

Baptists, the Holy Spirit, and the Threat of Women Preachers



Douglas Weaver

Doug Weaver is Professor of Baptist Studies and Interim Chair of the Department of Religion at Baylor University.

In 1984, Bill Leonard published the sermon, "Forgiving Eve."¹ I was working on a dissertation under his mentorship at the time, and I still remember what I said to him when I read the sermon. "Dr. Leonard, the sermon should be in the canon."

Such hyperbole was sincere, especially since the conservative resurgence agenda among Southern Baptists had just passed a resolution that declared women were ineligible for pastoral roles because Eve sinned first in the Edenic fall: "(Paul) excludes women from pastoral leadership to preserve a submission God requires because the man was first in creation and the woman was first in the Edenic fall."

In the sermon, Bill prophetically affirmed women's voices for pastoral ministry and dismantled the absurdity that women, and not us all, are responsible for sin. The one thing he got wrong was that women's ordination would not even be an issue in 50 or 100 years. It's now 35 years later, and women called to pastoral ministry are still considered an ominous threat to the patriarchs and their submissive supporters.

This essay happily acknowledges but does not primarily deal with the minority in Baptist history who prophetically spoke out for women's roles in the church, or the pioneers who filled those roles. It does, however, examine the enduring persistence of the opposition to

women's voices and how Baptist leaders argued their case in a way that sounds so familiar today—contending they were simply following biblical commands—against the threat of women's voices. It explores in particular how different perspectives of the Holy Spirit and women's roles intersected. To be Spirit-filled could mean freedom for women to preach, or it could mean female submission and silence to stop the threat.

The dominant attitude of Southern Baptists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that women should not preach or teach in front of men. In 1923, Kentucky Baptist pastor J.W. Porter compiled a series of essays, several of them written in earlier decades, titled *Feminism: Woman and Her Work*. The publisher, Baptist Book Concern, was closely tied to the *Western Recorder*, the fundamentalist paper of Kentucky Baptists, and had Landmarkist sympathies.

In an introduction, Victor Masters, the editor of the *Western Recorder*, offered reasons for why such a book was needed. He noted that in 1918, the Southern Baptist Convention took the disgraceful step of allowing women to be voting messengers at its annual meetings. The results were the inevitable heretical expectations that women should serve on convention boards and be permitted to speak to mixed assemblies of men and women. Masters lamented that most Baptists did not understand when they allowed women to be convention messengers that their actions would eventually produce sympathetic attitudes toward affirming women in the ministry of preaching. He was appalled that Baptists were imitating several other evangelical groups that had already affirmed women preachers. After detailing reasons for the delayed attention to the women's issue, such as not wanting to distract from the 75 Million Campaign, Southern Baptists' first major fund-raising effort that debuted in 1919, Masters offered a final commendation of the book attacking feminism: the misuse of the Scriptures had to be confronted and corrected because the "Feminist Movement" revealed a "spiritual kinship" with modernism and its tendency to "flout the Bible."²

The most prominent Baptist author in the collection was John Broadus of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The Broadus chapter was a reprint of an 1880 pamphlet he wrote, *Should Women Speak in Mixed Assemblies?* Broadus' hermeneutic reflected that of his Confederate-supporting rationale for the Bible's support of enslaving Black people. He urged Baptists to follow the so-called simple, literal

meaning of Scripture, and warned that any positive assessment of taking historical context into account when reading biblical writers such as the Apostle Paul was the first step in the slippery slope toward infidelity and denying biblical authority. Other authors in the collection followed Broadus' hermeneutic.

Broadus' answer (and that of the other authors) to the question he posed—written when Southern Baptists were beginning to affirm women's mission societies—was a resounding “No!” For Broadus, the plain, non-contextual, literal reading meant that women should dress modestly with head coverings. They were permitted to speak to other women in public, since the Bible had not forbidden women from those settings, but strict boundaries had to be maintained on the crowds as not even male reporters or editors could be present. Such would function as a “wedge” and crack open that airtight seal of biblical restrictions on women.³

Throughout the essays, Broadus and other Baptist patriarchs highlighted several themes they believed supported the restriction on women preaching. One specific biblical passage they confronted was Acts 2, which speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church, with the promise that in the End Time women would prophesy.

John Broadus and Kentucky pastor W.H. Felix took the standard fundamentalist approach that relied on cessationism to handle seemingly difficult passages where women spoke in public settings in the Bible. Cessationism was the belief that the Holy Spirit's work in miracles and extraordinary gifts such as speaking in tongues and prophecy were only operative in the days of the New Testament. These gifts had ceased to function after the church was established, and therefore were no longer relevant. Any claim to contemporary prophecy by women, cessationists argued, could not be attributed to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Even if the book of Acts had women prophetesses, the gift had ceased for the church.⁴ Cessationism became one of the major ways that Baptist patriarchs silenced the threat of women's voices in the church, especially in the pulpit.

T.T. Eaton, a Louisville pastor and editor of the *Western Recorder* prior to Victor Masters, interpreted Acts 2 in light of his view of biblical inspiration. According to Eaton, the Holy Spirit and the perfection of God had to inspire a plenary verbal—every word of the text—view of

the Bible. Since the Holy Spirit, according to the letters of Paul, forbade women from preaching, passages such as Acts 2 where women spoke in public must by necessity mean the audiences were all female. In particular, the presence of prophetesses in Acts and the specificity of women prophesying in Acts 2 must mean that these women were led by the Holy Spirit only to teach other women. The Spirit-inspired Scripture could not contradict itself.⁵

Throughout their condemnation of feminism, Baptist patriarchs used the story of Adam and Eve to justify their belief that women were not to speak in mixed assemblies. John Broadus and T.T. Eaton declared that women must not preach because Adam was the first in creation and Eve the first in transgression.⁶ J.B. Hawthorne, pastor of First Baptist Church, Atlanta, elaborated that the restrictions on women were derived from the divine order of creation. According to Hawthorne, because woman “was made out of the man and for the man,” submission is her natural, created function. Sin sealed the need for submission. Furthermore, preached Hawthorne, Adam was not deceived; Eve was, and submission was the penalty of her sin.⁷ The woman having been deceived by the devil, Hawthorne contended, meant she could never be trusted “with the office of Christian ministry.” With exasperation, he complained that women, just as Eve had, still wanted to “know too much.” “I have always had some sympathy with Adam,” Hawthorne chided, “because I know the bewitching power of female eloquence.”⁸ He intended his testimony to have added weight when he revealed that he had previously sympathized with women’s desire to preach in mixed assemblies. Hawthorne ceased having internal conflict over his views when he finally submitted to “conscience, Paul, and the Holy Ghost.”⁹

W.H. Felix concurred with Hawthorne’s assessment of women’s submission due to the order of creation. “The first feature of womanhood is subordination,” Felix wrote.¹⁰ Like Hawthorne, Felix said that Eve’s transgression consigned women to submission and denied them any authority over men in spiritual matters. In a declaration that echoed a hierarchical Trinity, Felix declared, “The order runs thus: Christ is subordinate to God, man subordinate to Christ, and woman subordinate to man.”¹¹

Sally Neill Roach, a member of T.T. Eaton’s congregation, found support for Eve’s legacy of submission in the nature of men and women.

Roach echoed others such as John Broadus who viewed woman as the weaker sex—less rational and prone to emotion—because of Eve’s transgression. Consequently Paul, under divine inspiration from the Holy Spirit, commanded women to be silent in churches and submissive in their home life (1 Cor. 14:34). Roach also mirrored the ideas of J.B. Hawthorne when she acknowledged that men, the stronger sex, had sinned in the Garden of Eden when Adam listened to Eve and ate the forbidden fruit, but he had only disobeyed and had not been deceived. Disobedience did not disqualify men for spiritual leadership, but being deceived had eliminated women from the trust of speaking in mixed church assemblies.¹²

All of the authors agreed that, as part of the order of creation, men and women were designed differently. Men and women were equally created in God’s image, the patriarchs admitted, but they have different functions in life and in the church. W.P. Harvey, Eaton’s business manager at the *Western Recorder*, had no issue with the “right of women to compete with men in areas that fit their nature,” but preaching was outside the proper sphere of women’s work. All the apostles were male, Harvey and others noted.¹³ Some patriarchs like Felix added their disgust with the push for women’s roles in public life outside the church. Support for women’s right to vote in public elections reflected this attempt at usurpation, Felix wrote, and even participation in the good cause of temperance distracted from women’s true purpose. According to Felix, women should honor the sphere of life they were created for, which was the home. Home is her workshop, he asserted: “if she never does anything else but ‘nurse babies’ she can do no grander work.”¹⁴

J.W. Porter argued that men were superior in intellect and biology, but women were morally superior (though not able to have spiritual leadership!).¹⁵ Like W.H. Felix, Porter emphasized that home and motherhood were the divine responsibilities set aside for women, and women who desired to preach were not called by the Holy Spirit but were usually impious, not married, or had failed at marriage.¹⁶ Because feminism was rebellion against God’s design for women, Porter exhorted that the best friend a woman could have is the “man who will tell her the truth about herself.”¹⁷

Sally Neill Roach was the only author willing to applaud the teaching gifts of women. While she denied women the right of speaking in

churches—she too noted that Jesus had no female apostles—Roach was willing to listen to women outside the life of the church, and she admitted that women might be better public speakers than men. Yet Roach declared that the Bible was her final authority and the Holy Spirit did not allow women to preach or teach.¹⁸

Women who left their divinely ordained sphere, the argument went, were guilty of usurping spiritual authority given only to men. According to Boyce Taylor, the Old Testament judge, Deborah, was the only biblical exception of a woman exercising authority over men. In this case, however, men had failed the duties of their sphere and had become “sissies.”¹⁹ According to W.H. Felix, attempting to usurp authority over men by teaching in mixed assemblies was bald “infidelity, a rejection of the Word of God.” The Holy Spirit, who spoke through Paul to exclude women from preaching, was “insulted with a flippancy unbecoming those who profess to be Christians.”²⁰ For Baptist patriarchs, the question of women speaking in mixed assemblies was settled by the final authority of Scripture. As T.T. Eaton summed up, “if the Bible is not clear on this subject, it is not clear on anything.”²¹

While the Baptist patriarchs constantly asserted their fidelity to biblical authority, they still resorted to denunciations of what today they would call gender confusion. For example, J.W. Porter, in his description of “the menace of feminism,” derided the lack of femininity among women who were interested in speaking to mixed assemblies as “the menace of the unwomanly woman.”²² “From the manish woman and womanish man, good Lord deliver us,” Porter cried. Seemingly foreshadowing later conservative concerns about gender roles, Porter lamented: “Should the current craze continue, the grammarian will have to use three genders for the human race—he, she, and it.”²³ W.P. Harvey also utilized gendered derogatory imagery to address whether women could preach. He asked, who is “the new man who flatters and toadies to the new woman?... He is of the namby-pamby brand. To call him a man would be a reproach to true manhood, and to label him effeminate would be an unpardonable reflection on the feminine gender.”²⁴

J.W. Porter’s assessment encapsulated the Southern Baptist patriarchal view of the threat of women’s preaching and the role of the Holy Spirit at the outset of the twentieth century. He asserted that liberalism and the acceptance of evolution led to destructive biblical criticism that

denied the Holy Spirit inspired the Bible. Such disregard for the Bible had led the Northern Baptists to elect a woman as their president. He worried that Southern Baptists were headed toward the use of women preachers and when they did so, a convention split would ensue. Porter concluded, “feminism has made more infidels among women than any single agency.”²⁵

In contrast to the dominant opposition in Baptist identity toward women preaching, some Baptists tied its affirmation to a compelling experience of the Holy Spirit. These Baptists were participants in the Holiness Movement of the nineteenth century. The Methodist, Phoebe Palmer, is often called the mother of the Holiness Movement. She emphasized the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a post-conversion experience of instantaneous sanctification—a dominant theme in the movement—but she also wrote a book, *The Promise of the Father*, that emphasized the biblical support for women preachers based on the Pentecost experience found in Acts 2 where women would prophesy in the End Times.²⁶

Among White Baptists, conservative Northern Baptist holiness advocate A.J. Gordon also cited Acts 2 as support for women preaching. The Boston pastor and missionary advocate believed he was living in the era of the “dispensation of the Spirit,” and reliance on the book of Acts and other passages that emphasized the miraculous undergirded his views on women preaching.²⁷ Gordon’s support for women preachers in Baptist life threatened or angered most Baptists. T.T. Eaton took a cessationist approach and lampooned Gordon’s insistence that the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit allowed women to preach. Eaton noted that Gordon did not espouse women’s ordination because of a married woman’s role at home, but in horror, Eaton said Gordon’s view opened the door for childless widows or single women to preach.²⁸

Among Black Baptists, most pastors also opposed women who preached. Anthony Binga of Richmond, Virginia was typical when he noted that women could teach Sunday School to women or vote in church matters, but could not, according to the Apostle Paul, exercise spiritual authority over men. Women who wanted to preach would be “throwing off that modesty that should adorn her sex.”²⁹

Black Baptists involved in the Holiness Movement, for example, A.J. Gordon, also tied the affirmation of women preaching to a compelling post-conversion experience of the Holy Spirit.

Virginia Broughton, who worked alongside Nannie Helen Burroughs in the National Baptist Convention, was a disciple of Joanna Moore, the holiness-influenced Northern Baptist missionary who ministered to African Americans in the South. Perhaps Broughton's most classic line was to her husband when she began to preach as an itinerant evangelist, and he questioned her right to do so. After he asked, when is "this business going to stop," Broughton told her husband: "I don't know; I belong to God first and you are next, so you two must settle it." Her husband soon supported Virginia's Spirit-led ministry, which not only advocated for a post-conversion Holy Spirit baptism of sanctification, but also affirmed a ministry of healing.³⁰

Another evidence of the Moore legacy were the ministries of two of her mentees, African Americans Charles Price Jones and Sister Mary Sweet. Jones was pastor of Mt. Helm Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, and Sweet was an itinerant holiness evangelist. Jones' support for the experience of Spirit baptism led Jackson-area Baptists to exclude him from their ranks. After a church split, he became the founder of the Church of Christ, holiness denomination. During his years as a holiness-supporting Baptist, he had conflicts with his friend, Mary Sweet, which revealed opposing notions about the acceptable boundaries of Spirit-led women in leadership. Sweet's travels took her to a church in Hazelhurst, pastored by one of Jones' friends, W.S. Pleasant, who became so enamored with Sweet's ministry that he told Jones, "Sis. Sweet is fairly raising the dead." According to Pleasant, "people fell out rigid, their eyes rolled and they became utterly helpless as if they had cataleptic fits. They would lie that way many hours." In later Pentecostal or charismatic history, that experience is called "being slain in the Spirit."

Jones became unsettled at the news and went to see for himself. He witnessed people being slain in the Spirit and felt a strong compulsion to fall as well. Jones said that he resisted the devil and remained standing, but only through the help of the Holy Spirit. He decided that "the nervous and weaker minded people" were those who had the slain experience. Jones had not opposed Sweet speaking to mixed church audiences, but tied the excessive emotionalism in her services to not operating under the proper male authority and she was thus deceived. Jones' holiness, Spirit-led ministry gave women more opportunities than

cessationists allowed, but he echoed other Baptists who never escaped the backdrop of their patriarchy and tied their opposition to women's leadership at the foot of Eve.³¹

The Baptist reaction to Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century often based its opposition to the upstart Pentecostals' openness to Spirit-led women preachers. When popular fundamentalist John Roach Straton began supporting the ministry of child evangelist, Uldine Utley, Victor Masters of the *Western Recorder* was livid. He bemoaned that a known voice for fundamental truths had slapped the Apostle Paul in the face with the support of women preachers.³² Baptists concerned about women preachers were especially drawn to Aimee Semple McPherson, the evangelist who attracted national attention for her success in bringing Hollywood stars and dramatic flair into the pulpit and into her Angelus Temple in Los Angeles in addition to reports of a sexual affair with a member of her church staff.³³

Baptists often equated Pentecostalism with McPhersonism and tied their disgust of her ministry to her gender. Fundamentalists, including Ben Bogard and J. Frank Norris, had a field day sexualizing her ministry. The cessationist Bogard said that the reported miracles in McPherson's ministry were dangerous because Satan produced "counterfeits [which] looked almost like the original." Leave it to the devil, Bogard warned, to have "the most attractive preachers in the world."³⁴ Norris had a verbal nuclear war with former protégé John R. Rice over the validity of holiness and Pentecostal ideas, with the arguments centered on McPherson.

Norris was a holiness-fundamentalist early in his ministry who affirmed the Holy Spirit in holiness terms of empowerment for evangelistic preaching, and he adopted a biblical literalism that practiced healing with anointing oil (James 5). He also spoke highly of McPherson as a preacher: she had the voice of a Hollywood movie star, and young seminarians should do well to skip their church history and theology lessons and listen to her sermons. But when Norris came into conflict with Rice in the 1930s, his weapons were a high-powered cessationism that repudiated anointing with oil and accused Rice of affirming McPhersonism, meaning a range of Pentecostal ideas. In case anyone had doubts that McPhersonism was demonic, Norris offered a hyper-sexualized caricature of Sister Aimee. She was biblical in one way, he admitted, since she was like the Samaritan woman in the gospel of John—"both had

a legion of husbands.”³⁵ In reviewing a ministry led by a woman preacher, Norris retorted that he was not surprised that services of anointing with oil, where the women were doing the “rubbing,” led to men and women having a “well day immediately after the ‘healing process.’”³⁶ After an exhibition of emotional ecstasy in a so-called Spirit-filled revival, Norris roared, these McPherson households had more babies. No doubt, the fear of Eve lived on as Baptists looked down upon emerging Pentecostalism.

Blaming women for discomfort with how some people have appropriated the presence of the Holy Spirit blossomed in broader circles in the Charismatic Movement of the 1960s and beyond.³⁷ The typical strong cessationist opposition to tying the Holy Spirit to an experience of a Holy Spirit baptism was prevalent, and the opposition was quite willing to tie it to women. In 1975, when Baptist Press called the Charismatic Movement the lead story in Baptist life that year, Baptists all over the South grappled with how to deal with charismatics in their churches and their associations. One of the livelier stories involved Baptists in the Dallas area.

In the early 1970s, the Dallas Baptist Association had its eye on Beverly Hills Baptist Church and its charismatic pastor, Howard Conaster. In January of 1975, the church left its facilities, which would hold about a thousand worshippers, for the “Bronco Bowl” amphitheater that seated 2,500. Crowds came. The association anxiously observed the church holding monthly Saturday evening youth rallies and worried that Conaster was turning youth from other churches into young charismatics.³⁸

W.A. Criswell, the pastor of Baptists’ largest congregation, First Baptist Church in Dallas, got involved when he preached at an annual associational evangelism conference. Criswell was known of course as the spiritual patriarch of the fundamentalist family of the latter part of the twentieth century. His 1969 book, *Why I Preach the Bible Is Literally True*, foreshadowed that legacy. During the moderate-conservative “holy war” among Southern Baptists in the 1980s, Criswell made news when he bluntly said that, if a woman testified to a call to the pastorate, she was badly mistaken because God never did that. Criswell’s blaming women had other manifestations.

Criswell, at least in the 1950s, can be classified as part of the holiness-fundamentalist legacy. His views of the Holy Spirit were similar to earlier exemplars such as A.C. Dixon, William Bell Riley, and the early J. Frank Norris. In 1953 Criswell, whom Joel Gregory has rightly called

the successor to Norris's flamboyant fundamentalist mantle, published *These Issues We Must Face* and insisted that Christians received the Holy Spirit at conversion, but they needed to seek and ask for subsequent fillings to have the "fullness of the Spirit" to witness and evangelize. He said that Pentecost in Acts 2 was the reception of the Spirit, but agreed that his affirmation of the subsequent fillings of the Spirit was what some people called the Holy Spirit baptism.

In 1973, during the heat of conflict over the Charismatic Movement in Texas, Criswell published sermons on the topic of the Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts. His views differed from his earlier reflections. He distanced himself from the phrase "baptism of the Holy Spirit," stating clearly that all believers were baptized into the body of Christ at conversion but still asserting that believers could be filled a thousand times. Criswell's 1973 book was a primer for dispensationalist cessationism about miraculous gifts, however, especially speaking in tongues which was tied to his disparagement of women's roles in the church.³⁹

At the 1975 evangelism conference in Dallas, Criswell, in his characteristic bombast, preached on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 11–14, which included the debatable phrase, "let the women keep silent" (1 Cor. 14:34): "Either Paul has lost his marbles, or there is something there I need to know. These verses are imbedded in a chapter on speaking in tongues. She's not to do it." Criswell exhorted, "You stop the women from speaking in tongues, and the practice will absolutely disappear from the earth. The tongues movement is a woman movement. And when she's taken out of it, it perishes on the vine." After a round of "amens" and laughter from the audience, Criswell continued: "It is senseless, inane, and idiotic. They think I am naïve. They think they can fool me into thinking that gibberish is a language... If that is the Christian faith, then I am not a Christian. Exclamation point."⁴⁰

In a Baptist Press interview, Jaroy Webber, president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1975, said that Criswell's scathing remarks probably had the support of about 95 percent of Southern Baptist pastors.⁴¹ Criswell's diatribe was about women and spiritual messages to the church via speaking in tongues, but the meaning was the same. He sexualized the ministry of women. He asserted that the intersection of women, spiritual leadership, and emotionalism were the key ingredients

of heresy. Said another way, his cessationism that cast away the discomforts of claims to the modern use of miraculous spiritual gifts had another bonus: it silenced the women.

The silencing of women preachers (or any spiritual leadership that might involve authority over men) in Baptist life has not been just a male activity. Scholars, most notably Elizabeth Flowers, have written about how conservative women supported their men in the takeover of the SBC in the late twentieth century.⁴² The paragon of the loyal pastor's wife was Joyce Rogers, the spouse of Adrian Rogers, a major leader in the "conservative resurgence." Joyce Rogers' 1980 book, *The Wise Woman... How to Be One in a Thousand*, was a diatribe against the rising feminist movement, and in the context of the SBC, the development—although slow going—of women's preaching and gender equality.

Rogers' book revealed the rising popularity of conservative anti-feminists who offered an alternative of family life that glorified the Victorian model of motherhood as the biblical model: The mother was queen of the home and the spiritual glue that nurtured children in the Christian faith and supported with full submissive loyalty the husband as the head and breadwinner of the household. Marabel Morgan's 1973 book, *The Total Woman*, provided the popular foundation for this conservative Christian anti-feminist genre. According to Morgan, whose book found a place on the shelves of many Southern Baptist homes, women must "accept your husband as he is," testify "I'll support the man," and realize submission is good and solves potential conflict. Morgan echoed earlier affirmations of men and women holding separate spheres in life as a divine arrangement: "equal in status, different in function."⁴³

The close ties between the language of the Holiness Movement and its intriguing prevalence as a counter or accommodation to the Charismatic Movement is evident in Beverly LaHaye's 1976 book, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman*. The holiness focus on being Spirit-led or baptized in the Spirit as empowerment for service and witnessing, without any Pentecostal reliance on speaking in tongues as the biblical sign of a post-conversion Spirit baptism, pervades every chapter. LaHaye testified to a distinct experience of grace—no extraordinary sign was needed—in which she received the filling of the Spirit. The Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled woman will be happy at home supporting her husband

and his career, LaHaye said. She “will want to be totally submissive to her husband.” The three primary results of the Spirit-filled wife will be “submissiveness,” a “joyful heart and thankful spirit.”⁴⁴

In similar fashion to LaHaye, Joyce Rogers wrote in the era of the charismatic focus on the Holy Spirit. She also offered an alternative approach with a reliance on the Spirit without becoming charismatic (or Pentecostal). Her writings, moreover, revealed the women’s side of a strong attraction among Southern Baptist conservatives to the holiness-influenced quest to be empowered for evangelism, purity, and victorious living.

Rogers urged Southern Baptist women to be “wise women” by relying on the Holy Spirit to support their husbands. She chided women for not being happy with homemaking and calling themselves by their husband’s names. She wanted to be called Mrs. Adrian Rogers, not Mrs. Joyce Rogers. The holiness-fundamentalist language of her book is striking.⁴⁵ Rogers was no charismatic, but she resonated with the desire for the Spirit’s presence and power in daily life. According to Rogers, the-one-in-a-thousand wise woman is one who is Spirit-led. She said that fading physical beauty, inevitable for all women, was “God’s ugly shop,” adding that “the Holy Spirit of God is the great beauty consultant. His beauty book is the Bible.”⁴⁶

Rogers never claimed a special baptism of the Holy Spirit, but like LaHaye declared that “the fullness of the Holy Spirit” changed her life. Her reliance on the language of the Spirit to draw a portrait of a submissive wife was most clearly seen in her extensive contrasts between spiritual and divine decontaminants. For example,

- The spiritual contaminant of the bondage of bitterness was the divine decontaminant—the love of the Spirit.
- The irritant of indecision was contrasted with the leading of the Spirit.
- The dirt of discontent was cleansed by the sufficiency of the Spirit.

In other words, Rogers suggested that the real evidence of being Spirit-led is not a charismatic experience, not a feminist awakening, not the false road of bitterness and discontent about women’s roles or asserting a call to preach, and not the quest for spiritual leadership that usurped male headship.⁴⁷

Rogers subtly went further than LaHaye who said the Spirit-led woman would want to be submissive, that submission was a result of being Spirit-led. Rather, without using the words “this is the unerring sign of being Spirit-filled,” Rogers equated submission with being filled with the Spirit. Submission was the functional sign of a Spirit-led victorious life. Being Spirit-led, then, was to be submissive to the spiritual head of a woman’s life, her husband, and to accept her role to support him fully. In other words, the woman knew she was Spirit-filled when she served God through distinctly female obedience—submission. Christian feminists said that the Holy Spirit called women and men to preach. For Rogers, it was the Spirit that silenced women except in their own restrictive submissive sphere of life. Submissive women could minister, even outside the home, but it was a women’s ministry to other women that modeled submission in all walks of life.⁴⁸

Openness to the Spirit and the role of women in Baptist life has increased, though seemingly in stops and starts. The African-American Lott Carey Baptist Foreign Mission Society recently hired Rev. Dr. Gina Marcia Stewart as its president after her tenure as pastor of the Christ Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. My own church, Calvary Baptist in Waco, Texas, recently called its third woman as pastor, Hannah Marshall Coe. The story of how so many conservative Baptists have been threatened by the presence of the Holy Spirit regarding women in roles of spiritual leadership, especially preaching, is endless and ongoing, however.

Current Southern Baptists fight over Beth Moore and whether she is preaching or if she can, according to their presumed authoritative reading of Scripture. Al Mohler of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary says that only a male voice fits the pulpit. Hyper-complementarians such as Owen Strachan or the Reformed “theobros” on the Internet still find warmth in the Edenic fall of Eve or in the purported order of family life found in the story of the Creation and even in their disreputable doctrine of the Trinity that emphasizes the eternal subordination of the Son as proof of women’s designated everlasting submission to men. The shadow of John Broadus and other early Baptist patriarchs looms large as contemporary arguments mostly replicate those of Baptist leaders who wrote aghast at the possibility that women might speak in

mixed assemblies. White Baptists don't often use Joyce Rogers' language and equation of being Spirit-filled with submission, but the conclusion is the same. Submission is the core of female orthodoxy.

Black Baptists also continue to debate the role of women preaching, often with more explicit attention to the Spirit. Bishop Paul Morton, founder of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship, ordained women, including his wife, Debra. While the group at times sounded as if ordained women still needed the "covering" of male leaders, Debra is senior pastor of Greater St. Stephen Full Gospel Baptist Church in New Orleans. Dwight McKissic of Texas, dually aligned with Southern Baptists and National Baptists, affirms the charismatic experience of a private prayer language in tongues and strongly defends women preaching, especially to his White Southern Baptist opponents. McKissic echoes somewhat the earlier holiness Baptist, Charles Price Jones, given he allows women preaching but will not affirm women as pastors.⁴⁹

Baptists, the Holy Spirit, and the so-called threat of women preaching has many twists and turns at their intersections. Clearly, some Baptists continue to have fear of the boundary-breaking winds of the Spirit. Others find that the liberation of the Spirit overshadows even the long shadow of those who hide behind hyper-complementarianism, cessationism, and bombastic sexualized patriarchy.

Notes

- 1 The sermon appeared in the November 7, 1984 edition of the *Christian Century*.
- 2 J.W. Porter, ed., *Feminism: Woman and Her Work* (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1923), 7-8. Other reasons for the delay, according to Masters, were preoccupation with the strains of WWI, and the recent attention given to the "apostasy" of the interchurch movement. Masters also admitted that the "traditional conservatism" of Southern Baptists made debate seem unnecessary.
- 3 John Broadus, "Should Women Speak in Mixed Assemblies," in Porter, *Feminism*, 45-53. On modesty, see also J.W. Porter, "The Menace of Feminism," in Porter, *Feminism*, 24-25.
- 4 W.H. Felix, "The Work and Sphere of True Womanhood," in Porter, *Feminism*, 79. Broadus, "Should Women Speak," in Porter, *Feminism*, 47-48.
- 5 T.T. Eaton, "The Bible on Women's Public Speaking," in Porter, *Feminism*, 100. See also W.P. Harvey "Shall Women Preach," in Porter, *Feminism*, 119.
- 6 Eaton, *Ibid.*, 101. Broadus, "Should Women Speak," in Porter, *Feminism*, 48.
- 7 J.B. Hawthorne, "Women Speaking in Mixed Assemblies," in Porter, *Feminism*, 57-59.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 58-59.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 54.

- 10 Felix, "The Work and Sphere," in Porter, *Feminism*, 68.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 12 Sally Neill Roach, "Women Speaking in Church Assemblies," in Porter, *Feminism*, 149. Broadus, "Should Women Speak," in Porter, *Feminism*, 45.
- 13 Felix, "The Work and Sphere," in Porter, *Feminism*, 79. Harvey, "Shall Women Preach," in Porter, *Feminism*, 115.
- 14 Felix, *Ibid.*, 83.
- 15 Porter, "The Menace of Feminism," in Porter, *Feminism*, 16-18.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 22-23. Harvey, "Shall Women Preach," in Porter, *Feminism*, 115.
- 17 Porter, "The Menace of Feminism," in Porter, *Feminism*, 9.
- 18 Roach, "Women Speaking," in Porter, *Feminism*, 154-56.
- 19 Boyce Taylor, "Women Speaking in Mixed Assemblies," in Porter, *Feminism*, 141.
- 20 Felix, "The Work and Sphere," in Porter, *Feminism*, 70, 71.
- 21 Eaton, "The Bible on Women's Public Speaking," in Porter, *Feminism*, 102.
- 22 Porter, "The Menace of Feminism," in Porter, *Feminism*, 9.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 24 W.P. Harvey, "Shall Women Preach," in Porter, *Feminism*, 113. Harvey included a short preface in which A.T. Robertson wrote in support of the "plain meaning of Scripture" against women speaking in mixed assemblies.
- 25 Helen Barrett Montgomery was elected president of the NBC in 1921. Porter, "The Menace of Feminism," in Porter, *Feminism*, 43. J.W. Porter, "Arguments for Women Speaking in the Churches" in Porter, *Feminism*, 164.
- 26 C. Douglas Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit, The Contested History with Holiness-Pentecostal Movements* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 3-7.
- 27 A.J. Gordon, *The Ministry of the Spirit* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1894), vii, 80. Scott M. Gibson, A.J. Gordon: *American Premillennialist* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 110-14.
- 28 Eaton, "The Bible on Women's Public Speaking," in Porter, *Feminism*, 104-106.
- 29 Anthony Binga, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (Richmond, VA: n.p., 1889), 98-99. E.C. Morris, leader of the National Baptist Convention, argued that women could be messengers to convention meetings. For the views of other Black leaders in the late 19th century, see Evelyn Higgenbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
- 30 Virginia Broughton, *Twenty-Year's Experience of a Missionary* (Chicago: Pony Express), 42. See also Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit*, 77-79.
- 31 C.P. Jones, "Characters I Have Met," in Anita Bingham Jefferson, comp., *Charles Price Jones: First Black Holiness Reformer with a One Hundred Year Chronology of His Life* (Jackson, MS: n.p., 2011), 25-29. Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit*, 61-69.
- 32 Editorial Paragraphs: "Dr. Straton's Fourteen-Year-Old Girl Evangelist," *Western Recorder* (1 July, 1926): 13, 16.
- 33 For more on McPherson, see Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit*, 172-89.
- 34 Ben Bogard, *Bogard-McPherson Debate* (Dallas: Rock of Ages, 1934), 17-19, 31.
- 35 J. Frank Norris, "The Bottle of Oil," *Fundamentalist* (6 September, 1935): 1, 3.
- 36 J. Frank Norris, "Can True Fundamentalist Baptists Fellowship the Snake-Poison-Oily Crowd?" *Fundamentalist* (24 January, 1936): 1, 5.
- 37 For an overview of the Charismatic Movement, see Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit*, 207-258.
- 38 See Sandra Pratt Martin, *Bite Your Tongues: A Story about Beverly Hills Baptist Church and its Pastor, Howard Conaster* (Fort Worth, TX: Harvest, 1976)
- 39 For more on W.A. Criswell, see Weaver, *Baptists and the Holy Spirit*, 237.

40 "Charismatic Movement Draws Criticism of W.A. Criswell," *Baptist Standard* (23 April, 1975): 3.

41 "Weber Views 'Divisive' Move," *Baptist Standard* (18 June, 1975): 7.

42 Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

43 Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1973), 54, 56, 69, 70.

44 Beverly LaHaye, *The Spirit-Controlled Woman* (Irvine, CA: Harvest House Publishers, 1976), 14, 71, 83, 170, 171. Quotations on pp. 71, 141.

45 Holiness had several versions. Baptists sometimes combined emphases from Wesleyan (focus on purity of heart and cleansing from sin) with Keswick holiness. Rogers and most Baptists mirrored the Keswick legacy of A.J. Gordon and denied that sanctification could be complete this side of heaven. Rather, the focus was empowerment for service but usually included a baptism of the Spirit experience and subsequent "fillings" of the Spirit form empowerment.

46 Joyce Rogers, *The Wise Woman... How to Be One in a Thousand* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 18-19.

47 *Ibid.*, 33-47.

48 Pentecostal women of the 1970s would not have considered themselves feminists just for believing that the Holy Spirit called them to preach. They would have thought it was biblically based submission to a specific call on their lives, despite the expected difficulties.

49 McKissic wrote, "It is time for the church to let Phoebe be Phoebe, Priscilla be Priscilla, and Phillip's four daughters conduct the ministries under God's authority, and God-ordained male leadership, as He has instructed them to do, even preaching in a Lord's Day Worship service." See Wm. Dwight McKissic, "Does the Bible Permit Women to Preach in Our Lord's Worship Service?" *Ascol/McKissic Debate/Dialogue* (Birmingham, 2019). See also McKissic, "From the Pastor's Pen: Questions Concerning Women in Ministry" (Cornerstone Baptist Church, Arlington, TX, 2 January, 1999).