.

they had been under; that I was confident they had been wrongly educated, and they were not ministers that met my ideal of what a minister should be.”³¹⁵ Instead, Finney confessed that his teacher was God: “I say that God taught me ... And I have often thought that I could say with perfect truth, as Paul said, that I was not taught the Gospel by man, but by the Spirit of Christ himself.”³¹⁶ A minister, Finney argued, was granted authority to preach, not from human institutions, but from divine inspiration.

Finney’s theology and practice of the call to ministry, however, was at odds with the religious and social rhetoric of the day. “In accepting the call to preach, then, Finney also took on the challenge of creating a new style of rhetoric and a new theology appropriate to the calling.”³¹⁷ Conventional mores of the nineteenth century assigned everyone their proper place, with women at home and silent. Finney’s new measures exhorted all who heard the call, men and women alike, to answer it. He gave authority to the Holy Spirit, not to the church. To the critics of his new measures, “Finney claims that his innovations grew out of his belief that the influence of the Spirit in conversion was ‘moral, that is persuasive,’ and that ‘the Holy Spirit operates in the preacher’ through the proper use of means ‘calculated to convert’ the people.”³¹⁸ His new theology was formed by an insistence on the power of the Holy Spirit to command one to discipleship and ministry, unbound by cultural mores or lines of gender, racial, or class division.

This Puritan conception of calling, ignited by revival fires, resulted in a rhetoric of Christian duty. In *What a Revival of Religion is*, Reverend Charles Finney wrote: “Religion is the work of man. It is something for man to do. It consists in obeying God.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 103.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 105.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 98.

It is man's duty." Furthermore, "Men are wholly indisposed to obey; and unless God interpose the influence of his Spirit, not a man on earth will ever obey the commands of God."³¹⁹ To deny someone's call was, in essence, to deny God's will. A person called, preached Finney, was duty-bound to accept God's call, no matter what it was. The result: Christians who heard their call "clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by God."³²⁰

Finney's sermons were effective in converting men and women alike to answer their call from God. While conventional social rhetoric dictated that a woman's domestic nature was conducive for the home, religious rhetoric suggested that her pious and pure nature made her fit for the church. In *Her Story*, Barbara MacHaffie states, "Perhaps most significantly, many nineteenth-century works radically revised the traditional estimate of women and claimed that women were naturally endowed with an inclination toward moral righteousness and happily formed for religion."³²¹ The religious rhetoric of call and duty was persuasive; women believed that they were included in the rhetoric of "every Christian should have a calling" as well as "religion is the work of man." So, they actively and prayerfully sought ways to respond to their Christian call and duty in the church.

Revival religion, in the hands of Charles Finney, had the power to preach a personal message to everyone present. But, revival religion in the hands of the institution had even more power. Institutionalized religion had the ability to canonize the cultural virtues of 'decency and order' into a powerful force against women's ability to engage in

³¹⁹ Baker, ed. *Religion in America: Primary Sources in U.S. History*, 135. This sense of duty fed Puritan Asceticism of "all work and no play" and Max Weber's Protestant Work Ethic.

³²⁰ Placher, *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 375.

³²¹ Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* Second Edition ed. (Minneapolis Fortress Press, 2006), 160.

public speaking of any kind, especially preaching. As a revivalist preacher in New York, Charles Finney strongly encouraged women to speak, but after he took a teaching position at Oberlin Institution, his position moved from public exhortation, then to careful silence, and finally to restrictions on women's public speaking. "The change in new measures practice closely fit emerging canons of middle-class respectability. Respectable women acted in carefully limited ways in official public spaces. Gendered norms shaped not only the spaces but also the styles of respectable practices. Respectable women were encouraged to cultivate their natural gifts for empathy, benevolence, and refined feelings."³²² Women were discouraged from speaking in public. The canon of 'decency and order' was further institutionalized. In *You Have Stept out of Your Place*, historian Susan Hill Lindley claims, "The rhetoric of the nineteenth century may have been more effusive ... but the substance of female subordination represented no dramatic change from dominant Christian tradition."³²³ Finney's revival rhetoric echoed Martin Luther's theology of a 'priesthood of all believers'; and yet, in practice of ordination, both abandoned theology and adhered to social convention, limiting women's call to preach.

In the Great Awakenings, Christian revitalization swept the American colonies. Powerful revival preaching challenged the authority of institutional doctrine and ritual and gave more credence to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into individual hearts and minds, drawing forth emotional experiences and personal commitments. Concerning the question of *how* is one called, Charles Finney preached an evangelical, inclusive,

³²² Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures : A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 162.

³²³ Susan Hill Lindley, *You Have Stept out of Your Place : A History of Women and Religion in America*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 53.

theological message. And yet, when it comes to *who* is called to preach, Finney's words became institutional, prohibitive, and conventional.

Reverdy Ransom

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in America, the question of call was answered in theology and practice. John Wesley answered the question of *how* one is called with attention to the personal experience of the revelation of the Holy Spirit. By granting authority to the Spirit, Wesley's theology informed his practice of sanctioning women's call to preach. Charles Finney answered the question of *how* one is called with an insistence on the power of the Holy Spirit to call anyone to discipleship without regard to convention, and a rhetoric of Christian duty to answer the call. But, his practice was not always what he preached, prohibiting women from taking theology courses and answering a call to preach. Reverdy Ransom answered the question of *how* one is called by way of the Social Gospel.

Reverdy Ransom (1861-1959) was a leader of the Social Gospel movement (1890-1914). This religious crusade has been described as "the movement among liberal-minded Protestant evangelicals to rally Christian forces to deal with the problems of society which were intensifying in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."³²⁴ The Social Gospel movement focused on social justice issues, such as poverty, poor schools, slums, racial tensions, alcoholism, child labor, dangers of war, etc. Social Gospel advocates were committed to inspire and form a socially relevant church. More conservative clergy were not as aware of the racial and socioeconomic inequalities; they

³²⁴ Calvin S. Morris, *Reverdy C. Ransom : Black Advocate of the Social Gospel* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990), 4. As defined by church historian Robert T. Handy.

believed that “such wrongs would right themselves through a natural evolutionary process, and in this progression, only the fittest would survive.”³²⁵ Ransom, however, believed that it was the mission of the church to right the wrongs of a racist society.

Ransom’s mission grew out of his theology that “individual worth was not ultimately promulgated by white society, but rather, given by God.”³²⁶ In 1900, Ransom founded and pastored the Institutional Church and Social Settlement in Chicago. Church members appreciated his preaching because “he did not preach about the hereafter, but preached about living and acting in the here and now.”³²⁷ His social gospel rhetoric was guided by the plea in the Lord’s Prayer that reads, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” Christians were not saved to heaven, as much as saved to make earth resemble heaven. Ransom re-interpreted call to encompass more than a theological creed or even an evangelical conversion, but a social gospel. And, he answered the question of *how* one is called by God with an unequivocal call to action to right the wrongs of a troubled world.

Fellow Social Gospel advocate, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), a Baptist pastor and theologian, preached and embodied a theology of the social gospel in his church’s New York neighborhood known as “Hell’s Kitchen.” He believed that all of human life and work are for divine purpose to improve humanity. He understood the call as less connected with ordained ecclesial power and more with “the old evangel of the saved soul.” He wrote that “it is a call to Christianize the everyday life, and the everyday man will have to pass on the call and make plain its meaning. But if the pulpit is willing to lend its immense power of proclamation and teaching, it will immeasurably speed the

³²⁵ Ibid., 74.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid., 108.

spread of the new conceptions.”³²⁸ From the pulpit, Rauschenbusch utilized the power of proclamation and teaching to extend the scope of Christian ethics and broaden the reach of social transformation.

Ransom answered the question of *how* one is called in social gospel language; in contrast, he answered the question of *who* is called to preach in a way so as to challenge social convention. As the pulpit was used by preachers to promulgate a rhetoric of exclusion and restriction based on the conventional gender ethos, Ransom preached and worked tirelessly to ‘speed the spread of new conceptions’ of call, in particular to include women’s call to ministry. In the 1898 A.M.E. Christian Recorder, he asked the A.M.E. Church to recognize women as deacons throughout the denomination:

It is conceded that there are certain kinds of work in the church which women can do better than men; a deaconess is a minister of the church called upon to exercise her special gift of teaching, nursing, or whatever it may be in the service of the church for the purpose of extending the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus.³²⁹

Two years after his appeal, in 1900, the A.M.E. Church authorized the Office of Deaconess. However, for Ransom, “Its recognition was only a partial victory for women, since deaconesses were not accorded clerical status, but designated instead as ministerial aides and helpers.”³³⁰ Ransom also supported women who sought to answer their call to pulpit ministry. Amanda Smith was “convinced of her call to God’s service and rebuffed in her attempts to enter the ordained ministry, and entered the field of evangelism.” During his tenure as pastor of North Street A.M.E. Church in Springfield, Ohio, Ransom welcomed Smith to the pulpit. In a memorial tribute upon her death, Ransom

³²⁸ Placher, *Callings : Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation*, 385.

³²⁹ Morris, *Reverdy C. Ransom : Black Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 119.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

remembered Smith as a “clear-minded prophetess.”³³¹ Ransom supported black women preachers publicly. In a poignant editorial in memory of Nora F. Taylor, Ransom claimed “there are few people to whom it is given to have in large measure both the gift of song and public speaking ... she could do both and do them well. She could sing an audience to a pitch of shouting enthusiasm and preach them into a melting tide of emotion.”³³² In addition to encouraging women to assume roles in the church, Ransom also celebrated the roles women played in many different organizations outside the church which were “sustained and maintained by the tireless efforts of women.”³³³ Ransom’s theology of ‘individual worth given by God’ informed his practice of supporting women’s call to ministry.

Summary

During the time of revival, preachers challenged doctrinal authority and theological formulations that regulated call. John Wesley called all to be open to receive a personal experience of the movement of the Holy Spirit. And despite challenges to the contrary, he endorsed the extraordinary call of female preachers. Charles Finney exhorted a call from God—not from theological or ecclesial institutions. Yet, when he left his revival pulpit to assume an educational post, Finney limited the call to preach to men. Reverdy Ransom preached a social gospel that beckoned all—men and women alike—to work for the improvement of the world. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century church in America, the concept of call was interpreted in a context of

³³¹ Ibid., 120.

³³² Reverdy Ransom, “Editorial: Nora F. Taylor,” *A.M.E. Church Review* 40 (October 1923), 91-92.

³³³ Morris, *Reverdy C. Ransom : Black Advocate of the Social Gospel*, 120.

revival in various forms. In the different ways the question of *how* one is called was addressed, Wesley, Finney, and Ransom each contributed a part of the narrative of call.

Conclusion of Tradition of Call

This Tradition section traced through church history the theological themes of call that have developed into the dominant call narrative—from “sacrifice” in the Early Church, to “monasticism” in the Middle Ages, from “priesthood of all believers” during the Protestant Reformation to “spiritual revelation” and “extraordinary call” of the Revival-Social Gospel era. The central biblical concept of call was interpreted differently throughout the history of the church. The tradition, as has been shown, is not unchanging, but instead continually changing. The tradition, as we have seen, is not a flat canvas with one clear picture of call; rather it is a rich tapestry composed of different theologies of call and vocation, and a diversity of faithful responses to the divine call. In the early church, the call to sacrifice in places such as martyr arenas, deserts, and homes was accepted by men and women alike. In the medieval church, the call to holiness was marked by a disciplined religious communal sequestered life, in which both men and women acted as participants and leaders. In the reformed church, the call to work included a priesthood of all believers; but, reflecting social convention, the call to preach only applied to a priesthood of all male believers. With the exception that a woman’s divine call might justify her office of preaching, some Protestant reformers, in effect, allowed women’s narratives of call to interrupt the dominant hegemonic narrative. In the revival church, the call to personal conversion and social transformation challenged the authority of the church and its prescriptions on call with the ultimate authority of the

Holy Spirit, which blows where it will and calls whom it calls. The dominant narrative that shapes the tradition of prohibiting female preachers was not one spoken by Jesus or even practiced by the church throughout much of history; rather it is a recent practice that seems less shaped by theology and more influenced by social convention.

In this section, we have explored the theological tradition of how call has been interpreted and articulated throughout the history of the church, beginning in the time of Jesus and leading up to and including the nineteenth century, in theological doctrines of call and vocation, in ecclesial practice and social convention. Finally, in the last section in this chapter of tracing the development of the call narrative, we examine the trope of the time to better understand how women's call has been shaped by the rhetorical witness of the church.

Trope: Inscribed Call

By law, American citizens were guaranteed religious freedom to worship or not to worship. But from the beginning, Americans were formed by religious rhetoric of Christian call and duty. In the early eighteenth century, the minister Cotton Mather (1663-1728) described the universality of Christian calling: "Every Christian ordinarily should have a calling. That is to say, there should be some special business, and some settled business, wherein a Christian should for the most part spend the most of his time; and this, that so he may glorify God ..." ³³⁴ Further, Mather explained that there is a variety of callings in the world: some are called to care for their neighbors' bodies, others are to protect their estates, and still others to serve their souls. While there are

³³⁴ Cotton Mather, "A Christian at His Calling" (1701) as quoted by Baker, ed. *Religion in America: Primary Sources in U.S. History*, 29.

various callings, Mather exhorted, “It is not lawful for a Christian ordinarily to live without some calling or another, until infirmities have unhappily disabled him.”³³⁵ Mather made it explicit that all Christians have a calling, and in fact, that it is unlawful for a Christian to live without a calling. What is implied is an imperative for all Christians to diligently seek and faithfully embrace their calling.

This religious conviction of call was prevalent in popular literature as well. John Bunyan’s, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) was a best-selling book in the nineteenth century.³³⁶ Such popular literature appealed to a culture that valued personal experience and circulated widely the idea that anyone—in fact every Christian—could and should follow their calling throughout their faith journey.

However, some ministers perceived this universal call as problematic, especially when including women. In response, they employed a distinctly different rhetoric of natural sphere. George Washington Burnap, minister of the First Unitarian Church in Baltimore, spoke of ‘The Sphere and Duties of Woman’:

We now see woman in that sphere for which she was originally intended, and which she is so exactly fitted to adorn and bless, as the wife, the mistress of a home, the solace, the aid, and the counselor of that ONE, for whose sake alone the world is of any consequence to her.

Burnap went so far as to refer to woman’s work as ministry: “Let woman know, then, that she ministers at the fountain of life and happiness.” But, Burnap limited women’s ministry to within the domestic sphere:

³³⁵ Cotton Mather, “A Christian at His Calling” (1701) as quoted by Ibid.

³³⁶ “It maps the spiritual journey not of a particular man, but of an Everyman figure named Christian as he undertakes a journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, from the figure of this world to the figure of salvation in the next.” Gregory S. Jackson, *The Word and Its Witness: The Spiritualization of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 105. “Christian’s pilgrimage makes explicit and available the allegorical patterning already underlying seventeenth-century Protestant autobiography.”

It is her hand that ladles out with overflowing cup its soul refreshing waters ... Her ardent spirit breathes the breath of life into all enterprise ... And the nearest glimpse of heaven that mortals ever get on earth is that domestic circle, which her hands have trained to intelligence, virtue, and love; which her gentle influence pervades, and of which her radiant presence is the centre of the sun.³³⁷

Appealing to the conventional definition of a woman's nature and sphere, Burnap and others preached a rhetoric that honored women's unique calling, while at the same time, gave more authority to nature than to divine call.

Other sermons argued against women's place in the church, but did so using a rhetoric informed by Biblical hermeneutics. Clergyman Cyprus Cort employed biblical exegesis in arguing against women preaching. He appealed to the interpretation and practice of the Jewish and Christian tradition: "If Christianity was to mark a new departure from the established customs of the Jewish Church on this subject St. Paul would have been pre-eminently the one to enunciate and emphasize the new departure."³³⁸ Cort gives the authority to re-interpret the Jewish custom to the Christian apostle Paul. "But where do we find the great Apostle of the Gentiles ranging himself on this question?" Cort asks rhetorically and then answers: "Not in favor of the right of women to preach or pray in public religious services ... 'Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak'." Then, Cort concludes: "We could not prohibit women from preaching in language more plain and positive than that

³³⁷ Rev. George Washington Burnap, First Unitarian Church in Baltimore, "The Sphere and Duties of Woman," 5th ed. Baltimore: John Murphy (1854) as quoted by MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* 179. See also "The Public Preaching of Women" by Robert Lewis Dabney, who taught at Union Theological Seminary, and made public proclamation against women preaching.

³³⁸ Cyprus Cort, "Woman Preaching Viewed in the Light of God's Word and Church History." *The Reformed Quarterly Review* 29 (1882): 124-26 as quoted by *Ibid.*, 225.

were employed by the Apostle Paul.”³³⁹ Throughout the nineteenth century, as theological seminaries became more prevalent and biblical exegesis became more prominent, sermons became more like the exposition of biblical texts. The authority of the Bible, in most Protestant traditions, replaced the authority of the Spirit.

Summary

From their pulpits and with the power of the ordained office, clergymen proclaimed a selective rhetoric: to encourage men, they preached a rhetoric of call and duty; to limit women, they preached a rhetoric of nature and Bible. As the nineteenth century progressed and the church became more institutionalized, the pervasive religious rhetoric purported that women were called to serve God with their gifts of purity and virtue, but only at home as mothers and teachers of children, and not with a public voice in the church. The rhetoric was disseminated by way of religious writings and the church pulpit, stressing decency and order and the biblical interpretation of Scripture that women are to be silent in church.

Conclusion

In seeking answers to the questions of *where, what, how* and *who* are called to preach, the survey of the text, traditions, and tropes of the church make strong witness that “Women have proclaimed the Good News they discovered in Christ since the earliest periods of the Church’s history.”³⁴⁰ The truth is that women have been preaching ever

³³⁹Cyrus Cort, “Woman Preaching Viewed in the Light of God’s Word and Church History.” *The Reformed Quarterly Review* 29 (1882): 124-26 as quoted by Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 4. It has been a history of female emancipation...

since the days of Jesus. Even the laws and restrictions forbidding their preaching reveal the reality that women did in fact preach.

In nineteenth-century America, rhetoric was pervasive; it shaped convention and limited the place of women in intellectual, political, economic, social, and religious environments. The conventional rhetoric of the state, culture, and church was an obstacle to women's freedom and voice. Within the traditional rhetoric of rights, women struggled with finding their place in the state; within the traditional rhetoric of nature, women struggled with finding their place in society (both socially and economically); within the traditional rhetoric of religion, women struggled with finding their place in the church. Over time, traditional rhetoric became established as convention and even sacred, unquestionable and seemingly unchangeable.

Nineteenth-century America is a particularly significant part of the historical, theological, and rhetorical tradition of women's call to preach. It was then that the question of women preaching was most publicly addressed. The next four chapters will introduce four American women who sought to answer their own calls in the face of resistance and prohibition, and in so doing, affected changes in the conventional and institutional restrictions on women preaching. Chapter 3 will explore the journal of Jarena Lee and Chapter 4 focuses on the writings of Frances Willard; Chapter 5 will examine the scriptural exegesis of Louisa Woosley and Chapter 6 will attend to the sermons of Florence Spearing Randolph.

Each of these women will be located within her particular historical context, specifically attending to those contours of the landscape that functioned as significant obstacles. Despite the obstacles they faced, these women were particularly skilled in

claiming and exercising their calls. They employed different strategies and tactics in order to articulate their call to preach using theological rhetoric. In doing so, they used the established rhetorical forms most available to them, but, they tactically re-inhabited conventional norms in order to reform the rhetoric of call and change the practices of women's preaching and ordination. They used the master's tools to re-construct a house with a place for them and other women to occupy the pulpit. In their call narratives, individually and collectively, they interrupted the dominant hegemonic narrative of exclusively male preachers. They wrote their call narratives, and in so doing, they re-wrote history.

CHAPTER III

JARENA LEE

*For as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach,
it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God.*
~Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*³⁴¹

Introduction

*If the negro be a soul, if the woman be a soul, appared in flesh,
to one master only are they accountable.*
~Margaret Fuller³⁴²

Jarena Lee was born in Cape May, New Jersey on February 11, 1783. Little is known of her childhood—even her family’s name has been lost. Although her family was legally free from slavery, her parents hired her out as a domestic servant at the age of seven. Having been born into a white man’s world, as Lee became an adult black woman and recognized her inward call to preach, she had to utilize creative methods of resistance and accommodation in order to overcome institutional obstacles and obtain ecclesial endorsement required to answer her call to preach. Her experience of divine call became

³⁴¹ Jarena Lee, "The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee" (Philadelphia: Jarena Lee, 1836) in William L. Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, Religion in North America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 36.

³⁴² Now considered an early feminist classic, Margaret Fuller, Arthur B. Fuller, and Horace Greeley, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition and Duties of Woman* (New York,: Sheldon, Lamport & Co.; [etc., etc.], 1855), Microform. Margaret Fuller, American writer, journalist, and philosopher, was part of the Transcendentalist circle, encouraged women of Boston to develop their intellectual capacities.

the hermeneutical lens through which she re-inhabited established and exclusive authoritative tropes and re-interpreted call so as to include women.

Jarena Lee lived at a time when Americans were declaring independence, reforming authority, and exercising freedom. In 1776, the United States adopted the Declaration of Independence, and in so doing, made a powerful statement of human rights: “that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these, are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The Declaration thereby established the principle that in a democracy every man has worth, and every voice counts—to support the government and even to “alter or abolish it ... shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness;” thus seeking to preserve a balance between the power of the will of the people and the individual conscience.

Even as the communal rights of the people were won, affirming that “all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights,” important questions surfaced. Which individuals were guaranteed these rights? Who was included in the word “men?” Did “men” represent all of humanity? At this time of newfound freedom, it soon became clear that there were exceptions to the democratic platform of “liberty for all.” This bitter irony was overlooked by some, but not lost on all. Civil War historian Robert Miller writes, “The Great Paradox of America was the development of race-based slavery at the same time that ideals of liberty and freedom developed. This Paradox led to a moral impasse in America, and the subsequent War that followed was the bitter fruit of our first truly moral encounter as a nation.”³⁴³ The

³⁴³ Robert J. Miller, *Both Prayed to the Same God: Religion and Faith in the American Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 7.

answer to the question became clear that “all men” did not include women and blacks; “men” meant men, and more specifically, white land-owning men.

Freedom and Equality

All Men Are Created Equal

The United States Constitution, signed in 1787, guaranteed the civil rights of representation and vote, not to all, but only to white upper-class men. White women and black men and women were excluded from the newfound freedom and liberty of the democratic nation. The writers of the Constitution did not designate that both women and men were guaranteed rights. At the time, “man” was often used to represent all humanity, but in this case, man meant man only—not woman. The Constitution did not include the word “slavery” or “negro,” but contained a “three-fifth clause” in which slaves counted as 3/5 of a man for purposes of representation in Congress. Although America’s founding fathers celebrated political victory in this new Constitution, historian Robert Miller claims, “they were only dancing with the devil. For behind the compromised birth pains of an American nation lay the dormant seeds of a deep moral flaw.” And, in fact, “the moral stain was already visible upon America’s Constitution.”³⁴⁴ The founding of the American nation was built upon a political, intellectual, economic, and social hierarchy: women and blacks were on the bottom.

With the Declaration of Independence came the establishment of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship for white men. For women and black men it was necessary

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 20.

to reform this political convention and expand the definition of who is “created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” Reform was possible in a society that had been dramatically affected by the Revolutionary War, “expanding the circle of people who considered themselves capable of thinking for themselves about issues of freedom, equality, sovereignty, and representation.”³⁴⁵ Women not only thought about issues of equality, freedom, and representation: they fought for them. The battle over women’s equality was a battle against women’s marginal place in nineteenth-century America.

All Men and Women are Created Equal

The most important and difficult battle became the basic civil right to vote. Olympe De Gouges sought to guarantee women rights as citizens of France in the “Declaration of Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen” in 1791—the same year the new American congress ratified the Bill of Rights—establishing the first 10 amendments to the Constitution of the United States (none of which spoke of women’s rights). Not for another 57 years, in 1848, would American women Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott write the “Declaration of Sentiments.” Modeling their work on the rhetoric and form of the Declaration of Independence, The Declaration of Sentiments begins with a familiar rhetoric of equality:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of

³⁴⁵ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 5.

happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.³⁴⁶

Likewise, it continues with a rhetoric of defense of equal rights:

Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.³⁴⁷

Stanton and Mott replaced references to King George III with “man” as the source of oppression. The oppressive authority of the British Crown had not been overthrown, they claim, but merely replaced by white men who owned property and slaves:

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

The document ends with a declaration of equality for women and a commitment of women to work together, using all possible means, until such equality becomes a reality:

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation,—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States.³⁴⁸

With the goal of gaining “immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States,” the female authors of this declaration committed themselves fully to utilize whatever means possible—even the pulpit:

³⁴⁶ Carol Lasser and Stacey M. Robertson, *Antebellum Women : Private, Public, Partisan*, American Controversies Series (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 173.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and national Legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf.³⁴⁹

They began their quest for equal rights with organization, demonstration, and public proclamation.

Stanton and Mott and three other Quaker women (Mary Ann McClintock, Martha Wright, and Jane Hunt) organized the first convention devoted to the issue of women's rights—including civil, social and religious. On July 19-20, 1848, over one hundred women gathered in Seneca Falls, New York to call into question the issue of women's rights by describing the current state of women's liberties in the U.S., and thereby naming the inequalities therein, such as: the closure of higher education to women, the exclusion of women from public professions, the social convention and religious order which established a "different code of morals for men and women," and the lack of the right for women to vote as a citizen of the United States. Suffragist Cady Stanton argued for the right to vote as essential in a representative government as "air and motion are to life."³⁵⁰ The women in attendance of the convention passed the Declaration of Sentiments, thereby committing themselves to work to gain suffrage, and ultimately, to end discrimination against women in all regards.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Jean H. Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists* (New York: Hill and Wang 2005), 116.

All Men, Every Where and of Every Color are Born Equal

While the Seneca Falls Convention is marked as the beginning of the women's movement in America, its inception actually came at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. In fact, many women worked for reform in both the women's movement and in abolition. But, their battles were different. The women's movement was fighting against the tradition of gender protection. The abolitionist movement was fighting against the tyranny of racial oppression.³⁵¹ In addition to the suffragists working to reform the intellectual and political landscape for women, abolitionists like sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimké appealed to mixed audiences—black and white, north and south, men and women—for the sake of liberty and justice for all men and all women, but especially blacks. Angelina Grimké made an eloquent Appeal to the Christian Southern Women of the South:

Respected Friends,

It is because I feel a deep and tender interest in your present and eternal welfare that I am willing thus publicly to address you ... We must come back to the good old doctrine of our forefathers who declared to the world, "This self evident truth that all men are created equal, and that they have certain *inalienable* rights among which are life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness."

Grimké begins her address by meeting her audience where they are—in obvious support of the political platform that "all men are created equal." But then she illustrates that this premise, while true in theory, is not true in practice, as long as there are slaves in America:

It is even a greater absurdity to suppose a man can be legally born a slave under *our free Republican* Government, than under the petty despotisms

³⁵¹ Ibid. A marked difference between the two movements is emphasized by the fact that it took women 50 more years to achieve suffrage than it did African-American men. See also <http://americanhistory.about.com/od/womenssuffrage/a/senecafalls.htm>.

of barbarian Africa. If then, we have no right to enslave an African, surely we can have none to enslave an American;

She argues that “all men” means *all* men—white and black:

if it is a self evident truth that *all* men, every where and of every color are born equal, and have an *inalienable right to liberty*, then it is equally true that *no* man can be born a slave, and no man can ever *rightfully* by reduced to *involuntary* bondage and held as a slave.”³⁵²

Like Stanton and Mott, Grimké utilized the established political rhetoric and re-interpreted it to include rights for black Americans.

Both the *Declaration of Sentiments* and the *Appeal to the Christian Southern Women* were works of powerful rhetoric. This rhetoric grew naturally out of a culture of individual conscience and thought (“I think, therefore I am”) and independent authority (“We ought to be free and independent”). This claim of individual authority manifested itself in declarations of rights, letters and speeches, and even autobiographies. The key was that the author claimed authority to speak for oneself.

Freedom of Religion

From its inception, the United States of America was founded on political and religious liberty. As the early colonial settlements became a civil nation, it began to develop a religious personality, as well. Although pluralistic and often contradictory, the American Republic began to produce a civil religion. One of the characteristics of this civil religion was that it gave freedom to worship—or not to worship—freely. In his 1728 *First Principles*, Benjamin Franklin wrote, “Since he has given us Reason whereby we are capable of observing his Wisdom in the Creation, he is not above caring for us, being

³⁵² Angelina Grimké, “Appeal to the Christian Southern Women of the South,” 1836 in *Ibid.*, 190.

pleas'd with our Praise, and offended when we slight Him, or neglect his Glory.”³⁵³

Franklin not only highlighted American's freedom, but also her responsibility to worship God.

In order to worship God, it was determined that educated and trained leaders were needed. In the early 1800s, a few American colleges, mostly in New England (e.g. Harvard 1636; College of William and Mary 1693, Yale 1701, Princeton 1746), were instituted, in which small classes of men entered to become qualified as professors, lawyers, doctors, and ministers. In these institutions of higher education, women and blacks were excluded from intellectual development and vocational training; and consequently, barred from the careers requiring advanced learning.

Calvin Puritanism, built on orthodox theology, emphasized the importance of what is taught and learned by way of formal education and study. The revivals of the nineteenth century relocated the emphasis on spirituality and thereby privileged revelation. Rather than thinking about faith, worshipers experienced divine outpourings of the Holy Spirit and personal conversions. In an age of independence and democratization, people were free to experience God in their own way. Consequently, the freedom of religious experience led to the autonomy of the call to preach. In place of theological institutions, the summoning Spirit had the power to instruct preachers.

The privileging of revelation of the Spirit over formal theological education had a leveling effect in church and society. Some churches were founded by those who were suspicious of the “pomp” and “vanity” of educated ministers. Elias Smith, founder of the Christian Connection, stopped attending school at age thirteen and taught himself the

³⁵³ Benjamin Franklin, First Principles in “Benjamin Franklin Papers” in Baker, ed. *Religion in America: Primary Sources in U.S. History*, 77.

Bible. He did not need to set foot in the hallowed halls of Harvard or Yale, because he had been “called like the ancient prophets, and apostles, from the handles of the plow; the fishing boat, sail-making, and other useful avocations.”³⁵⁴ The divine call and Bible study were highly valued by many religious leaders who subsequently founded churches based on these more humble attributes. “Populist and anti-intellectual, the Freewill Baptists, Christians, Methodists, and African Methodists created a religious culture in which even the most humble convert—the poor, the unlearned, the slave, or the female—felt qualified to preach the gospel, notes historian Catherine Brekus, in *Strangers and Pilgrims*, further describing this religious phenomenon as follows: “First intuitively, and then more deliberately and self-consciously, they shaped a culture in which inspiration was more important than education, emotional revivals more important than genteel worship services, and the call to preach more important than the hierarchy of sex.”³⁵⁵ In some religious movements, the call to preach was more important than the hierarchy of sex and/or race; that is to say, God had more authority than the political and cultural convention. However, in more formal and established churches, gender and race remained obstacles to participation and leadership.

Religion was a form of resistance among slaves; retaining their beliefs and practices empowered them to resist slavery and oppression—if not in body, then at least in spirit. According to Juan Williams in *This Far By Faith: Stories from the African-American Religious Experience*, religious faith is “a binding force for the black American experience ... the underlying center of the experience is faith, faith that God will guide

³⁵⁴ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 144.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

and protect.”³⁵⁶ The revivalistic spirit of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries empowered African Americans to fight for their liberation by taking control of their religious life and building institutions that would support their struggle for emancipation.

Richard Allen, a freed slave, was attracted by the accessible worship of the Methodist Church and the anti-slavery position of its founder John Wesley. But, not every Methodist church practiced what they preached. When black worshipers were pulled from their knees during prayer at the altar by ushers at the predominately white St. George’s Methodist Church in Philadelphia, black Christians were inspired to start their own churches. When the presiding elder would not recognize a new black church, Allen responded, “If you deny us your name, you cannot seal up the scriptures from us, and deny us a name in heaven. We believe heaven is open to all who worship in spirit and truth.”³⁵⁷ With that declaration of independence, Allen led the faithful remnant to start the Bethel church. In 1816, they formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), a connection of independent black congregations subscribing to the tenets of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but advocating against the discriminatory treatment of black people in religious affairs.³⁵⁸ The AME Church was founded on the power of the Holy Spirit and the freedom of conversion.

³⁵⁶ Juan and Quinton Dixie Williams, *This Far by Faith: Stories from the African American Religious Experience* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 9.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁵⁸ Thomas, Keller, and Women's History Project (United Methodist Church), *Women in New Worlds : Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*.

Freedom of Conversion

In 1804, Jarena Lee had a religious awakening. During a worship service, as a Presbyterian missionary read a psalm, Lee became aware of her sinful nature and was convicted to seek salvation. In Philadelphia, twenty-one year old Lee went in search of a church where she could experience conversion and learn the story of salvation. In the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, she realized she had found her spiritual home. At the very outset of the sermon, preached by the Rev. Richard Allen, Lee confessed, “my soul was gloriously converted to God.”³⁵⁹ The conversion experience, so central to Christianity, was even more profound for black women whose value and worth were called into question by slavery. In fact, in *This Far By Faith: Readings in African-American Women’s Religious Biography*, Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman argue, “For some African American women, the power of direct encounters with God through prayer and vision not only illuminated their humanity, but also freed their voices.”³⁶⁰ Three weeks later, during a service, Lee leapt to her feet and testified to the goodness of God who had saved her, while also pointing sinners toward their salvation, as recorded in her journal: “For a few minutes, I had the power to exhort sinners, and to tell of the wonders and of the goodness of him who had clothed me with his salvation.”³⁶¹ Lee felt free to share her testimony as a way to encourage others to conversion. She was even permitted to stand in her pew in response to the sermon and give explanation and witness to where she heard the word of God. Exhortation based on the preacher’s sermon was

³⁵⁹ Jarena Lee in Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 29.

³⁶⁰ Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman, *This Far by Faith : Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 5.

³⁶¹ Jarena Lee in Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 29.

one thing—preaching was an entirely different matter. As a woman she knew her place was not in the pulpit. It would take nothing less than an act of God to convince her otherwise.

Freedom of the Call to Preach

*I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.*
(Joel 2:28, NRSV)

Among the earliest women called to preach in the Wesleyan tradition were a number of African American evangelists, including Sojourner Truth, Amanda Smith, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote. In an age of racial bigotry and gender prejudice, the conventional belief was that women should not preach. Women who experienced a divine call, but were devoted to the church, struggled with accepting the call to preach. “These women were not revolutionaries bent on shaking structures, but reformers wishing a more inclusive and just organization,” claimed Methodist church historian Jualynne Dodson, “They were devoutly religious and felt supremely ordained to carry out their calls to preach the gospel of Christianity.”³⁶² Feminist claims for equal rights of all women did not drive them; rather, a divine call so compelled them and strengthened them to challenge the male domination of the church, even the pulpit.

Throughout the nineteenth century, many women reported having had divine calls, and despite resistance, they consented to preach, based on their claim that a divine calling supersedes all human authority. In 1829, Elleanor Knight had a dream in which

³⁶² Jualynne Dodson in Keller, ed. *Women in New Worlds*, 277.

God sent her a revelation—she heard God calling her to become a preacher. She cried out in disbelief, claiming that she could not preach, but she heard God telling her that she must preach. “When she awoke from her dream, she realized that even though she wanted to please her husband by ‘holding her peace,’ she had to submit to the will of God.”³⁶³ During church meetings, she began to testify and exhort, but she did not dare go so far as to “expound the scriptures,” as female preachers did. Other women were fully aware that they were preaching and invented a code language for what they were doing, using acceptable words like “testify” or “sing.” In this way, they claimed some power within the limits set by the prohibitions against women preaching.

Isabella Baumfree was sold into slavery, but escaped with her infant daughter to freedom in 1826. After being subjected to the inhumane brutalities of slavery, Baumfree had an experience of sanctification, by which she believed that her true identity was that of a child of God. In response to her experience of the call of the Holy Spirit, in 1843 Baumfree adopted the name “Sojourner Truth” and became a traveling preacher. Claiming her divine power and purpose, she became a speaker for abolition and women’s suffrage. In 1850, she published her memoirs, in which she claimed that she was called to preach, not by the authority of an earthly institution, but by the power of God: “Shall I run away and hide from the devil? Me, a servant of the living God? . . . I’ll go to the rescue, and the Lord shall go with and protect me.”³⁶⁴

³⁶³ Elleanor Knight wrote on the title page of her journal published to defend her right to exhort: “Read and then judge,” in Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 164-5. Some other female itinerant preachers and exhorters at the time include: Abigail Roberts, Sarah Hedges, Ann Rexford, Nancy Towle, Zilpha Elaw, Rebecca Cox Jackson, and Sojourner Truth.

³⁶⁴ Frances W. Titus and Susan B. Anthony Collection (Library of Congress), *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; a Bondswoman of Olden Time* (Boston,: For the author, 1875), 116. Sojourner Truth (ca. 1797-1883) was a black American freedom fighter and orator. Her most famous speech, “Ain’t I a Woman?” was given in 1851 at a women’s rights convention in Ohio.

Revelation had authority in nineteenth century America, thereby allowing individuals to argue their petition for endorsement to preach based on the claim that, according to evangelist Rebecca Miller in 1841, “Sisters had the right to speak for Jesus, whenever the spirit calls.”³⁶⁵ Backed by the authority of revelation and the power of the Spirit, they could face resistance boldly in asking: “Who are you to judge my experience as valid or not? Where you there? How can you detect its authenticity? If I say it happened, then it happened.” The experience of revelation had authority. One experiencing divine revelation had an unassailable position. Who could challenge divine revelation? Case closed. No more debate or critique. Even though some had no education, their call and preaching was deemed just as authentic—or at least that was the hope.

Call to Preach (*Inward Call*)

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin, for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:1-12)

In 1807, Lee experienced the call to preach in which she distinctly heard a voice speak to her, “Go preach the Gospel!” She questioned her experience and prayed for understanding. Her prayer was answered with a vision of a pulpit and a Bible lying on it. Lee’s call was immediate, irrefutable, and beyond her control. She did not aspire to be a preacher and would not have dared to speak publically, but the decision was not hers to make. After seeing heavenly visions and hearing God’s voice, she could not deny that

³⁶⁵ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 143.

she was called to preach. With both reluctance and resolve, Lee went to see Rev. Allen, to tell him of her experience of divine calling to preach and to seek the church's permission to do so.

I now told him, that the Lord had revealed it to me that I must preach the gospel. He replied, by asking, in what sphere I wished to move in? I said, among the Methodists. He then replied, that a Mrs. Cook, a Methodist lady, had also some time before requested the same privilege; who, it was believed, had done much good in the way of exhortation, and holding prayer meetings; and who had been permitted to do so by the verbal license of the preacher in charge at the time.

Allen conceded that Lee, like Mrs. Cook, might hold prayer meetings and give exhortations, with the authorization of the preacher of the church. But, he knew Lee was asking for more, and so he continued:

But as to women preaching, he said that our Discipline knew nothing at all about it—that it did not call for women preachers.³⁶⁶

Despite Jarena Lee's powerful experience of inward call and her strong sense of duty to answer God's call, Rev. Allen denied her a license to preach, saying that the church Discipline "did not call for women preachers." That is to say, Rev. Allen refused to endorse her inward call—or any woman's call—to preach with the church's authority. In the nineteenth century, the dominant narrative, in both church and society, was that women were not called to preach.

Therefore, Lee set aside the idea of becoming a preacher—and married one instead. In 1811, at the age of twenty-eight, she married Joseph Lee, pastor of an African American Society outside of Philadelphia called Snow Hill. Jarena Lee would forego pursuing her own call in order to support her husband's call, which she understood in a

³⁶⁶ Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* in Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 36.

dream as “to take care of the sheep, or the world will come and devour them.”³⁶⁷ When her husband died a mere six years later, she was forced to assume sole responsibility for the support of her two-year old child and a six-month old infant. However, in addition to parental responsibility, she was keenly aware of the obligation to answer God’s call on her life to preach—which had become for her “as a fire shut up in my bones.”³⁶⁸ The longer the fire raged, the more dangerous it became. Lee spent years questioning her worth, her salvation, and especially her call to preach, to the point of suicidal thoughts.³⁶⁹ Her call was so compelling; it made her ill until it was answered.

License to Preach (*Outward Call*)

In 1817, ten years after her divine call, Jarena Lee renewed her request for an official ecclesial license to preach. Rev. Allen, who had since become a bishop, was more keenly aware of the theological demand for proclamation that saved sinners, not to mention the practical need to keep church pews occupied and offering plates full. Henceforth, Allen would permit women to hold prayer meetings in private homes or exhort congregations to respond to the sermons preached by licensed male ministers; but still, the church refused to recognize Lee or any other woman as a preacher in any official capacity, or with any ecclesial authority. That is to say, in private homes she could encourage, or from her pew she could exhort, by the power of the Spirit; but she could not preach in the pulpit, by the power of the church.

³⁶⁷ Jarena Lee in *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁶⁸ Jarena Lee in *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁶⁹ Jarena Lee is among many women who tried to deny their call to preach and became physically and spiritually sick. Some became like a “tormented demon;” others became so depressed, they were driven to the brink of suicide. See Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 186-91.

In 1819, during a church service, Jarena Lee interrupted a minister's sermon because she simply could not wait until it was over to exhort the congregation. She remembers, "During the exhortation, God made manifest his power in a manner sufficient to show the world that I was called to labour according to my ability, and the grace given unto me."³⁷⁰ After the exhortation, Lee sat down, fully expecting to be expelled from the church for such a grievous affront to church Discipline. But, to her surprise, Bishop Allen rose and admitted that this woman had come to him eight years before, asking for permission to preach, but that he had put her off. But that now, as Lee recalls, "he as much believed that I was called to that work, as any of the preachers present."³⁷¹ Although Allen was opposed to female preaching on principle, in some cases—as with Jarena Lee—he made an exception.³⁷²

Itinerant Ministry (1818-1849)

Bishop Allen supported Lee's call, but in a limited capacity, as an itinerant. While Allen could not go so far as to issue an official license to preach, he did endorse her as an official traveling exhorter. Although this letter of recommendation from a bishop did not guarantee that Lee would be well received by clergymen she encountered in her travels, it no doubt helped open church doors and attract larger audiences to hear her preach.³⁷³ Thus began Lee's life as an itinerant preacher, traveling from Philadelphia to Baltimore, from Rochester to Dayton, preaching to white and black audiences alike. In

³⁷⁰ Jarena Lee in Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 44.

³⁷¹ Jarena Lee in *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁷² Note the case of Lorenzo Johnson, who "despite his strong prejudice against female preachers," had to admit that Salome Lincoln had "as great a CALL, as myself." See Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 230.

³⁷³ Jarena Lee and Rachel Evans were the only two women who were given official permission to preach from their bishops, even though many local churches welcomed women into the pulpit. See *Ibid.*, 134.

the deep South, where ministers generally opposed women speaking in public, most women dared not go. But, a few courageous black women, including Jarena Lee, claiming God had called them to minister to slaves, traveled to the border states of Maryland and Virginia, thereby risking being beaten, imprisoned, or even sold into slavery.³⁷⁴

Itinerants like Jarena Lee were not tied to individual congregations, but often, while they were preaching salvation to save souls, they helped to develop new churches. Itinerant preachers confess that they did not have control over their travels, but rather, went wherever God's Spirit directed them. Because of their incessant travels, itinerant preachers were essentially homeless. By practicing an itinerant vocation, female preachers "implicitly challenged the ideology of separate spheres by roaming across the country as itinerants."³⁷⁵ Some were critical of women, like Lee, who left their children at home with others while they traveled as preachers. But, Lee firmly believed, "as a Mother of Israel, she had been called to nurture the entire family of God, not just her own family."³⁷⁶ Her willingness to leave her children behind speaks less to her maternal weakness and more to the power of the divine call on her life. She had no choice but to obey God and be who she was created and called to be.

Life as an itinerant minister was physically grueling and financially taxing. Female itinerants had to endure threats to their health, safety and livelihood and embrace lives of poverty and self-denial. But, women who felt called to preach had little choice but to endure the hard life as traveling itinerants. "Since women could not be ordained or set apart by the laying on of hands, they did not have the authority to serve as settled

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 248.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 221.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 222.

ministers.”³⁷⁷ And so, without ordination, Lee answered God’s call by embracing the life of itinerant ministry. It is unlikely that Lee was welcomed everywhere she went or that she was she paid well, but overall, she had a fruitful itinerant ministry. In the fifteen months ending in October 1833, Lee traveled more than 2,700 miles. Throughout 1835 she preached more than once a day, for a total of 692 sermons.³⁷⁸

Despite the hard life of an itinerant preacher, she was driven by the depth of her call and the fruitfulness of her preaching:

May he not, did he not, and can he not inspire a female to preach the simple story of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, and accompany it too, with power to the sinner’s heart. As for me, I am fully persuaded that the Lord called me to labor according to what I have received, in his vineyard. If he has not, how could he consistently bear testimony in favor of my poor labors, in awakening and converting sinners?

With God as her guide and inspiration, Lee recorded the efficacy of her preaching:

In my wanderings up and down among men, preaching according to my ability, I have frequently found families who told me that they had not for several years been to a meeting, and yet while listening to hear what God would say by his poor female instrument, have believed with trembling—tears rolling down their cheeks, the signs of contrition and repentance toward God, I firmly believe that I have sown seed, in the name of the Lord, which shall appear with its increase at the great day of accounts, when Christ shall come to make up his jewels.

As she reflected on her life’s work, she was steadfast in her belief in her call and sanctification:

From that time, 1807, until the present, 1833, I have not yet doubted the power and goodness of God to keep me from falling, through the sanctification of the spirit and belief of the truth.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 225.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 246.

³⁷⁹ Jarena Lee in Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 37.

As a woman, she may not have been able to preach in pulpits, but she demonstrated the power of her words—written and exhorted—to bear fruit and inspire change.

Jarena Lee was never granted a license to preach by Richard Allen. But she was ordained by divine call and preached by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many women preached likewise—without a church license, but with the authority of divine call. As more women demonstrated their preaching skills, the church could no longer deny their call, and began to license and even ordain women to preach. Maggie Newton Van Cott, after having served her probation with the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1871-1872, was handed her license. She asked, “Will this [preacher’s license] make me more efficient in winning souls for Christ?” The presiding Elder A.H. Ferguson replied, “I cannot say that it will.” Van Cott replied, “Well, then, sir, I value it but very little.”³⁸⁰ When it came to the call to preach, the Spirit had the greatest authority and the experience of divine call had integrity—at least for the one called. Telling the story of call was not usually enough proof of a valid call to be endorsed by the church. The one called had to construct a narrative, interpreting their experience of call, with attention to how the story is told, emphasizing certain elements depending on the social and ecclesial context and the prevalent source of authority therein.

Freedom of Speech

With the dawn of independence, came the rights of men; this idea of independence permeated America, becoming a sacred ideal. However, it also revealed the limitations of independence. White men were the educated ones who possessed intellectual and political power. Women and black men were excluded from the

³⁸⁰ Janet S. Everhart, “Maggie Newton Van Cott,” in Keller, ed. *Women in New Worlds*, 315.

educational realms and political power. The primary means of disseminating this rhetoric was through the law (the Declaration of Independence and Constitution) and the interpretation thereof (voting rights limited to white land-owning men). The political declaration of “We are, and ought to be free and independent states” established the conventional rhetoric of rights, whereby the individual conscience of the individual person or individual country says what they believe to be true, based on their own experience and by their own authority. This led to the development of the autobiography, in which a person claimed the authority to tell their story and their own version of history.

Writing one’s story is a declaration of independence and authority. Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes “In Her Own Rite,” of both the impediments and small victories toward liberation: “Prior to the Civil War, the majority of black Americans living in the United States were held in bondage. Law and practice forbade teaching them to read or write. Even after the war, many of the impediments to learning and literary productivity remained. Nevertheless, black men and women of the nineteenth century persevered in both areas.” The obstacles, although significant, could be overcome with strategy and tactic. Using the established rhetoric, women and blacks re-inhabited them for their own purposes of undermining the convention. Gates continues, “More African-Americans than we yet realize turned their observations, feelings, social viewpoints, and creative impulses into published works. In time, this nineteenth-century printed record included poetry, short stories, histories, novels, autobiographies, social criticism, and theology.”³⁸¹

Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote all left autobiographical accounts of their

³⁸¹ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “In Her Own Write,” in Sue E. Houchins, *Spiritual Narratives*, The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxiv.

attempts to be faithful to God's call to preach. In order to preach, they traveled many miles and endured hardships along the way. Elaw traveled into slave states, where she was in danger of being sold into slavery herself. As O.C. Edwards notes, "Their sense of being led by God to do things opposed in the society of their time means that their autobiographies are accounts of extraordinary heroism in the service of the gospel."³⁸² Records testify to the fact that women defied restrictions and faced severe challenges, all for the sake of their call.

Jarena Lee was a preaching pioneer. Her call to preach was complicated by the impediments of the early nineteenth century: racial bigotry, prejudice against women preachers, and resentment of evangelism. In spite of these obstacles, she tactically exercised her independence by challenging the prevailing interpretation of the call to preach. Her spiritual autobiography is a work of theological interpretation, rhetorical strategy, agency claim, and narrative construction. Lee's story of divine call, resistance, and itinerant preaching echoes the stories of many other evangelical female preachers, who, in the words of Catherine Brekus, "inspired by their religious faith, courageously challenged the traditional taboos against women speaking in public."³⁸³ Lee's autobiography captured her narrative of call, written intentionally in such a way to convince others of the authenticity of her divine call to preach.

The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee

In 1836, Lee published her autobiographical journal, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, A Coloured Lady, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach*

³⁸² Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 565.

³⁸³ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 197. For divine visionary call of Julia Foote, see autobiography in Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 200-201.

the Gospel. With the help of an unnamed editor, Lee turned portions of her personal religious journal into a spiritual autobiography suitable for publication. Although Lee sought the approval of and the investment in the publication of her autobiography, the Book Committee of the A.M.E. church refused. Therefore, Lee personally financed the printing of two thousand copies and distributed them at camp meetings and even on the streets. “She became an autobiographer”—and publisher—“out of a conviction that the record of God’s work in and through her would help lead others to Christ.”³⁸⁴ The autobiographical genre “retained the orality of both homiletical exhortations—lively confluences of Biblical texts with personal accounts of how God’s grace infused their spirits ... —and their prayers— ... making of one’s *life* an oblation to God.”³⁸⁵ In fact, the discursive style was “particularly suited to, and a logical extension of, these women’s vocation to preach, teach, pray publicly, and testify.”³⁸⁶ After several years, she revised the original edition—adding “seventy new pages about her life on the preaching circuit—including explicit details about the people and places who had either supported or rejected her ministry as a female preacher.”³⁸⁷ Despite the church ban on the publication of traveling preachers’ books or pamphlets without formal approval, in 1849, Jarena Lee published an expanded version, complete with scriptural texts preached and number of souls converted, entitled *The Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*.³⁸⁸

In spite of its significance, Lee’s account was not universally received or affirmed; in fact, it caused quite a stir, both in church and society. To some groups, her

³⁸⁴ Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 6.

³⁸⁵ Houchins, *Spiritual Narratives*, xxx.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 39. In her revision, Lee tells mundane details of dates, names, places, sermons preached, but little reflection or interpretation. This may have been an intentional attempt to make the spiritual autobiography appear more objective. See Brekus, 171.

³⁸⁸ Houchins, *Spiritual Narratives*.

words were powerful, encouraging some to speak up; to others, her words were so threatening, they not only invited a rebuttal but also necessitated a rejection. In 1850, a group of women named “Daughters of Zion” appealed to the Philadelphia Conference to start their own conference and appoint their own preachers; but their appeal was rejected. In 1852, the A.M.E. Church made its definitive ruling: women were forbidden to preach.³⁸⁹ Three years after Jarena Lee’s publication, women were removed from official leadership in the church she knew and loved and labored in for years (A.M.E. Church); and thereafter, Lee herself disappeared from the historical record. But her rhetorical genius survived.

The importance of Lee’s book cannot be understated. The book “launched black women’s autobiography in America with an argument for women’s spiritual authority that plainly challenged traditional female roles as defined in both the free and the slave states, among whites as well as blacks.”³⁹⁰ As the first of its kind, Lee’s autobiography details the traditional roles of women in ecclesiastical contexts in the United States and the ways in which resistance to those roles began to be voiced. Lee’s description of her commitment to a call that was a fulfilling experience, but one that required separation from her children sounded ridiculous, if not blasphemous to the sensibilities of Victorian ears. “Because female preachers were opposed by men and women who branded them as masculine or shameless, they used their memoirs to defend their right to preach the gospel.”³⁹¹ In order to gain a reading of the public, women modeled their spiritual autobiographies on popular books like John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which detailed

³⁸⁹ Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 40.

³⁹⁰ Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 2.

³⁹¹ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 168.

the Christian's journey from sin to salvation. The Great Awakening marked an increase in the number of women's writings that recorded the personal and spiritual joys and sorrows of living the Christian life—among them were Elizabeth White's *Experience of God's Gracious Dealing*.³⁹² When African American women like Jarena Lee (and later Zilpha Elaw and Julia J. Foote) published their religious autobiographies, they seized authority to exercise their rights as citizens, and thereby claimed their rightful place in literary history. By appropriating the rhetorical genre available to them in their culture (race, gender, and class), they “entered into a discourse that would produce both a comparable spiritual and political *metanoia* in their ‘promiscuous’ audience.”³⁹³ Through their writings, they sought to claim a place of authority, whereby they could “resist the pressures of family and society, thereby rejecting the politics of gender, and could achieve legal and structural support from the church for their work as spiritual advisors, teachers, and occasional preachers.”³⁹⁴ Calling for a *metanoia* (a transformative change) in women's place in both church and society was courageous. Their formidable confidence in their privileged relationship with God gave them voice to write. The rhetorical genre of spiritual autobiography gave them the form to express their countercultural sense of call.

Private Rhetoric

Jarena Lee wrote and published her autobiography, as an interruption to the dominant narrative that denied women their call to preach with ecclesial authority. She

³⁹² Elizabeth White, *Experience of God's Gracious Dealing* (Boston: n.p., 1741), published posthumously, as noted by *Ibid.*, 168 n17.

³⁹³ Houchins, *Spiritual Narratives*, xxix.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

told the story of her divine call in such a way—with attention to the authority of revelation—so as to persuade the readers of the validity of her call. Her narrative described a private experience; her rhetoric was intended for a public audience.

To my utter surprise there seemed to sound a voice which I thought I distinctly heard, and most certainly understood, which said to me, “Go preach the Gospel!” I immediately replied aloud, “No one will believe me.” Again I listened, and again the same voice seemed to say, “Preach the Gospel; I will put words in your mouth, and will turn your enemies to become your friends.”

She confessed her surprise and her doubt. But her doubt was assuaged by a vision to confirm the voice:

At first I supposed that Satan had spoken to me ... Immediately I went into a secret place, and called upon the Lord to know if he had called me to preach ... when there appeared to my view the form and figure of a pulpit, with a Bible lying thereon, the back of which was presented to me as plainly as if it had been a literal fact.³⁹⁵

Lee became convinced that her divine call was plain to see, as clear as a literal fact. But the purpose of her written record was to convince others to share her clarity and conviction.

As she wrestled with the conflict between the resolve of her inward sense of call and the church’s refusal to endorse her preaching, she appealed to a higher authority:

For as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God. And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach? seeing the Savior died for the woman as well as for the man.

If the man may preach because the Savior died for him, why not the woman? seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Savior, instead of a half one? as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear.

³⁹⁵ Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* (Philadelphia: Jarena Lee, 1836) in Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 35.

In addition to theological interpretation, she engaged in biblical exegesis:

Did not Mary *first* preach the risen Savior, and is not the doctrine of the resurrection the very climax of Christianity—hangs not all our hope on this, as argued by Paul? Then did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel? for she preached the resurrection of the crucified Son of God.³⁹⁶

Lee recognized that a woman preacher may be unconventional. But, she argued, it is both scriptural (“Mary preached the resurrection . . .”) and theological (“the Savior died for the woman as well as the man”). Ultimately, she appealed to divine authority: “nothing is impossible with God.”

The rhetorical genre employed by Jarena Lee was that of a spiritual autobiography. It was personal and Biblical, homiletical and evangelical. Lee’s autobiographical journal was not written just for herself, but it was published and distributed to camp meeting audiences. Lee was both teacher (expounding the Scriptures) and preacher (inviting all to hear God’s voice and follow God’s way). She appealed to the authority of the Bible, reason, and her own personal experience of divine call. She was a woman sharing her personal story and at the same time, a messenger from God, showing a new way, giving a glimpse of a new kingdom on earth. Lee’s rhetoric had a dual purpose: to use her story as a way to call others to conversion and following God’s call; and to defend the legitimacy of her call to preach based on authority of God and her experience of hearing God’s call.

In the Chapter “My Call to Preach the Gospel,” Lee uses her call story as a way to invite others to conversion. To do so, she employs various strategies including: structure and persona, tone and technique, language and images. The structure of Lee’s rhetoric is significant in gaining a hearing and developing her case—consisting of four parts: 1) Her

³⁹⁶ Jarena Lee in *Ibid.*, 36.

personal experience of, resistance to, and wrestling with her divine call; 2) Her seeking ecclesial recognition of her “inward” call to preach among the Methodists; 3) Her turning to the Bible for an authoritative ruling; and 4) Her recognition that she is persuaded by her own argument, and by implication, encourages the reader to be persuaded; yet, either way, she is persuaded that her call and preaching has already sown seed, and trusts in God to bring forth harvest. Lee assumes the persona of the critic to identify with the audience; she meets them where they are, but does not leave them there. She offers herself as a living, breathing illustration of the ‘woman preaching’ question. She does not use theories or concepts, but describes a real woman with a real call to preach and who does so effectively, thus calling others to conversion.

Lee’s tone is confessional (“To my utter surprise there seemed to sound a voice ... “Go preach the Gospel!”) and humble (“no one will believe me”), but also direct (“I now told [Rev. Allen], that the Lord had revealed it to me that I must preach the gospel”) and bold (“If the man may preach because the Savior died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Savior, instead of a half one?”). Although she addressed the question of women preaching in the church, hers was not a political defense or theological apology, as much as a testimony aimed at conversion, “out of a conviction that the record of God’s work in and through her would help lead others to Christ.”

Her technique of questioning is purposeful and strategic. She moves from asking questions—of God, of church, of readers, of herself—to answering them persuasively. She begins with asking the question of her call to preach of herself (“I went into a secret place, and called upon the Lord to know if he had called me to preach”). Here, she

admits that she did not believe that it was God or that God would call her, a woman, to preach. Then, she puts the question to church authority, embodied by the Rev. Richard Allen (“I said I [wished to move] among the Methodists”). Next, she asks it as a rhetorical question—of cultural convention (“why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach?”)—and of the Bible (“Did not Mary, a woman, preach the gospel? for she preached the resurrection of the crucified Son of God.”). Although the church does not permit woman to preach, the Bible does (thus giving more authority to the Bible than the church). At the end, having answered the questions, Lee stands in a place of sure conviction: “As for me, I am fully persuaded that the Lord has called me to labor according to what I have received, in his vineyard.” And not only has she been called to labor in the vineyard, but her efforts have been fruitful: “I firmly believe that I have sown seed, in the name of the Lord.” Through the course of her questions about whether she, as a woman, was called to preach, she herself moves—and moves the reader with her—from no to yes. The form and the function are conversion. She invites the reader to move with her, to turn from one way of answering the question to another way. Using an inductive approach, Lee begins with her story and moves us to the place where we are confronted with the question of all women preaching.

Lee’s use of language and images is rhetorically significant. At the beginning, it is interesting that she describes her divine call using words and images of church authoritative preaching: (“Preach the Gospel! ... the form and figure of a pulpit, with a Bible lying thereon”). But by the end of her quest for validation, she describes her call to preach with less formal and more itinerant language: (“the Lord has called me to labor ... in his vineyard ... in awakening and converting sinners ... in my wanderings ... I have

sown seed, in the name of the Lord”). Lee moves from understanding her call from “preach” to “sow seeds,” from “pulpit” to “vineyard,” and from “Bible” to “in the name of the Lord.” Within the context of calling the question, this is curious rhetoric. We can imagine that she employs the metaphor of “sowing seeds in the Lord’s vineyard” intentionally—to bring to mind Jesus who preached the Parable of the Sower, who scattered seed on good soil, weeds and rocky soil alike and allowed God to bring forth fruit. Likewise, Lee seems to understand that the seed (i.e. the word preached) is to be scattered liberally without regard for where it lands—perhaps even beyond ecclesial boundaries—trusting that even there, God can bring forth the fruits of conversion and repentance. Lee ends at a place of acceptance—not of a lesser call, but even more convinced that her call is from God, thus all authority to preach comes from God, and the fruit of her labor returns to God. Thus, Lee’s use of her own story functions rhetorically as a way to call others to conversion and to following God’s call.

Lee’s rhetoric in “My Call to Preach the Gospel” also functions as a defense of the legitimacy of her call to preach based on the authority of God and of her experience of hearing God’s call. Here she makes three rhetorically significant contributions: she names and wrestles with the question of women’s inner call and the church’s outer call to preach; then, she answers the question of women preaching by appeals to authority; finally, she ‘calls the question’ (argues for the end of the debate) of women preaching.

Naming the Question of Women’s Call to Preach

Jarena Lee heard God call her: “Go preach the gospel!” Initially, she resisted—not believing that God would call her to preach. But, the voice and the vision could not

have been more clear. And in order to be in right relationship with God, she had no choice but to answer God's call to preach the gospel. The trouble was that the church refused to acknowledge, let alone endorse her call to preach. She was a woman, after all, and the Church Discipline did not call for women preachers. Using her voice empowered by the experience of divine call, Lee named the issue "For as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach;" and in so doing, she spoke truth to the ecclesial powers ("nothing is impossible with God"). As a matter of fact, Lee argued, God did call for women preachers.

Claiming divine authority, Lee argued for her need to answer her call to preach. She understood that she was called by God, first and foremost, to the task of preaching. While she sought an official church license to preach, when she was refused, she was not deterred. It was not the office of preacher that was most important to her, after all, but preaching the gospel in order to convert sinners. Therefore, she answered the divine call within the limits defined by the church. A line was drawn between spontaneous praying, witnessing or exhorting and authoritative preaching. While conforming to church canon, Lee worked to transform cultural and ecclesial norms about female preachers. She exercised agency by re-inhabiting the authoritative structures. Although she stayed behind the line in her preaching, tactically she crossed over the line in her rhetorical writing, challenging the status quo, calling others to move from 'the way it is' to 'the way it should be.' "Lee devotes great attention to the ways in which her direct experience with God following her conversion conferred upon her the authority to speak as a religious leader as well as opened up possibilities for her life not previously available."³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ Weisenfeld and Newman, *This Far by Faith : Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography*, 5.

Answering the Question of Women's Call to Preach

Lee then answers the question of women preaching through appeals to authority. She defended her call to preach on three basic grounds: 1) God's direct call (higher authority than any other human institution or cultural code); 2) Biblical precedents (of women following Christ and proclaiming Christ's resurrection); and 3) Efficacy (sinners turned to God as result of her preaching).³⁹⁸ Her direct call from God compelled her to seek ecclesial endorsement and Scriptural justification. Facing the formidable obstacle of the church, she appealed to the authority of the Bible to justify her call to preach. By interpreting the texts to understand Jesus as a whole savior who died for men *and* women; and Mary as the *first* preacher of the resurrection, Lee transformed the Bible into a defense for women's preaching, humanity, dignity and worth. Her rhetoric was concrete, specific, and transformative, and all within the frame of accepted authority. Finally, she appealed to the authority of efficacy: her preaching worked—sinners were converted (“tears rolling down their cheeks, the signs of contrition and repentance toward God”). After appeals to the authority of the church, the Bible and the results of her preaching, she returns to claim the authority of divine call and her personal experience thereof. Her tactic was to conform to the authorities, while at the same time, re-inhabiting them in a way as to begin to transform them. Lee claims voice, exercises agency, and constructs a narrative of call to persuade others of veracity of her divine call.

³⁹⁸ These appeals to authority were cited by other nineteenth century women—black and white. See Lindley, *You Have Stept out of Your Place : A History of Women and Religion in America*.

Calling the Question of Women's Call to Preach

Finally, Lee 'calls the question' (that is, argues for the end of the debate) of women preaching. After engaging the question and making appeals, she writes, "I am fully persuaded that the Lord called me to labor in his vineyard." Convinced of the integrity of her call to preach and the fruitfulness of its practice, she no longer cares to debate the question: "I firmly believe that I have sown seed, in the name of the Lord." While it seems as if she is merely calling the question for herself, by virtue of the publication of her spiritual autobiography—in which women can read themselves into her narrative—she calls the question for other women as well. She ends "My Call to Preach the Gospel" with trust in "the power and goodness of God to keep me from falling, through sanctification of the spirit and belief of truth." Truth of the matter is, Lee argues, the question of women preaching—and all questions—are not decided on human authority, but ultimately rest with God. Lee disrupts the conventional narrative of call and re-writes transformative scripts for women called to preach. While she maintains a conversational rhetoric throughout, her rhetorical punch is direct and powerful. Through her call narrative, Jarena Lee challenged the prevailing interpretation of the call to preach. With the recovery of her historical witness, we can re-imagine biblical and theological interpretations, re-claim rhetorical strategies, re-script call narratives, and re-establish practices of calling the question of women's call to preach. Still, Lee realizes that hers is but one work of de-constructing false perceptions of call. She invites other women to join in the rhetorical work of re-constructing a theology of call that is both faithful and liberating.

Conclusion

In her book *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and their Sermons, 1850-1979*, Betty Collier-Thomas offers a unique collection of sermons by many unknown African-American preaching women of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her intent is to allow the women to speak in their own unique style, but together, in one voice, they “present their audience with strategies for understanding and living with the tension between what is—human imperfection, injustice, suffering—and what God calls creation to be—a creation in which humans live righteous, harmonious lives in their relations with God and with other human beings.” Among the “Daughters of Thunder,” Collier-Thomas names Jarena Lee as one of the earliest “women who paved the way” for other women not only to live in the tension but also to work to transform human will to God’s will. Collier-Thomas issues a universal call to follow the example of women like Jarena Lee: “While never denying the reality of human suffering, these black preaching women offer powerful messages that all humans can overcome the imperfections of the world, and moreover, that all humans are called by God to overcome imperfections, both spiritual and temporal.”³⁹⁹

In her autobiographical account of her divine call to preach, Jarena Lee gave witness to the power of experience preserved in rhetorical narrative. Her strategy of naming, answering, and calling the question of her call to preach was effective in allowing her to claim her call to preach. Her appeal to the authority of divine experience serves as a model for women today seeking to claim their call to preach.

³⁹⁹ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, xvii.

CHAPTER IV

FRANCES ELIZABETH CAROLINE WILLARD

*The mission of the ideal woman ... :
IT IS TO MAKE THE WHOLE WORLD HOMELIKE ...
A true woman carries home with her everywhere.
Its atmosphere surrounds her; its mirror is her face; its music attunes her gentle voice ...
But home's not merely four square walls.
~Frances Willard, *How to Win: A Book for Girls*, 1886*

Introduction

Frances Elizabeth Willard lived at a time when industrialization was changing the economic and social landscape of the American nation. In the northern states, the first part of the nineteenth century was marked by “rapid industrial expansion, rampant materialism, and rising affluence for the urban middle class.”⁴⁰⁰ With advances in travel (e.g. Erie Canal) and technology (e.g. textile mills and factories), the United States was rapidly becoming an industrial nation.

Rapid economic growth paralleled dramatic social change. In *Cradle of the Middle Class*, Mary Ryan describes the impact of industrialization on Oneida County (New York): “Men and women stepped outside their households and into associations where they collectively devised novel modes of social support and security as a counterpoise to the frenzy of a rapidly growing market town.”⁴⁰¹ The newfound prosperity and mobility among the middle class gave way to ambivalence and fear. “The

⁴⁰⁰ Wendy Hamand Venet, *Neither Ballots nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 3.

⁴⁰¹ Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 144.

turmoil and instability in the Jacksonian Age of the 1830s penetrated into a wide range of institutions,” notes historian Elizabeth Grammer, “and created a great concern about social cohesion.”⁴⁰² Families began retreating into their homes in response to an increasingly mobile, segmented, and individualized social order. Far from an isolated event preoccupied with privacy, this cultural phenomenon “transformed into a more massive and formally organized social space, one that arranged social life into private and public sectors.”⁴⁰³ Boundaries were drawn between public and private, men and women. In looking for a way to shore up the traditional values and stability of their society, many turned to women as those who possessed the power to protect their families from the harsh realities of the industrializing economy.

On September 28, 1839, Josiah and Mary Hill Willard, of English descent, gave birth to Frances Elizabeth, a “welcomed child, a vision of delight.” Perhaps her parents charted her destiny as an author when they named her in honor of poets Frances Burney and Frances Osgood. Her father thought “Frances” too fancy a name; and in fact, she came to prefer “Frank” as a nickname. Frances “Frank” Willard lived the first two years of her life in Churchville, a small community near Rochester, New York.⁴⁰⁴ The towns around Rochester, in central and western New York, became the theatre for religious revivals during the Second Great Awakening. Revival preacher Charles Grandison Finney referred to the area as the “Burned-over District,” because it had been evangelized so thoroughly, to the point of having not a single soul left to convert—or “no fuel left to

⁴⁰² Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 2003), 29.

⁴⁰³ Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*, 150.

⁴⁰⁴ Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America's Suffragists* 138.

burn.”⁴⁰⁵ When Rev. Finney brought the fervor of the Second Great Awakening to upstate New York, calling for renewed commitment to the Christian faith, Josiah Willard experienced a life-changing epiphany. In order to answer his call to the preaching ministry to save souls, Josiah Willard hitched up his horses, and with his wife Mary, son Oliver and daughter Frances, traveled to Oberlin, Ohio, where he studied Hebrew, Greek, theology, and rhetoric for four years at Oberlin Collegiate Institute.⁴⁰⁶ From an early age, Willard became aware that God’s call to preach had the power to re-order priorities, uproot families, and re-direct vocations. In watching her father answer his call, Willard could no doubt have imagined what her call might look like.

However, she was also influenced by the fact that her father was able to answer his call and pursue his vocation, while her mother remained at home caring for the children. As a woman born into a world divided into public and private realms, the question of a “woman’s place” was ever before Frances Willard. She saw men and women as equal, and should have equal opportunity to answer their calls. She re-interpreted social mores and re-inhabited conventional tropes, such as the Cult of Domesticity, as a means of accommodation and resistance to the dominant narrative of call. While she never herself became a preacher, she worked tirelessly to overcome institutional barriers and to help other women obtain access to the pulpit and an ecclesial endorsement of their inward call to preach. Her public rhetoric took the form of re-

⁴⁰⁵ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York Hill and Wang, 1978). For more on the “burned-over district” see the 1876 Autobiography of Charles G. Finney.

⁴⁰⁶ Oberlin Collegiate Institute was founded in 1833 by the Congregational Church with the purpose of educating ministers and schoolteachers. In 1834, Oberlin became the first coeducation college with the admission of women. In 1835, Oberlin was the first college to admit students “without respect to color” and took a strong antebellum abolitionist stance.

scripted call narratives that appealed to various authorities, depending on the cultural context.

Women's Place: Home

Cult of Domesticity

Historically, a woman's role was domestic; however, in the nineteenth century, the difference between men and women came to be recognized not simply by the roles they played, but rather by their very natures. Men were characterized as industrious, political, competitive, and amoral, while women were seen as naturally domestic, submissive, pious, and pure; therefore, it was presumed, they must work in different spheres conducive to their natures. With the nineteenth-century separation of women and men into the domestic sphere and public sphere, the cultural understandings of a "true decent woman" and a "woman's proper place" were re-defined.⁴⁰⁷

In nineteenth-century America, with the rigid separation of men into the public arena of industry and politics and women into the private sphere of home, the social phenomenon historians have called the "cult of domesticity or the canon of domesticity was born, whose 'presiding spirit' was woman."⁴⁰⁸ This domestic cult began to shape the ideal of 'true womanhood.' Primarily among white middle-class women, the cultural

⁴⁰⁷ For more on the issue of expanding freedom, equality, sovereignty, and representation, see Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* 5. For a focused discussion on the impact of industrialization on the family in Oneida County, see Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. For more on the division of social sectors, see Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1990), 150.

⁴⁰⁸ Grammer, *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* 29. For more on Victorian ideology of domesticity, see Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* 237-38.

construction of the ‘true woman’ was based on a reification of domesticity and piety, often epitomized in homemaking and motherhood. Many women assumed the canon of domesticity with vigor, embracing their role to “defend their homes against the onslaught of an aggressively secular, fanatically mobile, and morally suspicious commercial culture.”⁴⁰⁹ With women at home, argues historian Mary Ryan in *Women in Public*, the middle-class society was able to “incubate a whole flock of new domestic values, practices and functions, including Victorian ideals as the pure, loving mother, the somber cautious breadwinner, the docile, passionless child.”⁴¹⁰

This move to the private sphere further accentuated the subordination of women. In her classic 1974 essay “Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview,” Michelle Rosaldo proposed a structural explanation. “The baseline for sexual inequality, she argued, was a pervasive association of women with private spaces and domestic functions and their parallel underrepresentation in the public realms where men spoke and acted authoritatively for the whole community.”⁴¹¹ Later, she re-stated the distinction between public and private, male and female “not as ontological categories or accurate descriptions of behavior, but as cultural constructions.”⁴¹² The cultural construction of the ‘true woman’ was based on a reification of maternity, domesticity, and piety and on the establishment of a canon with ‘decent and orderly’ practice within the private realm.

‘Decency’ was understood as that which defines woman by her domestic and submissive nature. ‘Order’ was that which limits women’s work to the private sphere

⁴⁰⁹ Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* 237.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

(for the good of church and society). The paired virtues of ‘decency and order’ effectively tethered women’s virtues to domestic life, thus creating a formidable obstacle against their ability to engage in work outside the home, especially public speaking or preaching. A decent woman’s place was in the home. This barrier was firmly secured in the common belief: “A woman cannot be the creator of culture because she has no choice of being: her destiny is not hers to shape or control.”⁴¹³ This cultural ethos became the dominant narrative—a habitus accepted without question and reinforced both consciously and unconsciously.

The Victorian society was characterized by traditional ideology and strict gender divisions. “The result of this was to confirm middle- and upper-class men’s access to public institutions and to the professions—higher education, medicine, law, the ministry—while simultaneously barring most women from the same opportunities on the basis of their theoretically crippling emotionality.”⁴¹⁴ The “true woman” was to be submissive, pious, pure and domestic. The compensation held out for women for their acceptance of subordination was the promise of “female influence,” a power that could only be exercised gently, subtly, and in private.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, a cluster of ideas on the nature of women—as pious, pure, and submissive—and their appropriate role—as wife and mother—was firmly planted in the minds of many Americans. The cult of true womanhood permeated much of American culture; in effect, it defined women’s place in the developing economy and society. The cult of true womanhood was spread mainly

⁴¹³ Mary Kelley, *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 221.

⁴¹⁴ Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), xxvi.

through the publishing industry, as it flourished between 1820 and 1850. According to Barbara MacHaffie, in *Her Story*, “the nature and role of women was a prominent topic in women’s magazines such as Godey’s Lady’s Book, in novels, and in religious literature.”⁴¹⁵ The conventional rhetoric of the early nineteenth century presented women as economically unproductive domestic servants, naturally submissive and emotional, and incapable of working outside the home.

Search for Truth

The Victorian conventional narrative was pervasive and powerful, inducing girls into the ways of the “cult of domesticity” from an early age. Whether or not women gave in or resisted it, the cult of domesticity was a force to be reckoned with. From 1846 to 1850, Frances Willard spent her childhood and adolescent years on an isolated farm outside of Janesville, Wisconsin. Frances was schooled at home at her mother’s knee, memorizing the English prose and verse of Shakespeare, Emerson, and other romantic poets, and also verses of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. While she appreciated her mother’s instruction, Frances yearned for formal schooling. When her father took a banking job in Chicago, Frances was able to enter the local Methodist-run North Western Female College, from which she graduated as valedictorian in 1859.⁴¹⁶ She understood that her college diploma was not the end, but only the beginning of “the Beautiful Search after Truth & Right & Peace. Only started—only opened the door.

⁴¹⁵ MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* 159.

⁴¹⁶ Frances Willard was not able to deliver her valedictorian speech (“Horizons”) because she was ill. The text of speech can be found in Amy Rose Slagell, “Good Woman Speaking Well: The Oratory of Frances E. Willard,” Ph.D. dissertation, (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1992), 88-94.

Thank God!”⁴¹⁷ Willard’s search took place in a culture in which conventional wisdom and practice assigned women to the home with no public voice. At the early age of 20, she began to challenge the status quo; In a journal entry dated Feb 1860, she wrote of her agreement with the popular liberal minister Henry Ward Beecher that women should have the right to vote.”⁴¹⁸ Her quest for ‘Truth & Right & Peace’ would take her beyond the domestic sphere of the home and into the church and public realms.

Women’s Place: Church

Conversion and Call

Frances Willard’s search led her to the church. But despite her faith commitment, she struggled to experience a true conversion of the soul. She came to realize that no matter how much she desired a conversion experience, she could not command it. She wrote, “I wish I could practically apply the intellectual belief I have in Christ, I wish I would trust in him whom I have not seen ... I wish I could feel my sinful condition—I see it, acknowledge it, intellectually, but I don’t feel it ... For Christ’s sake, I ask Thee, O Lord, let me feel as I see, how glorious a thing it is to be at peace with Him by whom I was created, by whom I am preserved.”⁴¹⁹ Willard had a keen intellect and easily opened her mind to deeper learning. But, she was discouraged that while she could study Truth, she could not feel it and know it deep down to her soul.

⁴¹⁷ Frances E. Willard journal, 23 July 1859, in Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, ed. *Writing out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 45.

⁴¹⁸ Wendy J. Deichmann and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford Edwards, ed. *Gender and the Social Gospel* (Urbana: The University of Illinois, 2003), 23.

⁴¹⁹ Frances Willard, Journal 23, October 1859 in Gifford, ed. *Writing out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96* 47.

At a church revival, Brother Matthew Simpson's sermon solved Willard's spiritual dilemma, when he suggested that the powerful feeling of Christ's presence would come to those who lived holy lives.⁴²⁰ Still lacking the feeling she imagined came with true spiritual conversion, Willard employed her intellect in discerning righteousness and truth, and dedicated herself to pursuing the ethical path of Right. Trusting that Christ's presence would come to her along the moral way, she sought probationary membership in Evanston Methodist Evangelical Church in January 1860, and then baptism as a full member on May 4, 1861... which she describes as "an eventful day ... "

... I think God looked on us kindly, & Christ loved us, with His infinite condescending love, as we promised, publicly, yesterday, to serve & honor Him always. I know that I will try. I prayed so earnestly for help & strength to keep the promises I made, as the hand of our Pastor trembled while it rested on my head, and he baptized me. ... I feel that no purpose is so deep & all pervading with me, as the *purpose* to live for God in the world & no desire is so strong as the desire to have Him smile upon me here & take me to Himself *at last* ...⁴²¹

Willard's Christian baptism laid the foundation for her lifetime of reform work. The water, words and touch of baptism impressed upon her that to be a good Christian she had to be a good citizen—"to live for God in the world." And so, henceforth she dedicated her life to keeping her public baptismal promise of serving God by being a good citizen and helping others do the same.

In accord with her baptismal promises, Willard attended church services and prayer meetings, so as to better understand how to embody a holy life. She describes her experience of attending a Ladies' Prayer Meeting led by Phoebe Palmer: "The exercises were to me, very interesting ... My earnest prayer is that we may all be more & more like

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 35 n24. Matthew Simpson (1811-84)—minister and later bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, friend of the Willard family—was a powerful antislavery speaker, who advised Abraham Lincoln during his presidency, and preached his funeral sermon in 1865.

⁴²¹ Frances Willard, journal 5 May 1861 in Ibid., 124.

Christ—our Divine Exemplar—This is what life is for—To *be* & to *do good*. Whatever I forget, may I remember this.”⁴²² Willard dedicated herself to expressing her religious convictions by putting them into practice in the world. Although her Christian vocation was not formed by an inward spiritual feeling or divine voice, nor endorsed by an ecclesial body, her life work was no less of a call. “She believed in the importance of individual salvation but understood that sinful systems—political, economic, and social—were in dire need of redemption.”⁴²³ Willard dedicated her gifts to the redemption and reform of corrupt social systems.

Women’s Place: Public Realm

*Humanity is not made for society, but society is made for humanity.
No institution can be good which does not tend to improve the individual. [adapted]
~Margaret Fuller⁴²⁴*

Call to Social Reform

Reform organizations and voluntary societies emerged at a time when educational opportunities for women were restricted and vocational options outside the home were limited; in effect, they functioned as a bridge between private and public spheres. Women were encouraged to join these groups—by none other than their ministers, who preached

⁴²² Frances Willard, journal 12 January 1866 in *Ibid.*, 222. Phoebe (Worrall) Palmer (1807-74) and her husband Walter, were evangelists and advocates of the Holiness movement. Phoebe Palmer led weekly afternoon prayer meetings known as “Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness.” Palmer’s aim was to help others reach sanctification—“God’s cleansing of a believer’s heart of sin and filling it wholly with God’s love.” Between her meetings, publications, and preaching at Holiness revivals, her ideas reached thousands of people. For more on Palmer, see Gifford, 202n4.

⁴²³ Edwards, ed. *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 22.

⁴²⁴ Now considered an early feminist classic, Fuller, Fuller, and Greeley, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century, and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition and Duties of Woman*. Margaret Fuller, American writer, journalist, and philosopher, was part of the Transcendentalist circle to encourage women to develop their intellectual capacities.

that it was “the right of women to work for others ... that women were suited by nature for charity work...and such groups were simply an extension of a woman’s role as mother and guardian of morality and religion.”⁴²⁵ With the church’s encouragement, women joined organizations to reform society. Some women who believed it was their moral duty to save their sons and husbands and civilization from the sin of alcohol and its devastating effects of poverty and violence, joined organizations such as the Woman’s Crusade (a precursor to the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union). Other women who did not shy away from speaking out on delicate issues of great social consequence joined groups such as the New York Female Moral Reform Society. At their meeting on May 12, 1834, the following circular was drawn up and later distributed:

To the Ladies of the United States of every Religious Denomination:

BELOVED SISTERS:—Suffer a word of exhortation on a subject of vital interest to the entire sisterhood: we refer to the sin of LICENTIOUSNESS ... this sin, we are persuaded, is one in respect to which it is emphatically true, that a radical reform can never be effected without the co-operation of woman. Here, if we mistake not, her influence may be most powerful and efficacious. She may wield a power that can be wielded by no one else ... And now, sisters, what say you? Under God, the privilege and the responsibility of this holy and blessed work, is yours.⁴²⁶

Women were called to claim the “the privilege and the responsibility of this holy and blessed work.” Paradoxically, this rhetoric reveals both an appeal to the nature of women—as keeper of the home—and also to the duty of women—to better the world beyond the home for good. In effect, it sought to expand the understanding of women’s nature from a restrictive domestic realm. Such rhetoric was effective in slowly but surely moving women from domestic work in the home to reform work in the world.

⁴²⁵ MacHaffie, *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition* 177.

⁴²⁶ The Constitution and Circular of the New York Female Moral Reform Society; with the Address Delivered at Its Organization, 16-18. New York: J.N. Bolles, 1834 in *Ibid.*, 181.

Women found a place in various reform movements, including: suffrage, temperance, abolition, and missionary work. Mary E. Richmond (1861-1928) was a leader in the nineteenth-century charity organization movement and in the creation of professional social work. Richmond exemplified a ‘socially responsible sense of calling,’ which, according to social historian Elizabeth Agnew, was “characterized by a dual commitment to scientific expertise and citizen participation in a morally and politically integrated civic life.”⁴²⁷ While women were encouraged to use their natural gifts nurtured in the home to heal social ills, they were nonetheless expected to work gently and quietly and behind-the-scenes. But, women like Mary Richmond and Frances Willard, through their reform work, began to claim more of a public presence and exercise more of a public voice.

Call to Public Work

The Civil War changed everything—from political ideology to domestic tranquility. The ideology of Victorian domesticity that had defined women’s roles in the antebellum era could not be preserved. The Civil War compelled men to take up arms on the battlefield and women to fill the gaps back home—in shops, offices, textile companies, and fields. In addition, a significant number of women were directly involved in the war effort—as nurses, aids, couriers, and even spies.⁴²⁸ Motivations among women varied from patriotism and compassion to the desire to be near a loved one and the realization that they were needed. Mary Elizabeth Massey, in *Women in the Civil War*, asserts that “The war gave them an opportunity to be independent, useful

⁴²⁷ Elizabeth N. Agnew, “Shaping a Civic Profession: Mary Richmond, the Social gospel, and Social Work” in Edwards, ed. *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 116.

⁴²⁸ Webb B. Garrison, *Amazing Women of the Civil War* (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1999).

persons.”⁴²⁹ Women, like men, had to step outside their assigned domains to support the war effort. “Women’s history and men’s history are not separate,” claims Laura Edwards in *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*; rather, “they are part of the same story.”⁴³⁰ And the story involves transgressing the boundaries of convention and propriety.

During the War, women were called to more than domestic duties. Mary Abigail Dodge (pen name: Gail Hamilton) wrote articles of opinion, such as “A Call to My Country Women.” In it, she criticized women who helped with war efforts only through their prayers or their sewing needles. . . . “O women, the hour has need of you.”⁴³¹ Female authors used their written rhetoric to stress civic duty over the cult of domesticity.

The paradoxical nature of the Civil War was not only visible in the political and economic landscape, but also in the social realm. According to historian Leonard, it was a “time of unprecedented rigidity of prevailing ideals of manhood and womanhood.”⁴³² Yet, it was also a time of reforming ideals. Despite efforts to maintain established economic and social convention, boundaries were changing. Some women were successful in “shifting some of the boundaries of acceptable middle-class behavior between men and women, although the shifts were hard won and painful and provoked much resistance.”⁴³³

In spite of this resistance, a growing number of women were throwing convention to the wind by inhabiting the public spaces and professions previously limited to men. But the women who exercised a public voice were especially disconcerting to the keepers

⁴²⁹ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 44.

⁴³⁰ Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn’t Live Here Anymore : Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 3.

⁴³¹ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 176.

⁴³² Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* xxi.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

of convention, and in fact, were baffling to the general population. In a New York newspaper editorial, the journalist named this confusing phenomenon “Gynaekocracy” which he defined as “a disease which manifests itself in absurd endeavors of women to usurp the places and execute the functions of the male sex.” Included in this category were: “free thinkers ... radicals ... women of doubtful morals ... bold, unblushing, flippant, unfeminine ... and bad imitators of men.”⁴³⁴

Women’s public voice was not as readily accepted as her quiet working presence; in fact, it was challenged outright. Historian Mary Elizabeth Massey notes that the general public was confused by and critical of women’s public voice: “What purpose could possibly be served by these brazen acts, asked their critics, and what did ‘this change in woman’s tactics mean?’ queried a bewildered editor.”⁴³⁵

In this time of shifting boundaries between public and private, and men’s and women’s duties, women re-inhabited traditional male places. Their physical presence, public platforms, pens, and petitions all proved to be effective vehicles for the rhetoric of reform. But, this was only acceptable during the time of war, in which nothing was as it had been before. According to Leonard, “Wars produce abrupt, conscious, and concentrated adjustments in the behaviors considered appropriate for men and women and allow for some crossing of gender lines otherwise considered inviolable.” During the war, it was acceptable, necessary even, for women to take jobs normally done by men. An enhancement in women’s socioeconomic status was expected—on a temporary basis at least. But, Leonard claims, “Although any and all such changes take place with the general understanding that they represent ‘unnatural’ and ‘abnormal’ arrangements to be

⁴³⁴ New York editorial, Geneva (N.Y.) Gazette, March 1, 1864; Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, Sept. 22, 1862 in Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 154.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

abandoned at the moment peace is restored, the likelihood is great that these ‘temporary’ alterations in societal expectations with regard to men’s and women’s ‘natures,’ abilities, roles, and interaction will have certain long-term consequences for gender redefinition.”⁴³⁶ Some women worked to ensure that the ‘temporary alterations’ in cultural convention had lasting effects in re-defining women’s nature and role, and in re-imagining women’s place and voice.

Inward and Outward Call

As Frances Willard considered the vocational pursuits in which she could “‘be good and do good,” she briefly entertained the idea of being a wife and mother, but she broke her engagement to Charles Fowler, a Methodist minister, and never did marry. Of all of the vocational options she considered—teacher, author, itinerant speaker, preacher—her preference was to be a preacher, as she was known by some as a “gospel talker.” But, despite her preference, she recognized that a “call” was a necessary prerequisite to becoming a preacher. In *Woman in the Pulpit*, Willard wrote, “I was too timid to go without a call; and so it came about that while my unconstrained preference would long ago have led me to the pastorate, I have failed of it.”⁴³⁷ And even if she had experienced a divine inward call, she realized that she would never receive the church’s endorsement of an outward call. Willard confessed her longing to enter the ministry: “The deepest thought and desire of my life would have been met, if my dear old Mother Church had permitted me to be a minister. The wandering life of an evangelist or a

⁴³⁶ Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* xxi.

⁴³⁷ Frances E. Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit* (Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1888), 62.

reformer comes nearest to it, but cannot fill, the ideal which I early cherished, but did not expect ever publicly to confess.”⁴³⁸

Painfully aware that she could not become a minister because the church prohibited it,⁴³⁹ Frances Willard engaged in the ‘proper’ occupation for single women: she taught school—in Illinois, New York, and Pennsylvania—in one-room schoolhouses, from 1859 to 1868. Then, in 1871, she was invited to become the head of the Ladies College of Northwestern University, thus becoming the first female college president in the United States. As a “mother to the girls,” she stressed both independence and morality. But as a professor of aesthetics and writing, she had to endure harassment by male students (including mice in her desk!). When the Ladies College lost its autonomy, Willard resigned and left behind what she saw as an overcrowded profession run by men which offered no opportunities for greatness. Throughout her life, Willard pursued her ambition: “to be widely known, loved and believed in, the more widely the better.”⁴⁴⁰ Her pursuit led her into the public arena where she claimed a public platform.

As she stepped out into the public realm to explore other vocational opportunities, she encountered formidable obstacles—sins of slavery, alcohol, and patriarchy—which became opportunities for her to live out her Christian call to “be and to do good” in the world. She was clear and resolute on her abolitionist stance: “American slavery—the

⁴³⁸ Nancy A. Hardesty, "Minister as Prophet or as Mother?" in Hilah F. and Rosemary Skinner Keller Thomas, ed. *Women in New Worlds*, II vols., vol. I, Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 88.

⁴³⁹ Not until September 15, 1853 was the first woman was ordained in the United States: Antoinette Brown Blackwell, ordained by a Congregational Church in South Butler, New York. It would be another ten years until the next woman was ordained. In June 1863 in New York, Olympia Brown (no relation to Antoinette Brown) was ordained by the Universalist Church. Some claim Olympia Brown was actually the first Protestant woman ordained, as she was ordained with full denominational authority. In some cases, the church’s response to these ordinations was not more female ordinations, as one might think, but rather, tighter restrictions on women’s roles in the church.

⁴⁴⁰ Frances E. Willard et al., *Glimpses of Fifty Years; the Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago etc.: Woman's temperance publication association, 1889), 1-2.

absolute control of one body & soul over another body and soul—is a living and daily repeated lie; a lie told by the people of the United States to the world.”⁴⁴¹ In her journal of April 13, 1861, she records the commencement of the Civil War in “the Land of the Free & the Home of the Brave.” While she admits to being saddened by the thought of the fighting, she is steadfast in her love of God and country: “But God works in these things, & if the Curse that Slavery entails upon us, can be removed, every true, patriotic heart must say, “let it be done.”⁴⁴² Willard’s life of reform work was guided and inspired by the “grandest [idea] ever comprehended by a human soul:” the words of Thomas Jefferson, who wrote in our Declaration of Independence, “All men are born free and equal.”⁴⁴³ This grand idea not only fueled the work of abolitionists, it also inspired the cause of suffragists, who believed that all men—and women—are equal.

Willard set her sights on following the path forged by women suffragists like Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony—to become a public speaker advocating reform. Willard assumed a public platform to argue for the need for prohibition “and the mote that she would remove from the nation’s eye was the sin of alcohol.”⁴⁴⁴ Her temperance quest evolved from principle to personal to plot. Her religious crusade to stamp out a sin of immorality became even more passionate as she watched her brother become devastated by alcoholism; therefore, her life’s work became ridding society of alcohol and its terribly addictive and destructive power. She joined the

⁴⁴¹ Willard, Journal 2 December 1859 in Gifford, ed. *Writing out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96* 51.

⁴⁴² Willard, Journal 13 April 1861 in *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁴³ Willard, Journal 2 December 1859 in *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁴⁴ Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America’s Suffragists* 155.

Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and to its mission, she promised to give herself fully—"soul, body, and spirit to Christ."⁴⁴⁵

Between 1874 and 1884, Willard was perpetually on the road, each year traveling between 15,000 and 20,000 miles, in order to deliver up to 400 lectures per year. As spokesperson of WCTU, she addressed mostly white, middle-class Protestant women; but from time to time she drew promiscuous audiences (made up of men and women). She spoke at Chautauqua, the famous religious meeting place in New York state "where the ruling fathers disliked women speakers but thought Willard, in the words of one promoter, a 'magnificent exception.'"⁴⁴⁶ In her speeches, she employed religious rhetoric: "Temperance feeds and clothes the poor, does industrial training, supports better wages, shorter hours of work, and cooperation and arbitration—all these modern modes of blessing will claim for those who work to bring them, the holy declaration from the lips of the carpenter's son; "Ye did it unto me."⁴⁴⁷ Her rhetorical strategy was temperance for the sake of home protection, to save women and children from the dangers of drunken husbands and fathers:

For the love of the dear homes whose watchfires are as beaconlights of heaven;

for love of you, heartbroken wives, whose tremulous lips have blessed me;

for you, sweet mothers, who in the cradle's shadow kneel tonight beside your infants sons; and

for you, sorrowful children, who, with faces strangely old, listen tonight for him whose footsteps frighten you; it is for love of you that I have dared to speak.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 171. See also Amy Slagell, dissertation, 418.

⁴⁴⁸ Frances Willard, address before the House Judiciary Committee, 1 February 1878, quoted by Slagell, "Making the World More Homelike": The Reform Rhetoric of Frances E. Willard in Martha S. Watson and

Willard tilled the earth, planted the seed and watered the ground, but the fruits of her temperance labors would not be fully realized until twenty years after her death, with the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which established the prohibition of alcohol in the United States.

Temperance was not Willard's only pursuit of reform; abstention was not the only gospel preached. "Subtly and strategically expanding the mission of the organization, Willard used her bully pulpit to advance a host of social causes."⁴⁴⁹ She worked for dress reform, peace and arbitration, labor reforms, Christian socialism, and women's suffrage. She argued for women's rights to utilize their particular gifts beyond the private domain in the public realm, for the good of society.

In both secular and sacred realms, Frances Willard encountered patriarchy and sexism that sought to deny women equal rights and opportunities. In her private journal, she recorded the many experiences of engaging others with the "Woman Question"—the moments of despair and moments of celebration and hope:

So I find it every where. The men best educated—most gifted—liberated most from prejudice the unilluminated past, think of woman as a human soul placed by a kind Creator on the earth to do & be all that she can be—unfettered by any law or custom ... May I live to see the day when this choice leaven shall "raise" the lump of public opinion nearer hope & Heaven! And may I be brave enough to speak in a womanly voice my honest word in this behalf!⁴⁵⁰

When Willard encountered openness to women's expanded public role, she was inspired to assume the public platform for the cause of women. She would dedicate her

Thomas R. Burkholder, eds., *The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Reform: A Rhetorical History of the United States, Significant Movements in American Public Discourse* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2008), 159.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., xxiv.

⁴⁵⁰ Willard, Journal 13 March 1869 in Gifford, ed. *Writing out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96* 298.

“womanly voice” to help women to do all they can with their God-given gifts ‘to be good and do good’ in the world. From a public platform, with a rhetoric of social reform, Willard empowered women to construct a narrative of call to be embodied in all realms—even and especially in the pulpit.

Women’s Place: Pulpit

Following the War, the place of women had been enlarged beyond the domestic sphere of the home, such that women as teachers and nurses were becoming more socially acceptable. However, the question of a woman’s role in the public sphere of the church was not by any means settled; a woman speaking from the platform of the pulpit was not at all tolerable. Victorian ideas about “a woman’s proper place” were coupled with a re-prioritized religious belief of “decency and order” to prohibit women from most public speaking, including preaching. In order to engage in public religious discourse, there were some women who appealed to traditional gender norms that were firmly established in nineteenth-century America. In doing so, they sought to preserve the “feminine” virtues of modesty, piety, selflessness and domesticity. Drawing on cultural understandings of “true womanhood,” they maintained that the duties of a minister would inevitably conflict not only with a woman’s primary domestic role, but also with her very nature.

Other women appealed to the traditional language of domesticity only to challenge the traditional gender norms and enlarge the roles of women. They asserted that women’s true nature was well suited for ministry. Their belief that “God chose the weak to confound the mighty” allowed them to remain within their culturally appropriate

role, while working to redeem the world for good by nurturing the family of God. They described their roles in familial language, referring to themselves as “Mothers of Israel” and “Sisters in Christ.” By claiming this ‘whole Savior’—“by marrying him and placing him at the center of their lives”—female preachers believed that their call was to make “the world their household, the pulpit their kitchen, and their readers their family.”⁴⁵¹

Using the language of their domestic domain, women argued that it was their duty to use their feminine virtues to preach the gospel.

But when women did preach, the responses were mixed. In 1839, “Sister” Roberts “seized the pulpit” of a South Carolina Primitive Baptist church and delivered a sermon; the response was not an “Amen!” but rather excommunication.⁴⁵² The question of whether or not “Sisters in Christ” and “Mothers in Israel” should be allowed into the “public pulpit” became a controversial issue among and between denominations in the nineteenth century. Advocates of a woman’s role in ministry, such as Phoebe Palmer allowed that the need may arise for a woman to temporarily inhabit the public sphere, but that even if she does, her “dignity, wisdom and womanly grace”⁴⁵³ would allow her to stay within the limits of ‘decency and order.’ Believing that the truth did not always lay within the bounds of ‘decency and order,’ Palmer set aside her “dignity and womanly grace” once and cried out in frustration: “The church in many ways is a sort of potter’s

⁴⁵¹ Grammer, *Some Wild Visions: Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in Nineteenth-Century America* 56.

⁴⁵² Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 130.

⁴⁵³ Phoebe Palmer, *Promise of the Father* (1859) in Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Turn the Pulpit Loose: Two Centuries of American Women Evangelists* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 67. Despite the far-reaching effectiveness of her words, she refused to call her work “preaching.” “It is our aim, in addressing the people...to simplify the way of faith...Preach we do not; that is, not in a *technical* sense.” Although she was a pioneer for female “preaching,” she sought to advance a more genteel model of ministry. See Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 338.

field where the gifts of women, 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?”⁴⁵⁴

Despite resistance, Frances Willard advocated for women’s presence in the public arenas of education, law, politics and medicine, and beyond—even into the sacred space of the pulpit. In 1877 she became the only female speaker in Dwight Moody’s evangelizing revival campaign in Boston. However, the increasing bureaucratization of America’s churches in the late nineteenth century resulted in even more restricted roles for women in authority. “Willard was dealt with several severe blows by organized Methodism, delivered by a hierarchy that admired her gifts and supported many of her causes, but that could not accept her demands for an equal role for women in the church.”⁴⁵⁵ In fact, despite some gains for women’s equal participation in the church, there were significant set-backs.⁴⁵⁶ In 1888, her own Methodist Episcopal Church refused to seat Willard and four other leading Women’s Foreign and Home Missionary Society and WCTU leaders as delegates. This public prohibition of laywomen’s ecclesiastical suffrage was a great blow to Willard and her supporters. Willard threatened to leave her denomination and form a new church in which women would enjoy equality in church governance; and further, one which would exercise the power to ordain women to preach. “The formation of this new denomination never actually occurred, but Willard’s threat indicated how disillusioned she was with her denomination’s

⁴⁵⁴ Lareta Halteman Finger, “Women in Pulpits,” *The Other Side* (July 1979), 14.

⁴⁵⁵ Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America’s Suffragists* 172. “Even in the lesser role of elected lay delegate to the Methodist Episcopal General Conference in 1888, Willard and four other women, among some five hundred ordained pastors, were denied seats. *The New York Times*, describing the conference as ‘made up of elderly men with bald heads and white hair,’ reported now-Bishop Charles Fowler as jubilant.”

⁴⁵⁶ For numerous examples of church hierarchy obstacles to women’s preaching, see Ruth Birgitta Anderson Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 160-8.

decision.”⁴⁵⁷ Despite resistance, Willard effectively advocated reform in both society (as president of the National Council of Women fighting for suffrage and other women’s rights) and church (as a delegate to the General Conference of the Methodist church).

Changing established socioeconomic convention is an onerous task for anyone, let alone those who lack social place and economic power. But women were tactical in their work. “Instead of talking about their rights,” Massey notes, “they were usurping them under the cloak of patriotism...and they were doing so well, anyone should have been able to see the sex barriers crumbling.” Some thought that after the war women would once again embrace the ‘cult of true womanhood’ and return to domestic tranquility, gladly leaving the public politics, platforms and protests to men. But, Massey rightly observes, “as they would eventually discover, it was going to be impossible to keep the ‘girls’ quiet and docile after four noisy, active years.”⁴⁵⁸

Yet, despite how much the women spoke out and advocated for reform, change was hard and slow and painful. Leonard explains: “Still the gender system, in the end, demonstrated remarkable rigidity and stability at its core. The very real adjustment of gender boundaries that resulted from middle-class women’s wartime pressure did not in turn, imply the possibility of the elimination of boundaries altogether; rather, it revealed the system’s fundamental resilience and stubborn durability.”⁴⁵⁹ It would take a public persona par excellence to both claim and change the cult.

Frances Willard was one of the nineteenth century’s most vocal advocates of a woman’s public role. With rhetorical finesse, she appealed to the status quo of women’s limited domestic role in order to enlarge it. She was skilled at turning the argument for

⁴⁵⁷ Edwards, ed. *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 29.

⁴⁵⁸ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, 174.

⁴⁵⁹ Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* 199.

women's natural feminine demeanor around, insisting that, if anything, "woman's nature made her a more suitable and effective minister than a man."⁴⁶⁰ Willard promoted the "true" image of women as naturally more pious and moral than men, while also advocating a more independent and active public role for women, including the pulpit. From her public platform, she proclaimed that the role of the ideal woman is "to make the whole world homelike."

Frances Willard's Place in History

Death and Funeral

Willard was a reformer, unabashedly so. She writes, "I am thankful to Thee, O God! That I did not live in the world before the nineteenth Century! ... That I am in the midst of the Reforms and Inventions and Civilizations of the Present Age ..."⁴⁶¹ She served as President of Chicago's WCTU, and in 1879, was elected President of the National WCTU, serving until her death in 1898. She led the largest women's organization of the time (in 1890 the WCTU had nearly 150,000 dues-paying members). After appearing at a WCTU convention, doing what she loved most, Willard died in February 1898, at the age of fifty-eight. "Willard's funeral reached epic, near-Lincolnian proportions with a large service attended by two thousand admirers at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York." A rail car drove her body through Churchville and onto Chicago so people could pay their respects. "No woman in America was better known, none was more universally loved—as the champion of the cause of women she was

⁴⁶⁰ Lindley, *You Have Stept out of Your Place : A History of Women and Religion in America*, 126.

⁴⁶¹ Willard, Journal 21 February 1860 in Gifford, ed. *Writing out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855-96* 60.

foremost in the world,” eulogized a Chicago paper.⁴⁶² She was laid in state in the Willard Hall of the Women’s Temple in Chicago. Frances Willard called herself “Frank,” but was called “Saint Frances” by the pulpit and “Queen of Temperance” by reformers, and by history she was called the “Social gospel theologian of the age.” Publicly she was introduced as the “uncrowned queen of America” and the “best known and best loved woman.”⁴⁶³ In fact, in a Chicago paper, her eulogy captured the scope of her work and predicted the strength of her legacy: “No woman in America was better known, none was more universally loved—as champion of the cause of women she was foremost in the world”⁴⁶⁴

Legacy

Despite tremendous popularity in the nineteenth century, Willard’s fame seems to have been lost. Perhaps her name, so closely identified with temperance, has been buried in the dust of Prohibition and swept out with the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Perhaps her strategy for women’s advancement was too conservative to advance the cause or to be claimed by modern feminists. Perhaps “her sentimental religiosity makes her an archaic figure in the twenty-first century” and appeals to a “mother’s heart” make her outdated.⁴⁶⁵ But, then again, perhaps it is because until now, no one has studied her rhetoric closely enough to see its brilliance and relevance for today. Carolyn De Swarte Gifford and Amy R. Slagell argue that Willard left a powerful rhetorical legacy that is

⁴⁶² Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America’s Suffragists* 180.

⁴⁶³ Amy R. Slagell, “Making the World More Homelike”: The Reform Rhetoric of Frances E. Willard ” in *The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Reform: A Rhetorical History of the United States, Significant Movements in American Public Discourse* ed. Martha S. Watson and Thomas R. Burkholder (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2008), 159.

⁴⁶⁴ Baker, *Sisters: The Lives of America’s Suffragists* 180.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

worth recovering. Gifford and Slagell invite us into the rhetorical genius of Frances Willard, seeking to redeem her legacy and reclaim her voice for women today.

Frances Willard was a pioneer of the public platform. When she spoke, people described it as pure eloquence. In response, one listener wrote: “What a speech it was! ... every listener sat entranced to the end.”⁴⁶⁶ Willard’s simple dress and powerful presence got her audience’s attention, but her words kept them “entranced to the end.” Willard writes, “words have souls, nay, what is worse, they have ghosts. Men are more frightened by words today than by ideas. If one can but couch his thought in acceptable forms it will be received in quarters where, did he utter it squarely, he would be cast out as evil.” With her well-chosen words, she spoke on behalf of “evolution, not revolution; -for womanly liberty, not ... wild license.” In her speeches, she called for women’s suffrage and a role in the public sphere, but by couching her “liberal ideas” in “acceptable forms” she gained a hearing with white, middle class, Protestant, conservative audiences, which the more revolutionary women’s suffragists could not get. As a speaker, she was described as “fervent, forcible, and withal most womanly.” By combining such seemingly contrasting characteristics, Willard became the “embodiment of the oxymoronic womanly public speaker”⁴⁶⁷

As President of WCTU, Willard encountered the power of resistance as she sought to change the dominant narrative that dictated women’s place and silenced women’s voice. She was not deterred; in response, she boldly claimed power to resist and transform structures of domination. From her public platform, she called on all women to claim power and use it for good in shaping the world for good. In an 1892

⁴⁶⁶ Slagell, “Making the World More Homelike”: The Reform Rhetoric of Frances E. Willard”, 161.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 162-3.

article, "The Woman's Cause Is Man's," Willard wrote: "[Woman] is learning the greatness and sacredness of power, that there is nothing noble in desiring not to possess it ... if only these forces are used in the spirit of the utmost beneficence toward whatever has life ... for life would have as its ultimate to bless all other lives."⁴⁶⁸ Willard worked through WCTU not only for temperance, but also for securing women's equal place in society. According to Willard scholars Wendy Edwards and Carolyn Gifford, "Willard saw the WCTU as, above all, *the* place in which to develop this new woman who was independent and self-reliant and would use power for good." Further, she believed that the most important work of WCTU was "shaping Christian women who were devoted to improving society and culture, to reform, philanthropy, patriotism, and religion."⁴⁶⁹ Her actions stemmed from her Christian beliefs. "Her faith would inform both her interpretation of 'the Woman Question' and her response to the issues raised by the question." Unlike prominent women's suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Willard refused to give up on Christian theology and its egalitarian possibilities. "Although she clearly perceived Christianity's patriarchal structures, she believed that they could be reformed."⁴⁷⁰ Strategically, Willard worked within the oppressive structures to bring liberation for women.

Strategies and Tactics

Although she dressed modestly and espoused conservative values, Willard promoted radical social ideas. She promoted and helped to shape cultural perceptions of

⁴⁶⁸ Frances Willard, "The Woman's Cause Is Man's," *The Arena* (1892: 716) in Edwards, ed. *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 27.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

the new ideal woman: self-reliant, independent, and dedicated to equality with men. But, she did so by grounding her campaign in the traditional domestic ideal of a true woman. “As she pushed for greater opportunities for women she carefully coddled the nineteenth century’s sensitivity to women’s special role.”⁴⁷¹ Despite the fact that she herself was not a mother, she championed the model of motherhood for social change. “Willard preached ‘Womanliness first—afterwards what you will.’ This was a key verse in the gospel according to Saint Frances.”⁴⁷² She successfully “manipulated the doctrine of true womanhood.”⁴⁷³ And she trained women to do the same. Through WCTU, Willard “sought to teach its membership how to articulate its aims and strategies effectively through speaking and writing, leading meetings, and working through the political process by petitioning, lobbying, and influencing party caucuses.” In fact, WCTU leaders ran “schools of methods” in which women learned a whole range of tactics to influence government at all levels—city, county, state, and national.⁴⁷⁴

Not only was Frances Willard a public speaker extraordinaire, she was also a prolific writer. In addition to the countless articles, pamphlets, letters and journal entries, she penned nine books—including an autobiography, a biography about her mother and sister, a history of temperance, a work encouraging young women to cultivate their abilities and do fitting work, and a polemic calling for the ordination of women. The extent of the success of her measures (of using values of the time to advocate social change) is reflected in the way her life was celebrated at her death.

⁴⁷¹ Bordin, *Frances Willard : A Biography*, 58.

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁷⁴ Wendy J. Deichmann Edwards and Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, *Gender and the Social Gospel* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 27.

Despite the cultural and institutional resistance, Willard cultivated a subversive alternative ethos. Her methods included: using her public voice to speak truth to the powers of society and church;⁴⁷⁵ utilizing tactics that seemed to conform, but claimed agency to transform;⁴⁷⁶ re-defining women's place, re-inhabiting authoritative tropes, and re-scripting women's roles with a memorable and effective discourse;⁴⁷⁷ and engaging in a conversational rhetoric that was invitational and communal.⁴⁷⁸

Women's Voice: Public Rhetoric (Speeches and Writings)

Let something good be said.

~Frances Willard, motto for Women's Christian Temperance Union's newspaper, 1888
and fireplace inscription in Willard's office, 1866-1898

In both her spoken and written words, Frances Willard used the central image of home to justify women's entry into public reform and political work. She called women into the public sphere, to use their unique moral attributes and natural abilities to help make the world a better place. In opposition to the conventional doctrine of separate gender spheres, Willard envisioned men and women working together—both at home and in the public sphere—to make the world more “homelike” for all. However, she moved

⁴⁷⁵ Turner and Hudson, *Saved from Silence : Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*. Charles L. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers : An Ethic of Preaching*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

⁴⁷⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Ellen T. Armour and Susan M. St. Ville, *Bodily Citations : Religion and Judith Butler*, Gender, Theory, and Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). Amy P. McCullough, "Her Preaching Body a Qualitative Study of Agency, Meaning and Proclamation in Contemporary Female Preachers." ([Nashville, Tenn.]: Vanderbilt University, 2012), <http://etd.library.vanderbilt.edu/available/etd-03222012-104750/>.

⁴⁷⁷ Armour and St. Ville, *Bodily Citations : Religion and Judith Butler*; Lawless, *Women Preaching Revolution : Calling for Connection in a Disconnected Time*.

⁴⁷⁸ Jane Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric : The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600-1900*, Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012).

from the Victorian notion of women's realm of home to a more radical position of equality at home and in public. She believed, "Only through combining the talents and powers of both sexes would humanity unleash the strength to remake the world."⁴⁷⁹ Willard's rhetorical banner of "making the world homelike" extended a woman's domain beyond the four walls of the home. Under that banner, Willard called women to public presence and political action. She encouraged all people, including and especially women, to develop themselves and to do their part to better the world and help make God's kingdom come on earth. She spoke less of right and more of duty, less of separate spheres and more of equal partnership, less of cult (of domesticity) and more of call (of women and men). Willard's goal "to make the whole world HOMELIKE" was at the heart of her reform rhetoric.⁴⁸⁰ It grew out of her Protestant worldview, in which it is believed that all Christians are called: in theological language—to establish the reign of Christ on earth; in practical language—to do their part to make the world a better place.

The collection of Willard's speeches, pamphlets, and books is voluminous! The following analysis will focus on the rhetoric of two of her books that most directly address the issue of naming, engaging, and calling the question of women as preachers: *How to Win: A Book for Girls*, which engages the issue of women's inward call; and *Woman in the Pulpit*, which addresses the question of women's outward call.

⁴⁷⁹ Slagell, "Making the World More Homelike" in *The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Reform*, 188.

⁴⁸⁰ Slagell, "Making the World More Homelike," 172.

How To Win: A Book for Girls

In *How to Win: A Book for Girls* (1886), Frances Willard more fully developed her new definition of ideal womanhood about which she had long been speaking (“The New Chivalry,” 1871) and writing (“Talks for Girls,” *The Chicago Post*, 1878). Willard addressed this 125-page book to girls because she thought they had the ability to imagine opportunities beyond the outdated customs and traditions of their mothers and the time to prepare themselves for the pursuit of those opportunities. She sought to help them live with this new understanding of what it means to be a woman in nineteenth century American society and beyond. Although she was a nationally known reform leader, admired and beloved by thousands of women, her persona throughout the book was that of an elder sister who spoke with the girls’ best interests at heart.

The overall rhetorical strategy assumes a rebuttal form. Willard describes the prevalent cultural attitudes and then challenges and corrects them with what she claims to be true. Her rhetorical function is to help her readers see themselves and their opportunities in a new way. Throughout *How to Win*, Willard’s rhetoric takes the form of: “You may have been taught . . . ; but I say to you” . . . What follows are three examples:

1) You may have been taught that God created women as weak and sinful and dependent on men; but I say to you that women are called by God to be Christ’s disciples.

In creating each of us with some peculiar talent, God has given us each “a call” to some peculiar work. Indeed time is almost here when the only call that will be recognized as valid, in any field, must involve in him who

thinks he hears it both adaptation and success. Each one of us is a marvelous bundle of aptitudes and of capacities.⁴⁸¹

Ours is a high and sacred calling. Out of pure hearts fervently, let us love God and humanity; so shall we be Christ's disciples, and so shall we safely follow on to know the work whereunto we have been called.⁴⁸²

Willard takes the issue of a woman's place to a deeper level when she introduces the theological language of "call." She understands God's call to human beings not just as spiritual but vocational. "God gives us each a call to some peculiar work." This is a subtle but important point: both men *and* women are given a call from God. As surely as God calls, God gives individuals gifts and abilities to do the work to which they are called. As disciples of Christ, women are called not just to *be* good, but to *do* good in the world.

2) You may have been taught that women are to stay at home; but I say to you ...

"a true woman carries home with her everywhere ..."

Indeed, if I were asked the mission of the ideal woman, I would reply: IT IS TO MAKE THE WHOLE WOLRD HOMELIKE. Someone has said that "Temperament is the climate of the individual," but home is woman's climate, her vital breath, her native air. A true woman carries home with her everywhere. Its atmosphere surrounds her; its mirror is her face; its music attunes her gentle voice; its longitude may be reckoned from wherever you happen to find her. But "home's not merely four square walls."⁴⁸³

Willard appeals to the accepted premise that "home is a woman's climate, her vital breath, her native air." But then she masterfully re-interprets the meaning of "home," beyond a concrete structure to a metaphorical concept by arguing, "a true woman carries

⁴⁸¹ Frances E. Willard, Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, and Amy R. Slagell, *Let Something Good Be Said : Speeches and Writings of Frances E. Willard* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 103.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 112.

home with her everywhere,” in effect, she enlarges a woman’s domain. Further, she claims this is a woman’s duty:

’Tis home where’er the heart is,” and no true mother, sister, daughter or wife can fail to go on in spirit after her beloved and tempted ones, as their adventurous steps enter the labyrinth of the world’s temptations. We cannot call them back ... There is but one remedy: we must bring the home to them, for they will not return to it. Still must their mothers walk beside them, sweet and serious, and clad in garments of power.⁴⁸⁴

Here Willard uses the word “call” to identify the problem: “We cannot call them back.”

Staying at home, she argues, weakens the woman’s voice and does not allow her to do the work God has called her to do. The answer, she says is: “we must bring the home to them.” The “home” is the rhetorical vehicle that allows Willard to persuade women to engage in public work, all the while embodying the virtues of home: therein lies their power.

3) You may have been taught that the ideal woman is to be passive and fearful of change; but I say to you that the times are changing ...

By some unaccountable perversion of good sense, the specialities of human beings who are women have been strangely circumscribed. But they were there, all the same, and now, under the genial sun of a more enlightened era, they are coming airily forth ...⁴⁸⁵

No doubt my readers have asked ere this inevitable question: “Why does that seem natural and fitting for a young woman to do and to aspire to now which would have been no less improper than impossible a hundred year ago?” Sweet friends, it is because *the ideal of woman’s place in the world is changing in the average mind*. For as the artist’s ideal precedes his picture, so the ideal woman must be transformed before the actual one can be.⁴⁸⁶

Willard exhorts the girls to embrace this change and prepare to make a difference in the world:

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 109.

Cultivate, then, your speciality, because the independence thus involved will lift you above the world's pity to the level of its respect, perchance its honor ...⁴⁸⁷

Clearly to all of them I am declaring a true and blessed gospel, in this good news concerning honest independence and brave self-help!⁴⁸⁸

In these excerpts, Willard sounds a wake-up call to the girls to whom she writes, tracing the evolution of the ideal woman from being “circumscribed” to “woman’s place is changing.” Standing on this new fertile ground, she calls out for the girls to “cultivate their speciality,” relying on their “independence” and “brave self-help.” By transforming the ideal of womanhood, she claims, they can enlarge the domain of actual women. In the end, the “call” becomes a battle cry in which Miriam summons all women to “Speak” and to “go forward.”

I have no fears for the women of America. They will never content themselves remaining stationary in methods or in policy, much less sound a retreat in their splendid warfare against the saloon in law and politics. The tides of the mother’s heart do not change; we can count upon them always. The voice of Miriam still cheers the brave advance, and all along the line we hear the battle cry: “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward” [Exodus 14:15].⁴⁸⁹

Willard acknowledges the narrative that has formed the girls, but now calls them to write the next chapter themselves; and this new chapter will necessarily be different.

Throughout the book, Willard’s tone is both domestic (“home is a woman’s climate”) and demanding (“take the dilemma of our destiny by the horns”); sentimental (“home is where the heart is”) and savvy (“home’s not merely four square walls”); religious (“ours is a high and sacred calling”) and revolutionary (“we hear the battle cry: ‘Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward’”). She masterfully takes a traditional understanding of women (“Still must their mothers walk beside them, sweet

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 114.

and serious, ...”), dresses it in her new ideal of womanhood (“... and clad in garments of power.”), and thereby, transforms the old and reconstructs the new (“so shall we be Christ’s disciples”) right before our very eyes; so that it is easy to accept it without question. She constructs a new ideal of womanhood that is a curious mix of the submissive and the suffragist, private and public, religious and reform. To support her argument, she appeals to the authority of religion (“God has given us each a call,” “the voice of Miriam,” Exodus 14:15), social Darwinism (“the world is changing,” “there was to come a wider evolution of the same ideal ... human destiny”), and reason (“we must bring the home to them, for they will not return to it”). In admitting that she “prefers the active to the passive voice,” Willard claims agency for herself (“I am declaring a true and blessed gospel”), for the girls (“Cultivate *your* specialty), for the women of America (“*they* will never content themselves remaining stationary in methods or in policy”), and for all of us (“Let *us* follow on to know the work whereunto we have been called”). In *How to Win: A Book for Girls*, Willard appealed to young girls contemplating vocational pursuits and called them, and their embodiment of home, into the public sphere of work.

Willard’s rhetorical quest to make the world more homelike was not limited to the public secular arena, but even extended into the sacred realm of the church. She was convinced that “a community without woman’s equal social action, a church without her equal ecclesiastical action and a state without her equal political action is very much what a home would be without a mother, wife, sister, daughter or friend.”⁴⁹⁰ Willard argued persuasively that it was radically inconsistent of the church to allow women (“delicate, modest, sensitive, home-loving, nestling, timid little things”) to serve as frontier

⁴⁹⁰Willard as quoted saying in 1886 in Slagell, "Making the World More Homelike": The Reform Rhetoric of Frances E. Willard ", 175.

missionary-evangelists among the “wild and naked barbarians;” while denying them the right “to engage in the motherly work of the pastorate.” Willard argued the pastorate was “motherly work,” for which women were uniquely and ideally suited.”⁴⁹¹ Strategically, she appealed to the accepted cultural ethos of women’s motherly nature only to enlarge its scope to include the pastorate. Despite the widespread ecclesial resistance of the time, Willard argued that motherly instincts and values were desirable criteria for the pastoral work of ministry.

Woman in the Pulpit

In speeches and in her book *Woman in the Pulpit* (1888), Frances Willard presented a polemic arguing for women’s ordination in the church. Another female reformer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, wrote her own version of the scripture, the *Woman’s Bible*. Stanton’s motivations for compiling the *Woman’s Bible* were much the same as Willard’s reasons for writing *Woman in the Pulpit*. “Both women were distressed by clerics and churchmen who cited scripture to justify a society in which woman were prevented from exercising full political and social rights. Both hoped their writings would spark genuine debate of the biblical position on the status of women.”⁴⁹² But, while Stanton gave up on the church as hopelessly patriarchal and turned against it, Willard would not cut herself off from the Christian community that had birthed her faith and nurtured her life’s work of reform; instead she worked to change it. “She believed with other adherents of the Social Gospel that Christianity overall had been a force for

⁴⁹¹ Thomas, ed. *Women in New Worlds*, 91.

⁴⁹² Bordin, *Frances Willard : A Biography*, 172.

good in the world and was a continuing inspiration for social reform.”⁴⁹³ With appeals to feminist arguments, Stanton encouraged women to escape the bondage of the Bible and church. But, Willard “championed the ordination of women and their equal participation with men in church governance” with the language of “refinement, sympathy, and sweetness of the womanly nature” that she claimed “fits women especially for the sacred duties of the pastoral office.”⁴⁹⁴

In 1888, *Woman in the Pulpit* was published—an outgrowth of an article Willard wrote for *The Homiletic Monthly*. In the Preface, she writes: “I beg a patient and unprejudiced attention, not only to their words but to the words of all the witnesses that follow them. With an earnest prayer that Christ’s blessed kingdom in the earth may be advanced a little by the considerations herein urged, I cannot but repeat the well known and half pathetic words, ‘Go, little Book, I cast thee on the waters, go thy way.’”⁴⁹⁵ Willard wrote her book for a public audience of open-minded readers who reasonably engaged controversial topics.

In the first three chapters of *Woman in the Pulpit*, Willard argues for woman’s presence in the pulpit based on appeals to the authority of the Bible and reason. In chapter four she allows men to speak in favor of women preachers. One Methodist minister puts in plainly and calls his male opponents to task:

Professedly we have three qualifications for the ministry, but really we have four. A candidate for ordination must have grace, gifts, and usefulness and must be of the masculine gender. But beyond all these is an inward call from God. The first three requisites women possess—nobody

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁹⁵ Willard, Preface (Evanston, Illinois, April 10, 1888) in Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit*.

disputes it. The only ground on which it is possible to oppose the ordination of women is that God has not called them ...⁴⁹⁶

He identifies that the most important qualification for ministers is the divine inward call.

Evidence of an inward call is the only ground by which to deny the ecclesial outward call or to endorse it:

Now upon such evidence as this we ordain men to preach; where this evidence is strong, and other qualifications are met, a man never fails of securing ordination in our church.

When men present their story of call, they are ordained as ministers of the word. But when women present their call story, the results are different:

Now we present this same evidence precisely that God has called women to the same blessed work. There are women who are willing to say, in the language of our ritual, 'We trust that we are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon us the office of the ministry in the church of Christ,' 'we think in our hearts that we are truly called according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ to this work.' Now, why not believe these women as well as men under the same circumstances? Are women any more likely to lie about their call, or to be mistaken about it, than men?...there are members of the church who have heard these women preach repeatedly; they are convinced that they are truly called of God, and that they ought to be ordained.⁴⁹⁷

Women's experiences of divine inward call are judged as not authentic, and therefore, not worthy of ordination. With these words, this male Methodist minister rightly identifies the problem and solution: recognizing women's call to ministry as valid as men's call.

In chapter five, Willard invites women to use their own voices in defense of ordained women preaching. She compiles testimonials from women who are engaged in the practice of the preaching ministry of the church. In so doing, she names the question of women preachers, using an inductive method. She counts the number of women in

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 83.

pulpits as over five hundred and cites the denominations that have only recently been ordaining women to the preaching ministry, including: Methodists, Baptists, Free Baptist, Congregational, Universalist, and Unitarian; in addition, the Society of Friends had always recognized the equality of men and women in the house of God. While she is not a preacher herself, Willard uses her pen and her public platform to help give the women preachers—and the cause of women preaching—a voice. She asks the question, “What have these women to say for themselves, who, in the face of so much prejudice (i.e., their cases being not judged on their merits, but *pre-judged*), have gone forward as ministers of Christ?” Then, as in the role of an interviewer, Willard allows the numerous female preachers to defend their positions—in their own words.

Frances Willard’s rhetorical strategy is simple: let the sheer weight of the evidence speak for itself. She does not interrupt the women’s testimonials with commentary or analysis. She just lets them tell their stories. Once we hear the voice of a woman through her own words and can picture her in her pulpit, then we have ears to hear her argument in favor of women preaching. Just as the women are different, so too are their arguments.

In the first excerpt, a woman who has been preaching in the Methodist Church for nearly fifteen years, described by Willard as “so eloquent that I have seen doctors of divinity and theological professors deeply moved by her sermons, a woman who always takes a text and stands in the pulpit, pleading as a mother with her children,” appeals to a woman’s motherly nature and argues that she can be both preacher and mother without one suffering neglect:

I have felt that the Lord did not wish me to make any defence of my peculiar position, so have never committed my views to writing. You

understand; he sent me out simply as an illustration. So I have gone forth...As for me, I shall go on standing as an unwelcome and unanswerable fact before opposers. And at the end of their profound arguments and fearful prophesying, I will still point to my five blessed boys, and meekly inquire, 'Have they gone to ruin?'"⁴⁹⁸

A woman who is an ordained and settled pastor of the Congregational church, who Willard reports "spoke one Sunday years ago, when the minister of her own church was absent, and has gone on ever since, the church has steadily grown not only in spirituality, but in numbers and material resources" argues that it is a woman's ethical right to preach:

I am not giving to argument on this question, believing in works much more than words. As a question in ethics, I see no controversy. It is surely right for a messenger to give a message of truth.⁴⁹⁹

A pastor in the Universalist Church (which accords women full ordination, and has a number of eminently successful women in charge of large and growing parishes)⁵⁰⁰ appeals to Biblical authority and then to a woman's natural gifts for ministry:

The strongest argument in favor of a woman ministry is found in woman herself, in her sympathetic and intuitional nature, in her high moral sense, in her deep and fervent religious spirit ... I do not mean every woman is qualified for the work any more than every man; I only contend that there are women who are particularly adapted to it, and that in the gifts and graces of a woman's nature there is that which so qualifies her for this work that the synod or council that forbids her entrance upon it is acting in opposition to the higher power that ordains through gifts of mind and character, and through deep spiritual aspirations, certain women to this divine work.⁵⁰¹

This Universalist preacher argues for recognition of call based not on gender but equality; furthermore she challenges the council that denies women who are given the gifts and

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 96.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 97. Several women have been ordained by councils, not acting with denominational authority, but independently, especially Congregationalists and Baptists.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

graces of ministry that they are actually acting against the higher divine power that calls and ordains certain women to the work of preaching ministry.

A Quaker preacheress, who believes in this radical inclusivity of call, points to women missionaries, with the hope that their example can “dispel the prejudice against women’s preaching.” A second pastor from the Methodist Church relies on her personal experience of pastoral work to present the efficacy argument, claiming that during the time of her pastorate, the church went from being virtually dead to being spiritually alive, with significant increases in attendance: “A two weeks’ revival service resulted in twenty-two conversions.”

Willard quotes the National Superintendent of the Evangelistic Work in the WCTU, who makes an appeal to the need of the church to have women in office and argues to end the debate:

You ask for my view of woman as preacher and pastor, and why? I believe the day is past for an argument to prove her fitness for the work. Much of the best pastoral work of the churches has been done by the women of the church for many years ... I do believe that a woman pastorate is absolutely needed by the church—a pastorate endowed with all the powers of that high office.⁵⁰²

Mrs. Catherine Booth, Joint-chief of the Salvation Army confronts the “trammels of custom, the force of prejudice, and one-sided interpretations of Scripture” which have “excluded her from this sphere.” She counters the “unnatural and unfeminine” claim with a reasoned argument that ministry is a woman’s nature:

God has given to woman a graceful form and attitude, winning manners, persuasive speech, and, above all, a finely tones, emotional nature, all of which appear to us eminent natural qualifications for public speaking ... we have numerous instances of her retaining all that is most esteemed in her sex, and faithfully discharging the duties peculiar to her own sphere,

⁵⁰² Ibid., 102.

and at the same time taking her place with many of our most useful speaker and writers.

Booth argues that preaching is not only suited to women's nature, but is her God-given right:

Why should woman be confined exclusively to the kitchen and the distaff, any more than man to the field and workshop? Did not God, and has not nature assigned to man his sphere of labor 'to till the ground, and to dress it'? And if exemption is claimed from this kind of toil for a portion of the male sex, on the ground of their possessing ability for intellectual and moral pursuits, we must be allowed to claim the same privilege for women.⁵⁰³

Phoebe Palmer, a leader of holiness prayer meetings, appeals to the truth and authority of the Bible and to the church's historical witness:

The Scriptural idea of the terms preach and prophesy stands so inseparably connected as one and the same thing that we should find it difficult to get away from the fact that women did preach, or, in other words, prophesy, in the early ages of Christianity, and have continued to do so down to the present time ...⁵⁰⁴

A Presbyterian layperson offers this Scriptural exegesis that supports women assuming her God-given role as moral guide from the pulpit:

Men have interpreted and preached and women have silently acquiesced, and have taken the place assigned to them from the pulpit, where the situation has not been rightly apprehended. From the third chapter of Genesis we understand that creation ceases when woman was made, leaving her in the ascending scale nearer to God in her gifts than the rest, and so fitted to be the moral guide of the race.⁵⁰⁵

Finally, Willard allows a female preacher whom she identifies simply as "one of the best known preachers in the United States, who has been preaching for fifteen years," to make a theological and ethical argument, and call women to action:

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., 107.

Shall women preach? Certainly, if God calls them to preach. He cannot make a mistake. If the existing social order is not in harmony with the divine plan, it will have to be subverted . . . Through false Biblical interpretation, the prejudices of the majority of the Lord's servants will bristle in woman's path like an *abatis*; and she will learn that she cannot argue down a prejudice. She may well take the advice of good, wise old Sojourner Truth: 'What's de use o' makin' such a fuss about yer rights? Why dun ye jes' go 'long an' take 'em?'"⁵⁰⁶

Here, this preacher asks the question ("Shall women preach?"); answers the question ("Certainly, if God calls them to preach. He cannot make a mistake. If the existing social order is not in harmony with the divine plan, it will have to be subverted"); and finally, calls the question ("She may well take the advice of good, wise old Sojourner Truth: 'What's de use o' makin' such a fuss about yer rights? Why dun ye jes' go 'long an' take 'em?'").

This is only a snapshot of the volume of testimonials Willard employs—they take up a full eighteen pages of her book. These quotes only hint at the powerful experience of reading woman after woman justify her presence in the pulpit. The number of women—not to mention their arguments—hold rhetorical weight and the power to convince the reader of the legitimacy of women's ordination.

Willard's audience was public, especially those wrestling with the question of women preachers. Her purpose was to convince readers of the legitimacy of women preaching and ultimately change women's place in church. Her voice of a neutral reporter was strategic. Her method was to ask the question, "what do you have to say for yourselves as female preachers?" and then simply allow a vast array of female preachers, in their own words, to engage the question of women preaching, based on their own

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 109-10. Note: an "abatis" is an obstacle constructed from tree branches laid in a row, with the sharpened tops directed outwards, toward the enemy. Abatis were used through the Civil War, after which time, they were replaced by barbed-wire fencing.

defense, with different appeals to authority. The multitude of voices provides different approaches and a unified chorus affirming women's preaching; throughout, we hear a distinct descant of calling the question and ending the debate of a moot point. The excerpts chosen by Willard were to show the "consensus of opinion among ministers" concerning the question of women preachers. The portions of testimonials provided herein represent a diversity of appeals within a consensus of thought. They all affirmed women preachers, in theory and in practice, but based on different authorities—from women's nature and gifts, to the witness of the Bible and the need of the church. The order in which Willard presented the testimonials is rhetorically significant: beginning with those who did not want to make arguments and building up to those who were seasoned rhetors and were not afraid to speak up and out—and call all women to do the same.

Willard explains that her motivation for writing *Woman in the Pulpit* was three-fold. One, she wrote this book because she personally felt the disappointment when her own call to pastoral ministry was not recognized by the church as an authentic call:

But even my dear old mother-church (the Methodist) did not call women to her altars. I was too timid to go without a call; and so it came about that while my unconstrained preference would long ago have led me to the pastorate, I have failed of it, and am perhaps writing out all the more earnestly for this reason thoughts long familiar to my mind.

Two, in her book, she pleads with women who feel a call to preach that it is incumbent upon them to seek theological training and ordination in order to answer their call:

Let me, as a loyal daughter of the church, urge upon younger women who feel a call, as I once did, to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, their duty to seek admission to the doors that would hardly close against them now, in any theological seminary, save those of the Roman, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches ...

Third, she wrote the book as an appeal to all Christian people to persuade women who are called ('whose heart God has touched') to pursue the preaching ministry, which she tactically describes with suitable words such as 'gentle,' 'heal,' and 'comfort.'

... let me pleadingly beseech all Christian people who grieve over the world's great heartache, to encourage every true and capable woman, whose heart God has touched, in her wistful purpose of entering upon that blessed Gospel ministry, through which her strong yet gentle words and work may help to heal that heartache, and to comfort the sinful and the sad "as one whom his mother comforteth."⁵⁰⁷

Summary

In both books, *How To Win: A Book for Girls* and *Woman in the Pulpit*, Willard makes three rhetorically significant contributions: she names and wrestles with the question of women's inner call and the church's outer call to preach; she answers the question of women preaching by appeals to authority; finally, she 'calls the question' (argues for the end of the debate) of women preaching and summons women to answer their calls and preach.

First, she brings to light the unspoken question, "Shall women preach?" by naming the problem—"women have been circumscribed" (*A Book for Girls*), and then allowing women preachers to respond to the question: "What have these women to say for themselves, who, in the face of so much prejudice (i.e., their cases being not judged on their merits, but *pre-judged*), have gone forward as ministers of Christ?" (*Woman in the Pulpit*).

Secondly, she answers the question of women preaching by reframing it into the language of call. In *A Book for Girls*, she primarily attends to the inner call: "Ours is

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 62.

high and sacred calling ... let us love God and humanity; so shall we be Christ's disciples and so shall we safely follow on to know that work whereunto we have been called." In *Woman in the Pulpit*, she attends to the outer call of women to preach—where the inner call has been both affirmed and opposed, but most importantly, embodied and practiced ("First, a woman who has been preaching in the Methodist Church for nearly fifteen years ...").

Finally, she calls the question to end the debate on women's place in the pulpit. For the girls, Willard calls upon the biblical heroine Miriam to sound the battle cry: "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." With such strong imagery, girls can see themselves as part of God's army, protected from the societal weapons of prejudice and custom; therefore, they can go forward to realize their calls to serve and to speak. For women who are called to preach, Willard ends with the warning that: "she will learn that she cannot argue down a prejudice." Instead, the call becomes a battle cry sounded by Sojourner Truth, who says, "just take the right to preach."

Conclusion

Frances Willard lived in a time when the "woman question" was predominately answered with social convention of domesticity and ecclesial restrictions on the role of women in church. Believing that men and women should have equal opportunity to answer their calls, Willard challenged the gendered nature of the dominant narrative of call. While she could not become a preacher, she used the power of her public platform to help women gain access to the pulpit and the ecclesial endorsement of their inward call to preach. With rhetorical finesse and tactical skill, she interrupted the authoritative

masculine call narrative with a public rhetoric that re-interpreted social mores and women's roles, re-inhabited conventional tropes such as the "cult of domesticity," and re-scripted call narratives. She claimed a place and a voice for women in the nineteenth century public and pulpit platforms, and beyond.

CHAPTER V

LOUISA MARIAH WOOSLEY

*It is an established fact that the women of the apostolic age did preach, and the Scriptures sustain her as a preacher, no matter what women-gaggers may say... To all who have studied the Bible, and have no pet theory to support, this truth is as clear as a sunbeam.*⁵⁰⁸

~Louisa M. Woosley, *Shall Women Preach? Or The Question Answered*

Introduction

Born on March 24, 1862 in Millwood, Grayson County, Kentucky—Louisa Mariah Layman lived in the center of the Great Revival of American frontier Christian evangelism. She was raised to assume an uneducated domestic role in the private sphere of the home. Her parents did not stress secular education as much as Christian faith informed by the Baptist church where her father served as clerk. Louisa Layman’s faith was built upon the foundation of American evangelical Protestantism of the nineteenth century, which espoused three essential aspects of faith: a personal experience of spiritual conversion and assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ; the ultimate authority of the Bible; and the call to evangelize and spread the gospel.

At the age of twelve, Louisa had an experience of conversion: she was “led by the Spirit to seek the atoning merits of Christ’s blood.”⁵⁰⁹ In response, she offered her sins as a sacrifice, and prayed that God would pardon her sin and wash away her guilt. She found a peace with God that comes with the assurance of salvation. Having had a

⁵⁰⁸ Louisa M. Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered* (Memphis, Tenn.: Frontier Press : Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Board of Christian Education, 1989), 70. Originally published by Louisa Woosley in 1891 in Caneyville, KY.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

conversion experience, her faith was confirmed as authentic by her family and her church, and she assumed that she would live out her days as a faithful member of the church. But, sometimes the Spirit moves, not where we want, but where it wills. In Louisa Layman's case, the Spirit moved in such a way as to call her to ministry.

Not long after her conversion, Louisa felt a sense of urgency to work for God in bringing others to faith in Christ through the public proclamation of the gospel, but wrestled with her ability to answer such a call: "Not having so much as ever heard of a lady preacher, and knowing that there would be much opposition, I tried to persuade myself that it was not right for women to preach. I was uneducated and many obstacles were in the way; and to say the least of it, the struggle was a hard one."⁵¹⁰ Layman was called to preach at a time when the question of Christian call to ministry was subject to the competing authorities of Spirit, Church, and Bible. Because she was a woman, her call to ministry was scrutinized more than a man's call would have been.

Spirit

Revival altered the contours of the religious landscape of America. Within the first century of settlement, it became clear that many immigrants came to the new world more for material gain than for religious freedom. This spiritual and ecclesial apathy was seen by some as a travesty, but by others as an opportunity for revival. The Great Awakening, a Christian revitalization movement that swept across the American colonies, especially in the 1730s and 40s, stressed spiritual conversion and personal introspection more than ritual and ceremony. This Protestant revival movement not only changed individuals, but also reshaped churches, including: Congregational, Reformed,

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

and Presbyterian. Like a century before, the conditions were ripe for another Great Awakening. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, frontier missionaries and preachers with evangelical zeal sparked another movement, named the Great Revival. Passionate preachers sought to rekindle the spiritual and ecclesial fires through revivals, during which “backslidden Christians will be brought to repentance ... Christians will have their faith renewed ... the churches are thus awakened and reformed.”⁵¹¹ Revivalists identified the Holy Spirit as the principle means by which revival and repentance are possible; they also preached that the divine outpourings of the Holy Spirit could fall on anyone—without regard to church membership, class, race, or gender. Caught up in revival fervor, men as well as women could be found praying and preaching in public gatherings.

Church

By the middle of the nineteenth century, spiritual revivalism was being managed and controlled by religious institutionalism. Revival religion was no longer driven by the Holy Spirit and evangelical preaching; instead religion was “firmly institutionalized as a manager and interpreter of the Kingdom of God.”⁵¹² The focus of preaching changed from a great emotional force to convert unsaved souls on the frontier; it began seeking to establish church members and build congregations. By the 1850s, “the clergy had become a profession, a coherent, self-conscious occupational body, organized and defined by a set of institutions which were outside lay or public control, which controlled the special learning needed to become a clergyman, and which possessed the power to

⁵¹¹ Baker, ed. *Religion in America: Primary Sources in U.S. History*, 138.

⁵¹² Thomas, ed. *Women in New Worlds*, 79.

determine who could enter the clerical ranks.”⁵¹³ The institutional authority controlling the clerical ranks was the church. Concern for ‘decency and order’ replaced the free spirit of revivals. The call that could be received by anyone touched by the Spirit was now limited to men who had been properly trained and thoroughly examined. To the eyes of mainline ministers,” reports historian Catherine Brekus in *Strangers and Pilgrims*, “female preaching resembled a contagious disease: it spread from denomination to denomination instead of staying confined to a few countercultural sects.”⁵¹⁴ Female preaching was seen as a “contagious disease” that had to be controlled and managed; and the institutional church became the controller of call and the manager of clergy.

Bible

Louisa Layman lived at a time when religion was changing from revival to institution, but the Bible remained the central authority in the Protestant church in America. During the Revolutionary War, England cut off the shipment of books in general, and in particular, Bibles. Further, the colonists were forbidden from printing Bibles. In 1783, Congress approved the Robert Aitken Bible (a copy of the King James version) to be the first English language religious book printed in the new nation. To the new republic, the Bible was a symbol of independence from England, as well as the freedom to worship without government control.⁵¹⁵ The American Bible Society was formed in 1816, with the goal of supplying a Bible to every household in the United States. By the 1860s, the Society, driven by their belief in the importance of the Bible in

⁵¹³ Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession : The New England Ministry, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 12.

⁵¹⁴ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 277.

⁵¹⁵ See Baker, ed. *Religion in America: Primary Sources in U.S. History*.

American culture, was regularly printing and distributing over one million volumes a year.⁵¹⁶

For both sides of the nineteenth-century religious tug-of-war, the Bible was the source of authority. The question was in its interpretation. For revivalists, the Bible was interpreted by the Spirit, who spoke powerfully to the preacher and personally to each and every individual. The revivals reflected the democratization of religion, in which the Spirit spoke differently to each individual. For the institutionalist, however, the church was the authoritative interpreter of the Bible. In nineteenth-century America, the Bible, as the central authority in the Protestant church, was used to keep women in their domestic place and out of the pulpit. Women who were called to preach in church pulpits needed to employ a biblical strategy in order for the church to recognize their inward calls as outward calls with full endorsement. And that is just what Louisa Layman Woosley did.

Call to Preach the Gospel: Shall Women Preach?

Louisa M. Layman Woosely was called to preach at a time in which the formation of Christian faith was played out in the theatres of frontier revival, institutionalization, and biblical interpretation. As the nineteenth century progressed, the question of the call to preach was subject to the competing authorities of Spirit, Church, and Bible. What began as a personal question of her own divine call became a prophetic witness and a communal summons for all women to claim their call to preach. Through her preaching and writing, she left a record of persuasive prophetic rhetoric that answered the question

⁵¹⁶ Paul C. Gutjahr, *An American Bible : A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 34-5. For more information on history of American Bible Society, see <http://www.americanbible.org/about/history>

of “Shall women preach?” positively and persuasively. Her call narrative interrupted the dominant narrative of the day with an alternative interpretation of the Bible in the form of a testimony. Cognizant of the authorities of Spirit, Church, and Bible, Woosley sought to claim her call to preach by writing a call narrative that employed the three essential tenets of Evangelical Protestantism: personal experience of spiritual conversion and assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ; the ultimate authority of the Bible; and the call to evangelize and spread the gospel.

Revival Spirit: Woosley’s Personal Experience of Divine Call

Revival Spirit

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the spirit of evangelical fervor swept through the southern states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. As Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist ministers followed the settlers westward, they preached emotional sermons to convert souls on the frontier; in so doing, they sparked the innovation of a new form of worship: the outdoor camp meeting. The first camp meeting took place at Gasper River, Kentucky in 1800 under the leadership of James Presbyterian minister James McGready (1763-1817).⁵¹⁷ McGready brought the zeal of revival to the frontier. Known as a fiery preacher, he “filled his congregation with the fear of eternal damnation unless they experienced a spiritual rebirth.”⁵¹⁸ McGready himself learned the importance of a conversion experience, in order to answer the call to

⁵¹⁷ Kimberly Bracken Long, *The Eucharistic Theology of the American Holy Fairs*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 64-5.

⁵¹⁸ John E. Kleber and Kentucky Bicentennial Commission., *The Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 597.

discipleship, and especially the call to preach. Licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Redstone, Pennsylvania in 1788, McGready traveled to Kentucky, where he served three Logan County congregations and led spiritual revivals. The highpoint of the Kentucky revivals was the Cane Ridge Revival in Bourbon County, in which “over ten thousand worshippers caught up in experiences, over a six-day period, inaugurated the Great Revival.”⁵¹⁹ McGready, along with other local pastors Barton Stone, Matthew Houston, and Richard McNemar, exhorted conviction of sin and conversion of heart.

In 1801, thousands of Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians all gathered in Cane Ridge, Kentucky for a tent-meeting revival: to hear the gospel preached with great emotion and to respond with renewed spirit and commitment. Some people sang and prayed; others cried for mercy. Many heard the call to conversion; some even heard the call to ministry. The Cane Ridge Revival converted sinners and called preachers individually and corporately as well; it gave birth to the Holiness Movement and the Restoration Movement, which formalized the Disciples of Christ, the Church of Christ, and the Evangelical Christian Church in Canada. This landmark event had lasting effects: it ignited the explosion of evangelical religion, which spread into nearly every aspect of American life and transformed the religious landscape of the country.

While McGready’s preaching style contained emotional force, his sermons were grounded in reformed theology. In *The Eucharistic Theology of the American Holy Fairs*, Kimberly Long notes that McGready’s “use of biblical language and allusions shows a broad knowledge of Scripture, and the construction of his sermons reflects an

⁵¹⁹ James D. Smith, III, “James McGready, 1797 Revivalist,” Kentucky Biographical Notebook, *The Filson Club History Quarterly*, 71:4 (October 1997), 463.

intellectual integrity.”⁵²⁰ His sermons reflected the missional theology of “New Side” Calvinism, seeking to redeem the evils of society through the power of the redemption of converted sinners. Through revivalist preachers like McGready, “all were called to experience the ‘new birth,’ accepting the good news of Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross for human sin, securing salvation by grace for those who would repent and believe.”⁵²¹ McGready and the other Cane Ridge preachers called all to this ‘new birth’ of conversion and discipleship. Richard McNemar remarked on the spiritual unity of the revival, noting that “neither distinction as to age, sex, color, or anything or a temporary nature: old and young, male and female, black and white had equal privilege to minister the light which they received.”⁵²² Believing that all those called had ‘equal privilege to minister the light,’ McGready joined other ministers in defending the actions of Cumberland Presbytery who licensed readers and exhorters with no formal education to preach to the frontier churches formed by revivals, but lacking ministers. McGready insisted that young men who possessed extraordinary talent were needed in these extraordinary circumstances.⁵²³ Those who experienced a personal conversion and a call to ministry were not only acceptable to McGready, they were needed to preach the gospel and save souls. James McGready and the other revivalists planted seeds of revival that continued to bear fruit for years to come, in the form of call: to conversion and to preach.

The Presbyterian Church of the Cumberland Presbytery had been licensing uneducated laymen to preach until a Synod of Kentucky commission prohibited the

⁵²⁰ Long, *The Eucharistic Theology of the American Holy Fairs*, 66.

⁵²¹ James Smith, 465.

⁵²² Smith, 466.

⁵²³ Douglas A. Foster, “The Springfield and Cumberland Presbyteries: Conflict and Secession in the Old Southwest,” *Restoration Quarterly* 32:3 (Abilene Christian University, 1990).

http://www.acu.edu/sponsored/restoration_quarterly/archives/1990s/vol_32_no_3_contents/foster.html accessed September 30, 2013.

practice in 1805. When revivalist ministers objected, insisting that some laypeople experiencing a call were needed and were gifted to preach, they were suspended and the Cumberland Presbytery was dissolved. McGready moved out of the Cumberland area when it looked like schism would result—which it did in 1810—forming three separate churches: the “Christian Church” of Barton Stone, the Shaker declension led by Richard McNemur, and the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Finis Ewing.⁵²⁴

While some people pointed to the dramatic success of the revivals in saving souls, others revealed the revivals’ shadow side. According to historian Bernard A. Weisberger, “The Great Awakening had, after all, split the Presbyterian Church . . . It had weakened the steady habits and good order which made religion a social cement;” therefore, some concluded, “There was something fundamentally dangerous about this movement, something that made for upheaval, uprooting good and bad alike.”⁵²⁵ Presbyterian turned Congregationalist-preacher Charles Finney’s new measures had been utilized in the revivals, successfully bringing sinners—men and women alike—into the Christian fold. However, some feared that Finney had opened a “Pandora’s box of female radicalism.” It was further predicted that “Whoever introduces the practice of female praying in promiscuous assemblies, will ere long find, to his sorrow, that he has made an inlet to other innovations.”⁵²⁶ Presbyterians of the Old School feared such female innovations, while those of the New School supported them. In response to the Revival spirit, the church answered with more formality and order; and women called to preach sought to do so with or without ordination.

⁵²⁴ James Smith, 467.

⁵²⁵ Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River; the Story of the Great Revivalists and Their Impact Upon Religion in America*, [1st ed. (Boston,: Little, 1958), 60.

⁵²⁶ Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845*, 276.

Call to Preach (Inward Call)

As a young woman, Louisa Layman experienced a divine call to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ through the public proclamation of the gospel: “I was impressed to labor in the vineyard of the Lord, seeing the harvest was truly plenteous and the laborers few.” But, she doubted her ability to answer such a call. She writes of her struggle:

But feeling my inabilities, I was made to inquire, who is sufficient for these things? In this I found no relief and felt to excuse myself on the ground that I was too young. Not having so much as ever heard of a lady preacher, and knowing that there would be much opposition, I tried to persuade myself that it was not right for women to preach. I was uneducated and many obstacles were in the way; and to say the least of it, the struggle was a hard one. Thus I passed my girlhood days.⁵²⁷

Despite the clarity of her call to “labor in the vineyard of the Lord,” she cited all the reasons why she could not answer the call: she was young, uneducated, and a woman. Given that she had never heard of a “lady preacher” and realized the weight of opposition she would face, she tried to convince herself that it was not right for a woman to preach.

Following the traditional path of least resistance, Louisa Layman married Curtis G. Woosley, a farmer from Caneyville, Kentucky on February 20, 1879. She assumed the duties of a wife, all the while trying to relieve the persistent calling she heard by trying to get *her husband* to respond to the call to preach. But, he would not do so because he was not called to preach. Thus, she had to find a way to reconcile *herself* with the call. She turned to the place where, she had been reared to believe, all truth resides: the Bible. In the fall of 1882, she began reading in Genesis and proceeded to mark all the places where a woman was mentioned, hoping to prove the futility of her call. She ended her quest in the summer of 1883 with the *Amen* of Revelation. Instead of proving that women could not preach, “I was now convinced of the fact that God, being no respecter

⁵²⁷ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 96.

of persons, had not overlooked the woman, but that he had a great work for them to do.” She was convinced that she had to preach; in fact, she uttered the prophet’s cry: “Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel.”⁵²⁸

Louisa M. Woosley sensed a divine call to ministry, but did not believe that women could preach—that is, until she read through the entire Bible. Woosley was not formally educated, but rather formed in her Baptist Kentucky home in the way of Bible study and prayer. Once convinced that women’s call and role in ministry were proven authentic by the word of God, Woosley accepted her call and began to preach. Even though armed with the Biblical justification of her call, Woosley did not find the relief she sought; instead, she experienced great suffering. She endured doubt and despair and even depression to the point of not wanting to live. In prayer, she promised to work for God if her joy was restored. Her answer came in the form of full blessing, such that she could no longer doubt. But, soon the doubts set in again: “The people will not hear me, and I cannot get work to do, and my husband will not be willing to let me go.”⁵²⁹ Despite her efforts to make appeals based on her family’s needs and her own health, her lack of education or eloquence, and her gender, she finally admitted, “God did not excuse me.”⁵³⁰ The call to preach pursued her until, at last, she understood her duty “as clear as a sunbeam” and was ready and willing to accept God’s call to preach. Woosley was ordained in 1889, becoming the first woman to be ordained by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 98.

Institutional Church: Woosley's Endorsed Outward Call

Religion in the 1840s was marked by a movement from revival to institution, from counter-cultural to cultural, from the spirit of revivals to professional decorum, from free will to 'decency and order.' The camp meetings, which began as emotional and ecstatic experiences were eventually "calmed down, domesticated, and organized by rules—camp meeting manuals were even published."⁵³¹ Preaching was no longer focused on saving the souls of thousands of unchurched folk on the frontier; it was directed at attracting church members and establishing settled congregations. Preachers who were called and inspired to preach by the Holy Spirit now had to be trained in theological institutions and ordained by the church. Churches that had previously supported women preaching in some form now withdrew their support, while some even denied they had ever permitted it.

Oberlin: Frontier Faith Meets Institutional Theological Education

Revival religion, in the hands of preacher Charles Finney, had the power to preach a personal message to everyone present. But, revival religion in the hands of the institution had even more power. Institutionalized religion canonized the cultural virtues of 'decency and order' into a powerful force against women's ability to engage in public speaking of any kind, especially preaching. As a revivalist preacher in New York, Charles Finney strongly encouraged women to speak, but after he took a teaching position at Oberlin Institution, his position moved from public exhortation, then to careful silence, and finally to restrictions on women's public speaking.

⁵³¹ Kenneth Keulman, *Critical Moments in Religious History* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1993), 135.

Since November of 1833, Oberlin had been the first college to open its doors to women and black students—thus establishing Oberlin as a place of great social reform (that would include abolition, temperance, and mission). Even though Oberlin’s public image was of a co-educational progressive school for men and women alike, in reality, women were not afforded the same intellectual freedoms as men. “Like many other nineteenth-century radicalisms, however, Oberlin’s progressive patina overlaid a deep and often pessimistic conservatism.”⁵³² Female students found themselves in a struggle over women’s place within society and the church. It soon became evident that Oberlin had no intention of training women as public speakers. Female students like Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown repeatedly faced restrictions on their participation in classes and events, especially those with any aspect of public speaking. In theory, Oberlin was a progressive institution of co-education, but in practice, it promoted a more conventional educational goal for female students:

Oberlin’s attitude was that women’s high calling was to be the mothers of the race, and they should stay within that special sphere . . . If women became lawyers, ministers, physicians, lecturers, politicians or any sort of “public characters” the home would suffer from neglect. . . Washing the men’s clothing, caring for their rooms, serving them at table, listening to their orations, but, themselves remaining respectfully silent in public assemblages, the Oberlin “coeds” were being prepared for intelligent motherhood and a properly subservient wifehood.”⁵³³

Female students in coeducational classrooms found that their college degrees were really intended to make them more effective wives for Oberlin theological students, not intellectual or learned individuals. Antoinette Brown enrolled in the college’s graduate theological studies program in 1847, but she was not permitted to graduate. Oberlin’s

⁵³² Steven E. Woodworth, *The Human Tradition in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, *The Human Tradition in America* ; (Wilmington, Del.: SR Books, 2000), 159.

⁵³³ Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College from Its Foundation through the Civil War* (Oberlin, O.: Oberlin college, 1943), 292.

contradiction between public and private support of women's rights surprised one female student, who noted: "I was never in a place where women are so rigidly taught that they must not speak in public."

Antoinette Brown's Biblical Defense of Women Preaching

Women who were called to preach in church pulpits needed to employ a biblical strategy in order for the church to recognize their inner calls as outer calls with full endorsement. While some anchored their claim of the right to preach in the numerous examples found in the Bible (e.g. Deborah, Miriam, Esther, and Mary), others took on Paul's prescriptions found in his first letter to the church at Corinth.⁵³⁴ It was commonly understood that the Pauline text was decisive for universal prohibition of women preaching and ordination: *Let your women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto them to speak ... for it is a shame for women to speak in the church* (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). In order to challenge the traditional interpretation of this and other Scriptural texts, Antoinette Brown utilized her educational tools in order to re-interpret the Biblical text with finesse and authority.

Despite the gender restrictions at Oberlin, Brown's coursework would prove critical in formulating the justification for her ordination. In particular, one class assigned a paper on the Pauline passages that prohibit women's ability to speak in church. What might have appeared as an obstacle to her ambitions ultimately helped her clarify her own position. To overcome the presumed restriction, she had to deploy the

⁵³⁴ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness : From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-Seventy*, Women and History ; (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Lerner argues that women did not begin to confront patriarchy and challenge traditional Biblical interpretations in the 19th century, but that the development of women's feminist consciousness took place in different stages and over hundreds of years.

tools she had learned at Oberlin to de-construct the passages' traditional interpretation and critically transform it into one that would justify women's official entrance into the pulpit. Brown argued for a distinct analysis. In her critical textual analysis of this text, she noted that the Greek word *lalein* is commonly translated "to speak." She argued that in classical Greek, *lalein* actually means "to talk, to chatter, to babble, strictly to make a babbling, prattling sound."⁵³⁵ So, she interpreted this passage to say that women should not chatter or babble; it did not prohibit women from speaking entirely. Further, she argued that Paul was setting a standard of 'decency and order' for the edification of the church. As long as women could meet the standard—through education and training, so as not to "babble"—then they were qualified to speak in church. Thus, Brown arrived at an authoritative interpretation that effectively expanded women's proper place to include the pulpit, and she made a biblical argument for women's ability to engage in rightly ordered sacred speech.

Brown's rhetorical strategy provided a new way of reading the Pauline texts, with the prescriptions not against women preaching, but against institutions where the education of women is not done decently and in order. Whether he was convinced of her argument or not, Professor Charles Finney thought that her paper merited publication and chose to include it in the July 1849 issue of the *Oberlin Quarterly Review*.⁵³⁶ Ordination, for Antoinette Brown, was not optional, but rather a pre-condition for women to preach. Her argument eventually won the day, as she was the first woman ordained in the United

⁵³⁵ Antoinette Brown's paper, "Exegesis of I Corinthians, XIV, 34, 35; and I Timothy II, 11, 12," appeared in the *Oberlin Quarterly Review* (July 1849).

⁵³⁶ Antoinette Brown's paper, "Exegesis of I Corinthians, XIV, 34, 35; and I Timothy II, 11, 12," appeared in the *Oberlin Quarterly Review* (July 1849). Zink-Sawyer notes that "ironically, the same issue featured an article by James H. Fairchild, one of the Oberlin professors most opposed to Brown Blackwell's presence in the theological program. Fairchild's essay was titled "Woman's Rights and Duties," in *From Preachers to Suffragists*, 87 n. 29.

States in 1853 by a Congregational Church in South Butler, New York. But, although sound, her argument was still too counter-cultural to convince everyone. Antoinette Brown decided that she would be a minister and utilized her educational skills of Biblical hermeneutics to interpret one controversial verse of Scripture to endorse her position.

By the time Louisa Woosley was struggling with her call, Antoinette Brown had already been ordained. But, it was a long way from New York to Kentucky. Likely, Woosley had never heard of Brown, but even if she had, she could not employ Brown's theological methods in her distinct cultural and ecclesial context. Unlike the Congregational Church with a local polity, Woosley's Cumberland Presbyterian Church was bound to the institutional polity, including ordination policies, which did not prohibit, but had never been interpreted to include women preachers. In contrast to Brown, Woosley sensed a divine call to ministry, but did not believe women could preach—that is, until she read through the entire Bible. Once convinced that women's call and role in ministry were proven authentic by the word of God, Woosley accepted her call and began to preach. Like Brown, Woosley addressed the “much-disputed question of the ordination of women” with a Biblical defense. But—even though persuasive—Brown's defense did not set a precedent nor unlock the pulpit for women to preach. Ultimately what worked for both Antoinette Brown and Louisa Woosley was a local church hearing them preach and experiencing first-hand their gifts and affirming their call.

Outward Call: License and Ordination to Preach

On January 1, 1887, Louisa M. Woosely was called upon by the elders of the Macedonia Cumberland Presbyterian Church, to conduct worship services in the pastor's

absence. Whether or not the church thought she could preach or that she knew her Bible from Genesis to Revelation, Louisa Woosley does not say—all we know is that the church called her to preach. While tempted to make excuses, she remembered her promise to God and accepted the invitation to preach. She reflects on her experience of and reactions to her preaching:

By the help of God I will do the best I can. And for the first time in life I went to the sacred desk and opened my mouth for God, Oh, that was a precious hour ... I felt that the days of darkness were past, and that God's approval rested upon my labors. But alas! This state of things did not last long. The fire of opposition began to burn. A cloud arose, and the winds of adversity began to blow, and the waves of criticism beat against me. Friends of former days were now foes. Even my father turned his back on me."... To-day, my sky is clear, the storm has abated, and my God on the waves is walking; the winds he holds in his hands, his voice like music I hear as it falls in accents so sweet on my soul, saying, "Peace, be still. Fear not, for I am with thee." ⁵³⁷

Here, Woosley recounts the circular journey of following God's call to preach: first, the joy she felt in preaching God's word; then opposition and adversity from critics and even friends and family; and finally, the reassurance of God's presence in this call. Reassured, she would accept another invitation to preach, feel the sense of joy in doing what she is called to do, only to be challenged again. As she pursued her call to the preaching ministry of the church, her steps would follow in the way of female evangelical ministers of the nineteenth century on this circular journey of joy, opposition, and reassurance.

In the fall of 1887, Louisa Woosley was received as a candidate for ordained ministry by the Nolin Presbytery of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and in November 1888 she was licensed to preach the gospel. A year later, she was ordained by the Nolin Presbytery, thus distinguishing her as the first woman of the Presbyterian Church to be given full authority for the work of gospel ministry. Although Woosley's

⁵³⁷ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 99.

ordination seemed to go against the cultural norms of the day, it was consistent with the history and theology of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. With a high theology of the sovereignty of God, the Church believed that God called whomever God wanted into ministry. Historically, the Church placed a high value on the inner “secret” call to ministry. As Woosley scholar Mary Linnie Hudson explains, “In other words, the church could not do or undo the will of God which set a person apart for ministry. The church’s responsibility was to affirm what God was doing and offer itself as an instrument for the Spirit’s work in ordaining a person for ministry.”⁵³⁸ Woosley’s ordination in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church was, theologically and historically, in good order. Woosley’s inward experience of God’s call was understood as ordained by God, even if ever denied access to the institutional rights of ordination within the church. Reflecting nineteenth-century American religion, in time, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church institutionalized call—giving less credence to divine inward call and more authority to ecclesial outward call.

Preaching Ministry

Despite her official qualifications, no invitations to preach within the walls of the church were forthcoming, effectively denying Louisa Woosley access to the institutional rights of her ordination. Therefore, she became engaged in the work of pastoral itinerant ministry outside the church walls. “The first summer I preached out-of-doors, in the open air, and in school-houses, but God blessed my labors.” Woosley met with early success as an evangelist: she preached hundreds of sermons, converted thousands to the faith,

⁵³⁸ Mary Linnie Hudson, “Shall Women Preach? Or The Question Answered: The Ministry of Louisa M. Woosley in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1887-1992,” Doctoral Dissertation (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 1992), 95.

and hundreds to membership in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.⁵³⁹ Perhaps the effectiveness of her preaching leading to the conversion of souls became public. Then things began to change. “At first I got no calls from my own people, but now they come from every quarter, and it is impossible for me to respond to one-tenth of the calls I receive. I can say truly God has opened for me an effectual door”⁵⁴⁰ Not only were the church doors opened for her preaching, but when she preached, the doors of the listeners’ hearts were irresistibly opened and transformed.

Despite the effectiveness of Woosley’s preaching—or perhaps because of it—opposition to her ordination became more vocal and intense. Whether or not the doors were open or shut to Louisa Woosley and her preaching, she fully expected to conquer resistance with God’s help. She writes: “With Paul I can say, ‘As much as in me is, I am now ready to preach the gospel to others ... From henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus ... For with God there is no respecter of persons, neither male nor female in Christ.’”⁵⁴¹ Woosley was ready to preach the gospel. She believed that God’s call was not divided by gender; in Christ, there was no male or female. Perhaps this was true theologically, but not ecclesially. Woosley would soon realize that the essence of the church’s debate over the authenticity of the call to preach was based, not on the theological integrity of God’s “secret call,” but on the gender of the one called.

⁵³⁹ Hudson, 91.

⁵⁴⁰ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 100. Effectual calling, from the five points of Calvinism, similar to irresistible grace, is by definition, efficacious. Those who are called by God must respond by allowing their inner heart to be transformed so outer practices can follow.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Call Questioned; Ordination Challenged

In 1893, The Kentucky Synod of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church refused to recognize the ordination of Louisa Woosley. The Judicatory Committee of the General Assembly was to decide whether or not the Nolin Presbytery could be instructed to remove Louisa Woosley's name from their rolls. While Woosley's status was being decided, the broader question that spurred debate was whether or not any woman's call to preach should be authorized with a church office of elder or preacher; that is, should women have ordination?

In *Women as Preachers and Elders: Shall They Exercise These Functions?*, B.G. Mitchell and H.H. Buquo took up the question. In the debates, both men agreed on the authority of the Bible: "In the settlement of this question our only and final appeal must be to the Scriptures. Much may be said about the 'changed condition of things,' the 'age of progress,' etc., yet these things cannot settle the question as to a woman's teaching and official place in the Church. The Scriptures, honestly interpreted, must decide."⁵⁴² However, they both admitted to the lack of clarity of the Scriptures. Thus, conflict arose over whose reading is honest and must decide the position of the church in regards to women's ordination.

Both Mitchell and Buquo agreed that the reading of 1 Corinthians 14:34 is inconclusive. Mitchell wrote: "If a fair, candid interpretation of Paul demanded woman's silence, this should be done, and it would be done. But we have seen his language does not demand it." Buquo wrote: "I do not pretend to know just what Paul did intend to teach on the subject under consideration ... But ... I do not believe that

⁵⁴² B. G. Mitchell and H. H. Buquo, *Women as Preachers and Elders : Shall They Exercise These Functions?* (Nashville, Tenn.: Cumberland Presbyterian, 1893), 3.

what Paul said about the silence of women was intended in a general sense.⁵⁴³ And so, without a conclusive Scriptural mandate, they appealed to two distinct authorities: tradition and progress. According to Mitchell, “Little more needs to be said as to woman’s place in the church. To say the least, only an extreme interpretation of the Scriptures, an interpretation at war with almost every settled and safe rule of exegesis, could clothe woman with full ecclesiastical power and pastoral oversight.”⁵⁴⁴ The Bible, he claimed is authoritative, but only if the interpretation is “settled and safe” and upholds traditional practices. Buquo, on the other hand, argued from the standpoint of an inclusive theology of call—progress should be encouraged, for the good of the church and the glory of God. He offered his argument in the form of an appeal to Mitchell and others standing in opposition of women’s ordination:

Brethren, let us remove all the obstacles that we legally can remove, and give our women the greatest possible scope to exercise the gifts and powers with which our Lord endowed them, and which he so freely and effectually called into requisition to aid in setting up his kingdom, while sojourning among men, and which he still requires in order that precious souls may be brought into that kingdom to the glory of God.”⁵⁴⁵

In addition to reflecting on the question in theory, Buquo actively engaged the question in practice. To the General Assembly deciding the fate of Woosley’s ordination, Buquo wrote the minority report, arguing: “Justice and the demands of God and the church suggest a recognition of the fitness of woman to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, and such actions should be taken by the Assembly as will encourage and justify ordaining women as ministers.”⁵⁴⁶ Buquo petitioned the General Assembly to not make a final

⁵⁴³ H.H. Buquo in *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁴⁴ B.G. Mitchell in *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-2.

⁵⁴⁶ “Today’s Proceedings,” *Eugene Daily Guard* 6 (22 May 1894): 1, as quoted by Hudson, 55-56.

decision on the ordination of women without first hearing from Louisa Woosley herself and receiving evidence of her successful ministry.

Although Woosley was not given a platform from which to defend her call and her ministry, she was offered the pulpit to preach to the entire Assembly. Interestingly, Woosley did not preach on the woman question, but preached the gospel's call for the church to engage in mission work in the west. Woosley demonstrated conclusively that her call was not about her own rights or status, but rather for the proclamation of the gospel. According to a newspaper account, "it seemed as if the Holy Spirit was present as on no former occasion during the Assembly."⁵⁴⁷

In the end, the General Assembly voted not to recognize Woosley's ordination, but instead to endorse her as a "Lay Evangelist." But, this vote would need to be ratified by the individual presbyteries of the church. Despite the passion and persuasive pleas of Buquo and others to remove the obstacles to women's preaching in the church, the fortification of the wall separating women from ordained ministry continued in earnest. Within presbyteries, debates raged. Those who were against women's ordination, like John Frizzel, in *Woman's Position in the Church*, appealed to tradition, for the sake of tradition, and seeks to quiet those who would want to change the way things are:

I do not believe additional legislation upon this subject at all necessary. I believe the constitution of the church as it now stands, when properly construed, settles the question adversely to the admission of women as ruling elders, but as the General Assembly has submitted the matter for the action of the presbyteries, I hope they will approve the SECOND set of proposed amendments and thus put a quietus forever upon this disturbing question.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ "The Closing Hours," *Eugene Daily Guard* 6 (25 May 1894): 1, as quoted by Hudson, 59.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

If it were up to her, Louisa Woosley would have been content to “put a quietus forever upon this disturbing question” of her preaching. But, that is the point—it was not up to her. Once she confirmed in the Holy Scriptures that women were called by God, she had to accept the call. She was called; she was ordained; she was a preacher—she could no longer stay quiet. She had named the question and engaged it in Holy Scripture; for her the question had been settled by God and there was no more need for debate.

But her opponents would not concede. Debate continued around the question of should women be ordained, and specifically, should Louisa Woosley’s ordination be stripped from her? In *Is Mrs. L. M. Woosley an Ordained Preacher?*, Rev. M. M. Smith of Logan Presbytery, Cumberland Presbyterian Church reports the facts of the matter and then examines the judicial process asking the question of propriety and good order.

In November 1889, Nolin Presbytery ordained Mrs. L.M. Woosley “to the full work of the gospel ministry.” In October 1890 Kentucky Synod met at Smith’s Grove. The fact of her ordination came officially before the Synod through the minutes of Nolin Presbytery. The committee in the case reported that according to our “Confession of Faith,” the “Presbytery had no authority” for such ordination. In other words, they found a case of “irregular proceedings.” However, despite attempts to nullify Woosley’s ordination, according to Dr. Hodge, an expert on Presbyterian Law, “irregularity does not invalidate ordination.”⁵⁴⁹

The effect of the Synod’s action in passing the minutes of Nolin Presbytery was that it left Mrs. Woosley an ordained preacher, and absolutely refused to order Nolin Presbytery to revoke her ordination.

⁵⁴⁹ Rev. M. M. Smith of Logan Presbytery C. P. Church, *Is Mrs. L. M. Woosley an Ordained Preacher?* (Bowling Green, KY: Press of the Park City Daily Times, 1895), 1-2.

The next spring, the General Assembly confirmed this action, and officially recognized her ordination.⁵⁵⁰ Although the Synod attempted to order her name retired from the rolls of ordained ministers, such action would not have the desired consequence:

You see they order her name retired. I don't know what they intend doing with her. The fact is, she just continues to be an ordained preacher. Dr. Hodge, in *Presbyterian Law*, says: "Synod has no power to order the lower courts to erase names from their rolls ... The erasing of her name has no effect on her ordination. The Synod has never said that her ordination was not valid. It has never said that it was null and void. The Synod, by its own deliverance at Auburn, reduced the whole matter to one single sentence—it is irregular."⁵⁵¹

In other words, the fact that Louisa Woosley was an ordained minister in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, albeit irregular, stood.

While the denomination continued to debate the legitimacy of her ordination, Woosley enlarged her "congregation" beyond the Cumberland Presbyterian Church of Kentucky and intensified her efforts at evangelism. As such, she continued to preach the gospel and save souls for Christ:

During the four years of my ministry, I have preached nine hundred and twelve sermons; for which God has given me two souls each. For two thousand souls more I am willing to consecrate the remainder of my life to God. Over five hundred have been received into the C.P. Church under my ministry. With a joyful heat, and a bright future before me, I lay aside my pen to resume the duties that God has made obligatory upon me. Let come what may, I know the Lord God and the Holy Spirit have sent me.⁵⁵²

With a joyful heart, Louisa Woosley went on preaching and serving the church into a bright and blessed future. Her ministry of preaching and church governance extended over a fifty-year period. In 1916, she was elected stated clerk of Leitchfield Presbytery in Kentucky and held that office for twenty-five years. On various occasions, she served as

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁵² Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 100.

a commissioner to the General Assembly. Her records indicate that by the age of fifty, she had preached 6,343 sermons, witnessed 7,664 professions of faith (adding 2,506 members to church rolls), and baptized 358 persons in 13 states.⁵⁵³ She was still preaching, even into her eighties. After a long and fruitful life, Louisa Woosley died on June 30, 1952, at the age of 90. Throughout her life, in her preaching and serving, teaching and writing, she remained faithful to her call.

Woosley's Narrative of Call: Call to Preach Gospel and Evangelize

Writing

Shall Woman Preach? Or The Question Answered was written and published by Louisa M. Woosley in Caneyville, Kentucky in 1891. Her book was published and available during the time of the debate over her ordination by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. Admittedly, she writes not as an educated scholar, but as a student of the Bible and a woman called and ordained to preach. She identifies her audience in the book's dedication: "To Christians striving for a more complete mastery of this question, and to those earnestly seeking the truth, is this little book most affectionately dedicated by L.M.W."

Toward these ends, Woosley lays down some preliminary ground rules. "I ask the reader to divest himself of all prejudice; to read this little volume carefully and prayerfully, before he comes to the conclusion that it teaches error. Be sure that you can prove by the Word of God that it is wrong. If you cannot disprove the author's position

⁵⁵³ Mary Lin Hudson, paper on Louisa M. Woosley, Historical Foundation website, <http://www.cumberland.org/hfcpc/minister/woosleyL.htm>

by a “Thus ‘saith the Lord,’ then have the courage of conviction to embrace all the truth herein taught.” And finally, she ends her introductory words and offers a pastoral blessing: “And now may the Holy One in Israel, in whose Church there is ‘neither male nor female,’ enlighten you, and lead you into all truth.”⁵⁵⁴ The question “Shall women preach?” began as a real question for Louisa Woosley, with which she had to wrestle before she, in good faith, could answer it. But, by the time of her writing this book, the question becomes rhetorical: she asks it only so she can answer it herself.

Strategies and Tactics

To counter the institutional resistance to her call to preach, Louisa Woosley applied a hermeneutic of suspicion to the Bible. In a culture in which the Bible had ultimate authority, Woosley argued that a personal prayerful reading was just as valid as the church’s normative interpretation. In order to defend her call to preach, she used a prophetic rhetoric, whose methods included: using her public voice to speak truth to the powers of the church;⁵⁵⁵ utilizing tactics that seemed to conform, but claimed agency to transform;⁵⁵⁶ re-inhabiting authoritative tropes and re-scripting women’s ecclesial roles;⁵⁵⁷ engaging in a conversational rhetoric that was invitational and communal;⁵⁵⁸ and

⁵⁵⁴ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 6.

⁵⁵⁵ Turner and Hudson, *Saved from Silence : Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers : An Ethic of Preaching*.

⁵⁵⁶ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Armour and St. Ville, *Bodily Citations : Religion and Judith Butler*. McCullough, "Her Preaching Body a Qualitative Study of Agency, Meaning and Proclamation in Contemporary Female Preachers."

⁵⁵⁷ Armour and St. Ville, *Bodily Citations : Religion and Judith Butler*; Lawless, *Women Preaching Revolution : Calling for Connection in a Disconnected Time*.

⁵⁵⁸ Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric : The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600-1900*.

re-constructing false perceptions of call with an alternative narrative of female preachers in the Bible.⁵⁵⁹

In *Shall Woman Preach?* Woosley employs various strategies, including adaptation of language, appeals to authority, and structure in order to engage the rhetorical question she poses. She uses the language of popular opinion, standing in the same place with the readers, stating the concerns they have: “Are these women out of their places? Are they making the world worse? Are they forbidden by the Bible to preach? If so, then they ought to be prohibited by the Church from preaching. They should not have the sympathy of the Christian world, neither should they be acknowledged as ministers, nor allowed to occupy the pulpit.” Woosley meets readers where they are, but gives them advance warning that they may not be staying there. “But if the Scriptures sanction woman’s preaching, she has a right to ordination and to the same assistance and recognition as men.”⁵⁶⁰

She appeals to the Bible as the sacred canon and highest authority: “The opinion of men is not what we want now. They have not settled, and cannot settle this question. But we want a ‘Thus saith the Lord,’ as is given us in the book of inspiration; and this we must obey.”⁵⁶¹ She engages the language of the day, only to correct it with the language of the Scriptures. After quoting the creation story in Gen. 1:28, she writes: “In this holy state God gave this happy pair the world as an inheritance. Not a word is said of man’s sphere and woman’s sphere, neither of his authority and her subjection; so, without a

⁵⁵⁹ Richard Rohr, *Preparing for Christmas with Richard Rohr : Daily Reflections for Advent* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008).

⁵⁶⁰ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 30.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

doubt, they stood on equal footing under the law.”⁵⁶² Here she corrects a common misconception about separate spheres with the equality of persons found in the Bible as ordained by God. She challenges the cultural cult of domesticity with a Scriptural text with women and men “on equal footing under the law.” Thus saith the Lord.

The structure of her book parallels the structure of her argument. First she discredits the opponents’ objections, making room for the correct interpretation of the Bible, in which women are called and play an important role. Then, she writes about how “the truth shall set you free,” thus calling the church to live in the truth of the Biblical witness of women preaching. At the end, she shares her own personal call to the ministry. It is instructive that she does not use her own call as the central part of the argument, but rather as a response to the truth she has discovered and proclaimed. It serves as an illustration of the efficacy of her argument. If the church allows the “effectual door” to be opened to women preachers, then the church will benefit from an increased number of members on earth and ultimately, thousands more souls saved for the kingdom of heaven. Using a deductive approach, Woosley begins with the question, then presents arguments against opponents and Biblical proof for her prophecy; and she ends with an illustration of the beneficial outcomes of women preaching.

Prophetic Rhetoric

The rhetorical genre employed by Louisa Woosley is that of Biblical exegesis and prophecy. It is Biblical and personal, evangelical and conversational. The persona she maintains throughout the book is that of a prophet calling out in the wilderness. She speaks as an interpreter through whom the will of God is expressed. She calls out the

⁵⁶² Ibid., 28.

false beliefs and then proclaims the truth in the form of a “thus ‘saith the Lord.” Her prophetic word describes a new way of reading the Bible and being the church; a way at odds with popular belief, but the way of the kingdom of heaven. Woosley’s tone is resolutely biblical (“My chief aim has been to present biblical truths . . .”), yet respectful (. . . “that the anxious inquirers after truth may be better able to understand the command and will of God”); confessional (“I tried to persuade myself that it was not right for women to preach”), yet commanding (“it is evident that women are to take part in the gospel ministry, for Christ said . . .”).⁵⁶³ Overall her tone is instructive: “In fact the whole tenor of the Scriptures proves that it was nothing unusual for a woman to teach the people, and there is not a single word of reproof or prohibition in the Old Testament Scriptures against woman’s preaching.”⁵⁶⁴

In *Shall Women Preach? Or The Question Answered*, Woosley makes three rhetorically significant contributions: 1) Woosley names the debated question of the ordination of women, thus highlighting the discrepancy between woman’s “secret call” and the church’s “sanctified call” to preach by challenging the church’s silence and discrediting her opponents’ arguments: “My chief aim has been to present biblical truths in such a form that the anxious inquirers after truth may be better able to understand the commands and will of God respecting the much-disputed question of the ordination of women.” 2) Woosley answers the question of women preaching by appealing to the authority of Scripture: “To promote Bible truths, and to aid others in deciding to help us in the spread of the gospel.” 3) Woosley calls the question of women preaching, by ending debate and summoning all women to answer their calls and preach—without

⁵⁶³ Ibid., 6, 96, 67.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., 82.

question—based on the biblical witness: “To aid in procuring, if possible, more uniformity of sentiment and practice in the Church to which the author esteems it an honor to belong.” In this rhetorical act, Woosley makes it transparent that with some corrective exegesis, the truth of the Bible will illumine the question of women preaching such that her place and the place of all women will be secured in her beloved church.

Woosley begins by naming the problem, thereby confronting the church’s silence on the subject of women’s call and its biblical witness. She asks: “Who can believe that the compilers of this book ever thought of such a thing as the Church’s being governed by its silence?”⁵⁶⁵ She breaks the silence by calling out those in the church who refuse to bring their arguments into the light of the day and under the scrutiny of Biblical truth (‘thus saith the Lord’). She uses a fable of the hawk and the bat to suggest that her opponents are like bats, forever fickle, flying around in the dark, because they are afraid of the light.

By such an admission, and by the fickleness of some; we are reminded of the fable of the hawk and the bat. All these objectors occupy the same position; they have no sure foundation, and are just floating about. If one of their puny arguments fails them, they resort to something else. They are like the bat when caught by the hawk. The hawk says: “you sweet little bird, I’m going to eat you.” “Oh, no,” says the bat; “you would not eat me! For I’m a mouse.” “Well then,” says the hawk, “I will let you go; for I ate a mouse a few days ago, and it made me so sick, I don’t care about having another vomit.” So the little bat flew away very happy, because the hawk had been so clever as to let him go. Another day a cat caught him when she was in search of food, and as she walked off with her prey, she said, “What a nice mouse I have for dinner.” “Oh no,” says the bat; “you would not eat me! I’m no mouse; I’m only a little bird.” And he flapped his wings. “Well then,” said the cat, “I’ll let you go: for only the other day I ate a bird, and I became choked on the feathers, and I nearly died.” And again the little bat flew away, hardly knowing whether he was a bat, a mouse, or a bird.

These objectors would sometimes have us believe that they are birds of the finest plumage, but when they are about to be used up, their

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 16.

“feathers fall,” and they would feign themselves to be mice, and begin to beg the question; and like the bat fly away. In reality, they are neither birds nor mice—only bats flying around in the dark, because the light hurts their eyes.⁵⁶⁶

Using this illustrative fable, Woosley identifies the problem as the ignorance of her opponents, who continue to hide in the dark their objections to women preaching.

Perhaps she strategically chose the form of a fable, as a less threatening way to make her accusation of those who refuse to be enlightened with the truth of the Bible.

Rhetorically, Woosley turns on the light, and in effect, she takes away their elusive power. Once in the light, she makes them present their feeble arguments—which she easily discredits.

Some opponents argue that the church should allow women to preach, but not to ordain them: “We believe woman has a right to preach, but not to ordination . . . Endorse her as an evangelist, and let her go.” To this argument, Woosley responds with apocalyptic language most powerful and persuasive for evangelicals: “Well, that is one way of ‘whipping the Devil around the stump.’” Instead of allowing men to define the power structure of the church, Woosley appeals to the sacred canon: “We would like to see a ‘thus saith the Lord’ for such a procedure.”⁵⁶⁷ To counter the argument centered on gender, Woosley appeals to the authority of the church and its need of different gifts for ministry. She reminds readers that according to Scripture, different gifts are given to Christ’s disciples; God bestows gifts without respect to gender. And the church is authorized to call disciples to be teachers, evangelists and preachers, according to the needs of the Church:

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 18.

The Church, in ordaining men, simply recognizes what she believes God has done. Hence, she inquires into their union with Christ, and into the dealings of God with them. If they give satisfactory evidence of being called to the ministry, and of an aptness to teach, she lays hands on them and ordains them.

However, Woosley argues that the church does not welcome the gifts of candidates for ministry—unless of course they are embodied in a man:

Any man, after showing himself competent to the work of ministry—not because the Church believes he is called by God, or because of his aptness to teach—is ordained; but because he supports a mustache, or wears men’s clothing.

She challenges the church to open the door to women, who share the same call and the same passion as men. But, the feminine features seem to be of more importance than theology of call:

The women are coming with the very same story, and knocking at the doors of the various denominations for admittance. They say, this subject is a flame in our hearts, and a fire is kindled in our bones. But a voice from within says, Depart, I know you not, ye poor, cursed women. You can’t get in here, because your hair is long, and your features are fine. You are not masculine enough.⁵⁶⁸

In summary, Woosley counters all of the shallow gender arguments with the declaration: “All men are not called to preach, neither are all women. The apostle understood this.”⁵⁶⁹ But some women are called and have received the gift. And those that are called should be able to use their gift to preach. “To tell them they should not use this gift, is like telling a bird it should not use its wings in flying.”⁵⁷⁰ Woosley employed the strategy of re-inhabiting the theology of nature. Using the metaphor of a bird, she recognized not only the delicate nature of women, but also their inherent power to soar. She argued that those who are called should be able to preach with the full endorsement of the church.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 65.

“The Church should either take this work out of woman’s hands, or clothe her with this authority.”⁵⁷¹

Having named the question and discredited the opponents’ arguments based on gender alone, Woosley moves to answering the question of women preaching by appealing to the authority of Scripture. She quotes passages in which women were present. Moses and Miriam stood together in battling against the principalities and powers and in leading the Israelite celebration of God’s faithful deliverance (Exodus 15:1-21). Daughters of Zion were called to arise and go forth by the prophets (Micah 4:8, 10). At Jesus’ presentation in the temple, Anna spoke of the story of redemption (Luke 2:38). “Anna was as truly a prophet, or preacher, as was Simeon.”⁵⁷² The woman of Samaria preached the gospel; the people heard it, believed it and were saved (John 4:39-42). In the Upper Room at Pentecost, women were there as God poured out the Spirit and says they shall prophesy/preach (Acts 1:13-14). Paul recognized, among his faithful companions, women who labored with him in the work of the gospel (Philippians 4:3). Woosley interprets Paul’s words as such: “If he preached, they preached; if he did the church scrubbing, they were helping him.”⁵⁷³ Woosley proves, beyond the shadow of doubt, that women were faithfully involved—right alongside men—in preaching and doing the work of ministry.

Woosley summarizes her quest for Biblical truth on the subject: “In fact the whole tenor of the Scriptures proves that not a single word of reproof or prohibition is in the Old Testament Scriptures against woman’s preaching. So, whatever may be said against her now, it is certain that she did preach and teach under the Law, and even

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 59.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 80.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., 83.

administered the sacrament of Circumcision.”⁵⁷⁴ In the New Testament, women played an important role with Jesus—proving their faithfulness, even over and above the men:

Not she with trait’rous kiss her Master stung;
Not she denied Him with unfaithful tongue;
She, when apostles fled, could danger brave;
Last at His cross, and earliest at His grave.⁵⁷⁵

Woosley concludes by claiming that the Scriptures prove that women were called beginning in biblical times and have preached throughout the history of the church. “It is an established fact that the women of the apostolic age did preach, and the Scriptures sustain her as a preacher, no matter what women-gaggers may say ... To all who have studied the Bible, and have no pet theory to support, this truth is as clear as a sunbeam.”⁵⁷⁶

With such overwhelming Biblical evidence, Woosley concludes: “it is evident that women are to take part in the gospel ministry ... It is evident that sex amounts to nothing in the kingdom of God.”⁵⁷⁷ Knowing that the church prays as Jesus taught, “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven,” She encourages the church to enact this prayer, so that in the church, as in heaven, gender will not matter, and women will participate fully in the gospel ministry.

Having fulfilled her first two purposes of naming the question by discrediting her opponents and proving that the Bible supports a woman’s call to and involvement in preaching ministry, Woosley then moves on to her final rhetorical purpose—to ‘call the question’ of women preaching. That is to say, she no longer engages or debates the question but summons women to answer the call—without question. Her audience

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 67.

becomes the women who are called to preach and seeking discernment and direction.

Her message comes addressed to the women as a call to faithfulness. She looks back to appreciate from whence women have come and then looks forward to where women in the church are going:

In order to realize the progress that is being made, and to comprehend what the future has in store for us, it now becomes necessary to give a glance at the past, by considering the position of women but a few years ago... Our own mothers tell us that they can remember the first time they ever heard a woman pray in public ... It is but a step from the past to the present,—and oh, what a contrast! ... The Church is moving forward, and Christianity is on her march and nothing can stop her. The blessings that she has bestowed upon womanhood, shall yet be owned by the world and enjoyed by all nations.⁵⁷⁸

Woosley claims that the Church is moving forward and nothing can stop it—especially not the question of women preaching. As her beloved church is moving onward (and even when it seems to get stuck), Louisa Woosley issues a call to women—to march forward in faith:

Women of America, and of God, let us, for the sake of what he has done for us, give ourselves wholly to his work, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, remembering that we are not our own, that we have been bought with a price—even the blood of Christ ... It is impossible to stand still; we must go forward or backward. Which will we do? Oh! Who will come to the front? Our motto is, Forward, march. Let us rally, and advancing in God's name, let us look to the hills from whence cometh our help. Let us like Paul "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Let us willingly give our hearts and our hands to the work which God giveth us to do.⁵⁷⁹

She calls the women to answer their call to preach—the high calling of God in Jesus

Christ—without question but with great conviction of heart and hands: "Here am I, send me!"⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., 95.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 60.

Conclusion

At a time when the frontier revival spirit was being managed by the institution of the church, and the Bible was widely read and individually interpreted, Louisa M. Woosely was called to preach. To the question, “Shall women preach?” the dominant narrative answered “no.” Using a hermeneutic of suspicion, Woosley re-interpreted the Bible in such a way to support the call of women to preach. By appealing to the authorities of Spirit, Church, and Bible, Woosley defended her call to preach by writing a call narrative that employed the three essential tenets of Evangelical Protestantism: personal experience of spiritual conversion and assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ; the ultimate authority of the Bible; and the call to evangelize and spread the gospel. What began as a personal question of her own divine call became a prophetic witness and a communal summons for all women to claim their call to preach. Through her preaching and writing, Louisa Woosley left a record of powerful prophetic rhetoric that positively and persuasively answered the question of “Shall women preach?”

CHAPTER VI

FLORENCE SPEARING RANDOLPH

But God, with who, there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, in His wonderful plan of salvation has called and chosen men and women according to His divine will as laborers together with Him for the salvation of the world.⁵⁸¹

~Florence Spearing Randolph, "Antipathy to Women Preachers"

Introduction

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

~Alice Walker

On August 9, 1866 Florence Spearing was born in Charleston, South Carolina to John and Anna Smith Spearing. She was the youngest of seven children and born into a black family who could trace their lineage of freedom back two generations before the Civil War. She was born at time when emancipation was proclaimed, the Civil War had just ended, and Reconstruction aimed to secure liberty and civil rights to blacks. But, she was born in a place in which the Black Codes made segregation and discrimination permissible by law.⁵⁸² As a black woman living in the south during the time of Reconstruction and Black Codes, she faced obstacles to 'life and liberty' based on her race and gender, and was continually confronted with explicit and implied questions

⁵⁸¹ Florence Spearing Randolph, "Antipathy to Women Preachers" (ca. 1930), in Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 127.

⁵⁸² Law passed by South Carolina immediately following the Civil War claimed to be fair to all races, but actually aimed at repressing black people. At first these laws were called Black Codes, but because of their deceptive nature, they eventually came to be known as the laws of Jim Crow. Jim Crow was the name of the character in minstrel shows, which featured white actors in "black face," or black make-up. The name Jim Crow represented the fact that Black Codes were based on racial disguise.

about her place, her authority, and her voice. The dominant narrative of the time limited a woman's place, restricted a woman's authority, and silenced a woman's voice.

Even as women made educational and vocational strides in the nineteenth century, still their public presence and voice continued to be debated. In the quest for equality of place, women spoke a 'rhetoric of rights' in the political realm. In the social realm, they articulated a 'rhetoric of nature' and duty. Such rhetoric affected progress for women, enlarging their place and authority in state and culture. But, on the religious landscape, convention was stubborn and seemingly fixed, not allowing women the place, the voice, or the authority of the pulpit. And so, in order to affect change in the church, women had to proclaim yet another kind of rhetoric: a 'rhetoric of call.' This 'rhetoric of call' came in a variety of forms: personal spiritual autobiographies, public platform speeches, and prophetic Biblical interpretations. Florence Spearing Randolph's 'rhetoric of call' took the form of sermons preached from a pulpit. As a Christian woman living during the rise in black churches that resulted from the religious revivals and great awakenings, she responded to the questions and prohibitions by claiming power: power of Spirit, call, and pulpit.

Question of Place (as a Southern Black Woman)

Florence Spearing lived in a time and place in which the question of a black woman's place was being challenged—in political, economic, and social realms. During the period of Reconstruction after the War, a series of amendments to the Constitution were ratified—giving blacks freedom from slavery, and the right to be represented and to

vote as citizens of the United States.⁵⁸³ However, blacks continued to struggle to claim and maintain these basic civil rights.⁵⁸⁴

While the Civil War put an end to slavery, freed slaves were left without land or the means to provide for themselves or their families. “In the decades after the Civil War,” note historians Martha Watson and Thomas Burkholder in *The Gilded Age and the New America*, “the ‘race question’ dominated all other issues in the South and affected life throughout the nation.”⁵⁸⁵ Reconstruction efforts went beyond political rights, including economic opportunities as well. In response, Southern states passed laws in an attempt to continue to control the freed slaves. Spearing lived in South Carolina at a time when Black Codes, in effect, legalized discrimination against blacks. South Carolina Black Codes were thought to be some of the harshest: they forbid all blacks from voting or entering political office. The codes also limited economic freedoms: a black person was prevented from becoming an artisan, mechanic, or shopkeeper without a proper license from a judge; at a cost of \$100, it was unlikely that a freed slave could afford such a license. Further, the Black Codes limited black migration into or within the state, forcing blacks to enter into a contractual relationship with a white master or to go to jail.⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸³ The Thirteenth Amendment outlawed slavery in the United States. The Fourteenth Amendment gave rights of citizenship to all citizens, including life, liberty, and property; further, it required that in order for Southern states to be admitted to the Union, they had to grant the vote to black men. The Fifteenth Amendment declared that the right of citizens to vote shall not be denied based on race, guaranteeing African Americans the right of voice and vote.

⁵⁸⁴ Although blacks would be officially/legally freed by the Emancipation Proclamation (1864) and black men the right to vote as equal citizens of the Union (1871), not until the Civil Rights legislation of 1965 would black men and women realize true equality and rights.

⁵⁸⁵ Introduction: "The Gilded Age and the New America" in Martha S. Watson and Burkholder, eds., *The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Reform: A Rhetorical History of the United States, Significant Movements in American Public Discourse* xvi.

⁵⁸⁶ For more on Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction : America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 1st Perennial Classics ed., New American Nation Series (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002). For more on black codes of South Carolina see Theodore Brantner Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South*,

Despite the restrictive codes of South Carolina, John Spearing was able to work as an artisan. However, the unfortunate and untimely death of his wife left him to raise four daughters alone on a cabinetmaker's salary. Since the Freedmen's Bureau had established schools in South Carolina, Florence Spearing was educated in local public and normal schools. However, her race and gender limited her choices to teaching or dress making. Most of her classmates were studying to become teachers, but Florence aspired to become "an outstanding modiste with dreams of travel and some sort of a career."⁵⁸⁷ When she saw her father grow ill and her sisters forced to work as domestic servants and seamstresses, she became determined to develop a skill that would allow her to earn a decent living for herself and for her family's well-being. And so, after graduating from Avery Normal Institute, she achieved her goal of becoming a modiste and an instructor in a dressmaking school.

A positive outcome of the Civil War for women was an expanded range of opportunities beyond the domestic realm, which hastened the "emancipation" of women. Historian Mary Elizabeth Massy argues, "The Civil War compelled women to become more active, self-reliant, and resourceful, and this ultimately contributed to their economic, social, and intellectual advancement."⁵⁸⁸ Yet, despite the sweeping changes the economic, social, and political landscape, they were not widespread. In this 'Era of

Southern Historical Publications, No. 6 (University,: University of Alabama Press, 1965), See also <http://www.crf-usa.org/brown-v-board-50th-anniversary/southern-black-codes.html>.

⁵⁸⁷ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 103.

Note: A modiste is one who makes and sells fashionable dresses and hats for women.

⁵⁸⁸ Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, xxii.

Excess,' "for those invited to the party, times were good;" But, claims Watson and Burkholder, "not everyone was invited to the party, and public outcry ensued."⁵⁸⁹

Despite opportunities for advancement, women and blacks were often classed together economically and socially. Although blacks won freedom in the Civil War, for a long time they remained second-class citizens everywhere in the nation. Within six years after the war (1871), black men were given the right to vote. However, neither the Fourteenth nor the Fifteenth Amendment made any provision for women's suffrage. Women, both black and white, were excluded from the amendments; their rights were not secured. Women would have to continue to fight for women's equality throughout the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth century before they would be granted the right to vote—not until 1920 (with passage of Nineteenth Amendment). In *Neither Ballots nor Bullets*, historian Wendy Hammond Venet claims, "Although suffrage would not be granted to women until the second decade of the twentieth century, woman's rights advocates in the postbellum period did not face the same degree of ridicule that they faced before the war."⁵⁹⁰ Champions like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony and Sarah and Angelina Grimké and others helped give legitimacy to women speakers and political organizations (e.g. National Woman Suffrage Association). Women, although free with rights of citizenship, had limited claim to place in the United States. In the years to come, they would continue to battle for women's civil rights. They would have to keep talking about their right to place, authority, and voice.

⁵⁸⁹ Introduction: "The Gilded Age and the New America" in Martha S. Watson and Burkholder, eds., *The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Reform: A Rhetorical History of the United States, Significant Movements in American Public Discourse* xv.

⁵⁹⁰ Venet, *Neither Ballots nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War* 161.

Powerful words in poignant rhetoric continued to be the most important weapon for all women—in written and spoken form.

By law, black women won freedom, but not equality. Repeatedly, they would have to make claims to equal treatment, as discovered by Maria Mitchell:

Maria Mitchell's case had everything to do with the new rights of African Americans. As Mitchell's son later testified, his "Mama was talking loud." Her target was B.D. Armstrong, a white man, probably her employer. When Armstrong asked her what all the "fuss" was about, Mitchell responded that "she was talking for her rights and would as much as she pleased and as loud as she pleased." Irritated, Armstrong threatened that "if she did not hush he would make her hush." Then he "struck her in the face five licks and broke out a piece of her tooth."⁵⁹¹

By telling her to hush, Armstrong tried to take away Mitchell's right of self-expression. But Maria Mitchell would not be hushed, and kept talking for her rights. In slavery, she was subject to the master's discipline; but now, after the War, she could speak up and demand equal treatment. And so she did: she filed charges against Armstrong, and he was indicted.⁵⁹² African Americans did not just speak about their rights to individuals, but also in public forums. Other times, they discovered that their actions spoke louder than words. In an era of "separate but equal," African American women continually had to re-interpret their social place and political voice.⁵⁹³

While the Black Codes restricted black migration into South Carolina, they did not limit movement out of South Carolina. In 1882, at the age of sixteen, Florence Spearing moved from South Carolina to New York and later to Jersey City, New Jersey. In a northern city she could not only earn three times the pay as she could in the South,

⁵⁹¹ Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore : Southern Women in the Civil War Era*, 143.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵⁹³ "In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that Louisiana's laws requiring separate railroad cars for blacks and whites were likewise constitutional, thus clearing the way for the "separate but equal" doctrine." Martha S. Watson and Burkholder, eds., *The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Reform: A Rhetorical History of the United States, Significant Movements in American Public Discourse* xviii.

but she also enjoyed more freedom. In 1886, she married Hugh Randolph of Richmond, Virginia, who had moved to Jersey City to work on the railroad as a cook. Together they had one daughter Leah Vila, born in 1887. They were married for 27 years, until Hugh's death in 1913.

For about ten years, Florence Spearing Randolph operated a successful dressmaking business from her home in Jersey City.⁵⁹⁴ In New Jersey, Randolph sought not only economic liberty, but religious freedom as well. She had found a place in the business world, but she now desired to find a place in the church.

Response: Claim the Power of Spirit

Conversion, Sanctification, and Formation

The religious culture of nineteenth-century America was marked by evangelical fervor and revival experiences of conversion. Such an authentic conversion resulted from a spiritual rebirth that transformed one's identity as part of the body of Christ. Despite this conversion, there was nothing that could be done to save oneself from eternal damnation and earn salvation. Only by complete surrender could one be sanctified to do God's will and thereby serve God fully. Through faithful worship and service, one was formed into a disciple of Christ. The Second Great Awakening not only aroused interest in spiritual transformations, it provided holiness camp meeting services, particularly among Methodists and Baptists; people gathered to listen to itinerant preachers and pray.

In this nineteenth-century religious culture of conversion, sanctification and formation, Florence Spearing came to faith. At the age of thirteen, Florence was

⁵⁹⁴ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 103.

converted at the Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The frequent house visits she made with her grandmother to teach the Bible and pray with the sick left an indelible impression on young Florence, as later in life, she decided to pursue a career in pastoral ministry. In 1886, she became a member of Monmouth Street African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Jersey City, New Jersey. Her gifts for ministry were recognized immediately; she was appointed Sunday school teacher and class leader for young people. In response to her conversion, Randolph sought direction for how to use her gifts by attending holiness meetings.

At one such holiness meeting, she experienced instant sanctification. She heard the leader describe a vision she had had of someone at the meeting “whom God wanted all for himself and what would happen.” Randolph wrote of her powerful experience:

Well something did happen that afternoon and it happened to me. My friend and I were the only two colored persons in the building, so at the close of the sermon or message, the speaker invited all to come forward and unite in prayer as she termed it “to wait on God.” ... As soon as my knees touched the floor, I felt a burning desire to pray. I did, and how well I remember the words “Thou who knoweth all my weaknesses, thou who knoweth all my fears, while I plead each precious promise, hear, hear, and answer [my] prayer.” With that I swooned to the floor and remained almost dead for sometime, as the speaker would not let anyone to touch me.⁵⁹⁵

Randolph describes this powerful experience involving her body, mind and spirit. Her body was moved to go forward in response to the leader’s invitation and uncontrollably swoon on the floor. Her mind came to a new understanding of herself as worthy of salvation. Her soul experienced instant sanctification, in which she felt God cleanse her sin, change her character, and set her apart as the one “whom God wanted all for

⁵⁹⁵ Florence Spearing Randolp, “My First Trip Away from Home,” and “My Second Trip from Home,” and “Marriage,” handwritten transcripts, Randolph Collection, compiled by Ibid., 104.

himself.”⁵⁹⁶ Being one of only two black people in the holiness meeting may have been fortuitous. Perhaps she was better able to see that the Spirit is no respecter of gender or racial divisions. Perhaps she was better able to believe that the Spirit has the power to move where it wills, within all persons, converting sinners like her to beloved children of God, and calling all to the continual work of sanctification and perfection.

With her conversion and sanctification, she witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit to redeem her and call her beloved, and give her a place in God’s eyes and in the kingdom of heaven. But, she still had to challenge barriers and claim a place for herself in the world—especially in the church to which she was called. But, as she soon discovered, she also needed to have the authority to inhabit the space.

Question of Authority (as an Ordained Minister)

Florence Randolph’s overwhelming experience compelled her to seek further religious formation and vocational discernment. In 1888, she began closing her flourishing dressmaking business once a week, so that she could attend to temperance and church missionary work.⁵⁹⁷ In the late 1880s, Randolph became acquainted with AME Zion Holiness Minister E. George Biddle. A former Greek and Hebrew scholar at Yale, Biddle was glad to provide Randolph with biblical instruction, theological training, and the use of his vast library collection. Biddle was impressed by his student and so invited Randolph, along with Rev. Julia Foote, to become a helper in leading holiness

⁵⁹⁶ Sanctification is to set apart, cleanse or purify. It is that action which God performs within the believer as to changing the nature and character of the person. There is *instantaneous* sanctification which occurs at the point of salvation, by which God sees the believer as clean and pure because of the covering work of Jesus Christ.

⁵⁹⁷ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 104.

meetings.⁵⁹⁸ During one holiness meeting, when the pastor of the Jersey City AME Zion Church (Rev. R. R. Baldwin) suddenly became ill, Randolph was given permission to lead the meeting, which turned out to be “one of the greatest revivals in the history of the church.”⁵⁹⁹

Inward Call to Preach

Despite Rev. Biddle’s affirmation of her gifts, opportunities presented to her by the church and her success as an exhorter and revivalist, still Randolph resisted the full acceptance of a call to be an ordained preacher. After all, she was not immune from the forces of the conventional ideology of separate gender spheres and roles; Randolph was a product of them. In fact, she did not believe that women should be preachers. But if she was mistaken on a woman’s limited role in the church, she prayed that God would correct her and make her call abundantly clear. Seeking evidence of call, she bargained with God, praying that if her dressmaking business would fail, then she would preach. Her business failed. Thinking that God had called her to preach, she went to her family and shared her sense of call. They judged that she had lost her mind. Ministers criticized her and opposed her. Again she took the matter to God in prayer. After a night of struggle in which she read about Abraham’s willingness to offer everything—even his own son, she surrendered to God’s call. Convinced of the truth of her call to preach, she defied gender conventions and gave up her responsibilities of family and home—“determined to go out

⁵⁹⁸ According to Randolph, Julia Foote “preached and taught holiness in white and colored churches for many years” in *Ibid.*, 103. In 1895, Foote became the first woman to be ordained a deacon and in 1899 was the second woman, following the controversial ordination of Mary Small, to be ordained an elder in the AME Zion church.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104.

homeless and [penniless] alone with Christ”—in order to answer God’s call and pursue a preaching career.⁶⁰⁰

Outward Call to Preach

Even as she tried to convince her family and herself of the authenticity of her call, word spread about this powerful preaching woman; word of mouth and local press coverage enlarged her audience and appeal. Soon, she was receiving invitations to conduct revivals at other churches, both black and white. Her popularity precipitated the official recognition of her authority: she was named a class leader, an exhorter, and even a local preacher. Lay people—men and women—were permitted to lead class discussions or to exhort, but could not preach without a proper license.⁶⁰¹ And so, despite her resistance to this official authority, she accepted a local preacher’s license so that she could preach in the church. With a measure of humility, Randolph celebrated her achievements, “The ball of criticism, fault finding and persecution began rolling. In 1897 I was granted head preacher. Not that I wanted honors, nor sought them but pressure was brought to bear by the pastor.”⁶⁰²

Despite her popularity and success as a preacher, when Randolph sought to have her call endorsed by the New Jersey Conference of the AME Zion Church, she faced strong opposition from fellow ministers and the presiding bishop. After all, the church was still engaged in a bitter debate over the recent ordination of Mary Small as an elder (in 1898), which some maintained was unauthorized. The church leadership feared that

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁰¹ Exhort is to urge strongly by argument to accept the truth of the sermon which has been preached by a licensed or ordained preacher.

⁶⁰² “Florence Randolph Life and Work in Part,” handwritten transcripts, Randolph Collection, as referenced by Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 104.

by approving Randolph's request for membership, they would be subsequently endorsing the elevation of women to positions of authority. Despite the opposition, Randolph's request was approved and she was admitted as a member of the New Jersey Conference in 1898. In April of 1901, Randolph was ordained as a deacon at the Annual Church Conference; and two years later, she was ordained as an elder.⁶⁰³ As an ordained elder in the AME Zion Church, Randolph was thereby granted full preaching and ministerial authority—at least in theory. Despite her efforts to claim the authority of the outward call, the church did not supply her with many opportunities to preach. The question of her authority was raised throughout her ministry. She responded to the challenge by claiming the power of her call and the authority of the ordained office.

Response: Claim the Power of Call

We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to women as freely as to men. If you ask me what offices they may fill, I reply -- any. I do not care what case you put; let them be sea captains, if you will.
~Margaret Fuller⁶⁰⁴

Ministry

The first two-thirds of nineteenth-century America had been marked with great economic change resulting from Industrialization. Beginning in the 1870s, the United States experienced unprecedented economic growth and population expansion.

Entrepreneurs in steel (Andrew Carnegie), oil (John D. Rockefeller) and railroads

⁶⁰³ See Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ "Margaret Fuller, American writer, journalist, and philosopher, was part of the Transcendentalist circle. Margaret Fuller's "conversations" encouraged the women of Boston to develop their intellectual capacities. In 1845 Margaret Fuller published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, now considered an early feminist classic." (about.com women's history, accessed 4-13-12).

(Cornelius Vanderbilt) made millions, establishing the U.S. economy as the largest and richest in the world. This “Gilded Age” was an era of enormous economic wealth for some and devastating poverty for others.⁶⁰⁵ The rapid industrial growth of northeastern cities resulted in corruption and social ills. Chiefly in response to the material excesses and extreme poverty of the Gilded Age, reform organizations were created. Throughout her ministry, Florence Randolph served as a committed suffragist, temperance worker, missionary in Africa, lecturer, and organizer of efforts toward the betterment of humanity, particularly to expand opportunities for women and to eliminate racism and elevate her race.⁶⁰⁶

Still, her primary occupation was that of church pastor and preacher. Seeking to prove herself as an ordained elder worthy of the authority of a pulpit in a mainline denominational church, Randolph’s early ministry was marked by sacrifice, suffering, and success. For the sake of her call, from 1897-1909, she worked as an itinerant preacher without a salary in order to help small dying churches throughout New York and New Jersey who could not afford to pay her. After Randolph would help the church become financially solvent again, she was replaced by a “nice young man” whom they would pay; and then she would be reassigned to another poor problem church.

⁶⁰⁵ The term "Gilded Age" was coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in their book, *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (1873). The term comes from Shakespeare: "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily... is wasteful and ridiculous excess." John D. Buenker and Joseph Buenker, *Encyclopedia of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe Reference, 2005). John D. Buenker, *The Gilded Age and Progressive Era, 1877-1920*, Sources of the American Tradition (Acton, MA: Copley Pub., 2002).

⁶⁰⁶ Randolph was the “founder and first president of the New Jersey Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, a member of the executive board of the New Jersey State Suffrage Association, chaplain of the Northeastern Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, and chairman of the regional department of the NACW. She served as president of the New Jersey AME Zion Women’s Home and Foreign Missionary Society...and Women’s Christian Temperance Union organizer and lecturer.” Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder*, 106.

By the time Randolph was born, two women had been ordained in the Protestant church. Antoinette Brown was ordained a minister by the Congregational Church of South Butler, New York in 1853. Ten years later, Olympia Brown (no relation to Antoinette Brown) was ordained by the Universalist Church. Despite the historical precedent of female ordinations, women who felt called to be ordained pastors could not simply point to other women with ecclesial authority; they had to prove the authenticity of their call by demonstrating their preaching effectiveness in order for their inward call to be fully endorsed by the ordaining body of the church. After much struggle and sacrifice, Florence Spearing Randolph demonstrated her preaching gifts and their efficacy. She became one of first women ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church. The AME Zion Church was the first black denomination to grant women suffrage (1876) and full clergy rights (1894).

While most women of the nineteenth century continued to preach as evangelists, itinerants or missionaries, what distinguished Randolph from the relatively few ordained female preachers at the time was that she preached from a church pulpit, with the full authority of the office of minister. Her last “problem church” actually became her “crowning achievement;” she served as minister of Wallace Chapel AME Zion Church in Summit, New Jersey for twenty-one years, from 1925-1946, and as pastor emeritus until her death at the age of 85 in 1951.⁶⁰⁷ In many respects, Randolph was a pioneer, “expanding opportunities for women in the church through her achievements.”⁶⁰⁸ With the authority of the ordained office, Randolph preached a gospel of justice and love, with

⁶⁰⁷ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 101,05.

⁶⁰⁸ Bettye Collier-Thomas, “Minister and Feminist Reformer: The Life of Florence Spearing Randolph” in Weisenfeld and Newman, *This Far by Faith : Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography*, 181.

a focus on gender and racial equality, summoning all to answer the call to make a better world.

Strategy and Tactics

Given the seemingly fixed dictates of social convention, Randolph adopted the technique of the time, “fighting fiercely and furiously” in her public attacks on racism, sexism and colonialism.⁶⁰⁹ Although her public presence was strong and direct as she worked on behalf of women’s suffrage and temperance, she was accepted by many men because of her feminine demeanor. Says one reporter for the *New York Age* (1905), “Her sermons, lectures and public addresses are all the more attractive and impressive because of the modest womanly manner in which they are delivered. In the pulpit, or on the platform, she is always a woman, and when she speaks [she] has something to say.”⁶¹⁰ This public persona served her well throughout her career. Her radical claims were wrapped in modesty. Her feminine dress and demeanor were not just for show or to gain an audience. Randolph was respectful of the established authority. She did not seek to overthrow the authority, but to simply enlarge the scope of authority to include women. Hers was not a revolutionary as much as a reform movement. And her tactics included re-inhabiting the establishment. By dressing as a woman and showing respect for the existing authority, she was accepted within its walls. Once an insider, she used her voice and authority to advocate change.

To counter the institutional resistance to her call to preach, Randolph applied a hermeneutic of critical evaluation, in which she sought to “adjudicate the oppressive

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 180.

⁶¹⁰ “The Rev. Mrs. Florence Randolph, Evangelist,” *New York Age*, Aug. 31, 1905”, Randolph Collection, in Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 106.

tendencies as well as the liberating possibilities inscribed in the biblical texts.”⁶¹¹ In a culture in which the institutional church and its normative biblical interpretation had authority, she demonstrated the value and purpose of the biblical witness in the contemporary struggle for liberation and justice for all God’s children. In order to claim her call to preach, she used a pulpit rhetoric, whose strategies included: using her public voice to speak truth to the powers of the church;⁶¹² utilizing tactics that seemed to conform, but claimed agency to transform;⁶¹³ re-inhabiting authoritative tropes and re-scripting women’s ecclesial roles;⁶¹⁴ engaging in a conversational rhetoric that was invitational and communal;⁶¹⁵ and re-constructing false perceptions of call with an alternative narrative of female preachers that she embodied in the pulpit, preaching a liberating word.⁶¹⁶

Question of Voice (as a Public Preacher)

Nineteenth century America experienced great economic and social change resulting from Industrialization. In addition, it was an era of religious revival that sparked the rise of evangelical Christianity. Christian preachers had a powerful voice and effectively shaped worldviews based on biblical and theological preaching. In order to help people navigate the waters of such significant cultural transformation, sermons were marked by the following characteristics: attention to the beauty and immanence of God;

⁶¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways : Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, 177.

⁶¹² Turner and Hudson, *Saved from Silence : Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*. Campbell, *The Word before the Powers : An Ethic of Preaching*.

⁶¹³ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Armour and St. Ville, *Bodily Citations : Religion and Judith Butler*. McCullough, "Her Preaching Body a Qualitative Study of Agency, Meaning and Proclamation in Contemporary Female Preachers."

⁶¹⁴ Armour and St. Ville, *Bodily Citations : Religion and Judith Butler*; Lawless, *Women Preaching Revolution : Calling for Connection in a Disconnected Time*.

⁶¹⁵ Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric : The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600-1900*.

⁶¹⁶ Rohr, *Preparing for Christmas with Richard Rohr : Daily Reflections for Advent*.

concern for the common people to make them better; and historical-critical biblical interpretation. The significance of such preaching was that it “furnished the thoughts and words from which a generation was able to construct their reality socially and thus to articulate for themselves the meaning of the new world in which they were living.”⁶¹⁷ Horace Bushnell, Henry Ward Beecher, and Phillips Brooks all preached such sermons, especially naming the social problems they saw, such as slavery and the status of women. However, O.C. Edwards notes, “they were too involved in the rise of middle-class Victorian culture and an urban, industrial economy to identify the characteristic evils they entailed. It remained for the next two generations of preachers to help their congregations understand that these new social and economic arrangements had spawned human suffering that Christian conscience could not tolerate.”⁶¹⁸

By the 1870s, America had entered the “Gilded Age.” As the gap between the rich and poor widened, social ills worsened, especially in cities where the living conditions for the poor were deplorable. In response to the material excesses of the age, social reform organizations were created to address the needs of those without power or public voice. Churches began to see their role in making the world better. Preachers began to proclaim a gospel with a call to put faith in action.

Washington Gladden, who was considered the “father of the Social Gospel,” devised a new genre of Christian preaching: joining the Biblical word with the cultural reality. His sermons both described a theological ideal and appealed for action by the congregation. In order for a responsive action to be faithful and right, it had to be a

⁶¹⁷ Edwards, *A History of Preaching*, 637.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 648.

“vehicle for the communication of the divine life.”⁶¹⁹ Homiletically, Gladden sought to inspire Christians to help make God’s kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

As a social gospel preacher, Walter Rauschenbusch was interested in saving souls, but also caring for bodies. He served a Baptist church in the “Hell’s Kitchen” area of New York City, an area where he witnessed terrible human suffering. His heart for ministry is clear in his introduction to his sermon on “The New Jerusalem:”

We have met together as a band of brothers after a week of toil, weariness, and failing, as an army rallies after one assault to prepare for the next. We have felt weak and starved; we have come to take the bread of life, to have peace and love, and faith, and a brighter hope. It is hope that beckons us on.⁶²⁰

Despite their good words and faithful ministries, the preachers of the Social Gospel have been criticized by later generations, particularly for their lack of attention to the whole range of social problems, especially concerning the issues of gender and race.

In her essay “‘The Woman’s Cause is Man’s?’ Frances Willard and the Social Gospel,” Carolyn De Swarte Gifford argues that Gladden and Rauschenbusch were not the only social gospel preachers. In fact, Frances Willard was a venerable figure in the social gospel movement, described as “the single most impressive reformer to have worked within the context of the evangelical churches.”⁶²¹ Willard viewed late nineteenth-century society through the lens of gender and helped to re-vision and reform gender conventions for the cause of women. But, as a white woman, she was not attentive to issues of race.

⁶¹⁹ Elizabeth N. Agnew, “Shaping a Civic Profession: Mary Richmond, the Social Gospel, and Social Work” in ———, ed. *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 122.

⁶²⁰ Rauschenbusch, “The New Jerusalem” in ———, *A History of Preaching*, 653.

⁶²¹ Sidney Ahlstrom as quoted by ———, ed. *Gender and the Social Gospel*, 21.

Black women preachers were able to perceive the contours of the socio-economic landscape that troubled the cause of African Americans and consequently, needed to be changed. Racism was central to their critique of American society. In “True to Our God: African American Women as Christian Activists in Rochester, New York,” Ingrid Overacker elucidates: “In their eyes true Christian fellowship, fundamental to the creation of the Kingdom, could not exist as long as some Christians considered themselves superior by virtue of race.”⁶²² But, African Americans did not just see society through the lens of race; first and foremost, they saw it through the lens of religion. Overacker describes it in the language of call: “African Americans are God’s children and are therefore responsible to answer God’s call ... Anything that interferes with the African American, and human ability to respond to God’s call is evil and must be confronted, actively and immediately, in order to establish African American, and human, equality and freedom.”⁶²³ The confrontation of this evil is both individual and corporate, but especially ecclesial:

Racism creates oppressive institutions and discriminatory practices that interfere with the African American response to God by limiting the ability of people to fulfill their human potential and therefore call.

It is therefore the responsibility of African American Christians to create communities in which African American women, men, and children can learn who they are as God’s children and what they are capable of as individual human beings so that they can answer God’s call. It is the responsibility of the church to provide a setting for that community.⁶²⁴

In the formation of such a community where all Christians can answer God’s call, preaching with good strong effective pulpit rhetoric is essential.

⁶²² Ibid., 203.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., 204.

For nineteenth century homiletics, John A. Broadus wrote the book on it. In *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (1870), Broadus advocates for the romantic becoming ordinary. It is not enough, Broadus argues, to focus only on the biblical interpretation and on the cultural application; the listeners must be persuaded to act. He writes:

so mighty is the opposition which the gospel encounters in human nature, so averse is the natural heart to the obedience of faith, so powerful are the temptations of life, that we must arouse men to intense earnestness and often to impassioned emotions, if we would bring them to surmount obstacles, and to conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil.”⁶²⁵

“Arousing men to . . . conquer the world, the flesh, and the devil” is hard work and a high calling. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the clergy had been professionalized. Being educated and ordained, clergy were respected by an enlightened and religious society. By virtue of the office, clergy possessed political, social and religious power, which they exercised from their pulpit. Through the words of their sermons, they shaped individual and social realities.

Florence Spearing Randolph lived during the time of the “Gilded Age” and the “Social Gospel” movement. As a woman, her work in reform organizations were accepted and welcomed without question. But, her presence and authority in the pulpit were challenged. In response, she used her prophetic vision and homiletic voice to claim the power of the pulpit.

⁶²⁵ Broadus in ———, *A History of Preaching*, 657.

Response: Claim the Power of the Pulpit

Pulpit Rhetoric

As a church pastor preaching weekly, Florence Spearing Randolph was engaged in the practice of writing sermons. Homileticians describe the characteristics of the genre of sermon as: a truth claim for a certain time to a certain congregation, attention to the Biblical text, reflection on theological doctrines, and applications to the cultural context.⁶²⁶ When preachers construct sermons, they seek to communicate with intentionality and clarity. Attention to each of these four characteristics increases the chances that the sermon will say what the preacher wants to say, and more importantly, improve the likelihood that the listeners will hear what the preacher intends for them to hear. Pastor Randolph's sermons made truth claims by appealing to the authority of the Bible, her evangelical theology and the particular context of her community of hearers.

The sermon genre employed by Florence Randolph was pulpit rhetoric. What makes a sermon a rhetorical act is that it “creates a message whose shape and form, beginning and end, are stamped on it by a human author with a goal for the audience.”⁶²⁷ Pulpit rhetoric, then, creates a message that is truthful, Biblical, theological, and cultural, and with a specific goal. The goal or “function” is what the preacher intends for the sermon to do, for example: to teach, to challenge, to inspire, to comfort, to reassure, or to help.⁶²⁸ Randolph was a teacher and a preacher, an evangelist and a pastor. With skillful exegesis of Scripture, explication of theology, and familiarity with her congregation and

⁶²⁶ John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching : Rhetorical Strategies* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

⁶²⁷ Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act*, 7.

⁶²⁸ For more on “focus and function” of the sermon, see Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 99-116.

the events of the world, Randolph shaped a message that called her listeners to inward reflection and also to outward practices of justice and mercy.

Randolph wrote her sermon manuscripts long-hand, frequently adding the notation of “comment.” Although she preached from a manuscript, her notation “indicates that she digressed from the text to elaborate on a particular issue, to expand on the scriptures, or to provide contemporary examples of similar situations, events, or persons.”⁶²⁹ The ministry of Florence Randolph began in the late nineteenth century, however, most of her career as a writer and preacher of sermons took place in the early to mid-twentieth century. Her sermons mark a shift between the nineteenth-century spiritual sermons that focused on holiness and called listeners to conversion to the twentieth-century political sermons that challenged social ills and called listeners to work for justice in the world.

As a preacher, Randolph helped her listeners to see individual sin and social ills through the lens of the gospel. Her early sermons focused on sin and the need for spiritual conversion.⁶³⁰ For example, “The Friends of Wickedness” (1909) begins “We desire to point out to you the hideousness of sin—how one sin leads to another...” and ends “Then let our hearts obey the gospel’s glorious sound; And all its fruits from day to day—be in us and abound.”⁶³¹ An integral part of her later sermons involved a move from spiritual truth to political action.⁶³² For example, “Hope” (1945), begins with the biblical truth from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: “We are saved by hope, which

⁶²⁹ Nine of her sermons have been published by Bettye Collier-Thomas in Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 118. The entire body of preserved sermons are available in the Florence Spearing Randolph Sermon Collection, Center for African American History and Culture, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

⁶³⁰ Randolph, “Christian Perfection” (1926) and “Conversion” (1931) in *Ibid.*, 130-36.

⁶³¹ Randolph, “The Friends of Wickedness” (1909), in *Ibid.*, 123-25.

⁶³² Randolph, “Antipathy to Women Preachers” (1930); “If I Were White” (1941) in *Ibid.*, 126-29.

hope we have as an anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast.” Then, with her words, she builds a bridge, “As hopeful for the spiritual, we should also be hopeful for the temporal; for life, while it reaches throughout all eternity, begins in this world.” And finally, she crosses us over to the world of faith-in-action: “We are in the world to make it better” ... “Every man and every woman has his or her assignments in the duties and responsibilities of life and each should seek to find out just what his or her vocation is, then go to work with a will, resolute and unyielding, and in the fullness of time astounding results will be achieved.”⁶³³ She made good use of her privileged pulpit position to summon those in power to use their privileged voice for good. On Race Relations Sunday (February 14, 1941), Randolph preached “If I Were White,” challenging whites to practice their faith: “If I were white and believed in God, in His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Bible, I would speak in no uncertain words against Race Prejudice, Hate, Oppression, and Injustice.”⁶³⁴ Week after week, Randolph courageously claimed the power of the pulpit to preach a relevant and transformative word.

Over the length of her pastoral ministry, Randolph preached a vast number of sermons. This analysis will focus on the rhetoric of two sermons that address most clearly the question of women’s call to preach: “Antipathy to Women Preachers” (1930) and “Looking Backward and Forward” (1943). These sermons not only contain the basic characteristics of a sermon (truth, Bible, theology and culture), but they also function as rhetorical acts with the goal of changing the way people see things in regards to women preaching. In these sermons, Randolph engages a three-part rhetorical strategy. First, she names and wrestles with the question of inner call; second, she answers

⁶³³ Ibid., 119-20.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., 129.

authoritatively and definitively, so as to end debate over women preaching; finally, she summons women to courageously and faithfully answer their call.

“Antipathy to Women Preachers”

In this sermon, Randolph identifies the question of a woman’s call to preach. Starting with the title, she names the problem for what it is—antipathy to women preachers. She confesses, “There always has been and still is great antipathy to women preachers.”⁶³⁵ She does not dismiss it or sugar-coat it but names it for what it is: antipathy—a settled aversion or dislike. In so doing, she calls out all those who would try to hide their aversion behind their chivalrous claim to protect women and their virtuous nature, leading them, sweetly but sternly, away from the pulpit and back into the house.

Having called the problem out of hiding and named it for what it is—antipathy to women preachers—Randolph then engages the question with appeals to the theological truth and biblical witness, not to mention logical reason. One can imagine Rev. Randolph using all the power of the pulpit to strongly challenge the way it has always been with the way God intended it to be: “But, God, with whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, in His wonderful plan of salvation has called and chosen men and women according to His divine will as laborers together with Him for the salvation of the world.” Despite the conventional way of seeing women as domestic servants, she corrects the popular perception with a biblical worldview.

⁶³⁵ Note how she uses antipathy, from Greek anti-pathos, when pathos is used by Aristotle to describe preacher’s appeals to listener’s emotions.

Randolph uses the language of the Bible to reinforce that she is not appealing to culture or the way she would have it be, but rather, the way that God has ordained it to be, as we read in the stories of women in the Holy Scriptures. She provides numerous examples of women playing an active role in the Bible, including: Miriam, Deborah, Hagar, and the women at the tomb who became witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. She reminds listeners that in leading the Israelites out of slavery, Moses did not work alone:

We see in the greatest event which makes up the history of Israel, woman is conspicuous and takes her part, for Miriam the prophetess is reckoned among the deliverers of Israel. We read from the Prophet—Micah 6:4 “... I sent before thee *Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*”⁶³⁶

Randolph re-tells the story of Deborah—a wife and a mother and also a wise leader and counselor for the people of Israel:

Deborah the judge shows very plainly what is possible for a woman to do, especially a woman led of God and her work [withstands] forever the assertion of some that a woman if she be a wife and mother is only fit to look after her household. Deborah was a wife and mother in Israel yet her capacious soul embraced more than her own family. It reached thousands on the outside and we see her work, both in and outside, sweetly blended together. See her under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim, and the children of Israel coming up to her for judgment. She was a great liberator.⁶³⁷

Anticipating the objections of those who appeal to the limited role of women in society, Randolph first describes Deborah as a wife and mother. Then, she goes on describe how Deborah cared for more than her family. Randolph's preaching engages both a pastoral persona that offers reassurances, and a prophetic persona that envisions another way to be women faithful to God's call. Her tone is both direct and demure. She calls the question of women preaching first, with a declaration of fact: “It can be plainly seen from the very

⁶³⁶ Randolph, “Antipathy to Women Preachers,” in Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 127. The sermon texts include: Isaiah 62:11; Matthew 21:5; John 12:15; Genesis 21:17, 26:24, 46:3; Exodus 14:13; Micah 6:4.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

beginning that God destined that women should take an active part in the great drama of life and should indeed be man's helpmate," clearly showing that there is no need for further debate. Period. But then, Randolph makes a move to the emotive level with a word of assurance: Like Deborah, whose work reached thousands on the outside, today, women's work both inside and outside the home could be "sweetly blended together." With Deborah's example of blending together work within the home and outside the home, Randolph employs Deborah as "a great liberator"—perhaps as a suggestive call for the women of today to look to Deborah and other women of scripture and in the church to lead the way to their liberation.

Randolph appeals to another woman in the Bible whose story is not well known or often preached. Hagar, a rejected slave of Sarah and Abraham's, is not part of the covenanted family and seemingly beyond the grasp of God's call. But things are not always what they seem. Hagar's story is a powerful witness of just how far-reaching God's call is. Here, we see evidence of Randolph's great skill as a preacher who calls listeners to step out into a new way, but also reassures them that they will not walk alone—but in the footsteps of Hagar and in the presence of God:

To Hagar in the wilderness of Beersheba (Gen. 21:17)[:] Fear not, Hagar, for God hath heard the voice of the Lord where he is." We hear him saying to Isaac and Beersheba[,] "Fear not, for I am with thee and will bless thee ..." To the children of Israel at the Red Sea (By the mouth of Moses)[:] "Fear ye not; stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show to you today."⁶³⁸

In addition to Miriam, Deborah and Hagar, Randolph also offers examples of men—Jeremiah, Ezekial, and Daniel—who were called to not fear but to trust in God.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 126.

Having shown examples of biblical women who played active roles next to men, Randolph engages the most problematic role of women—that of preacher. She uses the first women at the empty tomb of Jesus as examples of great faith and capable of great work—even to be the “first preachers:”

Hence we are not surprised that after the resurrection the first words spoken to the first preachers of the gospel are the words: “Fear not ye.” Fear not, women, because you are about a great work for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified and I am not surprised for you ministered to Him during His life. In death you were not divided. You followed Him to the cross, notwithstanding the danger to which you were exposed and now you have come to weep at His tomb. But weep not. He is not here, for He is risen, as He said.

The sermon recounts the call and charge of Jesus to the women: to go and preach the first gospel sermon without fear, because it is Christ himself who commissioned the women.

But go quickly and take the glad news, preach the first gospel sermon, take the message to those who are to be the teachers of the whole human race. Go and find his disciples wherever they are. You have been faithful, you persevered for the truth and hence you are honored by God and are first commissioned.⁶³⁹

Randolph calls the women at the tomb the “first preachers of the gospel.” She reminds listeners of Jesus’ words to the women: “Go quickly and take the glad news, preach the first gospel sermon, take the message.” Clearly and cleverly, Randolph encourages women who are called to preach today to fear not, because God is in the call and in the work to which they are called. She reminds them that, just like the first women at the tomb, they are called by God, commissioned by Christ, and needed by the church. The message of the sermon then is: If you are called by God, then you must not fear, but you must answer the call.

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

Florence Randolph's sermon inspired other female preachers to put the full weight of their authority and office behind this ongoing debate. Bishop Rosa Horn preached "Was a Woman Called to Preach? Yes!" at WBNX, a black radio station in New York City in the late 1930s. The sermon appeals to the biblical witness of women preaching. Horn explains, "when God said that both men and women would prophesy, God meant that they would both preach."⁶⁴⁰ Randolph re-inhabits the authority of the pulpit and the bible to preach an unconventional and liberating word that effectively re-scripts women's role in the church.

"Looking Backward and Forward"

On the sixtieth anniversary of Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of A.M.E. Zion Church (1943), Florence Spearing Randolph preached the sermon "Looking Backward and Looking Forward." This sermon was preached to women who had served the church as missionaries for sixty years. Randolph looked back and celebrated just how far they had come with their missionary endeavors; and in order to encourage the missionaries to not lose heart despite the challenges of today, she challenged her listeners to look forward to new possibilities.

Curiously, while it had been an established practice to train and send women into foreign lands to engage in the ultimate pulpit endeavor of converting souls of every color and creed, still it was not widely accepted to have women in American pulpits. Despite this seeming contradiction, Randolph does not preach this particular sermon in defense of women's ordination nor does she explicitly speak of women preaching. The fact that she does not specifically address women preachers suggests that for Randolph the issue is

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 176.

settled and she is not arguing whether or not women should preach, but rather beckoning women to follow their call wherever it leads—into a far-away land or into a local church pulpit. Her sermon is not a public address on women’s rights, but in her words to encourage missionaries, all women can find themselves and overhear a word of spiritual encouragement to answer their call.

At the beginning of the sermon, Randolph provides the structure of what is to come, based on the two portions of Scripture: first, ‘Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,’ and second, ‘Let thine eyes look right on and let thine eye lids look straight before thee.’ “Hence we are taking both, a backward and a forward look, as we rejoice in the leading of a mighty God.” And so, Randolph begins by looking back on the sixty years and honors the work of one of the General Presidents, the Rev. Mary J. Small and many other missionaries. “You, my dear co-workers, are looking back, back to your many prayers, your many dreams, many perished hopes, many disappointments, as well as your many joys. You have crossed your 60th milestone—surely you can say, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” After she briefly recounts the pains but also the gains of this “history, blessed history, sacred history,” she looks forward, reminding her listeners, “We are now at a new beginning.” While looking back over all the hardships and obstacles that women missionaries faced in answering their call from God, some might be tempted to get stuck in self-pity and blame: “Oh! How much there is concealed in a look, there is the look of contempt, of indifference, of pity, of sympathy.” But, with pastoral persona, Rev. Randolph reminds all: “But when we say ‘hitherto’ and look back, we also look

forward and then we say, “He who hath helped us ‘hitherto’ will help us all the journey through.””⁶⁴¹

While Randolph beckons her listeners to look forward, she realizes that there is still a long way to go in making things right—“there are yet a few more trials, a few more joys, more of real work.” And so she turns to the Bible, where she appeals to the example of Daniel. “Daniel had to fight with jealousy[,] the most cruel thing in all the world;--it is cruel as the grave—it will not stop at anything. But he did not only keep the window of his room open towards Jerusalem the Holy City, but he kept the window of his soul, his mind[,] open towards God—and prayed and he conquered by the way he was able to look at things.”⁶⁴² By refusing to bow to the powers of the state and worship the king, Daniel’s faith was sustained and strengthened by looking beyond the here and now of the lion’s den to the future of God’s realm.

Randolph then applies the truth found in the Biblical world to the challenges of the contemporary mission field:

Now if we are going to succeed in this great missionary endeavor[,] building schools, and churches in our African fields, then our souls must have windows; we must look away from self and self effort to God and his promises that cannot fail.⁶⁴³

Using the language of metaphor, Randolph communicates a deeper truth—windows of the soul allow a greater horizon of sight:

So many lives are like rooms without windows, they have no soul look, no spiritual look, no great ideas or ideals,--all they see are material things—what they eat and drink and wear, and the things they want. There is nothing grand and noble that does not look beyond self and self gratification ... Our souls must have windows, open windows so that we may have [the] long view.—You know,—we are told when the eyes are

⁶⁴¹ Randolph, “Looking Back and Looking Forward,” in *Ibid.*, 140.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

tired, not to fix them on things near, but to look far away—there is less strain. So when the heart and soul are tired with the strains and stress of life, with hardships and ingratitude, many times from those we serve, we must look beyond it all to the hills from whence cometh our help, look by faith until we see God, and there will come a peace and quietness that the world cannot give, neither take away ...⁶⁴⁴

Having invited missionaries to see through the eyes of their souls, she then challenges them to envision a better world and to work to embody their vision:

We as missionaries, must learn to look at the hills, see the wonderful changes for a better world—see our work as we would have it, dream dreams and see visions of our work as we would have it, not as we would not have it.⁶⁴⁵

Randolph utilizes the metaphor of “windows of the soul” to correct cultural perceptions and worldview with gospel lenses and spiritual sense.

Throughout this sermon, Randolph’s tone is personal (“Our happiness and joys, our burdens and sorrows, our successes and failures all depend upon the way we look at things ...”) and persuasive (“Our souls must have windows; we must look away from self and self effort to God and his promises that cannot fail.”), but overall pastoral (“Look by faith until we see God, and there will come a peace and quietness that the world cannot give, neither take away”).

While Randolph is speaking specifically to missionaries, her words can easily be heard as a message of encouragement and hope for women still struggling with claiming their calls to serve God as preachers. “So when the heart and soul are tired with the strains and stress of life, with hardships and ingratitude, many times from those we serve, we must look beyond it all to the hills from whence cometh our help, look by faith until we see God.” These words help remind women that their calls and gifts will not always

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

be recognized by the church on earth; therefore, they must look to God for guidance and direction. Rev. Randolph reminds women and all those who struggle with this conflict between serving God and serving God's church on earth: "But thank God—the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal."⁶⁴⁶ While she calls missionaries to trust God's call to foreign lands, the woman struggling to follow God's call to the foreign place of church authority can overhear her message of calling for the internal debate to end and the external pursuit of call to begin.

Randolph concludes this sermon with a call for her fellow disciples to look ahead and look to God. "Let us then, dear co-workers, renew our vows, place our hands in his, and be ever mindful of the heritage we shall leave to those who will celebrate the next 60 years.—*This is our only chance.*" This summons is full of faith in God's time, but also full of awareness of the need to stand and serve now. To women listening in, with a particular concern about how to answer God's call to preach, Randolph delivers her final poetic and powerful words.

The bread that bringeth strength I want to give,
The water pure that bids the thirsty live;
I want to help the fainting day by day—
I'm sure I shall not pass again this way.—

I want to give the oil of joy for tears,—
The faith to conquer crowding doubts and fears,
Beauty for ashes may I give always,
I'm sure I shall not pass again this way.—

I want to give good measure running o'er,
And into angry hearts I want to pour—
The answer soft that turneth wrath away—
I'm sure I shall not pass this way.—

*"Let your eyes look straight ahead—gaze right in front of you to God."*⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 145.

With the assurance that they will not pass this way again, Florence Randolph calls all women to focus on God and follow—into the mission field, into the pulpit—wherever God calls them to go.

Conclusion

In the theatre of nineteenth-century American religion, women played the role of social reformers and Sunday school teachers. Both social convention and church canon presented obstacles to women inhabiting the pulpit. Women's public place, authority and voice were in question. In order to effect change, women had to employ rhetoric: rhetoric of rights in the political realm, rhetoric of duty in the social realm, and rhetoric of call in the religious realm. For Florence Spearing Randolph, her 'rhetoric of call' took the form of sermons preached from a pulpit. She interrupted the dominant narrative restricting women's calls with an inclusive vision and compelling proclamation. She responded to the questions and prohibitions by claiming the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of her call, and the power of the pulpit. In her sermons, particularly "Antipathy to Women Preachers" and "Looking Backward and Forward," Randolph appealed to biblical witness and missionary practice in order to construct an alternative narrative of women's call. In her pulpit rhetoric, she effectively utilized a three-part rhetorical strategy of naming, answering authoritatively and definitively so as to end debate of women preaching, and summoning women to answer God's call into the office of ordained ministry and to claim the power of pulpit.

CHAPTER VII

CALLING THE QUESTION IN CONTEMPORARY HOMILETICS

*Each one of us has some kind of vocation. We are all called by God to share in His life and in His Kingdom. Each one of us is called to a special place in the Kingdom. If we find that place we will be happy. If we do not find it, we can never be completely happy. For each one of us, there is only one thing necessary: to fulfill our own destiny, according to God's will, to be what God wants us to be.*⁶⁴⁸

~Thomas Merton

Introduction

“Call the Question” traces the history of call through the nineteenth century, at a time when the question of women’s call to preach, although seemingly fixed by cultural convention, was being raised by some courageous women in different settings, through different genres, and to different effect. This project recovers the neglected narrative of women’s call to preach through the historical accounts and rhetorical witness of four preaching pioneers: Jarena Lee, Frances Willard, Louisa Woosley, and Florence Spearing Randolph. They each realized that telling their story of call was not enough to overcome the institutional and conventional obstacles to their preaching; therefore, they had to attend to how the story is told to convince others of its validity. Using rhetorical strategies, they constructed narratives of their call to preach, appealing to authorities particular to their contexts. These four representative women, although different in approach, all accomplished three things: 1) they named the issue of women’s call to preach; 2) they engaged the debate by de-constructing the conventional answer (“no”)

⁶⁴⁸ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1955), 131.

based on various authorities, then re-constructing the argument that allows women to authoritatively and faithfully claim their call to preach (“yes”); and 3) they ‘called the question’ to end the debate.

Having interpreted the call narratives, we can now assess the rhetoric of these women theoretically, and then suggest ways in which their rhetorical strategies can be organized and utilized by women who are seeking ways to articulate and defend their calls to preach in today’s ecclesial and homiletical context.

Theoretical Perspectives

Rhetorical Act

A rhetorical act, according to Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, is “an intentional, created, polished attempt to overcome the obstacles in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end.” In fact, she claims, a rhetorical act “creates a message whose shape and form, beginning and end, are stamped on it by a human author with a goal for an audience.”⁶⁴⁹ Kohrs Campbell details the elements of rhetorical action as follows:

1. Purpose: the conclusion argued (thesis) and the response desired by the audience;
2. Audience: the author’s target, i.e., the listeners or readers selected to play the audience’s role;
3. Persona: the role adopted by the persuader in making the argument (such as teacher, preacher, reporter, prophet, etc.);
4. Tone: the author’s attitude toward the subject and the audience (e.g. instructive, sarcastic, or persuasive);
5. Structure: the way the materials are organized to emphasize certain elements, gain attention, and develop the case;

⁶⁴⁹ Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act*, 7.

6. Supporting materials: different kinds of evidence for the argument;
7. Strategies: adaptation of language, appeals, and argument to shape the materials to overcome the rhetorical problem.⁶⁵⁰

In the previous chapters, I remember historical women who made effective rhetorical moves toward the liberation of the call to preach from oppressive structures, and I re-construct their arguments as a way to give women today access to their arguments. These four women engaged in rhetorical acts, that is, “intentional, created, polished attempts to overcome the obstacles in a given situation with a specific audience on a given issue to achieve a particular end.”⁶⁵¹ Through a variety of rhetorical acts — personal, public, prophetic, and pulpit—they effectively reformed understandings of the call to preach. For each woman, the genre—including the persona, tone, audience, and structure—is different; however, the purpose is the same: to convince their audience of the legitimacy of their call to preach. Each element of their rhetorical act is subjected to rhetorical analysis, as we seek to understand how they named the issue, engaged the debate, and effectively ‘called the question.’

Naming the Issue

In *The Word Before the Powers*, Charles Campbell defines the powers as that which “comprise all of social, political, and corporate reality, in both visible and invisible manifestations.” Campbell makes a convincing case for the proliferation of the powers. He argues that these powers come in different shapes and forms and go by different names, but are equally tyrannical. “The intransigence of other ‘isms,’ from classism to sexism to heterosexism, has likewise called attention to the legion of powers that oppress

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 7.

people and hold them captive.”⁶⁵² But, he also claims, by citing Walter Wink, that the church is called to transform the powers: “The church’s peculiar calling is to discern and engage both the structure and the spirituality of oppressive institutions.”⁶⁵³ One way the church engages the oppressive structures is by speaking truth to the powers. It begins by exposing the powers. According to Campbell, “Christian preaching exposes the powers of death. The preacher names the powers and unveils their reality ... Exposing them requires preachers to cut through ignorance, denial, and numbness and speak the truth in creative and powerful ways.”⁶⁵⁴ Sometimes the powers that need to be called out lie within the ecclesial walls, embedded in the ordination rituals, inscribed in the dominant narrative of call. All four women participated in this call to “engage the oppressive structures” through rhetoric which “speaks truth to the powers,” and seeks to transform the ecclesial and social powers that deny women their God-given call.

The first step—the essential step—in speaking the truth to the powers is in identifying the oppressive structures by calling them out by name. In *Saved From Silence*, Mary Donovan Turner and Mary Lin Hudson claim, “Hope is lodged in the naming. It is only when the oppression, the suffering, and the pain of the world continue to be named and proclaimed that we can continue to hope.”⁶⁵⁵ The power that the church has over the evil powers of the world lies in its hope. William Sloan Coffin has said, “Hope resists. Hopelessness adapts.”⁶⁵⁶ The preacher has the power not only to name the oppressive force, but also to speak a message of hope—pointing to a time when

⁶⁵² ———, *The Word before the Powers : An Ethic of Preaching*, 7.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 106. See also Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

⁶⁵⁵ Turner and Hudson, *Saved from Silence : Finding Women's Voice in Preaching*, 113.

⁶⁵⁶ William Sloane Coffin, *A Passion for the Possible : A Message to U.S. Churches*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 88.

injustice will be eradicated and the weeping will end. Not through a face-to-face battle of the powers that be, but rather through their narratives and their rhetoric, these female preachers named the oppressive powers and found their voice to construct a liberating narrative of call.

Engaging the Debate Tactically

The four representative women spoke truth to the powers by naming the oppressive powers that deny their call to preach. They engage in the debate by deconstructing the conventional answer (“no”) based on various authorities, and then reconstructing the argument that allows women to authoritatively and faithfully claim their call to preach (“yes”). The strategies they employed are particularly important to understand. Here, two theoretical perspectives are helpful: Michael de Certeau’s “tactics” and Saba Mahmood’s “creative resistance/re-inhabiting.”

“Speaking truth to the powers” is a most effective strategy for transforming the powers of oppressive institutions when one has a place of power in which to stand and from which to preach; for women, this is not a given. Strategies, explains Michael de Certeau, are actions which are organized from the establishment of a place of power. Tactics, however, “are determined by the absence of power.”⁶⁵⁷ Men have and continue to utilize strategies; whereas women have learned how to creatively make good use of tactics. De Certeau argues: “Although they use as their *material* the *vocabularies* of established languages (those of television, newspapers, the supermarket or city planning), although they remain within the framework of prescribed *syntaxes* (the temporal modes of schedules, paradigmatic organizations of places, etc.), these ‘traverses’ remain

⁶⁵⁷ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 38.

heterogeneous to the systems they infiltrate and in which they sketch out the guileful ruses of *different* interests and desires.”⁶⁵⁸ That is to say, tactics make use of the established tropes of their context, including the theological truths, biblical interpretations, and sermonic messages. Tactics remain within the conventions or canons of church tradition; however, within oppressive structures and tropes, tactics, as “guileful ruses,” do their work in advocating and embodying a different way. Tactics are what allow someone without power to “riff” off the authorities by which they are formed and which they seek to re-form. The “tactics” the four women employed used as their material and language the authoritative tropes of experience, culture, Bible, and church tradition, in an effort to transform them.

While some works focus on the women who resisted cultural convention and left the restrictive canon and practices of the church in order to work for women’s call to preach, this project focuses on women who stayed inside the restrictive conventional code and oppressive ecclesial walls and sought to make changes from within. How were women able to claim their voice in such prohibitive space? In her recent doctoral dissertation, “Her Preaching Body: A Qualitative Study of Agency, Meaning, and Proclamation in Contemporary Female Preachers,” Amy P. McCullough argues, “agency’s hidden work often lies in behaviors that conform.”⁶⁵⁹ Throughout history, women without power have tried to change oppressive structures through removal (leaving the prohibitive space), direct resistance (speaking the truth to powers), and indirect resistance (tactics). Some women have practiced resistance that looks like accommodation, but is creative, clever, and unconventional.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁵⁹ McCullough, "Her Preaching Body a Qualitative Study of Agency, Meaning and Proclamation in Contemporary Female Preachers."

Saba Mahmood, in her study of traditional Muslim women within the contemporary Mosque, describes such a form of resistance in agency. According to Mahmood, agency is “a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create.”⁶⁶⁰ That is to say, the possibility for change exists in the very structure of orthodoxy that resists change. Mahmood also suggests that “agentive capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms, but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms.”⁶⁶¹ In these case studies, I have explored the established authoritative tropes of the nineteenth century, focusing on what was available to the women, each in their particular social location. In each instance, their rhetorical strategies appealed to established authorities, and then strategically ‘re-inhabited’ them; that is, reclaimed them for their own purpose—to justify their calls to preach. This is not new. Although female preachers have historically inhabited subordinate space, Amy McCullough argues that “they have continued to exercise tremendous structure-altering agency ... that altered cultural norms about female preachers.” And they have done so not by dramatic action alone, but “female preachers also have enacted their agency through conforming to social norms or theological expectations about what it means to be female.”⁶⁶² The women in this study appeal to the authorities that deny their call to preach, then re-inhabit them in order to liberate and claim their call.

Eunjoo Mary Kim tells the story of women throughout history who have utilized this creative agency in re-inhabiting norms. One such preacher, Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz wrote the following poem that was sung at the dedication of a church in 1690:

⁶⁶⁰ Saba Mahmood, "Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject," in Armour and St. Ville, *Bodily Citations : Religion and Judith Butler*, 180.

⁶⁶¹ Saba Mahmood, "Agency, Performativity, and the Feminist Subject," in *Ibid.*, 186.

⁶⁶² McCullough, "Her Preaching Body a Qualitative Study of Agency, Meaning and Proclamation in Contemporary Female Preachers."

The Church, Bernard and Mary
it would be a good occasion
to bring them into concert
If I were a preacher.
But no, no, no, no:
I'm not cut of such fine cloth.
But supposing that I were,
what things would I say
moving from text to text
searching for connections?
But no, no, no, no:
I'm not cut of such fine cloth.

The words of Sor Juana's poem make a declarative statement about women not preaching; however, reading between the lines, we discover that she is preaching, even while she is saying she should not. Josefina Ludmer defines this tactic as a "trick of the weak," a rhetorical technique that combines acceptance of her subordinate position with the trick of saying one thing, but meaning another. Using this form, concludes Kim, "Sor Juana secures her position as a woman preacher, actually preaching while denying she was doing so."⁶⁶³ This illustrates what McCullough argues: "agency's hidden work often lies in behaviors that conform." Each of the four women in this study employ this "trick of the weak" in order to exercise agency in behaviors that conform, all the while transforming cultural and ecclesial norms about women preachers.

The conventional rhetoric of "women do not preach" silenced the four women, but also gave them something, in the words of bell hooks, to "talk back" to.⁶⁶⁴ Rhetorical analysis helps to "identify and reconstruct how we define ourselves to our institutions and how our institutions define us."⁶⁶⁵ In order to defend against marginalization, while also

⁶⁶³ Kim, *Women Preaching : Theology and Practice through the Ages*, 69.

⁶⁶⁴ bell hooks, "Talking Back," in Jodi O'Brien, *The Production of Reality : Essays and Readings on Social Interaction*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Pine Forge Press, 2006), 513-16.

⁶⁶⁵ Muriel Harris, "Making our Institutional Discourse Sticky: Suggestions for Effective Rhetoric," *The Writing Center Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2010), 1.

proclaiming our stance as innovators, Muriel Harris introduces the concept of “sticky discourse,” which she defines as “writing that is positive, appeals appropriately to our audiences, is highly memorable, and is concrete and specific.”⁶⁶⁶ In order to make the discourse “sticky,” Harris says the central claim has to be meaningful, yet simple; and “it has to replace old schemas with the schemas we want to stick.”⁶⁶⁷ These women, who experienced a divine summons to preach, knew the truth of the inspired inward call. However, as Harris reminds us, “the truth alone will not set you free. It has to be framed correctly.”⁶⁶⁸ The challenge that the women faced in the nineteenth century and that we face today is finding effective “frames” for our ideas, so that they will be remembered. In a way similar to Harris’ concept of “sticky discourse,” these women’s rhetoric unveils what aspects of their discourse “stuck” (or have the power to stick) with their audience—both then and now.

Calling the Question

After the women named the issue—spoke truth to the powers using their voice—engaged the question of their call—through tactics and re-inhabiting norms—and provided thoughtful and theological answers, they, in parliamentary effect, ‘called the question’ to end the debate over female preaching. In order to understand how women of the nineteenth century were able to do so, a recent study of women’s use of rhetoric as conversation is helpful. In *Conversational Rhetoric: the rise and fall of a women’s tradition, 1600-1900*, Jane Donawerth looks at how women engage in rhetoric in conversation, not in a confrontational or combative way. She argues that “women put

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 5.

forth conversation as a model for all discourse, urging speaking and writing that is collaborative, not antagonistic in relation to the audience, seeking consensus, not domination as a goal of communication, advising best practices for domestic rhetoric, developing an art of listening.”⁶⁶⁹ Donawerth provides a look at historical examples of women’s rhetoric in order to understand “the gendered nature of rhetorical discourse in their culture,” and how it “restructured the constraints of gender as a means to persuasion.”⁶⁷⁰ One of the women Donawerth studies is Frances Willard. She states that “Willard’s argument is founded on the concept of conversation as a model for discourse ... puts forth women as examples ... sees women’s preaching as an extension of her domestic experience in conversation”⁶⁷¹ This strategy of “conversational rhetoric” enables us to understand just how these women did not allow their exceptional “calling” to stop them; rather they also joined rhetorically in an ongoing conversation with other female preaching pioneers.

There is another method in which metaphors of “scripting” and “re-scripting” theoretically informs the ways in which these four women operate rhetorically. The four women studied inherited an established script with their conventional role highlighted. The role had been well-rehearsed by women centuries before them, and had given them a place in church and society. All they had to do was follow the script—without deviation. But, a preacher was not one of the scripted roles. And, as they tried and failed to interpret their calls within the constructs recognized as the appropriate components of a woman’s life script, they were forced to write their own narrative scripts—as Elaine Lawless describes, to “rescript” their lives. In a study of Pentecostal women preachers,

⁶⁶⁹ Donawerth, *Conversational Rhetoric : The Rise and Fall of a Women's Tradition, 1600-1900*, 16.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 100.

Lawless recorded their spiritual life stories and offered their narratives as “model life scripts” especially for women wrestling with their own calls to ministry. “The scripts of women who have come before them in this strange and demanding world serve as scripts not only for their lives but for their own narratives,” instructs Lawless, which in turn, “serve to dictate the structure of other women’s lives.”⁶⁷² The narrative provides more than a story, but a structure (and component parts) which can be replicated in numerous ways, specific to the particular context. And the script can be edited, even as it is being enacted.

In order to understand the significance of these women’s call narratives for encouraging other women to articulate their call to preach and for interrupting the dominant narrative, they make good use of this narrative strategy of rescripting. “This delicate interweaving of text and life experience, script and rescripting,” claims Lawless, “illustrates the power of language and narrative to validate and authenticate the lived life.” Further, this interwoven narrative “suggests how women’s stories serve to disrupt the status quo, call it into question, and provide the means to weaken male power and authority and deflect religious injunctions intended to silence women’s voices. It is indicative of the ways women take control of their lives and their voices, subvert the dictates of male hierarchy, and violate man-made codes which restrict them.”⁶⁷³ By interrupting and calling into question the dominant narrative of call, women claim voice, exercise agency, and construct a narrative of affirmation and inclusion. Lawless

⁶⁷² Elane J. Lawless, "Rescripting their Lives and Narratives: Spiritual Life Stories of Pentecostal Women Preachers," in David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis, *A Reader on Preaching : Making Connections*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Pub., 2005), 240.

⁶⁷³ Elane J. Lawless, "Rescripting their Lives and Narratives: Spiritual Life Stories of Pentecostal Women Preachers," in *Ibid.*, 241.

interprets the narratives of Pentecostal female preachers as “a strong statement about women who defy restrictions about what they can do and say; it can be interpreted as a story they tell about themselves—a story of liberation.”⁶⁷⁴ Likewise, the story I tell of four nineteenth century female preachers is a powerful statement about strong women who defy restrictions, de-construct the dominant narrative, and in their own (call) narrative voice, tell a story of struggle and liberation, in order to reclaim rhetorical devices and re-imagine creative scripts for future practice.

In a similar fashion, Richard Rohr’s description of the process involved in “mature” uses of scripture is suggestive for the way these women “call the question:”

1. They confront us with a bigger picture than we are used to; “God’s kingdom” has the potential to “de-construct” our false and smaller kingdoms.
2. They then have the power to convert us to an alternative world view by proclamation, grace, and sheer attraction to the good, the true, the beautiful (in contrast to lower-level motivations—shame, guilt or fear—which operate more quickly, so often used by churches).
3. They then console us and bring deep healing as they “re-construct” us in a new place with a new mind and heart.⁶⁷⁵

This model can be applied to more than the interpretation of scripture; it can also be used to re-frame a rhetoric of liberation. The model can be applied to the work of this project in order to re-state what the women did as a process of de-construction and re-construction:

1. In naming the powers that deny their call, they de-constructed false perceptions of call by naming the issue of women’s prohibitions.
2. In engaging the debate and answering the question of women’s call with various rhetorical and tactical devices, they converted people to a new worldview.
3. In ‘calling the question’ of women preaching, they re-constructed a theology of call that has the power to bring healing and wholeness to the church.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Rohr, *Preparing for Christmas with Richard Rohr : Daily Reflections for Advent*, 64-5.

This de-construction and reconstruction work is not once and for all, but rather an ongoing process. This project uncovers models of historical women calling the question which can be utilized by women claiming their call to preach, as well as taught as a homiletical method for preaching gospel.

Historical and Rhetorical Witness: Re-covering Narratives of Call

Jarena Lee: Rhetorical Narrative of Experience

After America's Declaration of Independence, Jarena Lee realized that there were exceptions to the words "liberty for all" because "all" did not include black women like herself. Although the dominant refrain was one of exclusion, Jarena Lee learned that the loudest voice does not necessarily speak the truth. When she heard God's still small voice calling her to preach the gospel, she realized that God's kingdom had the power to de-construct the false kingdoms of the world. As Lee wrestled with the conflict between her inner sense of call and the church's refusal to endorse her preaching, she appealed to a higher authority: "For as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach," still she believed that "nothing is impossible with God."⁶⁷⁶ By making appeals to divine authority and the authority of personal experience, Lee began to convert people to a new worldview. She used the genre of spiritual autobiography as a rhetorical form to express her countercultural sense of call. In her rhetoric, she challenged the status quo of the 'way it is' and called other women to claim their call to preach, as the 'way it should be.'

⁶⁷⁶ Andrews et al., *Sisters of the Spirit : Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, 36.

Using her voice empowered by the experience of divine call, Lee named the issue: “For as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach.” In so doing, she spoke truth to the ecclesial powers, arguing that since God called her to preach, then obviously, God does call women preachers.

Although Lee conformed to the church canon, which did not license her pulpit preaching, through her itinerant preaching and rhetorical writing, she worked to transform cultural and ecclesial norms about female preachers. With her own call narrative, she effectively interrupted the dominant narrative, which read: “But as to women preaching, he said that our Discipline knew nothing at all about it—that it did not call for women preachers.”⁶⁷⁷ By re-inhabiting the conventional trope of autobiography, she re-constructed a theology of call based on personal experience of call and divine authority over and above all other authorities. With an appeal to personal experience, Biblical witness, and the efficacy of her preaching in saving souls, Lee made a convincing case.

After naming the issue and engaging the debate, Lee ‘called the question’ of endorsed ecclesial preaching by women, claiming: “I am fully persuaded that the Lord called me to labor in his vineyard.” Convinced of the integrity of her call to preach and the fruitfulness of its practice, she no longer cared to debate the question: “I firmly believe that I have sown seed, in the name of the Lord.”⁶⁷⁸ Lee claimed voice, exercised agency, and constructed a narrative of call to persuade others of the veracity of her divine call.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., 37.

Efficacy of Rhetorical Narrative of Experience

When Jarena Lee first told her experience of the call to preach, Bishop Allen said, “Our Discipline knows nothing of it.” Despite the resistance, she could not deny her divine call. When she claimed and exercised her call during a worship service several years later, Bishop Allen could no longer deny her call to preach. Although she was not given a pulpit or a license, she was given authority to preach as an itinerant. Through Lee’s narrative of call and practice of preaching, the worldview of one bishop and that of the congregations to whom she preached began to change, expanding to include women preachers.

Frances Willard: Rhetorical Narrative of Cultural Reform

Frances Willard’s call did not come from a personal experience of hearing an inward divine call. Rather, when she was baptized as an adult, she realized that she was claimed by God and, in response, she made a public promise “to live for God in the world.” She sought to become a minister, because she was known as a “gospel talker,” but the church would not permit women to be ordained as preachers. The ‘cult of domesticity’ was inculcated into the minds of middle-class white women, limiting their place to the private sphere of the home. But Willard realized that through reason and rhetoric, she had the power to de-construct this false perception that had become entrenched in convention. She appealed to the authority of tradition in the form of women’s feminine nature and role in the cultural convention of society, but then re-inhabited it strategically for her own purposes.

First, Willard named the problem “women have been circumscribed” and, “their cases being not judged on their merits, but *pre*-judged,” giving a public platform to women preachers to respond to the prejudice.⁶⁷⁹ She strategically re-inhabited the conventional domestic rhetoric, claiming, “The mission of the ideal woman is to make the world more homelike.”⁶⁸⁰ She re-interpreted the issue of women’s right to preach by re-framing it in the theological language of call: “Ours is a high and sacred calling.”⁶⁸¹ Finally, she ‘called the question’ on women’s place in the pulpit with a battle cry: “just take the right to preach.”⁶⁸²

Willard addressed the prohibition of women from the pulpit by presenting a collaborative argument made by a host of women preachers. By using conversational rhetoric, she began to convert people to a new worldview by making appeals to the authority of women’s nature and collaborative reason. The genre of speeches and books gave her the rhetorical form to express her countercultural and inclusive sense of call for all who think themselves called: “God has given us each ‘a call’ to some peculiar work.” Willard articulated an attention to call that includes an awareness of other women who have made diverse and convincing arguments. Willard’s life and legacy illustrate the importance of public witness—being aware of the culture and the ways in which it shapes the church and the way the church and its rhetoric can shape culture and its practices.

⁶⁷⁹ Willard, A Book for Girls in Willard, Gifford, and Slagell, *Let Something Good Be Said : Speeches and Writings of Frances E. Willard*, 103.

⁶⁸⁰ Slagell, "Making the World More Homelike": The Reform Rhetoric of Frances E. Willard ", 112.

⁶⁸¹ Willard, Gifford, and Slagell, *Let Something Good Be Said : Speeches and Writings of Frances E. Willard*, 103.

⁶⁸² Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit*, 110.

Efficacy of Rhetorical Narrative of Cultural Reform

Frances Willard's book *Woman in the Pulpit* effectively expanded the cultural chorus defending women's call to preach, including women—and men—from different denominations and persuasions. When Willard spoke publically, crowds gathered to hear about the importance of temperance work, but also, perhaps unknowingly, became more open and accepting of a woman's public voice in order to address issues of importance. Her rhetorical platform—'a woman's call is to make the world more homelike'—became "sticky discourse," which stayed with audiences and began to change their worldview of women's role in society. While it is difficult to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of her rhetorical witness, the sheer number of women in the pulpit and in all different facets of nineteenth-century reform testifies to the power of conversational and communal rhetoric of women.

Louisa Woosley: Rhetorical Narrative of Biblical Interpretation

Louisa Woosley was born at a time when religion was changing from revival to institution, but the Bible remained the central authority in the Protestant church in America. The revivals inspired and empowered women to preach, but when the clergy became a profession, churches that had previously supported women preaching withdrew their support. Louisa Woosley sensed a divine call to ministry, but did not believe that women could preach—that is, until she read the entire Bible—from Genesis to Revelation. Convinced that her call was validated as authentic by the Holy Scriptures, she accepted her call and was ordained by the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1889.

Woosley addressed the much disputed question of the ordination of women with a Biblical defense. In her book *Shall Women Preach? or the Questioned Answered* (1891), she named the question of concern (“It is an established fact that the women of the apostolic age did preach, and the Scriptures sustain her as a preacher, no matter what women-gaggers may say”); then she engaged the question of women preaching with an appeal to the authority of the Bible, as she read and interpreted it (“To all who have studied the Bible, and have no pet theory to support, the truth is as clear as a sunbeam”); and then, she concluded by ‘calling the question’ and ending debate (“It is evident that women are to take part in the gospel ministry”).⁶⁸³ By de-constructing the falsity of one well-established biblical interpretation, Woosley re-constructed a biblical hermeneutic that engages the message of the whole Bible. In so doing, she articulated a more expansive theology of call that claims the testimony of the Scriptures and the movement of the Spirit. Finally, she encouraged all women to answer their call to preach: “Women of America, and of God, let us, for the sake of what he has done for us, give ourselves wholly to his work ... Let us like Paul ‘press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.’ Let us willingly give our hearts and our hands to the work which God giveth us to do.”⁶⁸⁴

Woosley’s narrative illustrates the importance of employing a holistic hermeneutic that allows one to grasp a message beyond one text. She also demonstrates the value of reading the Bible with a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’ that encourages one to question conventional interpretations and be willing to look at it through the eyes of those on the margins. Employing different hermeneutics reaffirms her respect for the authority

⁶⁸³ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 70.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

of the Word of God, above all other authorities, including feminine nature or social convention. Woosley's biblical defense illustrates the importance of prophetic witness—speaking a word from God that is not always welcome by God's people, but nevertheless is one they need to hear, trusting that, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, “the word that goes out from God's mouth shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”⁶⁸⁵

Efficacy of Rhetorical Narrative of Biblical Interpretation

Louisa Woosley's claim of biblical interpretation de-constructed the prevailing interpretation that only men are called to preach. Although her ordination was challenged and debated, in the end, it was upheld. This change in worldview went beyond an individual (Lee) or a group of people (Willard), to affect an institutional body of the church. Agency's work, which began as behaviors that conform, initiated a transformation of the very ecclesial structures that once prohibited women preachers.

Florence Spearing Randolph: Rhetorical Narrative of Tradition

Florence Spearing Randolph was born a year after the Civil War ended. Although the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) gave blacks their “official” freedom and the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution gave them the right of voice and vote, black women would continue to struggle for equal treatment as American citizens. Black women were most attentive to the contours of the social-economic landscape that kept them from realizing their full freedom. African Americans saw the evil of racism

⁶⁸⁵ Michael David Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Isaiah 55:11.

through the lens of religion, particularly the lens of call, in which they were able to see themselves as God's beloved, equally called and chosen and free. Despite resistance, Florence Randolph claimed her call to preach and served as pastor of Wallace Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Summit, New Jersey for twenty-one years. Her sermons focused on spiritual conversion and political action. In her sermon "If I Were White," she challenged: "If I were white and believed in God, in His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Bible, I would speak in no uncertain words against Race Prejudice, Hate, Oppression, and Injustice."⁶⁸⁶ She effectively used the power of the pulpit to preach social transformation in race and gender discrimination.

Using pulpit rhetoric, Randolph named the problem as "antipathy to women preachers" and then appealed to biblical and theological truth, in order to preach: "But, God, with whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, in His wonderful plan of salvation has called and chosen men and women according to His divine will as laborers together with Him for the salvation of the world."⁶⁸⁷ Having made her rhetorical point, she then went on to call women to answer their calls to preach, using nothing less than the words of Jesus himself, who commissioned the first female preachers on the day of resurrection: "But go quickly and take the glad news, preach the first gospel sermon, take the message to those who are able to be the teachers of the whole human race ... You have been faithful, you persevered for the truth and hence you are honored by God and are first commissioned."⁶⁸⁸ Having de-constructed the worldview of black and white, male and female, Randolph re-constructed a homiletical vision in which all are one in Christ, equally loved and called to preach the good news.

⁶⁸⁶ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 129.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

Having engaged the issue of women, she then, in effect, called the question, so that the debate will end. She exhorted women to hear the call of Christ to the women at the empty tomb as his call for all women—“go quickly and take the glad news, preach the first gospel sermon ... you are honored by God and are first commissioned.”⁶⁸⁹

Randolph’s pulpit rhetoric exemplifies the homiletical form of a message that combines Biblical interpretation, theological insight, and cultural context. In attending to what breaks through the text and its traditional interpretation, she is able to preach a fresh new word needed for a certain time and place. Her attention to inclusiveness and pervasiveness of call allows her to craft a message that summons all hearers to claim their place, claim their voice, and claim the truth that sets them free.

Efficacy of Rhetorical Narrative of Tradition

Florence Spearing Randolph and Jarena Lee were both members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church who claimed a call to preach. Lee was supported by Bishop Allen and was permitted to preach as an itinerant, beginning in 1819. Nearly seventy-five years later, in 1903, Randolph’s call to preach was not only supported by Rev. Biddle, but was also endorsed by the AME Zion church, thereby granting her full preaching and ministerial authority, which she exercised as an installed pastor in one congregation for over twenty years. The story of these two women marks progress made in the tradition of ordaining women called to preach. At the turn of the twentieth century, times had changed enough to give Randolph a place in which to stand in the tradition of ordained preachers. Randolph effectively utilized the authority granted to her to inhabit

⁶⁸⁹ Ibid.

the pulpit week after week to preach a liberating word aimed at transforming the tradition even more.

Summary

Despite the progress made by and for women in enlarging their place and position in the public realm of nineteenth-century American society, on the religious landscape, convention was seemingly fixed and resistant to women in the pulpit. In order to affect change in the church, women had to narrate their call in a variety of rhetorical forms: itinerant preachers' personal spiritual autobiographies (Jarena Lee), public platform speeches (Frances Willard), prophetic Biblical interpretations (Louisa Woosley) and pulpit sermons (Florence Randolph). Using distinct types of rhetoric and different approaches to various audiences and authorities, through their narrative of call, each of the women articulated strong and effective arguments for women's call to the preaching ministry of the church; in response, they received endorsement of their claims to pulpit places, engaged in sacred persuasive speech, and preached as ordained ministers of the sacred office.

An Ongoing Debate: Calling the Question Today

These four nineteenth-century preaching pioneers persuasively and effectively 'called the question' for the debate over women preachers to end. And, yet the debate did not end. In fact, today, nearly two hundred years after Jarena Lee's call to preach was affirmed by Bishop Richard Allen, the dispute over who is called to preach continues. After the question has been called by such powerful and persuasive rhetoric, why does

the debate persist? I posit at least three reasons: 1) Social convention and institutional tradition form a powerful force against change of any kind—good or bad; 2) Women’s voices of the past have not been well documented or preserved. Instead of building on the progress of the past, women have to keep starting over again and reinvent history (three steps forward are often followed by two steps back); and 3) Historical precedent of women preaching, although prevalent, does not translate to an ongoing practice.

Worldviews are hard to change. Women have to keep making the case. While increased attention has been given to recovering and preserving the tradition of women preachers, more focused analysis of the writings, especially in regard to their call, is necessary and worthy of further scholarly research. Historical writings need to be interpreted and put into practice. Ultimately, what is needed are best practices—of naming the issue and calling the question—that can become habits, which over time, can alter the status quo.

From this narrative that reinstates women to the historical preaching tradition, we are able to recover narratives of call and to reclaim rhetorical strategies and tactics. In turn, these strategies and tactics offer best practices for calling the question, including: re-scripting stories of call that re-inhabit authoritative tropes, re-interpreting call through different hermeneutical lenses, and re-imagining the preaching of call.

Rhetoric of Call: Scripting Call Stories

“Call the Question” reclaims women’s voices as a way to alter the status quo narrative that silences women and prohibits their preaching. By reclaiming the voices of these four women, it is possible to disrupt the historical silences that have discouraged other women from preaching. Reclaiming the rhetoric of ‘calling the question’ of women’s call to preach allows the re-construction of a worldview that can be transmitted

to others. This collective narrative of nineteenth-century women, who took the prescribed script of housewife and mother, and re-scripted it to include the role of preacher, is a powerful model for women today.

Despite the long history of women's preaching and ordination, and the fact that women have proven their ability to preach, many churches still question the legitimacy of a woman's call.⁶⁹⁰ During my time as a pastor and throughout my graduate studies, numerous women have shared their own experience of having their call challenged, ridiculed and denied, based solely on their gender. In order to alter the conventional narrative that silences women and prohibits their preaching, women today must continue to speak truth to the powers by making the case with appeals to different authorities, depending on their social location. Here is where collaborating and adopting different strategies serve women well. A conversation between historical and contemporary women results in the re-scripting of call narratives. Utilizing one or more of these rhetorical strategies, women can find a script suitable for their religious and social context, find their voice in the re-scripting of their call stories, and diffuse the power of the conventional script in order to name and claim their calls to preach.

Personal Voice: "Yes, but ..."

To the implicit—and often explicit—question of the time, "Shall women preach?" Jarena Lee answered unequivocally in her 1836 spiritual autobiography. Her rhetoric still speaks to us loud and clear. If Jarena Lee were alive today, her answer might sound something like this: "Yes, but" ... "Yes, I am called by God, without question! But I

⁶⁹⁰ "The fact that women were ordained for the first twelve hundred years of Christianity will surprise many people." See Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination : Female Clergy in the Medieval West*, vii.

don't need to have my call verified by the church. I don't need to have a license to preach. I will preach outside church walls in homes, in fields, on the streets, wherever God leads me and wherever there are sinners in need of conversion. Yes, I will preach as an itinerant, but I still believe that I am called to preach within the church, just as men. Until such time as the church changes its Discipline to be in line with God's call, I will preach in the places I can. Over time, my word will bear fruit and things will change. Shall women preach? Yes, but not based on human authority, but on the ultimate authority of God. Yes, I will preach, because, without question, God called me to." By telling her story in the form of a rhetorical narrative, Lee interrupted the dominant narrative with her own experience and interpretation of divine call.

Nearly two centuries have passed since Lee spoke her powerful rhetoric in her narrative, and yet, women still struggle with claiming their call to preach. A seminary student told me about the resistance she faced in the ordination process. When she shared her experience of hearing God call her to the preaching ministry, she was ridiculed by a male elder: "How could God speak to you when I have never heard God's voice? I don't know how you, a woman, could have possibly heard God's voice, when I, a man, have never heard it." I asked how she responded, and she admitted feeling alone and confused, not sure how to even begin to answer this man's suspicion of her call. As I reflected on her story, I wondered how it might have been different had she read about Jarena Lee. If this woman knew Lee's rhetorical defense, she might have had an effective strategy for claiming her call to preach. Then, she—and all women who are similarly challenged—might be able to stand strong on the shoulders of Jarena Lee and respond to the elder's challenge with these words: "Yes, I am called by God to preach, without question.

Listen and I will tell you my experience of God's revelation to me. I hope that you and the church will endorse my call. But, if not, then I will preach in the places where I can and trust that my word will bear fruit until such time that things change. I trust that things will change. I believe that God will use the gifts given to me and other women to preach. For nothing is impossible with God." Knowing a history of preaching that includes women like Jarena Lee effectively functions as a great cloud of witnesses that surrounds and upholds and encourages and reminds women today that they are not alone in their struggles to claim their calls to preach.

Practices of Scripting Personal Voice

Contemporary women also make up the cloud of witnesses; in fact, they play an essential role in helping women to hear the call. In her sermon, "Stories After Silence," Mary Eunjoo Kim shared her own story of call: when she was twelve years old and went to a revival meeting with her parents in Korea, she remembers, "The preacher was a woman. I still remember vividly her beautiful Korean traditional dress in the high pulpit." On the way home from the revival that night, as she remembered the powerful message preached, Kim told herself, "I want to be just like her. I want to be a preacher who proclaims the risen Christ."⁶⁹¹ Kim used her own experience of call to encourage other women to claim their own calls. In fact, she preached a message that invites all listeners to write their story as part of the gospel story:

Oh, now, I understand why Mark's gospel ends so strangely. Today's text is *not* the end of the story. Mark doesn't mean to close his Gospel here but wants us the readers to write the ending. He tells us, "You are the ones who are going to break the silence and conclude the Gospel with your *own* stories." Friends, what story of *yours* will end the Gospel?"

⁶⁹¹ Kim, *Women Preaching : Theology and Practice through the Ages*, 166.

Kim's sermon invites us to reflect on our call: What is your call story? How has it been challenged, ridiculed, and denied, as well as affirmed, celebrated and endorsed, by you yourself and by others? When have you experienced being silenced? How did you break the silence? What is your story after Silence? What story of yours will end the Gospel? Write your story of call. Narrate your story with rhetoric to convince others of the veracity of your call. Know your story by heart. Practice sharing your story. Draw your story. Dance your story. Sing your story. Pray your story. Embody your story. Speak your story. Live your story. Love your story. Preach your story.

Although careful discretion is needed, personal stories of call can be used effectively in sermons in order to help others be attentive to their own callings. Tap the rich tradition of the Sarahs receiving calls that seem outrageous, even laughable; the Marys and Jarenas receiving calls that seem impossible, but with God are possible. From them, we learn when to laugh, when to ponder, and when to speak up and tell our call story.

Preachers, particularly women, reminds Christine Smith, "have to believe in their own experience before they can believe in their own voices."⁶⁹² Let Jarena Lee's words help you believe in your experience of call and find your personal voice to preach.

Public Voice: "Well, (hell) Yes!"

To the question, "Shall women preach?" Frances Willard's answer can be captured well in these three words: "Well, (hell) yes!" The word "well" reflects not only to her desire to speak well and have patience until she thought of the right words to say, but also her desire to always speak for women's rights with a womanly voice. The "hell"

⁶⁹² Smith, *Weaving the Sermon : Preaching in a Feminist Perspective*, 99.

reveals the passion of the suffragists that she felt deep in her soul. She would never speak such a word, but thinking of it (as a parenthetical) would nevertheless give her the courage to stand up in front of a crowd or pick up her pen and speak a word of justice for equal opportunities for women who were naturally suited and equally called to public works, including preaching. If confronted with the question today, Willard would say, “Well,” then pause, smile to herself as she considered her next words—both fueled by passion (hell) and controlled by her well-measured character, she would remember her motto: “Let something good be said.” And then she would simply but strongly say, “Yes!” Knowing of the public witness of numerous women preachers, Willard interrupted and sought to change the dominant exclusive narrative.

Nearly two centuries after Frances Willard spoke her powerful rhetoric and claimed her call to preach, women still struggle with claiming their call. A seminary student related to me that when she shared her call to preach with a long-time member of the women’s guild, she faced polite, but strong resistance: “Don’t worry dear, women in the church have an important place: they bake bread for communion or teach the children in Sunday school. It’s tradition. We’ve always done it like that. That’s what women are best suited for.” The female student admitted to feeling excluded and frustrated, but she was not sure how to engage her challenger in discussing a different view of women’s nature and role. I wonder if this student had read about Frances Willard and knew her rhetorical defense, might she have had an effective strategy for engaging the dissenting opinion and a persuasive script for claiming her call to preach.

It is my hope that the woman challenged by a female church member about the restricted role of women in the church—and all those women similarly challenged—

would be able to stand strong on Willard's shoulders and respond to the challenge with these words: "Well, yes, I can appreciate the value of tradition in the church. And tradition teaches us that God has given us each a 'call' to some peculiar work, men and women alike. Some are called to bake the bread; others to teach the children; and others to preach the gospel. I am called by God to preach, without question. I hope that you and the church will endorse my call. Because, well (hell), I think there is room for reform. But, if not, then I will find other ways to make my case—even if it means I have to do so from a public platform outside the walls of the church. I will join with other women who are seeking to honor both their call from God and their commitment to the church. I will exercise my agency and use my voice for those who are powerless to do so."

Practices of Scripting Public Voice

Some women are so silenced by the convention of their particular culture that they do not have a voice; they have a word they cannot speak; they have a song they cannot sing. This is where the role of the community is most needed. Women who can speak need to speak up for those who cannot. This is difficult, but necessary work toward liberation.

Begin by talking with at least three other women about their sense of call. Now go beyond your comfort zone. Talk with women who are different than you are—in class, race, sexual orientation, political party, etc. Now go one step further. Find out where there is violence against women in the world. Read and research one particular place. Reflect on what the women's scripts sound like there—the ones which they have

been inculcated into and which, for better or worse, they know by heart and cannot imagine how they might say or do or live differently. Imagine for them how it might be different if they had a voice. Write or speak a public word about their inability to claim voice and call. Re-write their script for them. Or better yet, if possible, dialogue with a woman in another culture, and ask her what she would say if she could re-write her own script. Together, reflect on: who is God calling you to be? How can you respond? How can you use your voice for yourself and for others? Let Frances Willard's words help you script and claim your public voice.

Prophetic Voice: "Yes, Thus 'Saith the Lord'"

To the question of the time, which Louisa Woosley identified as the title of her book, "*Shall women preach?*" she answered unapologetically. Her prophetic rhetoric, direct from the pages of Scripture answered, "Yes, thus 'saith the Lord.'" As one calling out in the wilderness, Woosley's rhetoric spoke loud and clear, a message of repentance. She called the church out of its silence and into an engagement with the Biblical text—the book of truth—in which the answer to the question of female preaching is found. Neither church tradition nor the popular perceptions of gender had any authority to answer the question of women preaching. She appealed to the Bible as the highest authority, and in it she found the answer to the question "Shall women preach?" as "Yes, thus 'saith the Lord!'" Woosley wrote: "It is an established fact that the women of the apostolic age did preach, and the Scriptures sustain her as a preacher, no matter what women-gaggers may say ... To all who have studied the Bible, and have no pet theory to

support, this truth is as clear as a sunbeam.”⁶⁹³ Because of her critical biblical interpretive work, Louisa Woosley could confidently face the “women gaggers” and answer her call without question—and encourage all women to answer their call as such: “Yes, I will preach, because thus ‘saith the Lord.”

Despite Woosley’s persuasive answer to the question, “Shall women preach?” women’s calls are still rejected today. I listened in disbelief as a female seminary student, clearly gifted in preaching, explained in our Women’s Preaching class that her parents were bitterly disappointed when she shared her call to preach, saying, “Didn’t we teach you anything? The Bible says clearly that women are to be silent in church. If you pursue this path, consider yourself cut off.” We sat in silence waiting to hear her response. She confessed to feeling angry and confused, not wanting to go against the Bible, let alone her parents. But, not knowing how to respectfully explore the issue together, she remained silent. I wonder if this woman had read about Louisa Woosley and knew her rhetorical defense based on the Bible if she might have had an effective strategy for claiming her call to preach.

Standing on the firm biblical foundation laid by Louisa Woosley, this woman would be able to respectfully respond to her parents with these words: “Yes, I am called by God to preach. But believe me, I wish it were otherwise. I have carried this burden and tried to relieve myself of it by reading the Bible. But, in the Bible, I read about women being called and women preaching. And so I can no longer deny my call. I must say yes. But, I know this is hard for you. I wonder if we could sit down together and read through some of the places that speak to women’s call and place in the church; you

⁶⁹³ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 70. Originally published by Louisa Woosley in 1891 in Caneyville, KY.

might be surprised by the number of women engaged in ministry—I know I was. I hope that you will be able to support me in my call to preach. But, if not, I still have to follow my call, because God said so.”

Practices of Scripting Prophetic Voice

In the Bible, Paul says in his letter to the Galatians, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). But, throughout history and still today, when women attempt to claim their call to preach, the passage that is quoted to them is not the inclusive Galatians passage; instead more often than not, they hear the restrictive words of Paul to Timothy: “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.” (1 Timothy 2:12). This one verse is taken out of context, without critical inquiry of its meaning, and used as a gavel in the trial of women claiming a call to preach; it slams the judgment: women are to be silent; case closed. Sadly, this one verse has more power than all of the stories of women called to discipleship and women given gifts, and women preaching throughout the whole Bible. Ironically, the book containing “the truth that shall set you free” is that which is used to keep women captive in conventional roles and restrictive scripts.

The Bible’s witness of women and their roles and their voice goes way beyond one verse in one epistle. Take some time to explore the biblical stories of women. Notice the roles they play and the voices they have in the biblical narrative. Read books and poems that stretch your mind and challenge your way of thinking. Consider what the following poem, entitled “Woman’s Rights,” may be saying to you:

There's neither Jew nor Gentile,
To those Who've paid the price;
'Tis neither Male nor Female,
But one in Jesus Christ.

I am going to tell you friends
Without the slightest doubt,
A day is coming very soon,
When your sins will find you out.

A day is coming very soon,
When sin you cannot hide:
Then you will wish you'd taken,
The Bible for your guide.

You'll wish you had let women alone
When they were trying to teach.
You'll be sorry you tried to hold them down,
When God told them to preach.

Come, dear brothers, let us journey,
Side by side and hand in hand;
Does not the Bible plainly tell you
Woman shall co-ordinate the man?

The hand that rocks the [cradle]
Will rule the world, you know;
So lift the standard high for God,
Wherever you may go.

Some women have the right to sing,
And some the right to teach;
But women, called by Jesus Christ,
Surely have the right to preach.

Some men will call you anti-Christ,
And some would rather die:
Than have the Spirit poured out,
When women prophesy.

To prophesy is to speak for God,
Wherever man is found;
Although lots of hypocrites,
Still try to hold them down.

So be steadfast in the Word of God,
Though fiery darts be hurled;
If Jesus Christ is on your side,
He is more than all the world.⁶⁹⁴

This poem interprets the Bible as that which contains an open and inclusive call. Louisa Woosley's interpretation was based on a reading of the entire Bible, not just one verse. Let Louisa Woosley's biblical interpretation guide yours; and let her words help you script and claim your prophetic voice.

Pulpit Voice: "Yes, I Am!"

To a persistent question of the time, "Shall women preach?" Florence Spearing Randolph responded homiletically. The authority of her office and pastoral presence, answered, "Yes, I am!" As a seasoned preacher, her rhetoric spoke loud and clear, a message of change. She calls the church out of its traditional "antipathy toward women preachers" and toward a theological reading of the Bible in which women and men are equally beloved, gifted and called by God. She embodied her rhetorical witness; her very presence not only engaged the question of women preachers, but also called the question, that is, moved to end the debate. Being fully ordained and faithfully practicing ministry, the question, for her, is moot. But, she astutely realized that it is not so for all women and all churches. Therefore, she used the power of her words and her pulpit to summon all women to answer God's call—without question and without fear. She appealed to the authority of her trained interpretation of the Bible, and in it, she found the answer to the question "Shall women preach?" as "Yes, they did ... consider Miriam, Deborah, Hagar and the first women at the tomb commissioned by Christ to preach the good news of

⁶⁹⁴ Lillia M. Sparks, "Woman's Rights," *Latter Day Messenger*, 1934 in Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*.

resurrection.” And so, if Florence Spearing Randolph could preach to a congregation today, made up of women wondering how to justify their call to preach to the church, she would say without hesitation, “Yes, you shall preach.” Then, she would remind them not to be discouraged by those who see things differently; instead, “*Let your eyes look straight ahead—gaze right in front of you to God.*” Then, and only then, can you stand tall and answer any questions that may come your way: “Yes, I am preaching! Amen and Amen! (So be it!)”

Despite Randolph’s powerful pulpit rhetoric of women’s call to preach, women today still experience denial of their calls by the church. As I was talking with a woman who had just been ordained, I soon realized that it was not just an occasion for celebration, but for lament as well. She shared the story of her first day as associate pastor of a church. She met with the pastor to ask when she might preach. He responded, “Well, let’s not rush into things, now. I am the head pastor here, so I will preach and you can offer the prayer afterwards. Oh, and be sure to wear a skirt when you help in worship.” I was speechless, but eventually found the words to ask, “What did you say?” She told me that she felt so angry being rejected by her supervising pastor that she said nothing. She went away frustrated, wondering even if women are ordained and officially allowed to preach, will peoples’ perceptions and church practices ever really change? I wonder if this woman had read about Florence Spearing Randolph and knew her rhetorical defense, if she might have had an effective strategy for claiming her call to preach. Along with all of the other women whose calls have been and will be rejected by the church, she can follow faithfully in Randolph’s footsteps and respond to this pastor with these words: “Yes, I am called by God to preach, without question. And although

women have been ordained for many years, I know that for some in the church, this is still seen as out of the norm. Maybe it is fear of the unknown that keeps them from accepting the change. But, I am no longer afraid, for I am following in the footsteps of Miriam and Deborah, Hagar, and the women at the empty tomb who became the first preachers of the gospel. I hope that you will join me in helping the church to be not afraid, but to look straight ahead to God and follow wherever Christ is leading this church with faith and hope. Will you join with me, as partners in ministry, in helping to bring about God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven? I am called by God and ordained by the church and so somehow, someday I will preach without fear and with great faith. Amen and Amen.”

Florence Spearing Randolph claimed her call to the pulpit with the authority of ordination and the voice of a preacher. She challenged the power of church tradition, not by rejecting it, but by re-scripting it to include women's tradition of preaching. In sermonic trope, she preached a word of challenge and transformation.

Practices of Scripting Pulpit Voice

Consider a portion of a sermon Randolph preached called “Antipathy to Women Preachers:”

But notwithstanding the fact that the first gospel message was delivered to the women, there always has been and still is great antipathy to women preachers. But God, with whom there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, in His wonderful plan of salvation has called and chosen men and women according to His divine will as laborers together with him for the salvation of the world.⁶⁹⁵

⁶⁹⁵ Florence Spearing Randolph, "Antipathy to Women Preachers," in *Ibid.*, 127.

Within the walls of the church, in a traditional sermonic form, Randolph preaches a transformative word, challenging tradition with a different interpretation of the word of God. What word do you hear? What are you moved to say or to do?

In her sermon, "If I Were White," Randolph preached challenging words:

If I were white and believed in God, in His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Bible, I would speak in no uncertain terms against Race Prejudice, Hate, Oppression, and Injustice. I would prove my race superiority by my attitude towards minority races; towards oppressed people.⁶⁹⁶

What is Randolph's message? What is she calling the listeners to do? What is your response to this sermon passage? Is there a way you could use your privilege to improve the life of those on the margins or on the bottom? If you are a man, what might you do "to speak in no uncertain terms against Gender Prejudice, Hate, Oppression, and Injustice?"

Florence Spearing Randolph's pulpit voice spoke powerful words of transformation and reform. Let Randolph's words help you script and claim your pulpit voice to preach.

Summary

Each of these four preaching pioneers left behind a narrative of call containing rhetorical strategies for claiming call. Individually and collectively, they answered their call to preach and in so doing, composed a compelling rhetoric of call. They left behind an assortment of powerful and persuasive scripts for claiming call. Women today who face resistance to their call and restrictions on their preaching often feel as if they are alone in facing obstacles, making claims that have never been made before. Truth is,

⁶⁹⁶ Randolph, "If I Were White," in *Ibid.*, 129.

there is a rich history of women who, despite obstacles, claimed their call and preached. In order to do so, they used powerful rhetorical strategies in their call narratives, which effectively re-scripted their responses. The recovery of these rhetorical responses is generative for women today who struggle to find a voice that has the power to interrupt the dominant narrative that silences women called to preach. Women today can borrow a script suitable for their religious and social context. By exercising agency and voice, they can diffuse the power of the conventional script, and re-script their call stories, in order to name and claim their calls to preach.

While the focus is on historical women whose calls were denied in order to help contemporary women find their voice to claim their call to preach, this project is generative for anyone—woman or man—whose call is challenged based on social categories of race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. The scripts offered herein can be utilized by anyone to claim call within a particular cultural and religious context. In fact, the scripts are more powerful when groups of people are using them. There is power in joining voices across social categories. A chorus has more volume than a soloist. A unified effort has more power than an individual claim.

A script is important in order to give one a voice to claim the call to preach. However, even hearing a chorus of change-agents is not always enough to change minds. It is still true that people need to see it in order to believe it. In order to change convention, people need not only to hear a different response, but to see a different worldview. This project not only supplies rhetorical scripts for women to claim their call, but it also affords seminary professors and students opportunities to perceive and interpret call differently. By providing different lenses through which to see, homiletics

professors and students can better interpret call in order to reform and reinforce the new worldview—one that includes an expansive and inclusive call to preach.

Theological Hermeneutic of Call: Re-Interpreting Call

Even if women whose calls are challenged are able to hold tight to their new script and boldly claim their call to preach, once in seminary or divinity school, they often find continued resistance. Typically, in seminary and divinity school classrooms, the focus is on teaching the students how to preach; not enough time or attention is given to the critical examination of the ethics of call or rhetorical strategies for a contested call. While some women have been able to claim their call to preach in the church, many others still struggle—internally (spiritually) and externally (ecclesially)—with the question of call. A large gap remains for women between their inward divine call and the ecclesial endorsement of the outward call. Theological seminaries are a good place to explore call; and yet, seminary students are not always given the resources to engage the issue of call thoughtfully and theologically. I realized the problem when I asked a homiletics professor how, as a man on a staff of all men, he would engage women and the issue of women's preaching in his classes. He responded enthusiastically, sharing what he had done in his previous theological school, which as I recall went something like this:

Yes, I agree that it is important to get it out there in the classroom. And so, at the beginning of the semester, I divide the room—I line up the men on one side and the women on the other side. Then, I let the women go at 'em. I encourage them to scold the men for all of the injustices done to them through the years. I let it go on until everything is out on the table. Then we can start the class fresh.

He asked me what I thought and I said that while I appreciate the gesture, I wonder if there might be a more effective pedagogical method to engage the issue. Giving women the power to scold and shame men does not hold promise of providing them with good conversation partners, as together men and women seek to articulate their calls and learn how to preach. I contend that there are better ways to continue to re-script the neglected narrative of women's call to preach. I propose a better way to "call the question"—a re-framing that involves creative reflection, communal engagement, and critical construction of arguments. "Call the Question" provides a valuable pedagogical resource for homiletics, including a deeper sense of historical consciousness in regards to call, as well as a pedagogical model for teaching preaching practices.

"Call the Question" recovers a neglected narrative, not just for the sake of students knowing the history of women's call to preach, although that is valuable in and of itself. This historical witness of women preachers uncovers their methods of engaging the issue of call—faithfully and critically, thoughtfully and theologically, individually and collaboratively. The distinct and effective methods of four notable women are generative for re-framing contemporary homiletics and how it is taught.

The women in "Call the Question" offer distinct ways of "seeing;" through their lenses we can imagine a place for women and their call to preach. By re-inhabiting a traditional authoritative way of seeing, they re-construct a feminist hermeneutic of call. Individually each woman re-inhabits an authority of preaching: Jarena Lee re-inhabits the authority of revelation; Frances Willard re-inhabits the authority of cultural convention; Louisa Woosley re-inhabits the authority of the Bible; and Florence Spearing Randolph re-inhabits the authority of church tradition. Collectively, they offer us a way

of “seeing” the call to preach and a way of “doing” theology. Just as all of these authorities need to be re-inhabited in making a case for a woman’s call to preach, so too can these authorities be re-inhabited in order to construct a feminist hermeneutic that informs the process of sermon preparation. These hermeneutical lenses construct a pedagogical model to help reframe homiletics courses. As professors provide these different lenses and cultivate the practice of utilizing them, a robust theology of call emerges.

Call is a vital aspect of a seminary student’s vocational discernment and homiletical training, as well as of the preacher’s ongoing practice of ministry, including the crafting and the preaching of the sermon. All of the women in “Call the Question” demonstrate the importance of particular practices in the formation of their preaching identity and practices. For Jarena Lee, the practice of prayer and listening for God was vital to her writing. Frances Willard illustrated the value of listening to the communal body of Christ in order to change cultural convention. According to Louisa Woosley, reading the Bible and interpreting a word of truth takes practice, persistence, and patience. Florence Spearing Randolph demonstrated the importance of continually renewing the trope and tradition of the church. Each of these women passes on to us best practices, which over time can become habits, as well as ways to craft a sermon and to preach.

Interpreting Call through a Spiritual Lens

Jarena Lee constructs a feminist spiritual lens through which the revelation of God’s call to preach can be explored. Lee narrates and models a spiritual hermeneutic

that includes attending to the Scripture and the sermonic process by way of prayer, listening for God's voice, spiritual practices, and autobiographical journaling. Her private rhetorical witness can allow personal autobiography and experiences of call to be part of the theological "God-talk" of the sermon; like doctrine, personal experience can be a source of truth. Lee's attention to what is "above the text" allows one's own call story to be part of the theology of a sermon and calls the dismissal of the authority of revelation into question. Lee's Autobiography reveals her acumen with the integration of Biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and personal experience. She does not see them as distinct categories, but together comprising a rich and robust theology of call.

Practices of Re-interpreting through a Spiritual Lens

The feminist spiritual lens through which to explore what is above the text toward a theology of call is shaped and sharpened through the spiritual practice of *lectio divina* (prayerful reading). Begin by reading a Scripture text and then allow time for silent reflection, to hear which word is speaking to you. Then, read the same text a second time, allowing more time for silent reflection, asking God why that word is speaking to you. After reading it a third time, sit in silence, reflecting on the word that spoke to you. Take some time to journal about which word spoke to you and what word is being formed to preach. If you are in a group, you may want to share with one another. This practice is important to do before you consult commentaries. Know your own experience of the text and your own hunches before you try to engage in a conversation with others about the text.

In *Preaching as Testimony*, Anna Carter Florence invites preachers into a process of discovery of what we know to be true, and this requires getting in touch with our own experiences of the text. She encourages preachers to take some time to “Create it: Take your journal to a quiet place outside. Bring paints, pastels, charcoal, crayons, pencils, fountain pens, magic markers, or whatever else makes you feel like an artist. Read your text aloud several times. Draw whatever comes to mind, giving yourself time limits of two, five, ten, or fifteen minutes (to keep you from staring at the paper all afternoon).”⁶⁹⁷

Carter Florence also encourages preachers to try journaling on the text: “This is a practice many preachers swear by; they notice a depth in their preaching when they have given themselves the freedom to write whatever comes to mind, stream-of-consciousness style, for a set period each day. If you need stimulation to get your journaling going, try reading the newspaper each day with your text in mind; when you finish reading, start journaling immediately. Or, find a poem that you like that reminds you of something in the text, and riff on it for a while in your journal. You can journal after visiting parishioners or as a means of prayer. The point is that it gets you writing and into the writing habit.”⁶⁹⁸ And I would add, the value of journaling is to begin to develop the practice of being attentive to your own personal experiences in which you discern glimpses of grace and/or hear that still small voice, and through which, you can trust your experience of divine revelation as a source of truth.

This spiritual lens brings to light the movement of the spirit and reveals the subtle and not so subtle glimpses of grace; it functions as a hermeneutic of experience, which

⁶⁹⁷ Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, 142.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

can be used to examine a narrative of call or a Biblical text; it can also help focus the process of sermon crafting.

Interpreting Call through a Cultural Lens

Frances Willard constructs a feminist cultural lens through which the traditional interpretation of call can be explored. By attending to the voices of the community as a source of truth, Willard demonstrates how reason and critical reflection are necessary parts of the sermonic process. Given the powerful grip of social convention, sometimes public rhetoric is needed to critique the status quo inside the church, so the gospel can be heard with different ears. Willard's public rhetorical witness can be used to put theology in the public square, to allow public debates—especially those that feature women's voices—to influence and shape theological doctrines employed in a sermon. She quotes a woman preacher as saying: "If the existing social order is not in harmony with the divine plane, it will have to be subverted."⁶⁹⁹ Willard was effective in her efforts because her subversion was in the guise of re-inhabiting the traditional and conventional rhetoric of "a woman's place is in the home." She engaged in public rhetoric, in the form of speeches, letters, and books, in order to argue for other women to have a public platform and a public voice. Her consideration of what is "around the text" allows a cultural critique of the theology of a sermon and calls the traditional interpretation and dismissal of the authority of culture into question.

⁶⁹⁹ Frances E. Willard, "Woman in the Pulpit." (Boston: D. Lothrop, 1888), [http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h7h&bquery=\(HJ+5JL1\)&type=1&site=ehost-live](http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h7h&bquery=(HJ+5JL1)&type=1&site=ehost-live); ———, *How to Win. A Book for Girls* (New York, London,: Funk & Wagnalls., 1888), Microform. 109.

Practices of Re-interpreting through a Cultural Lens

The feminist cultural lens through which to see what is around the text, or to see the text through different eyes toward a cultural perspective is best refined by public practices, including: reading the newspaper and the Bible together, engaging people or writings from different cultural contexts and religious perspectives, and writing blogs or opinion pieces. Homiletic students can write an article or a blog on an issue of faith that needs a public voice, or write a contemporary sermon that “preaches the headlines.”

Willard did not have a church pulpit, but rather a public platform from which she “preached” societal reform. It is good practice to preach in a context outside the church: in a homeless shelter, a hospital, a nursing home, a shelter for abused women, or on the capitol steps. After you preach, ask your audience what they heard. Engage them in a conversation about the issues they face and what the good news of the gospel sounds like to them in their social location. This cultural lens, as a hermeneutic of social location, can be used to see issues more clearly, but it can also be used to attend to the voices in the community as a source of truth.

To prevent the experience of “culture shock,” Nora Tubbs Tisdale encourages preachers to engage in a process of exegesis of the congregation. In order to understand the unique culture of a local congregation, in *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Tisdale provides the following method for understanding the congregation’s own hermeneutical lenses through which they view God, humanity, nature, time, the church, and Christian mission:

1. View of God: What metaphors of God (Holy One, Judge, Shepherd, Father, Rock, Mother Eagle), for Christ (Bread of Life, Light of the World, Son of God, Friend of the Poor, Savior, Suffering Servant) and for the Holy Spirit (Wind, Fire, Healer, Empowerer, Gift-giver) are most prevalent in your

life/worldview, and what do they indicate about your/your church's understanding of God?

2. View of humanity: Are people considered to be sinners without hope, to be children of God, or to be fallible yet perfectible?
3. View of Nature: What is your understanding of creation and the place of human beings within it? What is the meaning of human 'dominion' in relation to creation?
4. View of Time: Are you primarily oriented to the past (reliving and longing for the 'glory days' of long ago), the present (living in such a day-to-day survival mode that it gives little thought either to the past or the future), or to the future (with plans and dreams and visions of what you would like to be and do)?
5. View of the Church: Is the church understood as primarily a "hospital for sinners" (where people are welcomed, whatever their life situation, and few restrictions are placed on church membership) or a "holy communion of saints" (in which certain ethical standards of lifestyle are required for faithful church membership)?
6. View of Christian Mission: Would the church's own self-image for social ministry best be described as: a. survivor church (reactive to the crises of an overwhelming world); b. crusader church (proactive in seeking out issues and championing causes); c. pillar church (anchored in its community and taking responsibility for the community's well-being); d. pilgrim church (caring for immigrants with ethnic, national, or racial roots), or e. servant church (caring for and supporting individuals in need)?⁷⁰⁰

How would you answer these questions for yourself? For your church denomination?

For your local congregation? Talk with other members of your church and see how they might answer the questions. How might knowing these answers—and better understanding your listeners—change the way you preach?

Whatever process you use, it is important to attend to the way that your congregation sees things of faith. The value of looking beyond your own personal lens is to begin to realize that others see things differently. Taking the time to appreciate other perspectives allows you to begin to develop the practice of being attentive to the experience of the other, in which you discern glimpses of grace, and through which you can appreciate others' experiences of the divine as a source of truth. This cultural

⁷⁰⁰ Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, 80-84.

hermeneutic brings into clear view other models of faithful response to the public call, including historical figures like Suffragist Lucretia Mott, Abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Social Reform Preacher Frances Willard, as well as contemporary figures like Hillary Rodham Clinton and Oprah Winfrey, in addition to members of the local church you serve. This cultural lens can be used to examine the culture of a congregation, but it can also help you focus on the process of sermon crafting.

Students should also engage in a communal process of exegesis, listening to diverse interpretations of one Scripture text, and then crafting a sermon that rings true to different experiences in diverse contexts. Learning how to put your personal and your tradition's interpretations in conversation with culture is a good practice for crafting relevant and accessible sermons. Consider this sermon by Karen Stokes:

I pray that we will have the courage to listen to the voices of those “others” out there—scientists and economists, feminists and womanists, voices out of the Third World, voices out of the gay and lesbian communities. Dr. Forbes spoke last night about those “others” when he said, “Perhaps God draws us into relationship with those others in order to help us get started in dealing with the Wholly Other.” The voice of the outsider can speak the word of God, and it is at our peril that we refuse to listen to those voices ... To be truly open to the movement of the Spirit in our world, we must abhor the facile denial of the authenticity in others.

The church is not purified by inbreeding. The church is purified by opening up to the cleansing, invigorating power of the Holy Spirit. If we can truly trust in that Spirit, if we dare find our security in that which we cannot control, that which forces us to move beyond our own comfort zone, then perhaps by the grace of God, we can risk hearing the truth, even when it's spoken in tongues. Amen.⁷⁰¹

Through a cultural lens, the bible is interpreted differently by others. This hermeneutic allows us to better understand the power of social location and domination in shaping the

⁷⁰¹ Karen Stokes in Jana Childers, *Birthing the Sermon : Women Preachers on Creative Process* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2001), 151-2.

lenses through which we read and interpret the bible. We preach in our own tongue, while honoring people and their different interpretations of God's word.

Interpreting Call through a Biblical Lens

Louisa Woosley constructs a feminist Biblical lens through which Scriptural interpretation can be explored more broadly and deeply. Woosley narrates and models a holistic Biblical hermeneutic that includes attending to the whole Bible—from Genesis to Revelation. In so doing, she challenges 'proof-texting' and demonstrates the need to read the whole Bible, in order to discern the meaning of a passage in the context of the whole. Woosley accepts that her call—and the call of all preachers—is not to preach Biblical texts, but to preach gospel truth. Her prophetic rhetoric challenges the church's traditional interpretations of Scripture and witnesses to the value of one's own careful and prayerful interpretation (as part of the sermon). Her hermeneutic provides a way of seeing gospel as part of the theology of call. She narrates and models a prophetic rhetoric that calls for a change in the way things are to the way things ought to be, not because she says so, but because "thus 'saith the Lord.'" Woosley's attention to the gospel "in and behind (and throughout) the text" calls the authority of the traditional ecclesial interpretation of one text into question.

Practices of Re-interpreting through a Biblical lens

The practice of reading Scripture through a feminist Biblical lens and perceiving gospel "in and behind (and throughout) the text" is best cultivated by holistic exegesis, including: study, prayer, reading, and writing. For example, when preaching on Luke 9:28-36, don't just read the assigned pericope, but the entire Gospel of Luke. Become

familiar with the author, themes, audience, theology, purpose, and meaning of the entire book of Luke, before attempting to write a sermon on the Transfiguration. Reflect on the verse itself, and then re-examine it when put in the context of the entire book. Memorize the Biblical text, walk around with it, drive with it, dance with it, embody it for a day and then write up exegetical hunches. After you study the text, you can consult critical commentaries and resources, and then record new understandings.

This Biblical lens can be used to read the Scriptures more broadly, but it can also be used to attend more deeply to the issue of women's call to preach. Woosley's biblical lens is one of a hermeneutic of suspicion. She is suspicious of the canonical interpretation and she reads for a liberating word. Students should be assigned to do a biblical study of a passage commonly used to argue against women's preaching (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:11-12). It is one thing to articulate a public rhetoric based on reason and culture, but it is another thing to craft a prophetic rhetoric based on biblical interpretation. Students can exegete and preach Scripture passages that speak of women, especially women who are called or who prophesy, proclaim, or preach. Practice crafting a sermon that meets people where they are with their traditional lenses, but that also challenges them to see things differently. This biblical hermeneutic gives us glimpses of the people of the Bible as prophets answering God's call to prophesy: We see Deborahs and Huldahs called to speak up for what is true; we celebrate Miriams leading the communal dance of victory and Annas joyfully announcing the Messiah; and we follow Susannas and Joannas and Louisas out of their homes into faithful discipleship.

Interpreting Call through a Traditional Lens

Florence Spearing Randolph constructs a feminist traditional lens through which the authority of the preached word in the pulpit can be explored. She narrates and models a semantic hermeneutic in which we can perceive and preach the message of truth by embracing the authority of the pulpit. Randolph's ordination and experience translate to a message of pastoral wisdom and truth. Her pulpit rhetoric witnesses to the power of the preached word to encourage all listeners, equally beloved, to change the world for good, but also to not lose hope by looking to God for guidance and direction. As is evidenced in Randolph's sermon "Looking Backward and Forward," the pulpit stands at the crossroads between the past and the future, the Bible and culture, God and humanity, sin and salvation, faith and works. She attends to what is "the means through which the text is preached" in pulpit rhetoric. Her ordained status and sermonic power call the restrictive pulpit rhetoric around the theology of call (and denial of women's ordination) into question.

Practices of Re-interpreting through a Traditional lens

The feminist traditional lens through which we critically evaluate the message of truth is best cultivated by attention to and embodiment of sermons. Students of homiletics can be assigned to listen to sermons and identify the message of truth. They can also be assigned to preach sermons (or portions thereof) written by some master preachers. Just like a beginning piano student does not start by playing an original work they compose, but rather begins with scales and then progresses to playing works written by others, so too, beginning preachers develop their abilities by practicing speaking the

words and preaching the messages that others have carefully and prayerfully crafted. Students can learn much about the homiletic call of women by attending to sermons preached by women, and should be assigned to read, analyze, discuss, and even preach portions of sermons by women. Truth is not only communicated in word, but in body. And so it is important that students embody the messages they preach; and this takes practice. Students can be assigned to preach a sermon with no words, just body movements. Or they can be required to preach with no manuscript, so as to allow the sermon to be inscribed on one's body.

Much has been written about the authority of the pulpit;⁷⁰² therefore, students will need to reflect on what this authority means to them and what it looks like in their context. For some, authority comes with the ordained status, the robe and the stole. For others, authority is earned through powerful preaching and liturgical leadership. Students can be invited to inhabit different pulpits of churches and reflect on their experiences. They will need to understand the power dynamics of the pulpit and ordained office and how to use them with authority, but also with integrity and humility. In addition, this hermeneutic allows students to read a familiar Biblical story in a new way; to re-examine the stories typically overlooked or moralized as a call to women's submission. This lens brings more sharply into view the call of Mary as both Mother of Jesus and Preacher of the Gospel, empowering us to stand tall in the pulpit with Florence Spearing Randolph and preach. Such a hermeneutic allows us to critically examine call in tradition, attending both to the normative interpretation as well as those who reside in the margins, without power and without voice.

⁷⁰² Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit : Preaching in American Protestant Spaces*.

To illustrate the power of a transformative message through a traditional lens, consider this sermon, “Have you ever imagined?” preached by Eujoo Mary Kim:

Well, even for us, it is difficult to imagine something totally new, because our imagination is biased toward our present experiences—what we see, what we hear, what we taste, what we touch. Just as the Sadducees imagined life in the resurrection as a continuation of this world, so may we believe consciously or unconsciously that the privileges we enjoy in this world, resulting from our nationality, class, gender, religion, and race, will continue even in the life of the resurrection.

The life-giving Spirit of God is already working on breaking human history and restoring everything to bring us new life in the resurrection. Thus, life in the resurrection is not for the dead but for the living. It can be tasted in advance even in this world by those who live and believe in the promise of God.

Jesus’ answer to the question about life in the resurrection was not good news for everyone, but a serious threat to those who were taking advantage of the status quo. They wanted to keep the sociopolitical, economic, religious, and cultural systems because they wanted to enjoy their vested interests and privileges forever. But...we know that no one could keep Jesus dead in the tomb, no one could keep in the darkness his vision for a new heaven and a new earth.

Instead, this vision has spread with the risen Christ, like water, gushing from a dammed pool, breaking the boundaries between men and women, masters and slaves, Jews and Gentiles, the rich and the poor, and the literate and the illiterate.

Have you ever tasted life in the resurrection—a strange new world where there is no more male dominance over females, no more rich over poor, no more majority over minority, no more first world over third world, but a world where only the children of God live together as sisters and brothers, like angels living in God’s presence? Have you, have you ever been able to imagine this? ...

I believe that you and I are called to this vision and invited to live the life worthy of the calling to which we have been called.

May the blessings of the risen Christ be with you and your churches forever, so that we may continue to live life in the resurrection even in this world! Amen.”⁷⁰³

What is your response to this sermon? How does it challenge your image and enlarge your vision of life in the resurrection in this world? Does the lens of tradition allow you to see or obstruct your view of “life in the resurrection?” What needs to change? What

⁷⁰³ Eujoo Mary Kim, “Have you ever imagined?” Texts: Matthew 22:23-33; Ephesians 4:1-6 in Kim, *Women Preaching : Theology and Practice through the Ages*, 174-81.

other lenses do you need to use? What other hermeneutics do you need to consider?
How will you preach this vision?

Summary

Jarena Lee, Frances Willard, Louisa Woosley, and Florence Spearing Randolph each offer a distinct way of “seeing,” a lens through which we can imagine a place for women and their call to preach. Collectively, these pioneers give us a way of seeing the call to preach and a way of doing theology. Their tactic of re-inhabiting the authoritative tropes of their particular social and ecclesial context in order to make a convincing case for a woman’s call to preach can also be utilized to construct a feminist hermeneutic that informs the process of sermon preparation.

Conclusion

“Call the Question” recovers the historical foundation of women preaching by detailing how four remarkable women re-inhabited authorities and re-claimed convincing tropes. It also shows how the women re-constructed a collaborative rhetorical model that allows a conversation between historical and contemporary women and the re-scripting of call narratives. Further, it describes the different lenses these women construct, thus giving us a feminist hermeneutic and a pedagogical model for teaching homiletics.

“Call the Question” is a hermeneutical project aimed at creative imagination. I have attempted to re-imagine a place in which call is rooted in history and theology, and gender is transcended, and all who are called can answer the call—without question. I re-imagine a seminary class that teaches women and men to preach in such a way that ‘calls the question’ of female preaching. I re-imagine a preacher who preaches in such a way

as to allow listeners to hear and wrestle with God's ongoing call to all disciples. I re-imagine a church that does not debate this question any longer, but benefits from the preaching ministries of women, who claim their call in order to call the church to discipleship—to help make God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

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The rhetorical witness of these four female preaching pioneers made progress in women's call to preach being endorsed and authorized by ecclesial institutions. They called the question and it was answered with more access to sacred pulpit places, greater authority to engage in sacred persuasive speech, and increased number of women ordained to the sacred office of preacher. But the point of 'calling the question' is to end the debate. And the sad truth is that the debate rages on even today. The question I must pose here—the question I was asked in my dissertation defense is: When do tactics reach a “tipping point”? When are the “tactics of the weak,” like re-inhabiting established authorities, not enough to overthrow conventional restrictions? When do conversations need to become confrontations? Does reform, at some point, need to become revolution?

These are difficult questions to answer definitively. In part, it depends upon the individuals and the cultural and religious contexts in which they live, and how they understand their own tipping points. It also depends upon the extent to which women (and other marginalized groups in regards to ordained ministry) can organize themselves to work together for this one cause. Even if some women are happy serving in their culturally acceptable place, they need to be inspired to work toward confronting the fact that other women are not able to answer God's call and use their God-given gifts to serve in pulpit places. If the tactics are not effective, women—and others marginalized by their call—will have to agree to collectively engage in strategies of “speaking truth to the powers.”

Ultimately, it depends upon the church and its willingness to be open to how the Spirit is moving to bring new life to an increasingly marginalized and shrinking institution. The “tipping point” may come when the church lacks the numbers and resources to sustain itself and is forced to do things differently. My hope would be that before that happens the church would proactively re-invent itself, welcoming this re-emergence with openness to all of those called to serve the church with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love.

APPENDIX

Homiletics of Call: Preaching Call

Finally, my project re-imagines a homiletic model for the church. Here, we turn to the practice of preaching, imagining how traditional texts seen through these different lenses and attended to by different practices could be preached differently. Jarena Lee's preaching was informed and shaped by her experiences of revelation and her personal autobiography, demonstrating the power of private rhetoric of call. Frances Willard took up a public platform to "preach" a word to transform society for good, modeling the effectiveness of public rhetoric of call. Louisa Woosley's Bible study and exegesis work informed her sermons and shaped her prophetic rhetoric of call. Florence Spearing Randolph used her pulpit to reform the church's tradition and to renew the pulpit rhetoric of call. In reclaiming the rhetorical practices of the historical witness of four particular women, we can reconstruct a contemporary feminist homiletic that calls the question of women preaching today. This practice guides preachers today how to preach a word that allows women—and men—to engage and answer their calls.

Re-imagining Call: Preaching Mary

This homiletical model is illustrated here by re-imagining the story of the Annunciation of Mary as a summons to all those called to faithfully follow and boldly proclaim a word. Using this model informed by the four rhetorical case studies, the Biblical story of the Annunciation will be re-interpreted as a call story. Calls are not reserved for a special elite group defined by the church, but rather are open to anyone who has ears to hear, who attends to the movement of the Spirit, the voice of God, and

the truth of the gospel. Mary was on the margins, not one that the church would have recognized as worthy of a call, and yet, she was called to bear the Son of God, to incarnate God's love, and to allow the word to become flesh through her. And so, when we attend to call stories like this, there is a word for all. This story not only describes a call story, but invites listeners into the story, to listen for their call to bear the Word.

The portrayal of Mary as the mother who silently treasures and ponders all these things in her heart has been prolific and powerful for women in encouraging their role as mothers, and for men in their longing for an earthly and/or heavenly maternal figure. Both as *disciple* and *mother*, Mary is portrayed as strong, but submissive and silent. If we take a closer look, we realize that in fact Mary has something to say to women and to the whole church. Using the lenses that the four historical women have recovered for us, we can see an enlightening mosaic of Mary's call emerge. The analysis de-constructs the traditional interpretation as a meek subservient Mary that models silent submission for all women, and re-constructs it as a call story that summons all women to claim their call and to preach with power, authority and voice.

“Do Not Be Afraid”

The story of the Annunciation begins with Mary having a divine encounter: “In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God ... to a virgin ... named Mary.” And the angel said to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God ... You will bear a son and name him Jesus ...” Since this encounter happened between Mary and the angel, with no one else around, this is an autobiographical account. Mary heard God's voice call her by name and call her to do something: to bear a son named

Jesus, the Savior of the world. Because of this divine encounter, Mary was able to face obstacles in the form of her betrothed Joseph, her family, and her community who doubted both this divine revelation and the immaculate conception. Even though human authority no doubt challenged and ridiculed her and her “call,” she knew she had personally heard God’s voice and she believed God’s word had ultimate authority. Mary, a lowly virgin woman, had found favor with God. Therefore, she was able to trust in her personal experience of God above all else, and answer God’s call to bear this baby for God’s sake and for the sake of the world.

Inspired by Jarena Lee’s narrative of call, we can preach the story of the Annunciation of Mary with attention to the divine encounter Mary had, calling her by name and calling her to assume a vital role in the salvation of God’s people. Such preaching not only calls Mary’s lowly status into question, but also calls the question of the authority of personal experience of revelation. One can imagine a preacher preaching a word of inspiration, inviting listeners to open themselves up to hearing God’s call and trusting their personal experiences of God’s presence in their lives, reminding them that God has work for each one of us to do in bringing about God’s kingdom of justice, love and peace. Mary was a young woman on the margins, with no status and no power. What does this say to us today about how and to whom God’s word becomes flesh? If we are reading only the great theologians and church fathers of the past, or looking to those in power in the church and in the world today to give us the answers and tell us what God is up to, maybe we are looking in the wrong place. Maybe we are overlooking the places where God dwells and people to whom God speaks. Jarena Lee described her revelation of call, but also spoke theology about the nature of Jesus Christ as a whole

Savior, for all people, black and white, men and women alike. Like Lee, who boldly claimed her call, Mary courageously claimed her call because God spoke directly to her. A feminist homiletic will allow the preacher to see Mary as one worthy of God's revelation and call, and for listeners to hear a word that invites them to actively listen so that when God speaks, we will hear; when God becomes flesh among us, we will get a glimpse; and when God calls even us, we will follow in the faithful footprints of both Jarena Lee and Mary.

"How Can This Be?"

After Mary hears the angel call her by name and calls her to bear the word of God in flesh, the story of the Annunciation continues with Mary asking the angel of God, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary's first response to something she does not understand is natural: she asks a question. Mary knows the reality of her virginity and that virgins can neither be pregnant nor have a baby. And so she asks the obvious question: "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary might have also been asking the question from a place she knew well: her lowly status as a young unmarried woman. She knows that she does not have status in society or in the religious realm. And yet, here was an angel calling her to participate in God's work for her people and for all humankind. Humbly, she asks: "How can this be, since I am a lowly woman?"

Instructed by Frances Willard, we can preach this passage with attention to how Mary asked the question, "How can this be?" Willard challenges us to not allow traditional cultural perceptions of feminine nature to limit us. In preaching this, we can draw attention to the fact that Mary was very aware of her lowly status as a woman and

that she could not possibly be capable of such a high calling. Such preaching not only calls Mary's lowly status into question but also calls the question of the authority of convention. One could imagine preaching a sermon that re-imagines the traditional question, "How can this be?" The question reminds us how often we limit God's way. We automatically respond with questioning ourselves and our abilities. We believe what others have told us about ourselves and our limitations and our place all these years, rather than seeing ourselves as God sees us: as beloved and called and chosen and capable. As Frances Willard boldly called the conventional code into question, so we can preach a courageous word. We can invite people to stop, and before they respond with a skeptical question about human limitations, to pause and wonder 'how can this be?' Turn it into a prayer and listen for God to tell us how it can be.

To Mary's question, "How can this be?" the angel answered "Nothing will be impossible with God." This was God's answer to all Mary's objections about being a lowly virgin, yet chosen and called blessed to bear the son of God. This was the answer that Jarena Lee gave to those opposing her call to preach the gospel: "it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God." This was the answer that Frances Willard offered in giving voice to the community of women preachers, one in particular who said, "Shall women preach? Certainly, if God calls them to preach. He cannot make a mistake." Nothing is impossible with God: This was the answer that Louisa Woolsley heard when she resisted God's call to preach: "By the help of God I will do the best I can. And for the first time in my life I went to the sacred desk and opened my mouth for God. Oh, that was a precious hour ... I felt that the days of darkness were past, and that God's approval rested upon my labors." Nothing is impossible with God: This was the

answer that Florence Spearing Randolph gave to the women commissioned to take the gospel into far-away lands, preaching: “So when the heart and soul are tired with the strains and stress of life, with hardship and ingratitude, many times from those we serve, we must look beyond it all to the hills from whence cometh our help, look by faith until we see God, and there will come a peace and quietness that the world cannot give, neither take away.”⁷⁰⁴ Nothing is impossible with God: This is the answer that we all need to hear when we are afraid of what God has called us to do when we are doubting our abilities. Nothing is impossible with God. Not bearing a child as a young virgin. Not preaching the gospel as a woman. Not stepping out in faith. Not holding onto hope. Not reaching out in love. Nothing. Nothing is impossible with God.

“Let it be with me according to your word”

When Mary believed that “Nothing is impossible with God,” then she could answer: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” First, Mary recognizes her humble status before God—she is a servant, and as a servant must be obedient. In this strange encounter with an angel, inviting her to be a part of a strange plan, she knows she doesn’t understand it all, but she trusts in God’s word. She believes that the words the angel speaks are God’s words and that they are true.

Louisa Woosley received a strange call to preach God’s word. She was perplexed because she was raised in a church with only men preaching. She knew her place as a woman was as a wife and mother. And yet, God was calling her to be a preacher. She read the Bible in order to convince herself that she was not called, and yet, in God’s

⁷⁰⁴ Randolph, “Looking Backward and Looking Forward,” in Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 143.

word, she found the answer to her question: “Thus ‘saith the Lord.’” Lousia Woosley trusted in the truth of the Word of God in Scripture and so she said, yes, and preached. She called all the women of America and of God, to declare with one accord: “Here I am, send me!”⁷⁰⁵

Encouraged by Woosley’s call, we can preach this story of the Annunciation of Mary with attention to the biblical witness itself and Mary’s extraordinary role therein. Such preaching not only calls gender assumptions into question but also calls the question of the authority of one limited biblical interpretation. One could imagine a preacher preaching a word that is contrary to popular opinion, but faithful to the biblical witness, and that summons women to answer God’s call. Despite the lowly status of women, Mary was called by God to bear the Son of God, to allow the Word to be made flesh in her; and she boldly claimed her call, saying, “Here I am.” Despite the prescribed place for women, Louisa Woosley was called by God to allow the Word of God to be heard through her preaching; and she boldly claimed her call, saying, “Here I am.” Despite all of the voices to the contrary, we are all called by God to do something to help make God’s kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. What is keeping you from believing you are worthy of God’s call? What is keeping you from knowing you are chosen and beloved? What is keeping you from trusting in God’s word? What is keeping you from being a servant and stepping out in faith? What is keeping you from saying “yes?” When God calls you to venture out in faith, allow Mary’s words to become yours: “Here I am, let it be with me.”

⁷⁰⁵ Woosley, *Shall Woman Preach? : Or, the Question Answered*, 60.

“And Mary said ...”

This is where the lectionary reading ends. This is where most sermons stop. But, the story of Mary does not end with her saying “Here I am, a servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” This story does not end with a silent maternal Mary. The story goes on. We read that Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town, and there she greeted Elizabeth. Elizabeth affirmed Mary’s chosen status: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.” And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”⁷⁰⁶

Mary’s words of the Magnificat have been called a prayer, a song, a hymn, a canticle of praise, and a poem. However, the word “said” suggests that what follows is some type of speech. And what Mary says is a bold word. Theologian Andrew Purves argues for the powerfully prophetic words of Mary: “In concrete and specific terms, Mary sings in the language of revolution (a turning around) to record her understanding of the great reversals that have unfolded ... Mary’s song is not bashful in announcing what may be summed up as good news for the poor and downtrodden, and as very bad news indeed for

⁷⁰⁶ Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, Luke 1:46-55.

those who hitherto have wielded economic, political, and military power.”⁷⁰⁷ And yet, the words of the Magnificat have been dressed up in soaring canticles and rhythmic poetry, giving the impression that the words are beautiful and the message serene. The words of the Magnificat are anything but. I wonder if the words were not meant to soothe, but to disturb? Perhaps the Magnificat was not a song but a sermon; the words not meant to be sung sweetly, but preached powerfully.

In the Magnificat, Luke gives Mary a voice—a prophetic voice—of great power. Consequently, Mary is portrayed as a preacher of the gospel. Luke depicts Mary as the spokesperson of God’s redemptive justice, a central theme throughout the gospel. Roman Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson interprets Mary’s Magnificat as a song of protest against the suppression of women’s voices and a spark for their prophetic speech. “Following the logic of her praise,” Johnson argues, “who can dare tell women they cannot speak?”⁷⁰⁸ In the text of the Magnificat, Mary is portrayed as a woman who faithfully responds to the incarnation of God’s word and who bravely and boldly proclaims a word of truth.

In her sermon “Antipathy to Women Preachers,” Florence Randolph names the most problematic role of women—that of preacher. She uses the first women at the empty tomb of Jesus as examples of great faith and capable of great work—even to be the “first preachers.” The sermon recounts the call and charge of Jesus to the women—to go and preach the first gospel sermon without fear, because it is Christ himself who commissioned the women, saying:

⁷⁰⁷ Andrew Purves, “Theological Perspective” in Year B, Volume 1 of David Lyon Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, 1st ed., 12 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 82.

⁷⁰⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 261.

But go quickly and take the glad news, preach the first gospel sermon, take the message to those who are to be the teachers of the whole human race. Go and find his disciples wherever they are. You have been faithful, you persevered for the truth and hence you are honored by God and are first commissioned.⁷⁰⁹

Randolph calls the women at the tomb the “first preachers of the gospel.” She reminds listeners of Jesus’ words to the women: “Go quickly and take the glad news, preach the first gospel sermon, take the message.” Clearly and cleverly, Randolph encourages women who are called to preach today to fear not, because God is in the call and in the work to which they are called. She reminds them that, just like the first women at the tomb, they are called by God, commissioned by Christ, and needed by the church. The message of the sermon then is: If you are called by God, then you must not fear, but must answer the call.

In a contemporary sermon on the Magnificat, Mary is portrayed as one who preaches a powerful and prophetic word that cannot help but change the hearts and minds of the listeners:

In the Magnificat, you may have the false assumption that the Magnificat is an exception in Luke, an aberration, an accident. You may falsely assume the Magnificat is an isolated Bible passage and can be tempered, watered down, or dismissed. Not at all. The Magnificat is a prelude to the whole gospel, and the theme of the whole gospel is that God respects the poor, exalts the poor, cares for the poor, feeds the poor, remembers the poor, helps the poor.

The Magnificat is revolutionary stuff, God’s revolution. Don’t get caught up in the poetry. Don’t get caught up in the music. Don’t get caught up in the creative interpretations that allow you to water down or dismiss the Magnificat. Let the revolution begin in your life and mine. This is God’s revolution in our hearts And when God gets inside of you, God changes everything.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁹ Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979*, 126.

⁷¹⁰ Edward F. Markquart, “The Magnificat and God’s Revolution,” Advent 4, Luke 1:46-55, <http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com>, accessed on November 11, 2009.

Immediately following the sermon, a communal response is invited and encouraged. The response can be in the form of silence, affirmation of faith, prayer, or song. A response to this sermon on the Magnificat might be to silently ponder the sermon: ‘What is Mary saying to me? How does God get inside of me? Am I willing to allow God’s revolution in my heart to change everything?’ Another response might be to confess faith in a God of revolution and redemption. Listeners might also respond by praying for God’s radical justice and abundant mercy in making Christ’s kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Finally, in response to the proclamation, listeners may lift their voices in magnifying God with Mary. With Mary as a model of faith, listeners can respond to the word by proclaiming Christ’s kingdom—in word and deed.⁷¹¹

Summary

In the Magnificat, the first sermon of the New Testament, Mary magnifies and declares the greatness of God. Following her example, Florence Spearing Randolph said ‘yes’ to her call and stood in the pulpit to declare the greatness of God. Inspired by Randolph’s preaching, we can preach this story of Mary with attention to the Magnificat, where Mary proclaimed a word in which God’s way overturned conventional belief; in fact, it turned the status quo inside out—the powerful are brought down from their thrones and the lowly lifted up; the hungry filled and the rich sent away empty—and it was all proclaimed by a woman. Such preaching not only calls into question Mary’s

⁷¹¹ Donna Giver Johnston, “Breaking the Silence: A Protestant Portrayal of Mary,” *Glossolalia* 5:1 (Fall 2012). <http://glossolalia.sites.yale.edu/>

silence, but also the question of the ordained call of women. One could imagine a preacher preaching a powerful word of proclamation of justice for all and a summons for women to be lifted up into the pulpit.

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