Women in Religion

Claiming Notability for Women Activists in Religion

editor Colleen D. Hartung

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Women in Religion — Volume 1

EDITED BY COLLEEN D. HARTUNG

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Foreword

More Notable Than Thou

Gender bias in the history of ideas is notorious. In religious terms, it can also be called heretical, blasphemous, and evil. The challenge to represent women's lives, voices, and accomplishments in the broad and deep reaches of religion is even more difficult than in other fields. While history has its male actors and music its male composers, religions have their male gods who reign supreme even over male practitioners. These gods eclipse and erase goddesses, women scholars and ministers, and women's ways of shaping spiritual consciousness. Women face formidable obstacles in religion, but women's struggles are their success.

It is no wonder Wikipedia is so thin on entries about women in religion. With the publication of this volume edited by Colleen Hartung, and subsequent volumes that will add scores more such articles, that problem will be solved. I predict that, in time, the actual numbers of women religious agents, if documented fairly, will far surpass those of men. After all, religion has long been seen as part of the soft, spiritual, domestic world associated with women, versus the tough, intellectual, global dimensions that are identified as male. But this will happen only if methodological changes are made in the whole approach to notability–if power dynamics are analyzed and transformed and entries admitted accordingly.

At the heart of the problem is who holds the power to decide, as feminist philosopher Mary Daly and other twentieth-century feminist theologians pointed out. Starting with God–who is Father, Lord, Ruler, King–the divine is male and therefore, Mary Daly reasoned, the male is God. That prescient insight remains at the heart of many religions' skewed biases against women. Even those traditions with female deities often have male leaders, mirroring the cultural norms.

The logic of the problem is simple and thoroughgoing: from being to doing to documenting to enshrining in the Wikipedia canon, maleness holds sway. Thus, if the divine is male and humans are made in the divine image, then only males can be fully actualized humans. Only males, then, can do or act religiously, whether in shaping ideas or celebrating sacred rites. What "counts" as religion, and therefore gets taken as "real" in each tradition, is what males do. So when it comes to documenting religion for Wikipedia or other global platforms, it is easy to determine whom and what to include and exclude, especially since the very people making the decisions are of the empowered class–namely, males.

The logic of the solutions is a bit more complicated. Moves away from gender binaries help a bit, but there is simply no way forward in religion without a wholesale revamping of the lenses of analysis and the rules of involvement.

This work is well underway thanks to countless collaborative efforts by women and some enlightened men. The *Woman's Bible* (1895/1898) was a bold early effort by suffrage movement members to excavate the very texts that undergirded their oppression. By the mid-twentieth century–when women in significant numbers began to study religion–conferences, workshops, courses, and caucuses developed, which incubated the nascent feministization of the field in virtually all traditions, albeit unevenly. A burgeoning body of literature developed, and the world would never be the same again.

Nothing was untouched, and one could say nothing was sacred, in that every dimension of religion–scriptures, teachings, doctrines, polity, pastoral ministry, ethics, rituals, education of children, and more–was scrutinized and challenged. When the perspectives of those who were marginalized on the basis of sex, race, nationality, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, and more were brought to bear, religion became a whole new field of inquiry.

The miracle is that there are *any* entries about women in religion on Wikipedia! Deeply entrenched biases die hard, and virulent backlash against women's gains are reasons why progress has been slow. But the most important reason is that savvy patriarchal gatekeepers understand that half-truths are being made whole and histories rewritten by projects like this book and the many that proceeded it.

For example, it is stunning to imagine the history of the United Church of Christ without the central contribution of Dr. Yvonne V. Delk, who directed the Office for Church in Society. Likewise, Shundo Ayama Roshi broke new ground in

Zen Buddhism as the highest-ranked nun. But recognizing these women in equal measure with men would upset patriarchy's apple cart. Yes, African American women played a shaping role in the UCC's justice work even when they themselves were still not treated justly. And yes, Zen Buddhist nuns in Japan are intellectual powerhouses and influential practitioners. Those insights do not only belong in Wikipedia entries; they necessitate a rewriting of basic histories of male-centric religions. As I have long contended, the underlying issue is that "adding women and stirring" is never enough. New, inclusive histories are required and their existence will be proof that power is being shared.

Social change is an important goal of activist scholarship. What will it take to value solid teaching as much as serious scholarship, both of which women do? When will the arts–including music, dance, painting, and sculpture–achieve the same status as religious doctrine and dogma when it comes to religious expression? How can the myriad forms of leadership that women exercise gain recognition? It is not just the work women do but the many ways women do it that remain invisible unless and until their stories are granted status. This is happening gradually, against strong odds, but with recognizable success in essays like the ones in this volume.

One wonders why Wikipedia, a fairly new and not always highly regarded source of information, is still so behind the curve. One reason is that new sources tend to imitate old ones. Moreover, less prestigious platforms tend to try to prove their bona fides by an exaggerated, and in this case outmoded and outdated, attempt at rigor. The result of aping patriarchy is patriarchy. But looking more broadly at the many religious players in their unique roles, and looking more deeply around the edges to see who has been left out or misunderstood, will result in a far richer and more useful–hopefully more well-respected–font of global knowledge. Such work is in everyone's best interest.

MARY E. HUNT

31 MARCH 2020

Leveraging Notability

Defining, Critiquing and Strategically Engaging a Wikipedia Guideline

COLLEEN D. HARTUNG

The contributions of women in all fields of work, scholarship, and life have been universally under-recognized across time. Studies show that gender bias on Wikipedia reflects this cultural bias that is transmitted and then amplified by Wikipedia guidelines, particularly through its notability standards (Wagner et al. 2016, 22; Kramer 2019). As an example, on October 2, 2018, Donna Strickland became the third woman in history to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics. She was already an accomplished scientist, as evidenced by numerous awards recognizing her scientific research, multiple publications in prestigious journals, and leadership of a team developing ultrafast lasers for optics investigation. However, she did not have a Wikipedia page until the evening after she received her award. A Wikipedia article drafted in March of 2018 was rejected in May 2018, just five months before she won the Nobel Prize, because "there wasn't enough coverage of [her] work in independent secondary sources to establish her notability" (Maher 2018). In other words, measured by Wikipedia's notability guidelines, her life and work did not warrant an article. While Strickland's

case is one of the most infamous examples of gender bias in Wikipedia, it is representative of a similar bias across the Wikipedia platform, where only 18% of the biographies are about women and only 9% of the editors are women.

The 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project coalesced as a way of addressing gender bias in sources of knowledge that identify the notable contributions of individuals in religious traditions–in history books, in institutional archives, in news media, and in sacred texts. This project found its primary focus with a concern for how this information ultimately makes its way onto a tertiary source like Wikipedia. The 1000 Women in Religion List contains more than 1500 individuals who are noteworthy as founders, practitioners, teachers, resistors, and researchers of the world's religious and wisdom traditions, yet do not have a biographical entry on Wikipedia. Like Donna Strickland, many of the women on the list have made significant contributions in their areas of religious or spiritual expertise. Like the Nobel laureate, their accomplishments are under-represented in the secondary literature. It is also worth noting that there are many women important to the development of the world's religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions who are not even on the list because we have little-to-no access to reliable secondary sources that record their accomplishments.

This monograph is a response to the problems editors and supportive librarians working with the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project are having meeting Wikipedia's notability standards for their biographical submissions. First, there is the general deficit of reliable secondary sources about women in trade books, encyclopedias, journals, news media, and more, which makes writing about these women difficult. Second, there is the logistical and socio-cultural problem of learning to navigate Wikipedia's notability standards in the context of a system that is notorious for its gender bias. Wikipedia editors, and the librarians who support them, are frustrated by these barriers to the work of including biographies about women on platforms like Wikipedia. The biographies in this volume address these issues of equity and inclusion by celebrating the unrecognized yet noteworthy work of women activists in religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions. For the most part, these are women who responded to the needs of the religious and secular communities where they lived and worked without the benefit of publicly recorded accolades, awards, or academic celebrity. Documenting their noteworthy accomplishments by writing their biographies addresses the deficit of secondary sources about their lives. This allows us to claim their notability and, in general, creates a more inclusive and equitable understanding of notability.

In this chapter, I begin by defining the dual challenge facing Wikipedia editors writing biographies for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project. First, there is the challenge of understanding and navigating Wikipedia's biased notability standards. Second, there is the challenge of leveraging, critiquing, and extending

these notability standards in ways that promote the inclusion of women. Next, I move to a reading of the biographical projects in this volume, where I identify the strategic ways of claiming notability deployed by each author. These serve as potential models for writing that increase representation and reshape our cultural and Wikipedia-specific definitions of notability. I end by holding up the work of projects like the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedida Project, highlighting the mundane task of writing biographies about women as an integral part of the broader effort to stake a claim for the noteworthy, largely unrecognized work of women activists in the world's religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions.

Wikipedia and Notability

Wikipedia is the world's largest reference website, containing over 48 million articles in 302 languages, written by 72,000 unique, active contributors. It is the 5th most popular internet site, visited by almost 400 million visitors monthly. The first page of a Google search almost always contains a link to Wikipedia along with an infobox populated by information obtained from Wikipedia and Wikidata. In a world where we question the reliability of almost any given source of knowledge, Wikipedia has become the default source for a comprehensive, objective presentation of the facts. It is not uncommon for disputes between friends, colleagues, neighbors, and partygoers alike to be settled by an internet search that takes you directly to a Wikipedia article.

Given its ubiquitous character and extensive influence, it is remarkable that each Wikipedia article is created collaboratively by volunteer contributors, called Wikipedians, who are mostly anonymous amateurs. There is no requirement that volunteer editors have a degree or certified proof of expertise. A specialist with multiple degrees in a given area has no privileged claim to authority. The contributions of an academic expert with a PhD are subject to the same review as any other editor. Articles on Wikipedia are living documents that are mercilessly edited across time by multiple editors with varying degrees of expertise. This model democratizes the curation and production of knowledge–a result that can be celebrated by feminist, womanist, and postcolonial theorists. Still, in academic circles, this dispersed authority creates concern about Wikipedia's reliability and, as such, many prohibitions remain about Wikipedia's use as a research tool and citation source.

However, concerns–academic and otherwise–about Wikipedia's reliability are not universally supported by the literature. Studies show that Wikipedia is almost as reliable as the benchmark *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Giles 2005, 900). Also, Wikipedia provides better coverage and longer articles about women than

Britannica (Reagle and Rhue 2011, 1138). Wikipedia is the encyclopedia anyone can edit, regardless of recognized expertise; nevertheless, its reliability remains comparably good precisely because of the exacting application of a system of norms and principles developed by Wikipedia's editing community to create and maintain an objective presentation of facts substantiated by verifiable sources. Policies and guidelines developed by engaged members of the community through Wikipedia communication conventions, such as talk pages, essays, and new guideline proposals, describe a set of best practices covering areas like content, deletion, editing, naming, style, social behavior, and notability. The focus is on the quality of a contribution, its substance, and its composition, not on the qualifications of a particular editor.

At the front end of the editing process, when a 1000 Women in Religion Project editor is deciding who to write about, notability guidelines are a primary influence. According to Wikipedia (n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (People)"), "A person is presumed to be notable if he or she has received significant coverage in reliable secondary sources that are independent of the subject." In other words, personal websites and blogs written by the subject do not count as reliable sources that indicate a subject's notability. Promotional biographies on business and university websites are also suspect. Wikipedia editors, informed by these notability guidelines, function as gatekeepers who determine which articles, including the biographies submitted about women in religion, meet the standards to become a published page and which do not. A well-cited article that makes a good case for a subject's notability helps to prevent any potential discussions about deletion. In order to increase the probability that a submission will be accepted, women included on the 1000 Women in Religion Project list are supported by at least two reliable sources. First-time editors are encouraged to select a subject with at least five reliable secondary sources.

So, how does this work in practice? Wikipedia articles are written in an encyclopedic style where every fact that is presented has to be backed up by a citation from a reliable secondary source: a published book, a major newspaper, an academic journal, or an internet source with a .edu or .org URL. Also, like any encyclopedia, primary research is not allowed. You might know from firsthand knowledge or from someone's blog that a woman named Margaret Jackson was born on November 21, 1932, in London, England, or that she started a university for women in Thailand, but if you cannot cite a reliable secondary source, you cannot use that information in your Wikipedia article.

Gender Bias: A Critique of Wikipedia and Notability Guidelines

If all things were equal, Wikipedia's notability guidelines would not be problematic. These criteria are, in fact, the foundation of Wikipedia's favorable ratings compared to other encyclopedia projects, such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, seen as the gold standard for a reliable presentation of the facts. Wikipedia's definition of notability suggests a logic that presupposes equity and assumes that all things notable are covered in some form of reliable media. Given this logic, if 18% of the biographies on Wikipedia are about women, one can assume that the life and works of men comprise 82% of the biographical information worth noting and knowing. Studies show that biographical information about women is covered less than biographical information about men in trade books, academic writing, scientific journals, and more. Just take a stroll through the biographical section in bookstores and libraries. They are dominated by stories about past presidents, kings, and war heroes who are mostly men. However, this is not because women are less noteworthy. Instead, conventional market wisdom suggests that more men buy biographies than women and that the biographies men are interested in reading are about men (Kahn and Onion 2016). There is more media coverage about the life and works of men than women because that is what sells. Remember, by definition, notability on Wikipedia is gauged by how much coverage a subject has received in various media. A woman might be noteworthy but, without secondary sources to back that up, she is not notable by Wikipedia standards. In this way, the ubiquitous gender bias in the production of knowledge, generally noted in the production of trade books, academia, and more, is reproduced as the apparent gender bias on Wikipedia.

In this current framework, an editor writing for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project deals with this bias by writing about a subject whose noteworthy character is extremely verifiable. In this way, the case for a particular woman's notability is supported by multiple citations that indicate significant coverage in various media outlets across time. This should be enough but, again, studies show that often it is not. Given equal notability, women are less likely than men to have a Wikipedia page (Adams, Bruckner, and Nasland 2019). The gap is more significant for women who are local heroes where notability can be questioned in the absence of unambiguous, global notoriety. In other words, the possibility of bias increases when editors make subjective decisions about what counts as notable and what does not (Wagner et al. 2016, 10).

Wikipedia's woman problem is so well documented that even the Wikimedia Foundation acknowledges that the representation of women on its biographical pages is a reproduction of ongoing cultural biases (Maher 2018). Recognizing this

gender bias, individuals and groups in the Wikipedia community have developed multiple WikiProjects, like the Women in Red project, that aim to increase the number and rate of biographical submissions about women and the number of women editors who would, presumably, write entries about women. In 2014, the Wikimedia Foundation committed to increasing the representation of women on Wikipedia from 14% to 25% by 2015. They failed miserably, suggesting that ongoing gender bias on Wikipedia is not just a simple replication of cultural bias that can be addressed by a valiant effort to increase the number of submissions about women (Torres 2016). Something else is going on.

Feminist critics of Wikipedia argue that the problem lies with Wikipedia's infrastructure, including, but not limited to, its encyclopedic and internet base, its policy, and its logic. They point to how these deep foundations are informed by, and in turn reproduce, patriarchal and hierarchical Enlightenment ideals such as the pursuit of objective knowledge and the idea of the great man (Ford and Waicman 2017, 3). There is actually a "Great man theory" entry on Wikipedia. This notable theory "is a 19th-century idea according to which history can be largely explained by the impact of great men, or heroes; highly influential and unique individuals who, due to their natural attributes, such as superior intellect, heroic courage, or divine inspiration, have a decisive historical effect" (Wikipedia n.d., "Great Man Theory"). "Great men" are conquering generals, popes, famous authors, titans of industry, leaders of expeditions that discover new worlds, geniuses that discover scientific wonders, and more. In this model, women often appear in an encyclopedic project like Wikipedia because of their relationship with a famous or heroic man as his wife, mother, or muse. They also appear as "great women" who achieve or overachieve as measured by the standards that identify "great men." Here, notable greatness is public rather than domestic, singular instead of collaborative, and supported by a presumably universal scale rather than perspectival claims. Substantive achievements that do not fit this mold are dismissed as trivial or insignificant. It follows that one of the reasons there are fewer women on Wikipedia is because many of the things women do in cultures around the world can be identified as domestic, collaborative, achieved at a local level, and therefore less notable within Wikipedia's current framework.

Feminist critiques reject this patriarchal, hierarchical framework, along with the notion that there is some absolute measure of notability. Feminist theory suggests that understandings of notability vary depending on the perspective of those doing the judging. Social, economic, geographic, and historical factors make a difference. From this perspective, what counts as notable varies across time and from community to community. Research supporting this point of view is readily available to the Wikipedia community on project pages, talk pages, and help venues. Nevertheless, despite considerable critique, gender bias on Wikipedia

persists. Wikipedia's notability standards are developed and enforced by its most active editors. 85–90% of the editors on Wikipedia are young, White, technologically savvy men who are passionate about things like sports, movies, popular culture, and politics–categories that are covered widely on all types of media within a culture where traditional notability sells (Sengul-Jones 2019, 18–23). Feminist critiques of Wikipedia are a hard sell on talk pages discussing the possible deletion of an article about a noteworthy, but not necessarily famous, woman activist in religion.

Strategic Ways of Claiming Notability

What do editors working with the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project do in the context of this manifest, ongoing, and seemingly intractable gender bias perpetuated by notability standards that reproduce and extend a biased representation of the world's knowledge? They continue to write boldly about women whose lives as activists have made a difference in the unfolding of the world's religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions. Moreover, in the writing, strategies have emerged that not only increase the number of women represented on Wikipedia, but illustrate the validity of varied perspectives on what counts as notable. The biographies in this volume support and extend the work of these editors by gathering reliable sources, presenting primary research, and being intentionally strategic in establishing the facts that make up these women's stories.

Each biography in this volume describes the life and work of a woman activist, noteworthy in her religious, spiritual, or academic context, yet not identified as notable, or at least not notable enough to have a biographical page on Wikipedia. The author's task is to make a case for their subject's notability in ways that identify her activism and recognize its effects. In each chapter, the work of these women as founders and leaders in the "great man" tradition–a second-wave feminist task–is amplified and made visible. Importantly, their work as coalition builders, collaborators, mentors, facilitators of resistance movements, challengers of traditional gender norms, and more–a third-wave feminist project–is also held up as an essential part of their notable character. Read carefully, and with an eye toward how each author builds her case, these biographies help us uncover strategic ways of writing and claiming notability. These strategies are varied and nuanced, tailored to the presentation of the particular life and work of the author's subject. Yet themes and trends emerge that help us to think about the task of writing women back into our histories in broadly strategic ways. The authors write in ways that bolster a woman's notability in a traditional mode, making her super-notable by using many high-quality sources. They uncover the textual erasure of a

woman's traditional notability by lifting her out of footnotes and archives to write her back into the narrative as the subject of her own notable story. They stretch the boundaries of notability by highlighting her local and domestic accomplishments. Finally, they reshape the boundaries of notability by identifying the importance of individual efforts to collaborative achievements and coalition building.

Bolstering Traditional Notability

You can thumb through any encyclopedic list of famous women in each of the world's wisdom traditions, any list of women who have been leaders of prestigious organizations, or any list of influential women activists in religion that pops up on the internet, and you will find a significant number of women who do not have a biographical entry on Wikipedia. The women on these lists are notable, even by Wikipedia standards, because their fame, influence, and power is searchable on the internet and recorded in various secondary sources. They should be part of Wikipedia's "hopeful and earnest approximation of a comprehensive and democratically authored history" (Valentine and Myrie 2019), but they are not. They are missing. Leveraging the concept of notability includes the work of writing biographies about these missing women. Most of the women in this volume are notable when measured according to Wikipedia's guidelines. Janet McKenzie is an internationally recognized artist. Shundō Aoyama Rōshi is one of the highest-ranking nuns in the history of Soto Zen. Dr. Yvonne V. Delk is the first African American woman ordained in the United Church of Christ (UCC). These women, and the rest of the women in this volume, are poster children for the gender gap on Wikipedia and can legitimately be classified as missing entries. The authors of their biographies recognize that their subjects meet and even exceed Wikipedia's minimum notability standards. They also understand that this does not guarantee a successful Wikipedia submission. They know from experience that the notability bar in the culture generally, and on Wikipedia specifically, is often higher for women than for men. Proactively, they strategically bolster their chapters with numerous citations in order to make an ironclad case for their subjects' notability. The authors in this volume deploy this strategy in a variety of ways. Here are three good examples:

Recollecting Sources

When the *National Catholic Reporter* announced that Janet McKenzie's painting, *Jesus of the People,* was the winner of their much anticipated "Jesus 2000" art competition, there was substantive national and international media coverage. The reaction to McKenzie's groundbreaking work was intense and prolonged, including

the well-publicized protests of her image of Jesus as a person of color by the Westborough Baptist Church. Nevertheless, she does not have a Wikipedia page. Wikipedia did not exist until 2001, so it is reasonable to guess that there is no page because, in the lapse of time between this career-defining event and the rise of Wikipedia, McKenzie's life and work was no longer front-page news. Ursic strategically recollects much of the original coverage as source material for her biography on McKenzie. She reminds us that, for several years, the coverage was international and sustained. She goes on to illustrate the ongoing relevance of McKenzie's work, quoting Fr. John Christmann, an artist and musician, in a February 2019 article entitled "Black Jesus Matters": "McKenzie brings us back to the essential reality of the incarnation and realization that Christian art is bereft without the full expression of humanity." Ursic's citation of numerable, verifiable sources allows her to make a strong case for McKenzie's notability based on Wikipedia guidelines for "significant and sustained coverage in reliable secondary sources" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability"). In her biography, Ursic does the hard work of gathering the many quality sources that illustrate McKenzie's important and unique influence across time as a creator of religious works of art. With citation after citation, Ursic makes an indisputable argument for McKenzie's superior notability as a great woman in the Enlightenment tradition.

Accessing Foreign Language Sources

Shundō Aoyama Rōshi is one of the highest-ranking nuns in the history of Soto Zen and one of the first to receive an advanced academic degree. She is the abbess of three temples in Japan and oversees numerous Buddhist activities. She lectures widely throughout Japan, has authored over 50 books, and, important for Wikipedia's notability guidelines, there is extensive coverage of her work in Japan. There is also considerable interest in her work among Westerners interested in Buddhism. Aoyama is notable by Wikipedia standards. However, most of the secondary sources covering her life and works are written in Japanese. The likelihood that these sources are accessible to a Wikipedia editor seeking to write a biographical entry in English on Wikipedia is low. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an expert in Buddhism in her own right, deploys a strategy that addresses this problem. She relies on a careful reading of available English sources; however, because there are only a few English language sources, she does not stop there. She compliments these limited sources with a strategic use of sources available in other languages. This gives us a sense of the international coverage and global significance of Aoyama's life and work. Tsomo's biography identifies English sources, gives us a sense of the multiple sources available in other languages, and provides another English source that can be used to bolster Aoyama's notability.

Placing Sources in Context

Dr. Yvonne V. Delk's story puts her life and work at the center of a half-century of civil rights history, from her participation in sit-ins at segregated lunch counters to her struggle for women's rights to her more recent support for issues affecting people who identify with the LGBTQ community. Mary Hamlen, the author of her biography, presents multiple sources that document her achievements in the struggle for human rights. However, with the spotlight on iconic civil rights figures such as James Forman and Dr. James Cone, her particular accomplishments have, up to this point, been overlooked. Hamlen notes that she is not even listed as a significant figure on the United Church of Christ (UCC) website, where she served in national leadership for over 20 years and was the first and only woman nominated to lead the denomination. So it is no surprise, given she is missing from her own denomination's website, that she does not have a biographical page on Wikipedia. Hamlen takes up her cause and champions Delk's story by gathering numerous sources that detail the trajectory of her career from a teacher of Christian education at a small UCC church in Atlanta, Georgia, to her positions in national leadership with the United Church of Christ. She uses her sources to trace Delk's work for African American rights, the rights of women and children, LGBTQ rights, and more. She presents Delk's accomplishments alongside sources that cover the overall development of the civil rights movement. Hamlen makes her case for Delk's notability through a strategic presentation of her sources that places Delk's life and work in a context where we can take account of her valuable contribution to the civil rights movement.

In all three of these biographies, the authors make a case for notability based on a presentation of high-quality secondary sources. The strategic nuances deployed by each author are instructive. Ursic jogs our memory, recollecting forgotten sources that remind us of the groundbreaking character of Janet McKenzie's image *Jesus of the People*. Tsomo supplements her detailed but limited English-language sources with information demonstrating the wealth of sources available in other languages. Hamlen places her sources in a historical context that amplifies her subject's notable contributions. These authors understand that, to bolster the case for their subjects' notability, they need more than raw sources. They need to use their sources to craft a coherent and compelling presentation of the facts.

Uncovering Textual Erasure

Based on an initial search of secondary sources, many of the women on the 1000 Women in Religion list are noteworthy by traditional and Wikipedia-specific

standards. After a closer look, however, questions often arise. The sources may exist, but they are contradictory, hard to access, incomplete, or even missing. Sometimes a source recognizes a woman's notable work but fails to recognize her agency in the creation of that work. Other times, sources recognize a woman's accomplishments as part of a collective effort and then fail to document the significance of her particular contributions, and so on. These texts or sources that are incomplete, contradictory, confusing, and sometimes hard to access indicate some erasure in the historical record. These types of erasure make it difficult to take account of notable women and their achievements. The experience of editors for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project confirms this assessment. Leveraging the concept of notability includes identifying the textual erasure of a woman's life and work, supporting her notability with reliable sources and amending the historical record. Many of the stories about women in this volume were difficult to tell because the secondary sources were compromised by textual erasure. The significant contributions of Bertha Mae Lillenas–a pioneering, early 20th-century preacher and hymnist–are omitted from some mid-20th-century biographies about her husband Haldor Lillenas, also a famous hymnist. Dusty copies of one of May Eleanor Frey's religious novels–*Altars of Brick,* popular in the 1940s and 50s–are still available on Amazon.com. However, many of the scarce volumes illuminating her life and influence are only available in remote archival collections. Miranda Shaw's seminal and award-winning work, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*, is covered widely in the secondary literature. However, secondary sources covering her life and ongoing influence are missing. Many of the authors in this volume take up the strategic task of ensuring an accurate historical record is available and accessible so that their subject's notability can be verified. Here are three good examples of this strategic approach.

Identifying and Diagnosing Inconsistencies in the Historical Record

Bertha Mae Lillenas preached and composed popular religious music at a time when the work women did was primarily domestic. The fact that historical records document Lillenas's talents as an ordained preacher and successful composer is remarkable and a testament to her notability. Even so, there is no biographical entry on Wikipedia covering her life and works. In her biography, Melisa Ortiz Berry explains that this is likely because mid-century sources, focused on her husband's achievements, rewrite Bertha Mae's history. They give her husband credit for much of her work as a preacher and church organizer. Berry makes a strategic comparison of early and later sources that allows her to pinpoint the textual erasure. Her work helps us to see the actual gloss of Bertha Mae's work in favor of a more socially acceptable presentation of Haldor Lillenas's work. By

pinpointing the erasure, Berry bolsters the validity of these earlier sources, making a more durable case for Bertha Mae Lillenas's notability.

Restoring Access to the Text

Mae Eleanor Frey was the first woman ordained in the Northern Baptist Convention. She served as a chaplain in World War I and was a world-famous global evangelist and a writer of popular religious novels. Used copies of her books –*The Minister* and *Altars of Bricks*—are still available. However, if you wanted to read anything about the life and work of this noteworthy woman activist in religion, you would have a problem. There are a few, scattered secondary sources available behind various publisher paywalls such as Newspapers.com or Brill.com. However, your best bet would be a visit to the Flowers Pentecostal Heritage Center (FPHC) in Springfield, Missouri. They have an extensive collection of Frey's published works, her correspondence, contemporary media coverage, obituaries, and recent coverage of her influence as a Pentecostal preacher and evangelist. Some of it is viewable online for free. Most of it is not. A quick scan through FPHC's index shows plenty of secondary sources to back claims about Frey's notability. However, the average researcher and Wikipedian has no way of getting to these sources because of their location in an archival collection that is geographically remote and, for the most part, unavailable in a digital format. As a result, the case for Frey's notability is weak, and there is no Wikipedia article.

Deborah Fulthorp's biography brings the coverage of Frey's life and work outside the institutional walls of the Assembly of God's archives into a larger public venue. Her strategy for making a case for her subject's notability involves restoring our access to sources about Frey's life since it is this lack of access that has, for all practical purposes, erased the story of Frey's notable character. Fulthorp scours the archives, uncovers Frey's history, and amends that history. She assembles the multiple archival sources into a coherent life story that foregrounds the importance of her subject as a model for women's leadership in religion and the advancement of women's rights. In essence, she restores our access to the text of Mae Eleanor Frey's notable life and work.

Foregrounding Agency

Miranda E. Shaw has spent over two decades researching the role of women and female deities in Buddhism, including extensive research in India and Nepal. Her groundbreaking work produced two seminal books: *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (1992) and *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (2006). Both books have been recognized with prestigious awards. Thirty editions of *Passionate Enlightenment* have been printed in seven languages. There are seventeen published editions of *Buddhist Goddesses of India.* Both books are well-reviewed

by many publishers. It is therefore strange that, beyond the cursory listing of her academic credentials and publications with her identification as an associate professor (all on the University of Richmond's website) and her birth year published on her *WorldCat Identities* page, there is no biographical coverage of Shaw's life and influence. This neglect amounts to an erasure of her life beyond the publication of her most popular books. It makes a full-throated case for her notability and the creation of a Wikipedia article difficult.

Shaw's biographer, Janice Poss, strategically grounds her chapter in a presentation of Shaw as a well-published and influential expert in Tantric Buddhism and Buddhist goddesses. Poss supports this claim with readily available secondary sources covering her seminal works. She bolsters the case for Shaw's notability with an analysis that puts her work in the broader context of Buddhist studies and 20th-century feminist critiques of Western interpretations of Buddhism that marginalize the importance of feminine deities and the role of women. However, the media coverage, which centers on her literary works, creates an oddly disembodied presentation of her accomplishments. Poss supplements these sources and analysis with a consideration of Shaw's life history, helping us to recognize that her award-winning books were not created *ex nihilo*—from nothing. Poss addresses this neglectful erasure of Shaw's personal story with a biographical history that brings her early life and influence, her accomplishments as a teacher, and her ongoing work in Buddhist studies into view. She also takes this life history and places it into the context of a Buddhist lineage of great teachers. Poss effects a strategic shift in focus away from her subject's award-winning books onto Shaw as the fully embodied agent, which makes a more durable case for her notability.

* * *

Each of the authors in this section thinks strategically about some critical missing piece or significant erasure in the coverage of their subjects' notability, which is otherwise well-supported by secondary sources. Their strategies vary depending on the type and circumstance of these gaps in the record. Berry reinforces our confidence in earlier secondary sources by pinpointing the textual erasure of Bertha Mae Lillenas's superior preaching and composing talents. Fulthorp retrieves Mae Eleanor Frey's history as an influential Pentecostal preacher and evangelist from its archival confinement and erasure. Poss refocuses our historical attention onto Miranda E. Shaw as the author of her award-winning books. Their strategic restoration of these erasures enables each of these authors to rewrite these women's stories. By restoring what has been erased and making history right, they justify the notable character of these women activists in religion.

Stretching the Boundaries of Notability

Forty percent of the biographical pages on Wikipedia describe subjects whose notable contributions are local rather than global. This statistic indicates that it is harder to make a case for a subject with local notability. Extra scrutiny beyond adequate secondary sourcing is also applied to "non-public figure[s]," "people who are relatively unknown," "subjects notable for only one event," and so forth (Wikipedia n.d., "Who Is a Low-Profile Individual?"). Wikipedia guidelines state that while "a determination of notability does not necessarily depend on things such as fame, importance, or popularity," those characteristics "may enhance the acceptability of a subject" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: What Notability Is Not"). Taken together, these Wikipedia guidelines and statements suggest that local, non-public, or domestic accomplishments are a questionable, though not excluded, basis for a determination of notability. A study released by Oxfam in January 2020 shows that, worldwide, much of the work women do can still be classified as local, domestic, and located in the private sphere (Coffey et al. 2020, 8). The notability of a woman whose life and work can be classified in these ways is sure to be contested even if the biography itself is well-supported by secondary sources. Wikipedia is not, after all, "an indiscriminate collection of information" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: What Notability Is Not"). Not only must the information presented be verifiable by third-party sources, "the topic must be worthy of notice" (Wikipedia n.d., "Wikipedia: Notability (People)"). In general, bias on Wikipedia favors global notoriety in a public and professional sphere, and these biases work against women's inclusion. Leveraging the concept of notability includes the work of writing biographies that challenge and stretch the boundaries between the local and the global, between the private and the public, and between the domestic and the professional.

Like most women in the world, there are women covered in this volume who attended to local and domestic needs outside the public eye. In these cases, part of the biographer's job is to identify the broader influence of the local, the private, and the domestic on the global, public sphere. For example, liberation theologian Beatriz Melano's local focus on the rights of women and children influenced the global development of liberation theology. Pentecostal missionary Margaret Peoples Shirer's domestic efforts around healthcare and literacy for the people she served advanced the global Pentecostal movement and the Assembly of God ministries in Africa. There are biographers in this volume who strategically attend to and foreground the connections between their subjects' local and domestic accomplishments and global trends. Here are two good examples of this strategic approach.

Tracing the Broader Impact

In her essay, "Surreal Feminist Liberation Theology," feminist theologian Mary Hunt identifies her colleague, Beatriz Melano, as one of "the earliest feminist voices in Latin American liberation theology" (Hunt 2010, 20). Melano was a persistent advocate as a professor and an activist in Buenos Aires, Argentina and at regional conferences in Latin America over multiple decades for a feminist approach that takes into consideration the needs of women and children. Hunt reminds us of her formative influence on her students at ISEDET (*Instituto Superior Evangélico de Estudios Teológicos*, Buenos Aires, Argentina), including feminist theologians such as Marcella Althaus Reid. Nevertheless, while her male colleagues, such as José Miguez Bonino and Emilio Castro, are recognized worldwide and beyond with Wikipedia pages and more for their role in the development of liberation theology, her locally recognized contributions are not well known. Her biographer, Martha González Pérez, has taken on the labor of collecting the sources that document her work at ISEDET and at Latin American conferences in ways that demonstrate her more extensive influence across time, across Latin America, and across the world. She strategically assembles these sources into a coherent narrative that makes a strong case for the global impact of Melano's locally recognized notability.

Detailing Domestic Dimensions

The Assemblies of God (AG), the fourth largest international Christian federation and the world's largest Pentecostal denomination, was founded in 1914. It quickly became a global church based on its mission to evangelize the lost by establishing church bodies in every country in the world. There are currently over 384,000 congregations in over 212 nations serving roughly 67.9 million followers worldwide (Assemblies of God n.d.). At the age of 22, in 1919, five years after the church was founded, Margaret Peoples Shirer arrived in West Africa, where she worked as a missionary for the Assemblies of God church until 1947. She helped establish missions in Burkina Faso and Ghana along with her husband and family. She created writing systems for local languages, translated scripture, and advanced literacy and healthcare, all in service of spreading the mission. In his book *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, Harvey Cox (1995, 121) identifies that women dominated the AG's early missionary work before organizational prohibitions were in place that limited their contributions. To great advantage, they used their domestic talents to pursue their professional ministries. However, historical coverage of this early period misrepresents women's work and the importance of their efforts. For example, Shirer's instrumental translations and literacy work for the Mossi and Ghanaian people, which paved the way for the establishment of the AG's ongoing

missions, is attributed to a group of "American missionaries" that one might assume to be men (Roamba 2016, 58). The day-to-day domestic engagements that allowed Shirer to develop an alphabet, a dictionary, and translations of scripture, which she taught the people to read, are erased by this gloss. There are Wikipedia pages that cover the vital work of AG missionaries. However, the work of Shirer and other early women missionaries, along with their work's domestic dimensions, is missing from these biographical and descriptive pages.

Biographer Rosemarie Daher Kowalski uses Shirer's letters, speeches, and articles, buried in mission results, fundraising accounts, and recruitment reports, as source material. She uses these sources to detail the domestic, mundane work of talking to women as they grind their corn. Her strategy lets us see how it is precisely this domestic work that enables Shirer to create a writing system, translate scriptures, and teach the people to read. Daher stretches the boundaries of notability by making the connection between this domestic labor, Shirer's professional accomplishments, and the AG's global mission. She makes a strong case for Shirer's notability by deploying sources that detail the domestic character of Shirer's work and its importance to the early development of the Assemblies of God's global mission.

* * *

Biographers González Pérez and Daher Kowalski both recognize that the local and domestic character of their subjects' lives and works requires a narrative and an analysis that makes connections to a broader public and global impact. Otherwise, their subjects' accomplishments will be dismissed as unworthy of public notice. González Pérez celebrates Melano's local and regional accomplishments even as she deploys sources that delineate the long-term and global impact of her subjects' life and work. In this way, she stretches and troubles the boundary between our assessment of local and global influence. Daher Kowalski makes a notable heroine of her subject by detailing the domestic minutiae that enabled the creation and spread of a global religion. In this way, she stretches and troubles the boundary between our assessment of domestic and professional influence. Through a strategic use of their sources, González Pérez and Daher Kowalski demonstrate the global impact of both the local and domestic.

Celebrating Collaborative Achievements and Coalition Building

Collaborating on, and coalition-building for, a common goal are, by definition, activities that bring people together to work jointly on an activity, project, or event. Success is, or at least it should be, identified as a collective accomplishment. Getting a man on the moon was a collaborative effort. We recognize people by name for this effort, including President John F. Kennedy, Neil Armstrong, and Buzz Aldrin. However, the effort also involved a 400,000 strong backup team (Riley 2009). A recent study suggests that women outperform men in collaborative problem solving (Sandle 2017). Studies also show that women who engage in collaborative efforts suffer a "coauthor penalty" that men do not (Sarsons 2015, 3). As well, men often receive solo credit for collaborative work involving both men and women (Laura Rutherford-Morrison 2017). An excellent example of this bias is the fact that it took 50 years and an Academy Award-winning movie for NASA engineers Christine Darden and Mary Jackson, mathematician Katherine Johnson, and computer programmer Dorothy Vaugh to be recognized for their groundbreaking contributions to the success of the moon landing (Elassar 2019). Wikipedia notability guidelines reflect the cultural bias in favor of singular achievement and male collaboration. If women's collaborative efforts are recognized, they occur as a mention or merger under a broader article covering the outcome or product of a joint effort. Leveraging the concept of notability includes highlighting the collaborative accomplishments of women who are already considered notable by traditional standards and documenting the essential role of unrecognized, particular women involved in noteworthy collaborative efforts.

Many of the women in this volume are collaborators and coalition builders. Ida Weis Friend was known as a founder, leader, and organizer of many Jewish and civic organizations at the turn of the 20th century in New Orleans. Through her strategic volunteerism, she built coalitions across religion, race, and gender that helped establish local and national labor laws to protect women, children, and minorities. Ellen Leonard, a Canadian theologian and prolific writer, is known for her work as a feminist scholar. She is less well known for her essential role in the collective effort to establish the Catholic Network for Women's Equality, which works for women's ordination and related issues of equality. Their biographers strategically foreground the collaborative and coalition-building efforts of their subjects and highlight the broader national significance of this type of work. In this volume, authors document their subject's accomplishments and count their collaborative achievements as noteworthy contributions to make a more expansive

and comprehensive case for their notability. Here are two good examples of this strategy:

Documenting An Individual's Collaborative Work

Ida Weis Friend was a founder, organizer, and leader of many Jewish and civic organizations in New Orleans at the turn of the 20th century. In her various roles, she functioned as an activist for the rights of women, children, and other oppressed minorities. Friend used her connections with national organizations to build coalitions that promoted human rights at the state and local level. The national organizations she worked with, such as the Urban League and the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), are well known, and their local and global accomplishments are documented on Wikipedia and beyond. The life and work of Ida Weis Friend, whose initiative was instrumental to these accomplishments, is mostly unknown. She was recognized in her lifetime by other community influencers who understood that, if they wanted to get something done, Friend could lead the effort. However, because her work was largely collaborative, the case for her notability is weak. It would be relatively easy to insert a mention of her achievements on the Wikipedia page for the Urban League or the NCJW, and that would be a start. Her biographer, Rosalind Hinton, goes further. Hinton identifies Friend's participation as a coalition builder and collaborator across multiple organizations and then goes about documenting her individual contributions. Hinton's strategy is to give credit where credit is due. She makes a strong case for Friend's notability by allowing us to see that her work as an individual was essential to the cooperative endeavors that had significant local, regional, and national impact.

Counting Collaborative Achievements

Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ, is a theologian, scholar, prolific writer, and respected professor. She is notable by Wikipedia guidelines as an academic and could, therefore, have a biographical entry on Wikipedia. The most logical strategy for making that happen includes supporting her case with multiple, reliable citations that document her remarkable life as an academic. However, Leonard's life's work includes more than her particular accomplishments as a professor and writer. Leonard also devoted herself to a collaborative effort to advance women's rights in the Catholic Church and more broadly, which eventually took form as the Catholic Network for Women's Equality. Wikipedia guidelines suggest a narrow focus on contributions and accomplishments that can be clearly credited to the subject of the biography. In light of these guidelines, Leonard's collaborative efforts that she cannot and does not claim as an individual achievement could be considered superfluous. Her biographer, Mary Ellen Chown, is not deterred. After

making a case for Leonard's notability aligned with Wikipedia's traditional guidelines for academics, she proceeds strategically by identifying Leonard's work with the Catholic Network for Women's Equality as central to her work as a feminist theologian. Chown makes a case for the noteworthiness of this collaborative work, so that our understanding of notability shifts to include dedicated participation in worthy collaborations.

The job of the biographers in this volume involves documenting the collaborative achievements of their subjects and counting them as noteworthy contributions. This is a third-wave feminist task that seeks to reshape our thinking of notability on Wikipedia and in general. Hinton identifies the individual effort involved in her subject's coalition-building efforts and then connects these efforts to their global impact. Chown makes a traditional case for her subject's notability and then foregrounds the significance of Leonard's collaboration. Here the strategy is not just a numbers game that aims for equal representation on a platform like Wikipedia. With a skillful use of sources and analysis, these biographers make the case that the notability of their subjects is enhanced by their collaborative accomplishments.

Writing Women's Biographies: A Strategic, Activist Endeavor

Women in religion have been pursuing writing as an activist endeavor across the world and the centuries. Hildegard of Bingen's (1098–1179) extensive writings challenge the patriarchal expectations for a woman's role within church hierarchies in her time and still today. Sojourner Truth's (1797–1883) "Ain't I a Woman" speech continues to challenge readers to consider the interlocking complexities of sexism and racism. Chung Hyun Kyung's (1956–) *Struggle to Be the Sun Again* challenges the imposition of Western religious values onto people in a non-Western context. These women, and many others, were activated by the oppressive biases that structure the lives of women, children, and other minoritized peoples. They wrote and spoke in strategic ways, sometimes even claiming divine inspiration, in order to critique their traditions, including interpretations of scripture, patterns of worship, organizational hierarchies, and more. They critiqued those in positions of power and called their followers to change their behaviors and to participate in collective action. They are rightly considered activists because their writing inspired an impassioned, spirit-motivated response in their readers.

The 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project was born of this activist impulse. Contributing biographies to Wikipedia, where only 18% of the biographies

are about women, and only 9% of the editors are women, is an embodied critique of a system that has ignored women's accomplishments and dismissed their notable character. The very act of writing an article and pursuing it to acceptance is a claim for that particular woman's notability. Making that claim in a world where notability standards are biased is an activist endeavor. However, editors for the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project are not without support. Biographers, like the authors in this volume, the librarians who support them, and the Wikipedians who will use their chapters as secondary sources form a nexus of activism. This interconnected activism has the potential to shift the percentages in terms of representation as well as our perceptions about women and notability.

The Biographer as an Activist

The biographers in this volume represent the determined few who choose to write biographies about women despite the hurdles. Market dynamics discourage the production of biographies about women. Research sources about the life and works of women are often insufficient or inaccessible compared to source availability for subjects who are men. In addition, questions about the relevance and notability of women subjects are more numerous and persistent than they are for men. It takes intestinal fortitude to embark on a project made more difficult by cultural biases beyond an author's direct control. Nevertheless, the authors of women's biographies forge ahead regardless of these hurdles. In doing so, they develop strategies and create models that make it easier for those who follow.

In "Writing Women's Lives: One Historian's Perspective," Susan Ware (2010, 417) recognizes that the "traditional narrative arcs that trace a male model of success or achievement do not necessarily apply to female subjects." Women biographers find inspiration in their subjects' struggles to "excel in a public realm usually reserved for men." Undaunted, women's biographers write inspiring accounts of the lives of women whose notable works have been ignored or dismissed. Moreover, their inspiring writings exceed market expectations. They go above and beyond in their efforts to track down hidden sources and do original research. Many of the biographers in this volume traveled distances to visit remote archival collections. They scheduled and rescheduled interviews with their subjects and their subjects' associates. They did all of this to fill out the unsubstantial documentation that is characteristic of so much history about women. With these sources, they create rock-solid arguments for their subjects' relevance and notability. They know their work will receive extra scrutiny because their subject is a woman, and they rise to the challenge. Writing high-quality biographies about forgotten women is an activist endeavor. Done well, it increases the interest in and

demand for information about women; it uncovers, creates, and increases our access to secondary sources, and it reshapes our thinking about women and notability.

The Librarian as an Activist

The group of women academics who initially conceived the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project included many with strong research and writing backgrounds. However, in spite of their skills, the group initially struggled with Wikipedia's sourcing guidelines and use of authority control databases. The project's association with Atla (formerly the American Theological Library Association) and member librarians helped overcome these barriers. Librarians who work with research databases daily have become essential to the success of the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project in multiple ways. First, librarians are uniquely prepared to search numerous databases to identify women who are missing from the 1000 Women in Religion list. Second, they have their fingers on the pulse of digital publishing and open access trends. Third, they can help editors who are not university employees, who live in remote areas, or who have limited financial resources to access reliable secondary sources. Women are traditionally more affected by access issues, and librarians can help them overcome these issues. Fourth, librarians understand the way encyclopedic knowledge is organized and authenticated. Their facility with "authority control" allows them to help build a list of 1000 and more women, since a woman who has one or more authority control numbers is likely to meet Wikipedia's notability standards. They are also able to help editors use these authority controls to access relevant information about a subject. These are but a few of the many ways librarians serve as activists. Librarians are on the frontlines of knowledge curation, acquisition, and production. They are uniquely positioned to function as activists as they work to overcome barriers for women editors and others interested in this work, and as they help to identify women who should be on notability-based platforms like Wikipedia.

The Wikipedian as an Activist

The fact that the Wikimedia Foundation recognizes gender bias on its platform, studies this bias, and supports programs to address the issue has a lot to do with the work of women like Sue Gardner, former executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation from 2007 to 2014, and Katherine Maher, the current chief executive

officer and executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation. They took reports of harassment and bias seriously and worked to activate the platform's collective efforts toward effective solutions. These efforts have been more and less successful, with the Wikimedia Foundation failing miserably at its 2011 goal to have 25% of its editors identified as women by 2015. However, their outspoken critique from the highest levels of the organization made a space for other activists to create projects that address the issue of gender bias at a grassroots level. For example, Rosie Stephenson Goodknight and Roger Bamkin started the Wikipedia project Women in Red in 2015, as a way to create articles about notable women. Other Wikipedia projects, including Art+Feminism, WikiProject Women, and WikiProject Gender Studies, also focus on gender bias on Wikipedia. Through their projects, these Wikipedia activists gather together editors and potential editors who are concerned about bias. They teach new people to edit. Furthermore, they work to rewrite guidelines to make the platform more user-friendly and to make the culture more woman-friendly. There are also super Wikipedians like Jess Wade, who write hundreds of articles a year about cis and transgender women in specific areas like science (Devlin 2018).

It is easy to identify these highly engaged women as activists working valiantly to shift the culture on Wikipedia specifically and in society more broadly. However, we cannot dismiss the ordinary editors who pursue their interest in women and religion, like the editors who participate in the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project. Many of them begin this work by jumping into, what is for them, the deep end of the technological pool in order to make a small but significant contribution. Many of these women are not technologically savvy. They do not necessarily have degrees in religion or credentials as a religious or spiritual leader. Still, they are concerned about gender bias on Wikipedia and beyond. They care enough to go out of their comfort zones and join the effort. Their contributions are essential because, in the end, it will take the regular contributions of a multitude of ordinary editors who are activated to do something if we are going to make a collective shift. Each of these people, from the highest levels of the Wikimedia Foundation to the ordinary, sometimes struggling editor working to edit an article about a woman in religion, is engaged in an activist endeavor that increases our access to biographies about notable women.

As editor, I want to recognize the biographers in this volume who make the case for the notability of their subjects in line with Wikipedia's current notability standards. Thank you for the strategic ways you extend and reshape our understanding of this defining concept. Thank you to the particular librarians who helped them with their research. Thank you to every librarian who works to improve the representation of women, women's works, and women's issues on the databases that support this research. Thank you to the Wikipedians who will use

the biographies in this volume as a secondary source for the creation of a new biographical entry on Wikipedia. You are all engaged in an activist endeavor that improves the representation of women on notability-based platforms like Wikipedia.

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CHAPTER 1

Mae Eleanor Frey

Early 20th-century Pentecostal Matriarch

DEBORAH L. FULTHORP, DMIN

The annals of history highlight people who challenge status-quo thinking–for better or worse–and who confront injustice with conviction. Over one hundred years ago, inspired women rose up to confront the inequalities they faced in society and the home. From its inception and advancement, the women's rights movement has inspired countless women: inventions designed, cures discovered, vocations pursued, and new ideas entered the public domain. In the early 1900s, one woman within the Pentecostal tradition blazed a trail for these "new" ideas, and her contributions stand the test of time. Mae Eleanor Frey helped establish a place for women in leadership within Pentecostal and Baptist circles. She gained the trust of both men and women across denominations and faiths, leaving a legacy all can emulate.

This chapter will highlight the contributions of Mae Eleanor Frey, an early twentieth-century Pentecostal matriarch, to American religion. Her life and ministry demonstrate the value of a woman serving in whatever capacity that God calls her and the importance of her calling being supported by men and women.

Shaping a Legacy 365 Days a Year

Mae Eleanor Frey was ordained as a Baptist pastor at the age of forty in 1905. She found her calling as a Pentecostal traveling evangelist and pastor sixteen years later and received ordination with the Assemblies of God (AG) denomination. Much like her contemporary, Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the Foursquare Church, Frey also faced the challenges of a woman in ministry with tenacity. Her correspondence with AG denominational leadership revealed her loyalty to the burgeoning fellowship but also her frustrations with consistent gender biases among her fellow ministers. The biases did not prevail, and she marched onward. Invitations to preach and minister never ceased, and she felt as if she was "on the job 365 days in the year" (Blumhöfer 1995, 82). Traveling from coast to coast and abroad, she actively preached, pastored, traveled, and authored religious novels until she passed away at 89 years old (77).

Known for her fearlessness and transparency, Frey's work and words reveal disparities between doctrine and practice for Pentecostal women in vocational ministry. Pentecostal historian Edith Blumhöfer (1995, 77) compiled Frey's work and letters to the General Council leadership of the Assemblies of God. These historical documents continue to shape the dialogue about the challenges modern women face. Frey's life story and words inspired generations of men and women to put aside gender biases and diligently to do the divine work of God's calling. Her contributions to the American religious landscape were many, and the legacy she helped shape for women in religious leadership roles continues today.

Rising Star

Born on August 5, 1865, to Erastus and Catherine S. Edick in Deposit, NY, Mae Eleanor Frey (née Mae Edick) overcame obstacles early on with tenacity and unbridled fortitude (King 2009, 59). Although Catherine had eight children, four of Mae's siblings died at an early age. She was sickly for most of her young life. Rugged determinism passed on by her mother helped her survive (Frey 1926, 21).

Her father was a bricklayer by day. He blocked out his grief by playing his banjo at local bars and social gatherings at night, to the neglect of his wife and surviving children. According to Frey, "My father drank and would spend his money around the corner where there was a gay crowd. He was not the kind that rolled in the gutter; he was a gentleman that drank, had talent and ability, made lots of money, but spent it freely, while mother turned our dresses and coats and made them over." Though a drunk and non-religious man, Frey led her father into faith toward the end of his life. He regretted the way he neglected his family and spoke candidly

about it on his death bed. “I am sorry for the way I neglected my children. It wasn’t me, but the whisky and that awful appetite that was born in me. But thank God I lived to see the day He took the appetite away” (Frey 1926, 20).

Her mother, though inactive in church, firmly believed in predestination. Part of the suffragist movement in New York and a member of the temperance society, Catherine Edick resolved to become a writer for the sake of her children (“The Band of Hope,” *Tunkhannock Republican*, June 4, 1880). She loved the theater, was an aspiring playwright, and pushed little Mae Edick into her first theatrical role at the age of 5 (Frey 1926, 21).

This upbringing made Frey fearless and gifted her with an ability to tell an attention-grabbing story (“Large Audience Hears Evangelist,” *Napa Valley Register*, July 6, 1927). These two motifs of audaciousness and storytelling imprinted themselves on her life and ministry and informed her work until she passed away. Because of her mother’s influence, in her teenage years, she took interest in the fine arts and studied “for the stage.” In her studies, she despaired of the out-of-touch language of Shakespeare. She longed to share and hear stories of people in her lifetime. Against the advice of her mother, she decided instead to become a reporter. Upon hearing a newsworthy story, she secretly wrote it and sent it to the newspaper for possible publication. As a result, the newspaper offered her a job as a reporter where she quickly became a “rising star” (Frey 1926, 21).

Love at First Sight

While a cub reporter, she was assigned to cover a revival where she gave an account of stories, both funny and miraculous. There, a man named Peter Isaiah (P. I.) Frey stood up and gave a testimony of his salvation and deliverance from alcohol. She felt attracted to him and recounted it as “love at first sight.” The next night, she experienced an encounter with God to which she attributed her conversion. In the middle of writing notes for her story, she experienced an “old-fashioned conversion” in which she “saw the love of Christ.” She tried to leave without making a firm decision but felt God’s thundering voice telling her that if she left, she would “go out a lost soul forever” (Frey 1926, 22). She ran to the altar in obedience and never turned back.

What Woman?

Soon after her conversion, she accepted P. I. Frey’s marriage proposal against her mother’s wishes. She saw it as a way to live out the Christian faith she lacked at

home with her irreligious parents. As a result of her conversion experience, she gave up her job with the newspaper. She went right up to the editor and, though he called her a fool, she forthrightly stated the reason for quitting: "God will not let me continue." She immediately left her mainline church and went to work in the City Mission, where she "played the organ and helped to lead souls to the altar" (Frey 1926, 22).

Contrary to the times, the Freys functioned much outside of traditional gender roles. God called both Mae and her husband into ministry. They started with "cottage meetings" and received a letter asking them both to "come and hold a campaign." Both of them lacked experience holding revivals, but they went: he shared his testimony, and she worked the altars. On their earliest trip together, she purchased her first Bible for 20 cents and faithfully "work[ed] the altars" (Frey 1926, 22).

Wherever they went, both she and P. I. attracted large crowds, which always initiated "revivals" in various denominations. In one of their early tent revivals, over 2000 people made decisions to accept Christ, professing a new-found faith. In later years, Frey frequently wrote articles for the *Pentecostal Evangel*, the flagship periodical for the Assemblies of God (AG) in the United States. She shared about this and other revivals they led in an article reminiscing about her early ministry experiences. "People in all the walks of life were saved. Society women, club men, rich and poor knelt together at the same altar and gave themselves to Jesus. Hundreds of children were saved, and crowds poured into the Sunday Schools" (Frey, "When We Prayed Through for Revival," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 23, 1940). The effects of this one particular revival were felt for decades.

Initially, she doubted the validity of female preachers simply because she never experienced seeing a woman preacher. People, however, continued to ask her to "take a night" of the campaign. Her first preaching experience occurred in Pennsylvania in 1901, when the minister requesting the campaign came to her and mentioned that the dean and students of the Baptist school were coming to "hear a woman preach." She reacted by asking, "What woman?" Her self-doubting declarations of "I cannot preach" failed to sway the minister. That night, with much trembling, she preached her first sermon. Forty to fifty students came forward and made decisions for the Lord (Frey, "When We Prayed Through for Revival," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 23, 1940). She continued to preach revivals until a few weeks before she passed away at age 89.

Together, the couple pursued ministry. P. I. was ordained with the Baptist association, and Mae declared to "never be ordained." However, her God-given gifts, talents, and pastoral heart resulted in full ordination by her faith community. A group of local pastors and ministers within the Baptist denomination of the Northern states (now American Baptist) urged her to become fully ordained. After

two and a half hours in the ordination interview, they voted unanimously and said, "Mrs. Frye [Frey], we want to confer this honor on you" (Frey 1926, 23). Speechless and humbled, she wholeheartedly accepted. Her actions set a precedent for others to follow. In 1905, she became the first ordained woman in the Northern Baptist Convention (King 2009, 59).

With My Very Last Strength

At the time of her ordination, she was gravely ill with tuberculosis (King 2009, 59). She described the days of preaching with this illness in sobering terms. "With my very last strength I preached the Gospel. Sometimes I would fill my handkerchief with blood as I stood in the pulpit and I preached until my voice and strength gave out. My body wasted to skin and bones" (Frey, "An Evangelist's Story," *Latter Rain Evangel*, May 22 1926, 8). For over ten years, doctors put her on various health fads, including different climates with hopes of redeeming her health. As a last resort, she sought out a German specialist. He sent her home saying "There was nothing he could do." A short time later, she hemorrhaged and sensed her life "slipping away." A friend called in a Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor, George Davis, to come and pray for her. Reading from James 5, he anointed her with oil and prayed. Instantaneously, a shock shot through her entire body, and she experienced healing before the pastor finished his prayer. To everyone's amazement and surprise, she got up and walked around. This scared her family and friends, who started mourning her loss. Upon seeing her walk around, her nurse exclaimed, "Don't put any dependence on this, for people often get like that before they die." Mae reported that she was completely and miraculously healed. After the healing she never touched a "drop of medicine" for 18 years or more (Frey, "I am the Lord that Healeth Thee: Healed of Tuberculosis," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, January 28 1928, 13).

Making Compresses and Knitting Sweaters

Not only did Mae Eleanor Frey pastor when women pastors were rare, but she also served as a Chaplain late in WWI. After spending time in prayer for the soldiers fighting overseas, she emerged beyond the gender expectations of "making compresses and knitting sweaters" by entering chaplaincy. Being a woman of pure grit and action, she took up a course in nursing and entered into hospital work with the Red Cross as a chaplain nurse. Feeling this was her duty, she spent endless hours working tirelessly at the hospital as a volunteer, all the while still maintaining

her preaching schedule on Sundays. The list of her duties as a chaplain-nurse included ministry to both spiritual and physical needs. She stated, "It was my duty to receive the sick, bring them into the ward, minister to their physical needs, and then find out if they were Christians, what their church membership was, and if they wished to see their pastor." She attended to dying men and women with the utmost care and compassion as they "tried to reach out for a single ray of light to help them through the dark valley" (Frey, "An Evangelist's Story," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 22, 1926, 9).

Forty-four years before the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Frey received equal pay for her work as a pastor. After her work at the hospital, she returned to her pastorate. She preached at Echo Lake Baptist Church faithfully despite a growing dissatisfaction concerning her personal spirituality. As an ordained pastor for Echo Lake Church, she received a payment, recorded as "Paid Mrs. Frey," of $5.00 each Sunday for her preaching (Echo Lake Baptist Church 1921). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average hourly pay in 1919 ranged from $0.537 cents to $0.75 cents for manufacturing jobs, bakers and bricklayers (U.S. Dept. of Labor 1946, 1914–23). Bakery foremen managing or leading a group of workers made up to 93.8 cents an hour in Brooklyn, New York (U.S. Dept. of Labor 1920, 1919).

In 1918, she preached twenty-two times and amassed a total of $110.00, plus a collection and a stipend for the gas it took, picking up her family to and from the station. Between 1918 and 1921, her total pay went up and included her transportation. Before she left, she was receiving $8.00 a Sunday per preaching engagement at the church. Within the same collection of financial records for Echo Lake Baptist Church it shows that, once she left, the payment returned to $5.00 for the next minister. It did not matter whether the preacher was male or female, they each received the same amount: $5.00 a Sunday (Echo Lake Baptist Church 1921).

Despite her efforts and income as a pastor, she increasingly grew dissatisfied with her preaching. Her heart grew restless as she sensed the "Spirit of God" drawing her more than ever in her life. One night she woke up with the words, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," ringing in her ears. She knew deep in her heart she could never accomplish this feat on her own. This, along with other conversations with minister friends experiencing "Pentecost," made her heart thirst for more (Frey, "An Evangelist's Story," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 22, 1926, 9).

Let it Fall

Her search for something more landed her in a Pentecostal Assembly where a special guest from Newark named W. I. Evans was preaching. As she listened to his

words, her body began trembling and shaking. Upon thinking she was coming down with the "grippe," she left and sensed the Lord saying to her, "You are not sick in body, but your soul is sick: you have been drawing back for twelve years. At that time I would have baptized you with the Holy Spirit, even as I did the disciples of old, but you listened to the voice of men and drew back." She went back three months later, feeling spiritually parched like "a salt land." This was her first exposure to the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a second work of grace and to Pentecostals who "spoke in tongues" as evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit (Frey, "An Evangelist's Story," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, May 22, 1926, 8).

With all the tenacity she had, she fought against this experience much like she resisted her ordination. After she accepted the invitation to a convention at Bethel Training School in Newark, New Jersey, she had a personal revelation. The experience turned her heart toward Pentecostalism. She recounts her story of praying for this experience:

> As I knelt there, my soul was in a commotion. It just seemed as though my whole life was a failure. Sister Little said, "Begin to praise the Lord, Sister Frey."
>
> "I can't praise Him."
>
> "Praise Him anyway."
>
> "No, I am not a hypocrite and I don't feel like praising the Lord," I repeated sententiously.
>
> "Say it again."
>
> "Praise the Lord, O, I don't feel any different."
>
> "But praise is comely, Sister; offer Him the sacrifice of praise."
>
> "I never did that before. I don't believe in shouting," I answered.
>
> The minister and everybody around me were praying and praising the Lord, making the loudest noise I ever heard, all praying at once "Sister, God wants to baptize you, say, 'Praise the Lord.'"

> "Praise the Lord," I snapped. O, how good He was, patient, loving Christ. All at once something was pouring down from above all over me.
>
> "It's the Latter Rain" said Sister Little, "Oh Lord, let it fall." And fall it did. (Frey 1926, 22)

This experience in Pentecostalism changed the trajectory of her life and ministry. In her prayer time, she received "visions of lands, countries, great mountain peaks, prairies, oceans, ships, people of every class and condition." Her husband soon received a similar experience, which they refer to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in tongues. They both stayed on in their pastorate for a year and a half. In 1921, she resigned her pastorate with Echo Lake Baptist Church to follow the vision God gave her for worldwide evangelism (Frey, "An Evangelist's Story," *Pentecostal Evangel*, June 5, 1926, 9). She affiliated herself with the Assemblies of God and sought ordination at age 54. This was 14 years before the AG took an official stance in their bylaws and constitution on the ordination of women in 1935 (Qualls 2018, 502–57).

Still on the Firing Line

Although Frey enjoyed a full life of ministry, traveling, and doing the work of an evangelist, she experienced many challenges that are not mentioned in her personal correspondences. In some of her letters to the leadership of the Assemblies of God in 1928, she used the phrase "still on the firing line" (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection). Written to describe her intense ministry schedule and travel, it characterized her family challenges as well.

After marrying P. I. Frey in 1887, their first son, Stuart Wells Frey, was born in 1889. Twenty-one years later, they unofficially adopted a daughter, Catherine Elizabeth, and named her after Frey's mother (G. King, pers. comm., September 16, 2019). The records of the 1900 census for Paterson, NJ, indicate another child, known as "Lidia," was born in 1884, three years before Mae and P. I. married or met (U.S. Dept. of the Interior 1901, Passaic County, ward 1, district 106). In the 1910 census conducted from Cattaraugus, New York, Lydia A. Frey's mother was listed as being from Minnesota and her father from Pennsylvania (U.S. Dept. of Commerce 1913, New York, Cattaraugus, Salamanca, district 0100). Another son, known as "A. L. Frey of Philadelphia," also surfaced in connection with Mae Eleanor Frey's husband's obituary in 1928 ("Deaths with Funeral Announcements: Frey," *Los Angeles Times,* November 28, 1928). Newspaper stories predating his obituary connected an A. L. Frey in Philadelphia to various petty theft incidents.

Though these children present a mystery, a newspaper article in 1885 revealed the possibility of a previous marriage for P. I. Frey. "Mrs. Isaiah Frey, who has been very ill of typhoid pneumonia, is convalescent. Several of Benj. Frey's [brother to P. I.] children are also sick" ("Home and Other Matters," *Wyoming Democrat,* April 24, 1885).

Though Frey spoke of both her son Stuart and daughter Catherine affectionately in her correspondence to Assemblies of God General Superintendent J. W. Welch, her children had their own share of challenges (Frey 1925). Their private lives remained tumultuous, but these stories were rarely shared with the public. Stuart Wells Frey's marriage and engagement to Edna Mountfred (Mumford), highlighted in the *Times-Tribune* newspaper, listed all participating in the wedding party as if it was the social event of the year ("Marriage Announcements," *Times-Tribune,* June 30, 1909). On October 21, 1914, Stuart landed in the newspaper again in a divorce case against his wife Edna, printed as one of "Fifty Cases on Divorce Schedule" (*Scranton Truth,* October 21, 1914). Their little girl Elizabeth was only four years old at the time. His second marriage, to Floris Frey, ended in divorce as well. According to a death certificate, they lost their five-month-old baby girl, little Floris Frey, to bronchial pneumonia complications caused by a skin disorder called *Erysipelas* in March 1928 (Pennsylvania Dept. of Health). He remarried a third time, to a Minerva, and they settled in Florida ("Deaths in Tampa, Other West Coast Cities," *The Tampa Tribune,* November 21, 1966).

Following her granddaughter's passing, Frey poured herself yet even more into ministry. At the age of 63, she spent six months in Canada. While there she preached twice daily, and her schedule remained "dated up until Christmas." According to a letter written to J. R. Evans on October 31, 1928 (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection), Frey hoped to return home to her husband and spend Christmas with him.

Earlier in the same year, she expressed raw and frank frustrations in letters of correspondence to J. R. Evans, Chairman of the Assemblies of God, concerning realities she faced as a woman in ministry. Relentlessly, she sought to find a pastorate in Southern California to be near her husband in his failing health.[1] Her requests were denied. She wrote, "There is absolutely no open door for me in the pastorate in Pentecost in California. At their last Council I felt like a criminal as they brought in their foolish women question again. As I should say their foolish resolutions about women and thrashed it and thrashed it from and con until one felt like asking God to forgive us for being women" (M. E. Frey to J. R. Evans, September 8, 1928, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection).

Due to her husband's poor health, Frey's evangelist work provided the sole support for her husband and her daughter, who attended boarding school. She

lamented this fact in her letters to J. R. Evans (e.g., September 8, 1928, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection), but remained faithful to her vocation in spite of these hardships. While she traveled, doctors in a Glendale sanitarium cared for her husband and worked to extend his life. Unfortunately, her husband did not make it to Christmas. He died on November 25 of the same year.

We Can't Trust Them

In her letter, as well as in articles she wrote for *The Pentecostal Evangel*, Frey continued to speak her mind about the challenges facing women in ministry. She used her own experiences to speak out against the duplicity of those in Pentecostal ranks on the topic of women in ministry. She penned, "The men will wax eloquent in their frustrations about women but when some of these very men want to go away for a rest they send for me to come and take their pastorates while they are gone, and I marry, bury their dead, give the Lord's supper and do the very same things that any pastor is obliged to do." She kept nothing back when she asked them why they called her, a woman, to pastor while they were gone. The answer always given, "We can't trust them, we would not have any work left when we returned, but we have confidence in you, Sister Frey." Her frustrations mounted with the California Southern Council to the extent that she contemplated moving her credentials back with the Baptist Denomination or even taking on a pastorate with Aimee Semple McPherson's "crowd" (M. E. Frey to J. R. Evans, September 8, 1928, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection).

I Detest Denominationalism

Frey was also a woman of great paradox. Although she was ordained as a Baptist minister early on, and with the Assemblies of God in the second half of her life, in her own words, she "detest[ed] denominationalism." The thing she detested was the very framework she forged. Torn between a love for the experience of the baptism of the Spirit she found as an Assemblies of God minister, she missed the freedom she possessed as a female pastor within the Baptist ranks.

> I sometimes wonder if my ministry has narrowed or widened since leaving the Baptist church. Many, many times I would hold campaigns in a Methodist or Presbyterian church in a place where there were Baptist churches and the Convention board never payed [sic] any attention to it–I

> had more freedom that way, but not the blessed freedom of the Full Gospel as I have it now. (Blumhöfer 1995, 82)

She continued in ministry with the Assemblies of God, traveled around the country preaching across denominations and faith communities. She preached wherever an open door or invitation came (Frey, "Preaching to the Mormons," *Pentecostal Evangel*, October 9, 1926). Her journey with the Assemblies of God ultimately led her across continents with the Pentecostal message.

World-famous Evangelist

Her first overseas trip carried her to Greece, Spain, Great Britain, Italy, France, Turkey, Egypt, and Palestine, sailing on *Baltic* in 1924 at age 57 (Frey 1923). When she returned, she frequently lectured on her overseas work and drew large crowds. *The Oakland Tribune* promoted her as a "World Famous Evangelist," under nonsectarian religious services ("Non-Sectarian," advertisement in *Oakland Tribune,* August 30, 1924). *The Californian* described her as a "Famous Lady Preacher" ("Evangelist Mae Eleanor Frey," *Californian,* December 11, 1924). Another paper reported her presentation about the Holy Land was, for those who attended, "the most dramatic lecture that they ever heard" ("Large Audience Hears Evangelist," *Napa Valley Register,* July 6, 1927).

Twenty years later, she continued to speak her mind against forming associations among the broader Pentecostal groups when the first "exploratory conference" occurred in 1947. This small beginning and conference formed the current Pentecostal Worldwide Fellowship. She wrote a letter on August 24, 1948, directly to General Secretary J. R. Flower asking him,

> Why do we need to organize another group many of whom are fanatical to the extreme and who hold to doctrines that, as the Assemblies of God, we cannot accept? I suppose that even the group that handles snakes can be admitted, for fundamentally they are sound … Well, maybe I am narrow and off the record in writing this letter to you but "them's my sentiments." (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection)

The Minister

In 1938, at the age of 74, she expanded her contributions to religion and Pentecostal theology in a unique and innovative way. She wrote a novel called *The Minister* that

was informed by her experiences as a female Pentecostal minister. With each character, she intertwined portions of her theology and belief system. She creatively used the genre of fiction as a teaching tool for Pentecostal doctrines. *The Minister* was an extension of her ministry. Her work appealed to blue-collar people within the American religious landscape. It unlocked a fascinating look into many people's social and spiritual lives. She integrated stories of "everyday people" while embracing her love for Pentecost. Innovative for her time and place as a woman, the book became a means to teach Pentecostal theology through narrative fiction.

The plot traces the story of a mainline denominational minister who "reached his thirty-fifth year and had not yet fallen in love" (Frey 1939, 14). He met a young woman named Mildred, who was also unmarried. She received a supernatural experience at the Pentecostal-like tabernacle revival meeting that came to town, yet he remained complacent. Because of her convictions, Mildred refused marriage to the minister. Many, if not all, of the convictions of this new church, which echo Frey's holiness themes, spread to the people in the community. They discuss the beliefs over dinner, at the meetings, at home, and through the romantic scenes as well.

The antagonist, a girl named Jane Hampstead, longed for the heart of the minister. She tried to break up Dr. Stillwell's love by getting Mildred's family to send her to a sanitorium because of her experience at the tabernacle. Mildred left for England and there met someone who directed her to work in India. This broke up the relationship until they met once again at the Taj Mahal on an unexpected trip in India. According to Frey, "The Minister has been compiled from different incidents that have come under my own observation and which have taken place during thirty-five years of my ministry. Names and locations are all fictitious. The Divine Healing meeting was an actual occurrence. I was an eyewitness to many marvelous things" (Frey 1939, preface).

Themes like the infallibility of the Bible, salvation, Trinitarian belief, baptism of the Spirit, along with other elements of the "Sixteen Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God," materialize throughout the storyline. After Mildred experienced "Spirit baptism," the rhetoric shifts and includes vocabulary used within Pentecostal circles.

> "Mildred," the minister was ruffled, and he spoke sharply, "I suppose you know that the Bible is not to be taken literally. So much of it is figurative; besides the translators have made so many grave mistakes; large parts of it are rejected by modern scholarship."
>
> "I believe the Bible to be the infallible Word of God," was Mildred's quiet reply.

> "Certainly," was the minister's quick response, "it contains the Word of God, but Mildred, I hope you are not among the deluded set who believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible."
>
> "Yes, James, I am among that number," was the girl's answer. (Frey 1939, 44)

In other instances, Mildred speaks of being filled with "God's Holy Spirit" and "spreading the gospel story" (Frey 1939, 45). Ultimately, the story ends with their marriage and declaration to serve Christ the rest of their lives. The same admonition conveyed in *The Minister* to serve Christ wholeheartedly characterized Frey's life.

Five years later, at the age of 78, she published to a wider audience through the Eerdmans Publishing House of Grand Rapids while pastoring Bethel Full Gospel Church in Rochester, New York (M. E. Frey to J. R. Flower, August 2, 1943, Mae Eleanor Frey Collection). Her second work, *Altars of Brick,* intersected with the acceptance of the Assemblies of God and other classical Pentecostal denominations into the National Evangelical Association. Using different rhetoric from her first book, she appealed to the Church at large but again used narrative to deal with the theological and ethical issues of her time. "Gone were references to Pentecostal peculiarities so evident in *The Minister*, although, in step with other evangelicals, the common enemy remained theological modernism" (King 2009, 60).

"Wait Until I'm Dead!"

During the same year *Altars of Brick* was published, on August 2, 1943, she wrote in a letter to J. Roswell Flower that her life was only beginning. "Life begins with me at 78. I sure am getting along. For eleven months, I have supplied the pulpit of this important church. I hope now the Council is sending us a pastor so I can go home for a couple weeks' rest and do some work with my pen beside get going in campaigns that are waiting for me to be free" (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection). Her schedule was full up with preaching, radio broadcasting, campaigns, interim pastoring, and writing for four more years. Although placed on the superannuated list for aged and retired ministers, she continually refused this designation in her letters. One such correspondence, dated September 11, 1944 (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection), expressed her frustrations. "My dear Bro. Flower, I have to hurry and answer your letter before you put me on the superannuated list of old preachers, Mercy! Wait until I'm dead, but not while I'm alive. You see it's like this, I have calls

enough to keep me going until 1948 so I have to fill them if the Lord tarries." Another year later, she sent in a donation to the retirement fund instead of receiving from it.

Finally, in September of 1954, she settled down to retire at her son's home in Connecticut. She conceded her retirement but continued to preach as opportunities presented themselves. At the age of 89, she preached a revival at the Rev. Norman S. Farrington's church in Huntington, New York. Farrington graciously presided over her funeral a few weeks later, after she "retired from this life" peacefully at Stamford, Connecticut, December 4, 1954 (King 2009, 62).

Conclusion

Mae Eleanor Frey's exemplary contribution as a woman fully engaged in Baptist and Pentecostal ministry left an indelible mark on American religion at a time when women struggled to make their place known. Her pioneer work in Pentecostal literature, ministry, and life spanned two world wars, the Great Depression, the early American Pentecostal revivals, and so much more. She faced struggles of balancing ministry, health, and family with both grit and heartache. Through it all, she displayed to other men and women that gender and age remained inconsequential to answering the call of God. "God almighty is no fool–I say it with all reverence–would He fill a woman with the Holy Ghost–endow her with ability–give her a vision of souls and then tell her to shut her mouth?" (Blumhöfer 1995, 82). She spoke up when others stayed quiet. Her legacy continues today within the lives of all women who answer the calling to ministry and share God's story with all who will hear.[2]

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Notes

1. In a letter to Evans on September 8, 1928, Frey wrote, "I am his sole support. I would love to take a settled pastorate for there is nothing else I can do but preach the Gospel. California is the only place he can live. I also have a young daughter just reaching 17 that I must support until she finishes school" (Mae Eleanor Frey Collection).
2. The author wishes to thank Phyllis Reigle Funk for sharing oral stories of Frey's influence on her family. With her contributions, and through sharing resources

put together by her father before his passing, the author was able to piece together the information and timeline of Frey's work and life.

CHAPTER 2

Janet McKenzie

A Sacred Artist's Life of Creative Activism

ELIZABETH URSIC

I first saw Janet McKenzie's artwork when I was a graduate student studying religion and art at Yale Divinity School. The *National Catholic Reporter* issued a full-color supplement of the results from an art competition titled *Jesus 2000: Jesus for the Third Millennium*. The initial call was for submissions of original artwork meant to answer the question, "What would Jesus Christ look like in the year 2000?" More than one thousand artists from around the globe submitted over sixteen hundred images. The supplement included the top sixty images, depicting Jesus in a variety of ways from realistic to abstract, and traditional to contemporary. The winning image, Janet McKenzie's *Jesus of the People,* appeared on the cover. I was captivated by this dark-skinned, clean-shaven Jesus who gazed at the viewer with a gentle countenance. I was even more intrigued when I learned that the model for the image was an African American woman. This essay explores the artistic development of Janet McKenzie and how her art propelled her to international fame. By following the contours of McKenzie's life and career, we will see how art, particularly sacred art, can speak to social tensions of a particular time, and how a painting can become iconic when underlying themes resonate long after the particular historical moment has passed.

The Early Years

Janet McKenzie was born in Brooklyn, New York, and her parents were of European descent, predominantly Scandinavian and Scottish. She and her sister were raised in and around New York City. Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, her role models were her mother and her immigrant grandmother. As a young adult, she experienced deep tragedy when she lost both her parents and her grandmother in one year. McKenzie was only 23 years old when her mother died of cancer. "My mother and grandmother were so inspiring to me–accepting and kind and really contributed to putting me on this path. My mother died at a very early age, and she died only two weeks apart from her mother. They were very close in life and in death. In many respects, I carry on my work hopefully to speak for them, and for myself" (Larson 2006). McKenzie said she felt helpless witnessing her mother's suffering and death, and she came to realize how many women cannot speak for a variety of reasons, including early death. Today she feels all women's journeys are interwoven and linked together. Inspired by her maternal lineage, McKenzie committed her talent as an artist to produce emotionally honest and accessible images of strong and empowering women. "As a woman I did not get to share my adult life with my mother. But on the other hand, losing her then really helped me commit to imagery of women" (Stoddard 2002).

McKenzie studied art at the Fashion Institute of Technology and the Art Students League, both in New York City. It was at the Art Students League where her artistic abilities blossomed. The League supported her studies with the Merit and Arnold Blanch Memorial full scholarship award. McKenzie continued to stand out among her peers when she became the youngest recipient at the time to receive the Edward McDowell Traveling Scholarship. With this prestigious award, McKenzie was able to travel and study art in Europe for a year. "I bought a car in England, took it right over to the continent, drove 10,000 miles and looked at as much art as I possibly could" (Stoddard 2002). Upon her return, McKenzie was invited by the League to present her first solo show (Sacred Art Gallery n.d.). Since completing her studies, McKenzie has always supported herself as an artist. Her commitment to her art has been fueled by mission and purpose. She felt driven by a calling that was larger than a personal desire to create. However, her sense of purpose intensified the more she gave dignity and voice to diverse women through her art.

As her life unfolded, her other purpose and commitment became the care and love of her son, Simeon. McKenzie raised Simeon as a single mother. When he was young, McKenzie left New York and settled in Vermont. When asked why she chose Vermont, she said, "I wanted to start a new life. I wanted to get away from New York, and find a different place to live, a place I was unfamiliar with. I wanted, if I

could, to leave some of that sadness behind and provide my son with a fresh start, if that was possible" (Stoddard 2002). Simeon, who today is in his forties, admires his mother for staying committed to her art while supporting them. "Now that I am older, I understand how difficult it was for my mother to raise me, because she is self-employed and being an artist, there is a lot of uncertainty with where the next paycheck would come from" (Stoddard 2002). McKenzie concurs, "We were often below the poverty line. Every minute of it was worth it, but it was tremendously challenging" (Stoddard 2002). Today mother and son remain close, and Simeon is one of her greatest supporters. He creates and maintains his mother's website and helps to share her art with the world. He even poses for her paintings. He also goes on tour with his mother to help with art exhibitions. McKenzie is proud of her son and the man he has become. In an email to the author on November 10, 2019, McKenzie stated, "Simeon works a full-time job for a non-profit in Burlington, VT, helping first time business owners start a business. Many are New Americans, and many are low income Vermonters. He is kind and gives his expertise and heart to others. His love for my art and me is behind his involvement with my work and his presence is needed on many levels, more than I can say."

McKenzie thought the move to Vermont would be temporary, but it became her permanent residence. Initially, she and her son lived in Burlington. Next, they headed north–so far north that Simeon attended school across the border in New York State. Finally, when her son was in college, she purchased a home in Island Pond. "I moved to Vermont many years ago in order to start a new life, for my art, for my son and for myself. I came to Island Pond and there was a house. I went to an auction and I purchased this house in the Northeast Kingdom, expecting to stay one or two years and now I've been here twenty (laughs) … I am incredibly grateful to have this beautiful salmon-colored house that provides a wonderful place to live and a very private perfect space for me to create in" (Blackwell 2017). The term "kingdom" creates an almost mythic aura about where McKenzie lives, but the term actually refers to three counties in the northeast section of the state. However, it does have special significance for McKenzie. She feels called to this remote area that fosters her creativity and spirituality. The media describes McKenzie as living a hermit-like existence, and she does not disagree. "My life is somewhat monastic, and it completely supports this work that I do, which is prayer" (Blackwell 2017).

McKenzie's turn toward creating sacred art came after she was already successful as a professional artist. For two decades, she painted images of female figures and traveled across the US for exhibitions and gallery events. In the mid–1990s, McKenzie's art began to change. Just as her mother and grandmother inspired her early career, family connections inspired a new chapter in her artistry. "I realized that my nephew, a mixed race African-American of nine or ten living in

Los Angeles, would never be able to recognize himself in my work," said McKenzie (Kleinert 2018). She decided to make a racially inclusive statement with her art and began to add children and symbols to her paintings of female figures.

It was also around that time that McKenzie's desire to express more sacred themes in her art emerged. She traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico, in 1994, at a time when she felt an impasse in her work that was making her unhappy. "I had a longing for something not in concrete form. I guess in some sense I confronted it. The result was a transformational experience. I realized what I wanted was a more spiritual expression and I wanted so much to use the image of Madonna and child, but I did not feel I had a right to. I was not Catholic, and I felt it was bad form to do it" (Stoddard 2002). McKenzie had been raised Episcopalian and always felt her art had a spiritual path but did not feel she should paint an image so identifiably Catholic. It was when she returned to Vermont and was approached by a local Catholic priest to create art for the chapel of St. James Greater Parish Church in Island Pond that her first overtly religious painting was produced. "It was really when Fr. Richard Fowler put his arm around me and said 'you have a calling and you have to follow it. God wants you to do this.' He set me free and all these doors opened" (Stoddard 2002). The invitation by the priest broadened her sense of where her art belonged and showed her how her art could contribute to others in new ways. His invitation and openness also showed her that she could be connected to different traditions in new ways.

Jesus 2000

McKenzie did not see the announcement for the *Jesus 2000* art competition. It was a friend who saw the announcement and sent her the information. The art competition was sponsored by the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR), a widely read Catholic newspaper in the United States. *NCR* was founded by an American Catholic journalist who wanted to bring professional journalism standards to Catholic news reporting. It is a member of the Catholic Press Association and has won excellence awards for national news reporting from this organization six times between 2008 and 2014. *NCR* editor Michael J. Farrell was involved with the *Jesus 2000* project from the start. He had the original vision for the art competition and oversaw its development.

McKenzie was not sure she wanted to enter the *Jesus 2000* art competition. "I never had an interest or a calling to paint Jesus. But when a friend sent me an announcement, it really got me thinking about this. Could I? Would I? Should I?" (Blackwell 2017). The invitation to present Jesus as he might look today is what caught McKenzie's imagination. The competition instructions presented artists

with a simple question, "What would Jesus Christ look like in the year 2000?" McKenzie's answer was to paint an image that was honest for herself. "I was trying to create a painting that was uncompromising in terms of my commitments as an artist and as a woman. I wanted to pay homage to groups that have been left out and under-celebrated in His image" (Stoddard 2002).

She only had three weeks to paint and submit the image. "I used a model, a friend of mine. I felt she was the perfect inspiration for the painting" (Stoddard 2002). Maria was a young African American woman from her neighborhood in Vermont. It was Maria's face that came into McKenzie's mind when she contemplated painting an image of Jesus for the *NCR* competition. "Her intentions are pure. She celebrates life. It allowed me to bring us, as women, into an image of Jesus. All my life I have had to fit myself into sacred imagery, iconic imagery of Jesus where I do not know where I belong" (Stoddard 2002). The more she thought about it, it made sense, not as a controversial statement, but rather as a statement about who is included in Jesus Christ, "to incorporate, once and for all, women, who had been so neglected and left out, into this image of Jesus" (Kleinert 2018). The way that the painting emerged felt like it had a life of its own. "The painting simply came through me," she said. "I feel as though I am only a vehicle for its existence" (Kleinert 2018). When the painting was complete, McKenzie herself felt transformed by the work. "My journey with this painting has been nothing short of life altering. *Jesus of the People* is dark and modeled by a woman because people of color and women have traditionally been under-represented or left out of iconic imagery of Christ" (McKenzie n.d.). McKenzie's goal was not to win the competition. "This was not a contest for me. This was about creating a work of art. If nothing else, I thought I would create a painting that my nephew could see himself in and probably just send him a print of it down the line, and I would be completely satisfied" (Leith n.d.).

Jesus of the People, courtesy of Janet McKenzie.

The *NCR Jesus 2000* art competition generated an overwhelming international response and was a huge success. 1,678 images of Jesus were submitted by 1,004 artists from nineteen countries on six continents. While most of the images were paintings, submissions also included photography, sculpture, and mixed media. A panel of three judges were invited to review all the images and select the top ten. Judge Pattie Wigand Sporrong said, "Over the two days we spent pouring through the art, the images ranged from traditional depictions of a man with a beard, light brown hair and blue eyes, to super heroes with bulging muscles, to a many-earringed figure in a leather coat, hanging out on a city corner among street people. Some pictures were abstractions–light on water, light in the sky, raging fire. Others were variations on a role–preacher Christ, homeless Christ, cradled Christ, Christ holding planet earth" (Farrell 1999, 15). Judge Sherry Best also noted certain overriding themes:

> [M]any of the images incorporated symbols and physical features of multiple cultures. Some representations were specifically Native American, African, Haitian, Latino or Asian … A theme less pervasive but seen often enough for comment was "Jesus as clown." This is not the same as the

> "Laughing Jesus," a theme that became popular 20 or 30 years ago … These [clown images] seemed to emphasize the role of Christ as the bearer of glad news, but in a sad situation. The scapegoat references within these images gave Jesus a sense of poignancy. (Farrell 1999, 8)

Judge Cory Stafford focused on the purpose of the project. "This competition was not primarily looking for the most skill in controlling the medium; it was more about expanding on existing notions or transforming them or taking them to an entirely new level and showing us something we had never seen in 2,000 years of contemplating the godhead as it appeared to us on earth" (Farrell 1999, 19). Publisher Fox felt that the response was "the collective cry of longing of so many" (Farrell 1999, 10). He said something new was accomplished through the multiplicity of images. "The lesson I have learned is that no one face of Jesus suffices anymore; it never did once the original Jesus left us … Two millennia after the incarnation, the human family sees Jesus in tens of thousands of ways. We are witnessing an explosion of human consciousness as we contemplate Jesus … as Christianity breaks out of its traditional Western template and becomes a truly global religion" (Farrell 1999, back page).

Choosing the winner from the top ten was left to celebrity judge Sr. Wendy Beckett. Beckett was well known for hosting television art programs on the BBC and PBS and for publishing books that popularized famous masterworks found in museums and other settings. Becket said she struggled to select one image because the images were so personal and varied. She said that even among the top ten, five images were her first choice at some point during her deliberations. She noted that choosing an abstract image might have been easier but felt the issue of *Jesus 2000* called for something more specific. Becket also humbly admitted that her judgment could only be subjective. "For myself, I have no image. I cannot even begin to visualize the Jesus in whom and through whom I live. But the very act of trying to envisage him is deeply fruitful. Every artist will have come closer to him in the effort, a prize far more important than worldly success. Every viewer will understand our Lord more deeply as he or she thinks of what this image could be and responds to what the artists have made visible" (Farrell 1999, 7). Beckett's statement does not suggest a lack of faith, but rather a faith so all-encompassing that no one image could describe it. Even without a personal image herself, Beckett sees imagining Jesus in new ways as a contemplative practice, drawing both artist and viewer into a deeper faith journey.

In the end, Beckett chose *Jesus of the People* by Janet McKenzie as the winner of the competition. Beckett writes, "This is a haunting image of peasant Jesus–dark, thick-lipped, looking out on us with ineffable dignity, with sadness but with confidence. Over his white robe he draws the darkness of our lack of love, holding

it to himself, prepared to transform all sorrows if we will let him. A symbolic sheaf of wheat is to the right (readable also as a lance), and on the left a symbolic Eucharistic host. This seems to me a totally surrendered Lord who draws us into holy sacrifice" (Farrell 1999, 7). Right below Beckett's statement on the same page of the *NCR* supplement, McKenzie offers a different explanation of the symbols. "Jesus stands holding his robes, one hand near his heart, and looks at us–and to us. He is flanked by three symbols, the yin-yang symbol representing perfect balance, the halo conveying Jesus' holiness and the feather symbolizing transcendent knowledge. The feather also refers to Native American and the Great Spirit" (Farrell 1999, 7).

Interestingly, where McKenzie painted Eastern and earth-based symbols along with the Christian halo, Beckett saw traditional Christian iconography. For McKenzie, the difference in interpretation does not bother her. In an email to the author on November 10, 2019, she said that Beckett's commentary, "touches my heart completely because the essence of the painting absolutely reached her" (Janet McKenzie, email message to author, November 10, 2019). McKenzie speaks of painting so people can connect emotionally with the soul of the image. While the artist and the celebrity art judge interpreted the symbols differently, perhaps this demonstrates how sacred art becomes iconic–when the imagery connects to something deeper through the frame of reference of the viewer.

McKenzie's choice of model for the painting drew the most comment. McKenzie always intended to paint Jesus as a man, but a female model expanded how the image developed. "The feminine aspect is served by the fact that although Jesus was designed as a man with a masculine presence, the model was in fact a woman. The essence of the work is simply that Jesus is all of us … I would like to think that *Jesus of the People* might contribute in a small way to reminding us to love" (Farrell 1999, 7). McKenzie's skill as an artist accomplished what might be considered an impossible task. At first glance, the image does not challenge an assumption about the maleness of Jesus. However, once the viewer knows the model for the painting was female, it is possible to see femaleness in the image too. Jesus is clean-shaven, wrapped in a cloak, with cropped black hair, and wearing a crown of thorns. His look is serene. "It's a total acceptance of his fate, and that's what the painting is about–acceptance," she said. "I want to remind people of the importance of loving one another. I hope people are able to go to the essence of the work, which is kindness and peace" (Kleinert 2018). This is the Jesus McKenzie sees and wants to show us.

Becoming a Prophet

McKenzie was fifty-one when she won the competition. As the winner, she received $2,000 plus a major publicity campaign. She was informed by a phone call. "Michael Farrell, the editor, called me and I somehow knew. I inhaled and he said in his lovely Irish accent, 'no no no you must let me finish.' So he told me. My painting had been selected and could I come to New York to be on the *Today Show* tomorrow with the painting on a plane? And I said no, I will drive it to the city. So that's what we did" (Larson, 2006).

Her first appearance on national television changed Janet McKenzie's life forever. After the *Today Show* appearance, she was no longer a relatively unknown artist living a quiet existence in upstate Vermont. Now she was an internationally recognized artist who dared to paint Jesus in a new way. She was asking viewers to recognize that people of color and women are underrepresented in depictions of the godhead. She painted Jesus as male, but including a woman of color as inspiration for the image was a way to express the fullness of humanity through a single image of Jesus. The reclusive artist had become prophetic, speaking into the tensions of the times. Through her painting, she exposed blind spots about who is included in Jesus Christ. "Visual art provides concrete form to abstract ideas and helps other people see those ideas in a real form so they can say, 'oh yes, I get it now'" (Leith n.d.).

McKenzie felt she was pointing a way towards a more inclusive future with a healing image, but that was not the first response when it appeared on national television. McKenzie was shocked by the negative reaction and hateful response to the painting after the *Today Show* appearance (McKenzie n.d.). The reactions were extreme. "It received world-wide enormous publicity. And the response, initially, was absolutely horrific. People hated it. They were angry. They called me up, told me to read the Bible, hung up on me. … My mail was separated at this little local post office for fear of letter bombs … I've been shocked at the response of something that should be ordinary. We should expect to see all people celebrated in sacred art, all races" (Blackwell 2017). Shortly after her painting won, McKenzie received approximately 300 email messages condemning the picture and its artist. The harassment was constant and included demands for her to stop painting.

While the dark skin Jesus ignited the ire of some, when people found out McKenzie had used an African American woman as a model, the hate mail increased (Wicai 2000). She even received death threats. For McKenzie, it was overwhelming. In a 2006 interview on Vermont public television, McKenzie read one of the letters. "How dare you. It's not enough that the Catholic Church continues to feed thousands of people the lies they represent but you are now attempting to make Jesus into a woman. You can do as you wish, but I warn you

now, hell is not a nice place. These actions are mentioned time and time again in the Bible and people go to hell for them" (Larson 2006).

The situation became even more dangerous when the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) targeted McKenzie and her painting. The WBC is a Kansas-based religious group known for inflammatory hate speech against LGBT people, other religions, US soldiers, and politicians (Mikulan 2009). They are famous for conducting anti-gay protests across the US, picketing at military funerals, and stomping on the American flag while yelling "thank God for dead soldiers," and "God hates America" (Westboro n.d.). The WBC wrote an angry letter connecting McKenzie's painting to Vermont's Civil Union Bill that was under consideration at the time. They sent copies to Senators Patrick Leahy and Bernie Sanders, as well as to Governor Howard Dean. It is still possible to view some of the hate-filled blogs against McKenzie and the Vermont Civil Union Bill with titles such as "Vermont is the Antichrist Bethlehem" (SocMen 2002). The FBI became alerted when the WBC planned to protest in front of McKenzie's home. One protest was even organized and publicized, but a severe snowstorm prevented the protest from taking place. McKenzie wonders if the snowstorm was divine intervention at some level when she says, "God provides, I guess" (Larson 2006).

That did not stop the harassment. Because of the ongoing and varied threats, McKenzie took precautions with the painting. She added a Plexiglass cover to the original *Jesus of the People* painting during the first few exhibitions. "There hasn't been one aspect of this painting that hasn't been ripped up and thrown back. Every aspect, including race, the clothes and all the colors used," she said. "The most universal remark I received was that Jesus didn't look like that. Jesus was Jewish. That was the thread that bound those comments together," said McKenzie. "But then there were people who commented that Jesus was from Northern Africa. Yes. Certainly. And [Scripture-based references] 'his hair was like wool' and 'his feet were burnished brass.' But everybody said something" (Black 2000). Eventually, the wave of adverse reactions subsided. However, even now, almost twenty years later, she reports that it has never completely stopped.

McKenzie has become more reflective and philosophical about the onslaught of criticism. "First, it was a total surprise and a shock. Second, it saddened me, initially, because the negative responses came first. And they were really mean, to say the least. This really disappointed me because I thought we had evolved beyond that level of viciousness and hate. But then the positive support began pouring in and really overwhelmed the negative. This painting is really about grace and love. I trust that the message of the painting will speak, and I stand behind the painting" (Stoddard 2002). McKenzie understood that familiarity with images of Jesus as White was underneath many of the reactions. "All of us need to see ourselves celebrated in such imagery. On the other side of things, I have come to notice that

people have an attachment to Jesus staying White because it is a familiar image. This does not mean to replace those that have come before it. This is in addition to, this is an inclusive image meant to include us, those of us left out of this imagery because we all need to see ourselves celebrated in the image of Jesus" (Larson 2006). To McKenzie's credit, she responded to the harassment and threats with understanding in an early interview. "Initially I was very saddened, but now I feel differently because I know change comes hard and as an artist, I feel it's my job to lead people" (Wicai 2000).

Positive Reaction

In the end, the people who embraced and stood up for the work far outnumbered the detractors, and this group has only grown over time. McKenzie's supporters have carried *Jesus of the People* forward into the world through museum exhibitions, documentaries, and film. They have written about it in books and magazines from South Africa to Iceland, Vietnam, Australia, and Russia. Prints are all over the world; the image has appeared in Bibles. "The rallying and support has been phenomenal," McKenzie said (Wicai 2000). During the first year, there was a steady demand for radio, television, and newspaper interviews. As well, her work appeared in exhibitions in different cities across the country. The first exhibition at Pace University in Manhattan included thirty-five entries. That number grew to forty-four at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and sixty-three at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville (Wicai 2000).

What began as a creative and innovative way to engage the new millennium had become a cultural phenomenon. Because the exhibits continued to grow in size and popularity, the editor of *National Catholic Reporter*, Thomas Roberts, described the exhibition tour "like a painting chain letter … People just want it that badly" (Wicai 2000). There were traditional portrayals and innovative images, including a street person, a modern-day carpenter, and even a TV news anchor. There were images of Jesus sitting in a diner and as a prisoner waiting to be executed.

Nevertheless, the highlight of the show was McKenzie's *Jesus of the People*. In Chicago, police officers and firefighters on their way home from night shifts would stop by to see what they called "the Picture." One appreciative viewer laid a bunch of lilies beside the painting (McKenzie n.d.). In an interview during the Chicago exhibit, McKenzie said, "It's on its own path, and I'm trying to keep up with it" (Wicai 2000). During the Chicago exhibit, McKenzie received a commission to create a work for a new chapel at St. Xavier University on the south side of the city. As the popularity of the painting increased, McKenzie became more relaxed. For

the next show in Belleville, where 10,000 people were expected to walk through the exhibit, McKenzie decided to remove the plastic cover over the painting and pay more attention to the positive feedback (Wicai 2000).

Some may question why a White woman painted one of the most celebrated dark-skinned Jesus images. However, the reactions from the African American community have been particularly edifying for McKenzie. "The reaction has been predominantly appreciative … The greatest exuberance has come from non-Catholics" (Black 2000). *Jet* magazine published the image, and Whoopi Goldberg wanted to purchase the painting. McKenzie turned down the offer because she wanted the painting accessible to everyone instead of in one person's collection (Larson 2006). Pattie Wigand Sporrong, one of the contest judges, curated the Chicago exhibit. "I had an older woman come in who was dressed to the nines. She was African American. She burst into tears when she saw McKenzie's painting and said, 'Honey, I'm an atheist, but that's my Jesus right there'" (Wicai 2000). In 2002, the National Black Catholic Congress met in Chicago, and McKenzie's son Simeon accompanied her on the trip. "It was an amazing experience to witness 3,000+ African-American men and women standing, crying, and weeping in front of the painting while it was on the altar. That was something that was extremely moving and something I will never forget" (Larson 2006).

Protestant churches also embraced the image. In 2002, the Reverend Jonathan L. Walton was pastoring a small church in Newark, New Jersey, for a mostly African American and Latino community that was under-resourced. The building had once been a high-steepled Presbyterian Church. As he described it, "All the icons, all the images of Jesus, both in stain glass and on the walls, were all of Michelangelo's cousin or Jesus looking like a Greek God. So I began searching for different images because it really pained me to see these small African American children come in each Sunday and look up at these images of the divine and of the sacred and not be able to see themselves or their skin color or their pigmentation in any way in any representation of the divine. I thought that was tragic. So it was at that moment that I began searching for different images of Jesus, and I came across that wonderful painting of Janet McKenzie, *Jesus of the People*. At that moment I became captivated with Janet McKenzie and her work" (Blackwell 2017).

The African American models who sit for McKenzie feel the same about her art. Amy Robinson explains the process and how it makes her feel. "Her work reflects the diversity and the celebration of diversity. I am extremely proud every time I am asked to pose for her. She shares with you her vision for the painting. So it is almost like you take on this role of tangibly placing yourself in what she is trying to create. And I love it. I see the essence of me. I see other beautiful women. I know some of the women that Janet uses as models, so it is always nice to feel you are part of their essence as well" (Blackwell 2017).

Jesus of the People has also received positive responses from around the world. Valerie Maysie D'Souza from India wrote about the image in her article, "Jesus of the People–The Role of Art in Theological Reflection": "This was a Jesus for the dark Continents … while very typical of an African American, it could be a Dalit face, a tribal Indian Face, the marginalized face of society … This Jesus was definitely one with the poor, the outcasts, and women" (D'Souza 2002, 12).

Even with world-wide fame, McKenzie's original motivation for painting the image remained. She created *Jesus of the People* so that her bi-racial nephew could see himself in an image of the divine. McKenzie says the exhibition she was most proud of that first year was when she learned that two of her paintings, *Jesus of the People* and *Madonna and Child—Boundless Love,* were both displayed at her nephew's locker at school (Black 2000).

Newer Work

Since the *Jesus 2000* art competition, McKenzie has created an extensive catalog of sacred art paintings. She continues to advocate for racial diversity, and her favorite themes include Madonna and Child and Holy Family. She has painted these iconic images, along with many others from the Bible, as different races, including Asian, Latino, African American, Caucasian, and Native American. Her exhibition paintings have specific characteristics. Her paintings are usually large, often life-sized. Most figures are cloaked and painted with little or no background to give a sense of timelessness. When asked if her style was informed by art deco, McKenzie answered, "I've always worked a little different from other realists. My work has a very strong linear almost geometric approach. I am after strength, connected to the earth but heaven oriented. When people sit for me there is a rising up, a drawing to, and a sense coming through the figure" (Stoddard 2002).

McKenzie has also continued to receive commissions outside of religious settings. In 2007, the Breyo Fellowship commissioned McKenzie to create an ongoing body of work titled, "African American Women Celebrated." The series pays homage to women of color and brings together themes long important to the artist: motherhood, iconic women alone, children (the future), and the gift of the elderly. McKenzie was inspired to paint the elderly with the same care and compassion she had shown all her previous art themes (Sacred Art Gallery n.d.).

Jesus of the People also continued to grow in popularity, both for the power of the image and for the controversy it had endured. In the new millennium, gender and sexuality debates in churches were turning to LGBT issues, and scholars were interested in exploring sacred art that had been censored or labeled as blasphemous. Art historian and minister Cherry Kitteridge chose *Jesus of the People*

as the cover for her 2007 book, *Art that Dares: Gay Jesus, Woman Christ and More*. All the artists wrote short essays about what led them to create these images. They also shared their artistic process and how it connected with their identity and faith. *Art That Dares* was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award in 2007.

In 2009 Orbis Books published *Holiness and the Feminine Spirit–The Art of Janet McKenzie*. Twenty-seven well-known writers and theologians–all women–wrote reflections for the art. The authors included: Sr. Wendy Beckett, the Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, Diana Hayes, Sisters Helen Prejean, Elizabeth Johnson, Joyce Rupp, Ann Patchett, and Joan Chittister. Given complete freedom, each author wrote about a different painting in whatever way it spoke to them (McKenzie n.d.). The image chosen for the cover, entitled *Holy Mother of the East*, was paired in the volume with an extended poem written by Joanna Chan. In the acknowledgment of the book, McKenzie thanks mentors, benefactors, foundations, and art networks for their support. She also adds a special note of gratitude to her models, in particular to her friend "Maria and her children Morrow, Apple, Sophia, and Zephyr [who] appear in many of my paintings, and I am eternally grateful to them" (Perry 2009, ix). Many of the artist's current pieces illustrate her interest in pulling the viewer "to look inside" by painting some faces with closed eyes. "The eyes are the windows to the soul, you know," she explained (Black 2000).

Holy Mother of the East, courtesy of Janet McKenzie.

Naming God was published in Great Britain in 2011. The book featured hymns, prayers, and poems for worship written by the Rev. Dr. Jan Berry along with eleven of McKenzie's paintings, including the cover image. In 2013, Orbis published another book featuring Janet McKenzie's art. *The Way of the Cross: The Path to New Life* is a book-length treatment of the Stations of the Cross written by Joan Chittister. The Stations of the Cross are fifteen images that follow the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, commonly found in Catholic and other churches as locations of prayer and contemplation. Chittister had never done a book-length treatment of the Stations before, but it was McKenzie's paintings that prompted her to agree. *The Way of the Cross*, where McKenzie is artist-as-theologian, won a 2014 Catholic Press Association Book Award. The book was also recognized as a 2014 National Indie Excellence Book Awards finalist.

McKenzie's work continues to inspire social activism as well as prayer. In 2016, a mass shooting took place at the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida, targeting the LGBTQ community. With forty-nine people killed, it remains the second-most deadly shooting in US history. It is also one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in US history, second only to September 11, 2001 (Swanson 2019). In response, McKenzie

created *A Brave and Quiet Heart*. In an email to the author, she describes the painting:

> The subject within *A Brave and Quiet Heart* offers a gesture of possibility while simply looking at the viewer, flanked by doves symbolizing this person's inherent sanctity, something that is so often forgotten or dismissed. The pride flag is interpreted as inextricably part of their essence. My hope is that *A Brave and Quiet Heart* will serve as a visual testament to hope over despair, to love over hate and to the memory of those souls who lost their lives at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, June 12, 2016. (Janet McKenzie, pers. comm., December 3, 2019)

A Brave and Quiet Heart, courtesy of Janet McKenzie.

In 2016, McKenzie was also commissioned by Harvard University to create a work of art for the historical Harvard Memorial Church, located in the oldest section of Harvard's campus. The art commission came after McKenzie had delivered the 2013 William Belden Noble Lecture at the church with *Jesus of the People* exhibited on the altar. The minister who had invited McKenzie in 2013 and championed the 2016 commission was none other than the Reverend Jonathan L.

Walton–the pastor who found *Jesus of the People* to inspire his Latino and African American New Jersey congregation in 2002. During her 2013 visit to Harvard, McKenzie had a moment of reflection. "While waiting to speak, I looked at the painting displayed on the altar and it was emotional. I was reminded not only of the very hard and challenging, and at times joyful, journey I have experienced in response to the painting but more importantly, the long road we still have ahead of us to eradicate racial and gender prejudice and violence" (McKenzie n.d.).

The 2016 Harvard commission was to create a painting for the renovated student and common space on the ground level of the church. McKenzie created *Divine Journey: Companions of Love and Hope* to celebrate many people. A dark-skinned Mary, holding the baby Jesus, is at the center, surrounded by four women of different ethnicities. "If you were to view this painting as perhaps stone, the figures are meant to be unified as a mass. Everything in the painting leads to Mary. Mary is the physicality. Mary is the figure who reaches out to us. She is the bearer of faith and hope. The figures are the companions of love. They are all on the divine journey, just as we all are" (Stoddard 2002). At the unveiling ceremony, Walton celebrated McKenzie's work for its social justice message:

> Janet McKenzie's art challenges us to reconsider who and what we consider divine. Consider her award-winning and internationally acclaimed *Jesus of the People*. Her interpretation of Jesus pays tribute to two groups traditionally left out of religious iconography: women and people of color. By using real women of color as models for her biblical scenes, McKenzie counters default associations between whiteness and purity, between maleness and divine power. This is the reason why, when considering artwork for the Student Oasis, Janet McKenzie immediately came to mind. (Blackwell 2017)

Divine Journey: Companions of Love and Hope, courtesy of Janet McKenzie.

The following year was significant for gender politics and protest. Just one day after Donald Trump's inauguration as the 45th President of the United States, the historic 2017 Women's March in Washington, DC took place. While the organizers expected 200,000 participants, a half million people showed up with sister marches taking place across the country and around the world. In an email to the author, McKenzie stated that participants brought handmade signs to the event, and at least one group of women from Minnesota mounted a poster of McKenzie's painting as their contribution to the march.

Completing the Circle

By 2019, it had been two decades since McKenzie had received her call to create sacred art in New Mexico, and in the same year she had won the *Jesus 2000* art competition. Now she was called back to the southwest desert, both as an accomplished sacred artist and as a speaker, for the 2019 *Universal Christ Conference* sponsored by the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) located

in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The CAC was created by Franciscan Father Richard Rohr, who saw a need to connect social justice work with contemplation. The *Universal Christ Conference* was held in the Albuquerque Convention Center to accommodate the 2000+ conference attendees.

To prepare for the conference, McKenzie had months of detailed communication with the conference organizers, followed by a 2,400-mile round-trip drive from Vermont to Albuquerque with her son Simeon and his partner, Amy Robinson. In an email to the author on November 13, 2019, she described the experience: "My Toyota Tacoma pickup held us, the exhibition of twenty-four paintings, thousands of prints and greeting cards, and everything we needed to do this conference. We packed the truck with two feet of snow on the ground." When she arrived at the convention center, a black pipe and drape entrance had been specially constructed as a transitional space from the outside world into the conference. The art was displayed along a darkened corridor with soft lighting on each piece. McKenzie wrote about each work with the hope of creating a personal and quiet experience for each visitor. The interactive space produced this result. McKenzie expressed gratitude. "Seeing people walk the 'gallery' slowly, looking at the art and reading the text, after all of the very hard and detailed work up to that point, touched my heart greatly and made it all worthwhile." McKenzie was particularly moved by the number of men who quietly thanked her in whispers for her painting of Joseph and Jesus. Each man shared his journey with her. Many were raising children alone or had lost a child, devastating their lives. "This painting acknowledges the nurturing and loving side of men, inspired by my father and son. One man was raising seven children after his wife's death. They came to the conference by themselves seeking peace and answers."

When it came time for McKenzie to speak onstage, there were 2,300 people in the audience and another 2,800 watching through webcasting. The stage held three large screens overhead.

> I am not a public speaker at all, and I was in awe of the professional speakers there. Father Richard Rohr, John Dominic Crossan and Reverend Jacqui Lewis were fabulous. I don't know what happened or why, but a calm peacefulness came over me and I forgot about the overhead screens and all the people watching. I simply shared the dreadful and threatening reception to *Jesus of the People* and the 20-year journey of this work in the world, serving to remind that all people have a right to see themselves honored within sacred art. The talk gave me the opportunity to thank all those who share my vision of the importance of inclusion and support my work and that nobody does anything all by themselves. (McKenzie, pers. comm., November 13, 2019)

After her talk people lined up, many in tears, to thank McKenzie for her art. She found the experience humbling. The Center for Action and Contemplation purchased one hundred posters and gave them randomly to attendees to carry outside to the vigil held on the Albuquerque Civic Plaza. "Seeing Tim Shriver, President of the Special Olympics, tightly holding *Jesus of the People* with his eyes closed, will stay with me for the rest of my life," McKenzie said (pers. comm., November 13, 2019). After the vigil, some attendees carried the posters to the NM/Mexico border in support of asylum seekers. Additional attendees purchased posters for other events, which makes McKenzie hopeful. One of the conference participants was the Reverend Monica Whitaker, a priest and co-chair of the Anti-Racism Committee for the Episcopal Diocese of Arizona. In an email to the author on November 10, 2019, she stated: "I was inspired to include Janet McKenzie's posters in our 2019 Arizona border visit and summit this fall after seeing the posters used during a public witness event at the conference. The images and text reflect the message that we can see the image of God in everyone and everywhere." Whitaker ordered posters of *Jesus of the People* with the printed message, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Jesus." For the Arizona summit, she wanted to increase awareness of the important ministries taking place on both sides of the border. The posters were displayed during a bilingual Eucharist celebrated near the border. "McKenzie's art expresses how divinity is revealed in human beings of all races, ethnicities, and genders, especially those often marginalized by the dominant culture. I thought that participants would appreciate viewing McKenzie's artwork to help them process emotions and reflect on spiritual insights that can arise when engaging with complex topics such as immigration and humanitarian rights" (Whitaker, pers. comm., November 10, 2019).

The *Universal Christ Conference* brought McKenzie even more invitations to exhibit her art and speak. One exhibition at St. Paul's Ivy Church in Charlottesville, Virginia included a well-attended conversation with Jimmy Wright, President of the Jefferson Scholars Foundation, about the importance of seeing everyone as created equally in God's likeness. In 2019, McKenzie also engaged the topic of children separated from their parents at the border with a solo exhibition titled *Radical Courage and the Feminine Spirit—the Art of Janet McKenzie* at the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture in New York City. In an email message to the author on November 13, 2019, McKenzie described the event. "This intimate exhibition was inspired into existence by the violent and racially divisive times we are living through. The iconic individual, mothers with and without their children, and the Blessed Mother are presented as reflections of hope and healing justice."

McKenzie chose to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of winning the *Jesus 2000* art competition in her home state. The First Methodist Church of Burlington set up *Jesus of the People* and some of McKenzie's other works for viewing and

meditation. In an email to the author on November 10, 2019, she stated that she was pleased that the exhibition also included talks and an interfaith panel that invited responses to the painting from the perspective of social injustice, both in society at large and in the Vermont community (Janet McKenzie, pers. comm., November 10, 2019). McKenzie continues to live in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. "It speaks to my soul and inspires my work. I am grateful for the acquisitions and commissions I receive and execute in this undisturbed part of the world … I live and work in isolation, but I am far from alone" (McKenzie n.d.).

Conclusion

As McKenzie enters her seventh decade of life and her third decade as creator and steward *of Jesus of the People,* she continues to advocate the message she has expressed throughout her career. "My paintings reflect hope for greater acceptance among all of us, for seeing with honest eyes, having an open mind and a willing heart. My work celebrates our inherent similarities rather than our differences because what lies beyond skin and gender, within the depth of our universal soul, is more alike than we'll ever know" (McKenzie n.d.). McKenzie's medium of painting allows her to show this advocacy by presenting us with prophetic images. Her paintings teach more than preach. They propel the viewer through a self-reflective examination of their thoughts and emotions. Her use of painting rather than words to express theological truths compels viewers to reflect on their internal, religious imagery, whether they want to or not.

While writing this essay, I had opportunities to share the image of *Jesus of the People* with a variety of people who had never seen it before, and I heard a wide range of comments. Some people were inspired, and others wanted to hear more about the artist and the painting. Thankfully I did not encounter the hostile responses that McKenzie had endured, but I did hear responses that "Jesus did not look that way." It was telling that people made these comments as statements of fact instead of personal statements of preference or familiarity. Internal sacred images can become so entrenched that they become unexamined touchstones for many people's faiths. As the Reverend Jonathan L. Walton eloquently pointed out, the most famous Jesus images often look more like the painter than any possible historical Jesus.

Janet McKenzie's art continues to teach us to see the sacred in new ways. We need more studies examining the critical role artists serve to advance and develop theologies. We are living in a visual age. Sacred artists need to be recognized and understood not just for the art they produce, but also for the ideas and theologies they express and explore. Sacred artists like Janet McKenzie invite us to probe

deeper into our concepts of God. No one image can tell the whole story of Jesus, as the collection of 1,678 images submitted for the *Jesus 2000* art competition demonstrates. Varied images can help us to grasp a more complete understanding of who Jesus Christ is for all Christians. McKenzie is clear that art, created with the right intent, can be a transformative message. "I think art that comes from the heart with sincerity, that's the art that creates positive change" (Leith n.d.). McKenzie's art points us in the right direction.

McKenzie created *Jesus of the People* as an image that would speak to the world in the new millennium. The tensions around race and gender that informed her work in the year 2000 are still with us today. In his 2019 article, "Black Jesus Matters," Fr. John Christmann (2019) writes, "McKenzie brings us back to the essential reality of the incarnation and realization that Christian art is bereft without the full expression of humanity." McKenzie's goal is for everyone to see themselves reflected in sacred imagery. Her art is iconic because it connects to something deeper in all of us. "The painting is about the surface because as a visual artist I have to work with those limitations, but the essence of the painting is how you feel when you look at it. It is what goes on within" (Larson 2006). When asked why she continues to paint mostly women, her answer is personal, and it connects to her early motivations for becoming an artist. "A visitor to an exhibit told me that my paintings of women remind her to stand up a little straighter–a statement that invariably resonates and inspires" (McKenzie n.d.).

The history of *Jesus of the People* shows that, while McKenzie's art may threaten some people, many others are inspired, and it is this core community she wants to serve. This sentiment is reflected in her preference for where she would like *Jesus of the People* to be permanently installed. "I would like *Jesus of the People* to end up in a small chapel within a large church in an African American community in a large city with a lot of access for people. That is my dream for it. I think it belongs around the people for whom it has the most relevance and importance. I think I am called to be an artist and I think it is my gift to the world" (Larson 2006).

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CHAPTER 3

Miranda E. Shaw

A Passionate Path of Women's Active Contributions in Tantric Buddhism

JANICE L. POSS

> The luxurious worldly attire of a Bodhisattva indicates that the Bodhisattva participates fully in worldly life but does so … without any loss of equanimity. Bodhisattvas manifest such an appearance in order to "fulfill" beings' "wishes" for beauty, protection, joy, amazement, and inspiration. The concept of the Bodhisattva is so central to the Mahāyāna that its practice methodologies are characterized as the Bodhisattva path. (Kamata and Shaw 2003, 176)

Dr. Miranda E. Shaw is a multi-award-winning author on women's contributions to Tantric Vajrayana Buddhism in South Asian and Himalayan regions, including India, Tibet, and Nepal. Her seminal book, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism,* published by Princeton University Press in 1994, won the James Henry Breasted Prize for the best book on Asian History published between 1990 and 1994 from the American Historical Association, the Tricycle Prize for Excellence in Buddhist Scholarship, and the 1995–96 Critic's Choice Most Acclaimed Academic Book award. Her notable and extensive work is a testament to her long, enduring, and significant

career and contributions in redefining Tantric Buddhism with a feminist sensibility. Her second book, *Buddhist Goddesses of India* (2015), is also well-reviewed and widely read. In addition to her duties as an associate professor of religious studies at the University of Richmond in Virginia, she has lectured extensively and written many articles, book chapters, and essays on the subjects of Tantric Buddhism and Indian goddesses. Her work as an academic professor and writer has "taken her a long way from her Methodist childhood in Ohio" (Griffin 1999, 13), leading her to concentrate on women's historical and contemporary contributions to Tantric Buddhism in India, Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal. Although "Shaw [says she] eschews labels, declining to give her age, marital status or to tie herself down to a specific religion," Buddhism and goddess worship inspire her most (Griffin 1999, 16–17).

Miranda Eberle Shaw was born on May 9, 1954 in Ohio to her parents John Norris and Merry Grant Norris, who supported and nurtured her throughout her life. She attributed her love of books to her grandmother, Frances Wilson Eberle. She is grateful to her mother for her constant appreciation of her success and to her life companion, Kenneth Rose, with whom she has shared her intellectual journey and to whom she is indebted for his "personal and scholarly ministrations" (Shaw 1994, xiii).

Early Inspiration, Education with Honors and Early Career

When Shaw was in junior high school, a family friend gave her a copy of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. These contrasted sharply with her Midwestern upbringing and sparked an interest she ultimately pursued in her education and career (Griffin 1999a, 17). Early on in her studies in art history and then religion, she was aware of the lack of a woman's perspective in Tantric Buddhism, even though there are many female sky-dancers, *apsara* and *ḍākinī* images in the visual aesthetics of the religion. The intense female imagery in Tantric *thangkas* inspired her to pursue their deeper meaning, which led her to study the historical background and religious significance of these rich visual aesthetics (University of Richmond 2010; Griffin 1999, 14–15).

After graduating from Ohio State University with honors, *cum laude*, in 1978 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history, she remained there on a full scholarship to pursue a PhD. However, Shaw realized that her understanding of Tantric art would require immersion in language and religious studies. In 1981, she began studies in religion at Harvard Divinity School and Harvard University. During her time there, she acquired three degrees with honors. In 1983, she received a master's in theology (MTS) and, in 1985, a Master of Arts in the study of

religion (MA) at the Harvard Divinity School. In 1992, she was awarded a PhD with distinction in the study of religion from Harvard (Shaw, pers. comm., January 9, 2020).

As a pre-doctoral student, she accumulated many distinguished honors and grants. She was a University Fellow at Harvard University from 1983–85 and received Harvard's annual Bowdoin Graduate Literary Prize in 1986. She received two Radcliffe Grants for Graduate Women in 1987 and 1988 and received the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship for Research Abroad in 1987–88. She was able to study the Tibetan Language in 1988–89 with the Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship and was awarded the Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship for 1989–90. Finally, she accepted the Harvard Whiting Fellowship in the Humanities in 1990–91 to complete her dissertation.

Shaw was taught and influenced by many notable teachers and colleagues along the way. She studied with, among others, American Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman, who is currently Indo-Tibetan Buddhist professor at Columbia University, Mastatoshi Nagatomi, distinguished and first Professor of Buddhist Studies at Harvard University, and Lama Sonam Jorphel Rinpoche, who is the head of the monastery of Rinchen Paldri in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.

Early in her professional career, she was invited to contribute to the exhibition catalog, *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art,* which was shown at the Columbus Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 2003–04. In an email communication with the author (June 7, 2020), Shaw described her significant role in shaping and unifying the catalog's entries. In addition, she co-authored two articles for the catalog, which will be explained in more detail later.

Tantric Buddhist Formation — the Influential Teachers

Shaw's travels to India, then Nepal, led her to study, do field research, and write on the missing story of women in Tantric Buddhism. In India and Nepal, seedbeds of Tantric practice and development, she was encouraged and guided by many Indian scholars and Tibetan lamas, gurus, khenpos, and tulkus from the four major schools of Tantric Tibetan Buddhism; the Nyingma (rNying ma–རྙིང་མ), Kagyu (Bri gung bKa' brgyud–བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་), Gelug (dge lugs pa–དགེ་ལུགས་), and Sakya (Śākya–ཤཱཀྱ་). Six months into her first year and a half of field research in India, she met with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India. She secured the Dalai Lama's approval of her research into Anuttara Yoga Tantra, the most esoteric form of Tantric practice, and

the realm in which women and women's writings have a prominent role. This official approval was a turning point (Shaw, pers. comm., June 7, 2020).

Recording the lineage of Tibetan Tantric teachers is an important Tibetan tradition. In honor of this practice, Shaw's teachers and Tibetan guides are listed here:

- From the gDe-Lugs (Gelug–དགེ་ལུགས་) lamas of Tsongkhapa lineage, she worked with Lati Rinpoche, Tara Tulku Rinpoche, and Gungru Tulku.
- From the Bri gung bKa' brgyud (Drigung Kagyu–བྲི་གུང་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་) tradition, she worked with H. H. (Drikung Kyabgon) Chetsang Rinpoche–the 37th throne holder of the Drikung Kagyu lineage and 7th reincarnation of the Chetsang Rinpoche–Ayang Rinpoche, and Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen.
- From the Karma bKa' brgyud order (ཀརྨ་བཀའ་བརྒྱུད་) she worked with H. H. Sharmarpa Rinpoche, His Eminence the 10th Nenang Pawo Rinpoche (1912–91), Trangu Rinpoche, Luding Khenchen Rinpoche, and Khenpo Abbe.
- From the Sakya school (Śākya–ས་སྐྱ) she worked with H. H. Sakya Trizin, Jetsun Chime Luding, and, finally, Luding Khen Rinpoche.
- From the Nyingma (rNying ma–རྙིང་མ) tradition of Padmasambhava, H. H. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910–91), Minglin Trichen (sMin gLing khri chen rin po che –སྨིན་གླིང་ཁྲི་ཆེན་རིན་པོ་ཆེ) (1938–2008), Tulku Thondup, and Lama Tsultrim (Allione).[1]

From 1959, when the Land of Snows–another name for Tibet (ka ba can gyi yul–ཀ་བ་ཅན་གྱི་ཡུལ)–was conquered and occupied by the Chinese and renamed the Autonomous Region of Tibet, handing this knowledge down to the Tibetan diaspora became increasingly important. Many Tibetans escaped over the Himalayas to live in exile in India, Bhutan, Nepal, and other places that welcomed them as political refugees around the world. Shaw would not have been able to visit the monasteries to do research on Tantric Buddhism for her dissertation and her book on Tantric practice and women, *Passionate Enlightenment,* if it had not been for the teachers who so willingly assisted her.

Early Career and Success

As mentioned above, one of her early successes as a young tenured professor was the publication of articles in the groundbreaking art exhibition and its accompanying large-format, 560-page catalog, *Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art.* This exhibition was shown in 2003 at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and in 2004 at the Columbus Art Museum in Columbus, Ohio. The exhibit contained over 160 objects of Himalayan art, providing a "detailed analysis"

of and insightful historical scholarship about these aesthetic masterpieces in their "socio-religious context" (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 9). She co-authored two articles for this catalog: "A New Identity: The Vow of a Being Destined to Enlightenment, Bodhisattvas: Perfected Beings as Exemplars," with Mayumi Kamata and the text for Article #153 in the exhibition of Shri (ཤྲཱི་) Palden Lhamo (dpal ldan lha mo–དཔལ་ལྡན་ལྷ་མོ), the "Glorious Goddess" and "Protectress of Tibet," with John C. Huntington (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 498). Her writing and editing were significant contributions to this art exhibition, which was, for the first time, organized around the ritual purpose and practice of the objects presented instead of solely for their aesthetic value. At the time of the exhibition, Stephan Markel, curator and department head of South and Southeast Asian Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, wrote a review for *Orientations Magazine*. He recounts that these practices, "previously taught only to initiated disciples … have gradually become a subject for modem scholarship over the last 65 years. With this public awareness, it has become possible to explain these esoteric processes … connecting the works of art to their underlying meditative practices. No prior exhibition of Himalayan Buddhist art has ever attempted this deep a level of contextual explanation" (Markel 2003, 26, 31). The opportunity to collaborate as a contributing colleague to this unique exhibition that related the art object to actual religious ritual and practice allowed Shaw's knowledge and expertise in art history and esoteric Buddhism to excel. This provided her with a practical experience of presenting religion in a pragmatic, new way that she has carried throughout her writing and career.

From the beginning of her academic pursuits, Shaw received a number of research grants and other awards that funded and promoted her postgraduate work. Often, she received these more than once, such as the writing fellowship from the Schwab Charitable Trust Kayamandala Fund in 2009–10, 2011–12, 2012–13, and 2014–15, the American Academy of Religion's Research Grant in 1999–2000 and 2007–08, and a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship for 1995–96 and 2007–08. She also received a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend in 1993.

Professional Career — Teaching

Since 1998, Dr. Shaw has been an associate professor of religious studies at the University of Richmond in Richmond, Virginia. She was an assistant professor from 1991–98. Before that, she was a research assistant at Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions from 1989–91, where she taught two seminars, entitled Buddhist Meditation and the History of Tantric Buddhism. Her teaching

embodied the Harvard University ideal of "the public intellectual." She was guided by Harvard's emphasis on the need for the scholar and professor to participate in "broader cultural conversations beyond one's classroom and immediate academic peers" (Shaw, pers. comm., June 7, 2020). This broad understanding of education is at the heart of Shaw's understanding of her vocation as an educator. It has informed her teaching, writing, and public interviews, which promote a reinterpretation of Tantric studies through a feminist lens.

Award Winning and Ground-breaking Book — Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism

Dr. Shaw is primarily known for her scholarship on goddesses, goddess practice, and the existence and contributions of women in Tantric and Tibetan Buddhism. She has made vital and historic additions about women's agency within Tantric practice through several books, numerous articles, interviews, symposia, Buddhist dance performances, and edited book entries. Most notably, her books *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* and *Buddhist Goddesses of India* are used worldwide as authoritative sources on these subjects.

Shaw's detailed research and analysis in *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* brings awareness and attention to the female side of women's experience in Tantric Buddhism. This focus counters the dominant, one-sided narratives that give preference to male experience and male advancement in teaching. Her career in academia has focused on correcting biased perceptions and improving recognition of women's contributions and active involvement in Buddhism either as lay practitioners or historical *siddhas*—Tantric adepts who successfully attain the goal of their meditation practice (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 535). Her work also focuses on a feminist reconsideration of mythical female figures such as *ḍākinīs*. She has explained these female figures' roles in order to ameliorate misinformation, confusion, and incomplete understanding within the practice of Tantric Buddhism's complex teachings.

Women's Share in Tantric Buddhism

Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism, published by Princeton University Press in 1994, won the James Henry Breasted Prize for Asian History from the American Historical Association in that same year. This prize, named in honor of James Henry Breasted (1865–1935), who founded the Oriental Institute at

the University of Chicago, is awarded for the best book in English on any field of history prior to the year 1000 CE. The book also received the Tricycle Prize for Excellence in Buddhist Scholarship and the 1995–96 Critic's Choice Most Acclaimed Academic Book designation. In this book, Shaw explains the development of Tantric Buddhism, the role and agency of women, and women's experience of Tantric practice. Shaw cites numerous sources from both Tibetan and Indian texts, as well as many Western scholars who have studied historical and contemporary Tantric knowledge and understanding at the highest levels in this form of Buddhist study, ritual, and practice. The book was approved and blessed by H. H. the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, at the time it was published. Shaw summarizes her book this way:

> This treatise challenges Western assumptions concerning medieval Tantric Buddhism. [I] draw on interviews and archival research to demonstrate that Tantric beliefs promoted co-operative relationships between men and women and relied upon women as a source of spiritual insight. (Shaw 1994, 12)

Passionate Enlightenment is available in Korean, French, German, Italian, Russian, Swedish, and Asian editions. At this writing, a Polish edition is in progress. Her book is widely read because her expert scholarship has made a clear and elegant case for explaining the teachings of Tantric Buddhism. Her feminist methodology pays particular attention to women's active roles as seekers, leaders, and adept practitioners. Her knowledge of the practice explains the subtleties of Tantrism developed by the Nyingma school–a branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism practiced primarily in Tibet, but also in Nepal, Bhutan, and specific areas of India. Her research clarifies many misunderstandings that the West has about the role of a female consort in this practice. She dignifies the partnership between a woman and another who is on the path to learning and enlightenment. She suggests this relationship can lead to a profound, spiritual, intimate union. This union can be sexual. However, more importantly, it is about deep, sacred intimacy. She adeptly illuminates that this intimate union is mutually fulfilling for the individuals who have jointly agreed to engage this practice together. In *Passionate Enlightenment,* Shaw assists her readers in understanding this high-level, sacred, and complex practice as a reciprocal exchange that does not necessarily insist on the sexual. She goes on to shed light on a mutual relationship between two people, where each partner achieves understanding, tenderness, affection, gentleness, warmth, friendship, and special knowledge about the other. This partnership, in turn, can bring new knowledge and understanding about oneself. Shaw emphasizes, in ways that others have not, that tantric practice is anathema to desire, lust, or only sexual pleasure.

Women's Presence is Everywhere in Tantric Tibetan Buddhism

Passionate Enlightenment explores the active role women have had throughout history in a context where women have been theoretically diminished, hidden, or erased from historical and contemporary records. She uses feminist hermeneutical strategies such as suspicion, retrieval, and remembrance. Shaw explains her feminist philosophy this way:

> It is crucial to restore to historical accounts the eminent women whose importance can be measured in terms of conventional historiographic models, but it is also necessary to redefine historical importance so that women's lives and concerns are included. Eliciting a gynocentric [her-story/her-storical] design often requires the application of creative hermeneutical strategies, such as strategies for reading texts to extract information about women. (Shaw 1994, 12–13)

These feminist concerns and methodologies were foreshadowed in her early writing in *Circle of Bliss*. In the first article, co-authored with Mayumi Kamata, about Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, and other enlightened beings, such as *dakas* and *ḍākinīs* (mkha' 'gro ma – མཁའ་འགྲོ་མ་), bodhisattvas, not generally female, remain in the world to help others, including women, achieve enlightenment. Buddhas, male or female, are the supreme enlightened beings. Male *dakas* (heroes) and female *ḍākinīs* (sky-dancers) are sacred protector spirits, advanced in their practice (Ozer and Lingpa 1999, 162). Images of these were crafted to be used as aids for practitioners to focus on when doing visualizing meditations or placed in temple settings or monasteries.

Image 1: Shadakshari Lokeshvara, China, Yuan Dynasty, c. late 13th or early 14th century, silver with parcel gilding; gilt copper alloy base, H:5–1/2 in. (13.9 cm) W: 4–5/8 in. (11.7 cm.) D: 3–1/8 in. (7.9 cm). (Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond. The E. Rhodes and Leon B. Carpenter Foundation, from the Berthe and John Ford Collection (91.532).)

Her second article, written in collaboration with John Huntington, is about Shri Palden Lhamo (dpal ldan lha mo – དཔལ་ལྡན་ལྷ་མོ་), considered the female leader of all Tibetan female spirits. Shri Palden Lhamo is a Dharma Protector, a goddess, a female with authority and responsibility to protect and bless the Dalai Lamas. Illustrated here, she is a symbol of Tibetan statehood, and her great importance is closely tied to the fortunes of the Tibetan people (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 498).

Image 2: Shri (Palden Lhamo), Central Tibet, c. 1750–1850, opaque watercolor and gold on cotton cloth, H: 28–1/2 in. (72.4 cm. W: 21–1/4 in (54 cm.). (Los Angeles County Museum of Art. From the Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associate Purchase (M. 83. 105.17).)

Shaw develops this concern for women figures and practitioners more fully in *Passionate Enlightenment*, where her research into Tantric Buddhism exposes many aspects of its patriarchal, gynophobic nature.

In an interview with Ellen Pearlman in *Tricycle*, Shaw clarifies her view of "the importance of women in the tradition of tantric teachings and practices." For her, "Tantric Buddhism is a nonmonastic, noncelibate strand of Indian, Himalayan, and Tibetan Buddhist practice that seeks to weave every aspect of daily life, intimacy, and passion into the path of liberation" (Pearlman 1994). In her book, Shaw argues against the dominant interpretation of Tantric practice, which de-emphasizes the role of women and sees them as marginalized and subordinated, if not downright degraded and exploited. Her desire to uncover the hidden role of women led her to embark on a two-year quest doing fieldwork in India and Nepal. What she found was extraordinary. She recovered forty previously unknown works by women from India's Pala period (eighth through twelfth centuries CE). The Pala dynasty ruled

primarily in what is now known as Bihar and Bengal in India. The Pala Court practiced Mahāyāna and Tantric Buddhism, which they eventually introduced to Tibet. With her important discovery, she has been able to reinterpret the history of Tantric Buddhism during its first four centuries. Shaw claims that the tantric theory of this period, heavily influenced by the Pala Empire, promoted an "ideal of cooperative, mutually liberating relationships between women and men while encouraging a sense of reliance on women as a source of spiritual insight and power" (Pearlman 1994).

Feminist critiques address male dominance on a global scale. Feminist theory suggests that this global dominance has shut down women's ability to be seen and heard as a vital part of religious history. In *Passionate Enlightenment,* Shaw retrieves and writes this history anew with an energized force not seen previously in Buddhist Tantric studies. Women from around the globe, whether they are scholars, religious adherents, or political advocates, are increasingly aware of how gender biases have side-lined them, causing economic poverty and a lack of educational opportunities. They are beginning to see how these biases relegate them to the home and hide them away as caretakers of children and others. Critiques of these biases inform Shaw's work. Greatly influenced by the pioneering feminist work of Gerda Lerner and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, she pursued this work. Shaw brings this feminist awareness into focus. She works to expose and redefine the androcentrism that exists throughout Tantric and other forms of Buddhism, even as she brings the latent feminine principle into focus (Shaw 1994, 12–14).

In one interview, she makes a poignant observation about perceptions and presences of women in our societies. "In 1999, I watched a procession of 800 women carrying different kinds of food to all the shrines in Patan. It was an amazing procession and a great tribute to all the women of their society," Shaw said. "I look at female images in our own culture and ask whether there are images of female sacredness. The fund of positive female images is quite limited. I have observed that there is an affirmation when one is exposed to positive, divine images of females. It makes you think about gender in a different way" (University of Richmond 2010).

Sexuality in Tantric Buddhism

Shaw observes that in a Western, Judeo-Christian context, the sexual act is viewed dualistically. On the one hand, it is necessary for procreation and encouraged by religious leaders. On the other hand, sexual desires and actions are taboo and viewed as a sign of human sinfulness. The idea of ritual intimacy, as addressed in

Tantric Buddhist practices, totally escapes its purview. Shaw refutes dualistic notations of sexuality in her critique and reconsideration of this Western religious worldview. Her research identifies a value-laden sexuality in Tantric Buddhism, whose purpose is a quest for "right" relationship between consenting partners. This "right" relationship glorifies each partner's spirit through an intimate exchange that creates self-growth as they join together. This joining together is a mutual sharing of each person's soul, passion, heart, emotion, consciousness, will, essence, core, and being. In several interviews with various interlocutors, she states that this is a very different view than the one assumed in the research initiated by the Victorian British during their invasion of Tibet (December 1903–September 1904) and colonial occupation of India (1858–1947). Her rethinking of their misguided understanding is expressed by a response to one interview in 1999, in *Common Boundary*:

> "I was compelled to discover what insights lay behind these images. I would look at the goddesses and their eyes would grip me and hold me," Shaw said. "'Look for us,' they would command. 'Look for us and you will find us.'" Shaw's conclusion based on what she found about those goddesses is that women are, and have always been, the queens rather than the pawns in Tantric Buddhism. (Griffin 1999, 15)

[Shaw] goes on to say, "Both Wicca and Tantric Buddhism teach that the spirit and matter are intertwined. The divine can be manifest through the body, heart and mind. You don't have to escape the world to discover spirituality. You don't have to repress emotions, physical desires, and instincts. If you follow them to their source, their root, you will find spiritual knowledge and power" (Griffin 1999, 16).

Across her works, she concludes that the sexual union sought in Tantric Buddhist practice has nothing to do with pure sexual attraction. It is, rather, a mutual quest for a deepening of spiritual connection with each other which, according to Tantric belief, cannot be achieved without this type of union with the other.

In *Passionate Enlightenment,* Shaw explains that the Tantras are sacred texts and that their purpose is for a mutual advancement toward enlightenment. Partners are embarking on a journey that is without ego-gratification of either one. Their reasons for the practice, then, must be agreed upon with absolute clarity. Partners must share a precise idea of what those reasons are and that this is a sacred practice. Tantra practice of this kind is always initiated by the women–a principle that prevents the manipulative misuse that has occurred in the West. She continues to elucidate the subtleness that the texts describe here and that there is always an "elaborate decorum" to be followed by the male to be sure that he is worthy of her as a partner in this practice. Indeed, he pays her "homage" in various

ways according to the Yogini Tantras, which the Tibetans call the "Mother Tantra." This homage can be in the form of prostrations, circumambulations–walking around her to the left–following the "etiquette behavior of the left," serving her meals with his left hand, and remaining on her left side. These rituals prove that he is not self-serving but civilized and refined to make him worthy of being her spiritual companion. He is there to serve her. Shaw's reconstructive expertise in the field of Tantric Buddhism and specialty in its Himalayan forms is not disputed. Through her work in *Passionate Enlightenment*, she has been instrumental in bringing a more greatly nuanced and corrected interpretation to the practice of Tantric Buddhism (Pearlman 1994).

Her Research — Archival, Art Historical, and Ethnographic

Dr. Shaw has done extensive field research in her discipline. She has traveled and investigated Tantric Buddhism in Nepal, India, and Japan. She has done comprehensive research–textual, art historical, and ethnographic–in various locations in India studying texts on women in Tantric Buddhism, such as Calcutta, Dharamsala, Ladakh, Dehra Dun, and Bodh Gaya–all significant sites known for rich Buddhist history, places that storehouse that history, or both.

Her textual research concentrated on and included searches for texts by women, biographical material on women, and evidence of women's practices. Toward this end, she visited many Asian libraries and manuscript archives and even found crucial texts in collections held by religious groups and individual practitioners. She spent numerous hours translating and interpreting the texts. This work included consultation with scholars and masters with diverse areas of expertise, such as Sanskrit philology, Tibetan language, and Vajrayana practice and imagery (Shaw, pers. comm., June 7, 2020).

Works of art constituted another area of Shaw's inquiry. Her exploration encompassed museums, repositories of archaeological photographs, temples, private collections, and the homes and workshops of artists currently producing Vajrayana art. The ethnographic dimension of her research focused on observing rituals, documenting activities at sacred sites, and conducting interviews of masters, scholars, and practitioners (Shaw, pers. comm., June 7, 2020).

She traveled to Japan in 1988 to interview the shingon (Japanese Buddhist Tantric) priest Shinichi Tsuda on his textual research on Indian Tantra. From 1988–89 and in 1991, she went to Calcutta, Dharamsala, Ladakh, Dehra Dun, and Bodh Gaya, India, as mentioned above, to conduct interviews and research in those locations on women and Tantric Buddhism. In 1992 and 1993, she went to Nepal to

research the dance tradition of the Vajracharya Buddhist priests of the Kathmandu Valley (Shaw, pers. comm., January 7, 2020).

In 1995, she did ethnographic and archival research into Tibetan and Newar living goddess traditions, sites, and manuscript collections in Nepal. She traveled to India and Nepal in 1997 and 1999–2000 to examine Buddhist goddesses in local museums, to translate Sanskrit texts about these goddesses, to photograph the annual Kali Puja and Durga Puja–Hindu goddess festivals in Calcutta–and finally to do field research on goddess traditions in Kathmandu, Nepal. This research produced her book, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. From September to October 2007, she ventured to Kathmandu, Nepal once again. However, this time she went to gather information on the annual Kumari festival and the Purana Guhyeshvari shrine. She also conducted follow-up interviews of female trance mediums that are part of her book manuscript for her forthcoming volume, entitled *Buddhist Goddesses of Tibet and Nepal* (Shaw, pers. comm., June 7, 2020).

Skillful Means: Interviews and More

Shaw was featured online on the website *The Yogini Project*. This website is no longer active. However, during its tenure, it was a well-visited, empowering online resource. It was a vehicle for women practitioners of Buddhism, scholars, translators, filmmakers, bloggers, and others, well-known and respected in their respective fields, to come together as a community. Participants, including Shaw, were united in the mission to bring knowledge of the feminine in Vajrayana Buddhism and its practice to a broader audience.

Vajrayana Buddhism uses oral tradition to pass teachings from one disciple to the next. To this end, Shaw makes time for in-person, oral interviews that pass on her knowledge about what promotes a healthy view of sexuality for women through her explanation of Tantric Buddhism and what she calls the "feminine divine" (Shaw 2015, 32). Her interviews and other writings reflect and connect the sacred found in the feminine to the feminist work of her colleagues, such as Acharya Judith Simmer-Brown, who calls this concept in Buddhism the "feminine principle" (Simmer-Brown 2003, 40) and Neela Bhattacharya Saxena, who calls the feminine divine "gynocentric 'pregnant nothingness'" (Saxena 2015, 4–18). Each woman has used her own "skillful means" to recognize and retrieve the voices of women in religious venues in India and the Himalayan region.

Shaw's theological exploration encourages feminists to find the connection to the feminine divine. Shaw pushes her readers to remember and reconnect the mind and body and to embrace what she calls our embodied divinity, our body/mind principle, and our gynocentric pregnant nothingness. Shaw does this

through her involvement with dance, which began through her research in Kathmandu. In her review, entitled "Weaving and Dancing Embodied Theology," of a new book by Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow, Shaw explains how she sees dance as a theological retrieval of the body:

> My embodied theology centers on dancing … to invigorate my body after doctoral work [which] led me to a Tantric Buddhist dance practice in Kathmandu. The somatic exploration revealed patriarchal shaming and violations held as bodily memories and hidden barriers to well-being that dancing could break through. Rather than viewing my body as a receptive medium of experience or an instrument to do my bidding, I engage … my body's spontaneous dancing, as a creative stream of guidance, wisdom, and healing. The dance at the heart of my embodied theology requires no formal training. To dance simply involves a shift from routine functional motions to moving deliberatively, allowing visceral impulses to generate movements … Attuning to our moving body can draw our awareness and senses to a single focus. (Shaw 2017)

It is through dance, as skillful means, that Shaw reintegrates the mind/body dualism, not only in Christianity but also in Buddhism. Shaw uses weaving as an analogy in this article to suggest that the energies represented by the divine female principle and pregnant nothingness intertwine through dance to create a theological cloth woven into a binding tapestry of religious practices and beliefs.

Another way that Shaw made a skillful contribution was at the recent "scholar salon" on May 27, 2020, hosted by the Association for the Study of Women and Mythology (ASWM). Her presentation was entitled, "Wild Felines and Divine Females as Guardians of Sacred Place." Here Shaw's research offers a new and different vision of wild felines and revered female figures. Her explorations of the fierce feline aspect of the feminine continues her work on the "feminine divine" in her early article on Shri (ཤྲཱི་) Palden Lhamo (dpal ldan lha mo – དཔལ་ལྡན་ལྷ་མོ་), the "Glorious Goddess" and Protectress of Tibet. In the image she described in this earlier article, the goddess is dressed with a tiger-skin skirt, surrounded by other fierce figures that are her attendants, one of which is lion-headed. There she identified that these fierce animal symbols represent the protective instinct of a mother who will block any harm that may come to her child, whether animal or human (Huntington and Bangdel 2003, 498). In the 2020 salon, she talks about the "nuances of power evoked by the leonine imagery." She looks at the "shared character of the leonine females as guardians of sacred place (caves, settlements, cities, empires, nations)." She examines the roles of the female lions in order to understand the reverence for, and trust vested in, a power that can be thought as common to wild felines, divine females, and women. She goes on to identify

ecofeminism as a response to the violent rise of patriarchal conquest and an effort to reclaim female, leonine ferocity in order to protect our sacred home, mother earth (AWSM 2020).

Beyond Passionate Enlightenment: Buddhist Goddesses of India, Tibet and Nepal

Shaw extended her research into women's presence in Tantric Buddhism by documenting Buddhist goddesses in India. This research, supported by a Fulbright scholarship, resulted in her book, *Buddhist Goddesses of India,* published by Princeton University Press in 2006. It won the ForeWard Magazine Religion Book of the Year Award in 2006 and a Choice Outstanding Academic Title Award in 2007. Kent Davis reviewed her research saying, "While some have criticized Shaw as a 'feminist,' my perception is that she is a realist, conducting research where previous scholars have missed crucial connections, or chosen not to make them" (Davis 2010, 4). In *Buddhist Goddesses of India,* Shaw shows herself to be a feminist who is also a realist. Shaw rethinks and highlights the actual roles of women and the feminine in Tantric Buddhism. She courageously champions a holistic, realistic way of seeing that identifies a need for new definitions in sacred sexuality that promote equality and mutuality. Her definitions enrich and broaden the West's often androcentric distortions of sexuality. Her search for women's divine presence within Buddhism and, in particular, Mahāyāna Buddhism is nuanced in this volume. Her fieldwork on this volume began with research in India because it is the source for Buddhism and then expanded to include Tibet, Nepal and the Himalayan region, other bastions of Tantric Buddhism. She expands the roles, incidences, existence, and manifestations of women throughout the Buddhist pantheon. She presents a comprehensive survey of Buddhist goddesses in this volume, which she claims no one has ever done. She explains concepts and their functions as they relate to goddesses in the Buddhist pantheon, such as *dhāraṇi*—sounds that "carry" the essence of the deity–and *vidyā*—"to know." Often, these essences carry a salvific function but are elusive and mystically able to change form. Shaw helps us to see that these deities act in many manifestations and do not live on the margins of Buddhist practice but are fully integrated.

Shaw combed libraries, museums, and monasteries in India for previously unknown or ignored primary sources. She also critically evaluated available secondary sources in light of her current research. With so much new information coming to light now, she has been able to correct misidentifications. Shaw deftly amends and furthers our knowledge about how Buddhism fits within the goddess movement today. She uses the term "goddess" boldly and authoritatively because,

based on her research, women's divine presence exists of its own accord, no longer tethered for its meaning to a dominant male gender role. In *Buddhist Goddesses of India,* Shaw states that "exploring the relationships between human and divine females will facilitate increasingly nuanced analyses of the varying status, roles, participation and contributions of Buddhist women in different historical venues" (Shaw 2015, 451).

Conclusion

> The teachers would look at the sky for unusual cloud formations or a rainbow or something out of the ordinary. When they received that confirmation, they would work with me while continuing to watch for signs. They felt that it was significant that I was a woman. These teachings have been guarded by female spirits through the centuries, and the teachers felt it was natural that the *ḍākinīs* would choose to reveal the teachings to a woman at this time. So, they felt that I had been sent or chosen by the ḍākinīs to translate these teachings in the West. They believed that these teachings could not be revealed without the cooperation and blessings of the *ḍākinīs*. That is not to say that there is anything special about the transmitter, the method that was chosen to transmit them. What is special is the transmission. (Pearlman 1994)

Dr. Shaw's academic career has been one of transmission. Through her dedicated commitment to her subject, women in Tantric Buddhism, she has transmitted a critical reassessment and reconstruction of the feminine principle that not only lifts the role, work, and knowledge of women into a broader audience but builds an important foundation for women within Tantric theory and practice in Tibet and the rest of the world. By doing so, she has addressed misconceptions around Tantric sexual practices that have relegated women to a servile role in this ritual system, lifted up the positive mutuality involved in these practices, and reconceived women as honorable and dignified in their equal access to enlightenment. Shaw's enormous body of work, including over one hundred book chapters, articles, conference papers, symposia, lectures, essays, dance presentations, and interviews, has transmitted transformative information about the practices and mystical rituals of Tantric Buddhism from the monasteries, lamas, and gurus of India, Tibet, and Nepal, to Western culture to create a more informed global understanding about where women belong within religious discourse.

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Notes

1. Many of Shaw's teachers listed here are still practicing, doing ministry as their lineages continue. Here is a listing of their websites in order: 1. His Eminence Kensur Kyabje Lati Rinpoche (www.lionsroar.com/his-eminence-kensur-kyabje-lati-rinpoche-spiritual-advisor-to-the-dalai-lama-1922-2010/); 2. Venerable Tara Tulku Rinpoche (www.shambhala.com/snowlion_articles/ven-tara-tulku-rinpoche-gives-guhyasamaja-in-toronto); 3. Ayang Rinpoche (ayangrinpoche.org/about-ayang-rinpoche); 4. Khenchen Konchog Gyaltsen Rinpoche (drikungdharmasurya.org/khenchen-konchog-gyaltsen-rinpoche); 5. Shamar Rinpoche, the 14th Shamarpa or 'Red Hat Karmapa (www.diamondway-buddhism.org/buddhist-teachers/shamar-rinpoche); 6. "His Eminence Nenang Pawo Rinpoche (kagyu.org/eminence-nenang-pawo-rinpoche); 7. the Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche (gampoabbey.org/our-abbot-the-venerable-khenchen-thrangu-rinpoche); 8. Thrangu Rinpoche (thrangumonastery.org/teachers/v-v-thrangu-rinpoche); 9. His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche (www.tsechen.org/index.php/english/about-sakya/sakya-masters/44-his-eminence-luding-khenchen-rinpoche); 10. His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trichen (hhsakyatrizin.net/sakya-trichen); 11. H. E. Jetsun Chimey Luding (www.sakyangongaling.it/h-e-jetsun-chimey-luding); 12. His Eminence Luding Khenchen Rinpoche (www.tsechen.org/index.php/english/about-sakya/sakya-masters/44-his-eminence-luding-khenchen-rinpoche); 13. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (shechen.org/spiritual-development/teachers/dilgo-khyentse-rinpoche); 14. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (www.shambhala.com/authors/g-n/dilgo-khyentse-rinpoche.html); 15. Minling Trichen Rinpoche (www.nyingma.com/artman/publish/mindrolling_trichen_rinpoche_.shtml); 16. Tulku Thondup Rinpoche (www.tulkuthondup.com/about-tulku-thondup-rinpoche); 17. Lama Tsultrim Allione (www.taramandala.org/introduction/lama-tsultrim-allione/bio/).

CHAPTER 4

Beatriz Melano

First Female Protestant Doctor of Theology in Latin America

MARTHA GONZÁLEZ PÉREZ[1]

Beatriz Elena Melano Laguardia was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on October 20, 1931. Her father was Giuseppe Melano, who worked in the area of publicity for a tobacco company; her mother, Maria Luisa Laguardia, was from Uruguay and was one of the first women dentists in Buenos Aires. Susana Campertoni mentions that, as a young girl, Melano helped her mother in tasks at the Baptist Church (Campertoni 2012, 142). As a member of the Methodist Church, while she was studying at Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, she met Richard Couch, a Presbyterian minister, and they were married in 1957 (Melano 1961, 10). They had two daughters and a son: Ana Gabriela (deceased), Johanna Ruth, and Marcos Jose. In February 1959, they were sent by the United Presbyterian Church, US, to teach at the Union Seminary in Buenos Aires (Melano 1961, 10).

Melano participated in the Student Christian Movement and had Margaret Flory (1914–2009), an internationally known mentor for students in religion, as her friend and supporter during her university studies. In 1959, during the Carnahan Lectures, she met the French Reformed theologian Suzanne de Dietrich (1891–1981), whom she admired for her theological clarity. There were two important people in her academic life: Yvonne van Berchem (1893–1970) and her husband,

Emanuel Galland, a minister in the Reformed Church, who jointly created the Emmanuel Center in Colonia Valdense, Uruguay. Likewise, in Bolivia and Montevideo, Uruguay, she was invited by Aymara women to offer lectures along with courses in education and theology. In 1963, she participated in the Encounter of North American Presbyterian and Latin American Reformed Women, which took place in Mexico. In the 1960s, she gathered Catholic and Protestant women to work together on consciousness-raising to achieve the recognition of women in all spheres of life (Campertoni 2012, 141–6).

Image 1: Beatriz Melano (used by permission).

Melano received her teaching degree from the National Normal School in Lomas Zamora, Uruguay, in 1950 and received a degree in modern languages from Tift College in Georgia in 1955. She also received degrees in Christian education and theology from Princeton Theological Seminary (1957) and, in 1970, graduated with a degree in modern literature from the University of Buenos Aires, Department of Philosophy and Literature with the thesis: "The Problematic of Salvation in O'Neill" with Jorge Luis Borges as her adviser (Melano 1970). While at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, she took advanced courses in psychology and religion (1964) and later carried out her clinical pastoral practice at Presbyterian Hospital while at

Union Seminary in New York (1964), where she also studied Christianity and Drama (1964). She completed her doctoral studies in religious studies under Paul Ricoeur in Strasbourg, France (1975). She wrote her thesis on "Hermeneutical Method: The Theory of Interpretation According to Paul Ricoeur" with Roger Mehl (1902–97) as her adviser (Melano n.d.). She was a professor at the Higher Evangelical Institute of Theological Studies (ISEDET) in Buenos Aires and, while there, founded and directed the Department of Christian Education. Finally, she was a member of the IV Commission of the World Council of Churches.

Melano belonged to a generation of Christian scholars and activists in Buenos Aires and beyond such as Julia Esquivel (1930–2019), Raúl Macín (1930–2006), Hiber Conteris (1933–), Rubem Alves (1933–2014), Julio de Santa Ana (1934–), and Justo L. González (1937–). Others within the cultural sphere were people such as María Elena Walsh (1930–2011), Elizabeth Azcona Cranwell (1933–2004), and Alejandra Pizarnik (1936–72). Melano published two books: *La mujer y la Iglesia* (Women and the Church, 1973) and *Hermenéutica metódica: teoría de la interpretación según Paul Ricoeur* (Hermeneutical Method: The Theory of Interpretation According to Paul Ricoeur, 1983), plus several chapters in anthologies. She translated James D. Smart's book *The Teaching Ministry of the Church* into Spanish (*El ministerio docente de la iglesia,* 1963) and collaborated with Ricoeur on an anthology, *Del existencialismo a la filosofía del lenguaje* (From Existentialism to a Philosophy of Language, 1983).

As of 1959, she began to write about theology, biblical interpretation, Christian education, pastoral psychology, evangelization, ecumenism, the mission of the Church, systematic theology, liberation theology, and ethics. She gave conferences on liberation theology, feminist theology, Black theology, Christian education, religious studies, and hermeneutics. She was a member of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights of Argentina whose president was Methodist minister José Míguez Bonino (Asamblea Permanente 1995).

In 1994, Janet W. May, a professor at the Latin American Biblical Seminary in Costa Rica, edited the fourteenth volume of the theological journal *Vida y Pensamiento* (Life and Thought). In the introduction to the volume, she mentions that this edition was dedicated to the First Encounter-Workshop of Female Professors of Theology, which paid homage to Melano. She states:

> In this number we are including some papers from the First Encounter-Workshop of Female Professors of Theology. In this encounter, a small representative group of women met, who teach at theological institutions throughout Latin America. We wanted to get to know one another, share about our tasks, ideas and challenges. We also wanted to honor Beatriz Melano whose entry into theological education established a landmark and

> a challenge to all women and male theologians, many years ago, and was a stimulus that has produced fruit: the incorporation of other Latin American women into the field of education. (May 1994, 3)

In another posthumous homage, Melano was considered to truly be "an amazon of the universe of Protestant theology in the second half of the 20th century" (García Bachmann 2009, 49). Her voice has been rescued and analyzed by new generations of female and male theologians (Azcuy 2012, 67). She approached the new forms of theology from the hermeneutical proposals of liberation theology and the theological offerings of authors such as José Míguez Bonino, Pablo Richard, Mortimer Arias, Emilio Castro, Rubem Alves, Hugo Assmann, Julio de Santa Ana, and José Severino Croatto, many of whom were professors at ISEDET. For her hermeneutics, she condensed the works of the French Reformed philosopher Paul Ricoeur. She read Eric Erikson, Miguel de Unamuno, Antonio Machado, and Sigmund Freud widely.

She recognized the value of other female authors whom she admired, such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the first woman to defend her right to study, and "her right to think and write theology," as Melano (1985, 51) states. Her affirmation of Sor Juana as the "first theologian in America" became an important reference point. Lucy Stone and Mary Wollstonecraft in the 19th century also raised their voices in the struggle for human rights and the defense of women's rights (Melano 1973, 78–9). She also took on the ideas of anthropologist Margaret Mead (Melano 1973, 27). Melano was also influenced by Rosemary Radford Ruether's critique of Plato's soul-body dualism (Melano 1973, 59). She claimed Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's re-interpretation of patriarchal Christian traditions, since "patriarchalism meant that women were gradually eliminated from leadership and subordinated to traditional feminine roles" (Melano 1979, 127). For Melano, the Bible transcends patriarchy, and, with Letty Russell, she learned "that without a change in language, the process of changing structures is slow." That is why Melano affirms that it is "necessary to change the language of the oppressor for a new language and new images" (Melano 1979, 119).

Rubem Alves–the initiator of liberation theology in the Protestant sphere–and Melano were invited to attend the Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians in 1976 (Tanzania). He was invited to speak about the "Presence of the Church," and she was given the theme of "Outline for a Theological Approximation and a Perspective of the Church." However, Alves could not attend, so Melano took on both themes and presented a single essay entitled: "Liberation Theology and the Mission of the Church in Latin America" (Melano 1985, 21). Other relevant articles written by her were "Feminist Hermeneutics. The Role of Women and its

Implications" (Melano 1994, 15–33) and "Liberation: A Biblical Perspective (I Samuel 1:2–2:11)" (Melano 1997, 227–36).

From her standpoint as a professor, she influenced Dr. Mary Hunt, who said that she learned a lot from Melano about the relationship between women and religion in Latin America. Hunt was a visiting professor at ISEDET between 1980 and 1981 (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 18, 2017). Likewise, she was an influence on the theological thought of students such as Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952–2009) (Hunt 2010, 19). There is a letter, dated August 18, 1995, in which Althaus-Reid sends a résumé of her thesis, along with a tape, to Melano. Marcela Bosch (1955)[2] and Mercedes García Bachmann (1963) are two other students, from different faith traditions, whose work shows evidence of Melano's influence on their theological offerings (García Bachmann 2009, 493–8). Althaus-Reid recognized that Melano coined the term "pertinent theology," which was a precursor of liberation theology (Althaus-Reid 2005, 41). Professor Pablo R. Andiñach says that she retired from ISEDET in 1998, and he considered her a pioneer of feminism, influenced by Doröthee Solle (1929–2003) and the educator Sara Eccleston (1840–1916) (Pablo R. Andiñach, pers. comm., April 7, 2016).

Historical Setting

In the 1960s, Protestants and Catholics, from each of their theological stances, were challenged to become involved in the social movements of the different Latin American countries. Melano affirms that, in that period of history, particularly in Argentina, they were living under the weight of the "Perón tyranny" (Melano 1961, 10). In many countries in the region, military dictatorships used macro-structural violence emanating from public institutions. Military and paramilitary groups used violence to repress anyone who thought or acted contrary to the dictatorial system supported by the United States (Gaudichaud 2005, 16–17). Many forced disappearances, tortures, jailings and extra-judicial executions, among other extreme situations, took place.

These terrible experiences were perhaps what motivated the young student, Melano, to meet with her fellow students to reflect on the actions that, from their Protestant Christian vision, they could carry out in favor of the lives of people who had suffered violence. The historic moment that developing countries in Latin America were experiencing demanded that the churches leave aside their passivity. Melano's writings reflect the uneasy feeling that the non-Catholic Christian churches had about the task of generating concrete actions in favor of life as a way of showing solidarity with the oppressed and the Gospel. Melano participated in the Center for the Study of Social Law (CELS) in Buenos Aires, along with an

ecumenical group of pastors, professors, and other people, including Rabbi Marshall Meyer (1930–1993). This group met regularly to support human rights work in the early 1980s (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 18, 2017).

The mission of Protestantism in Argentina in the 1960s was to act in such a way as to avoid the political, social, economic, and ecclesial damage derived from the thrust of US imperialism. One of the latter's strategies to obtain the submission of the countries in the Southern Hemisphere was to implement state terror through dissuading any social movements or civil, labor, or student organizations; there is evidence in the so-called "Horror Archives" (Gaudichaud 2005, 21–25).

As early as 1916, some Protestant churches organized activities to respond to the political, social, economic, and religious situation in Latin America. The circumstances led to the creation of various conferences that occurred on three different occasions. The I Latin American Evangelical Conference (I CELA) entitled "Evangelical Christianity in Latin America" (I Conferencia Evangélica 1949) took place July 18–30, 1949 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Seventeen countries participated. The main themes were "The Latin American Reality and the Presence of the Protestant Churches" and "The Message and Mission of Protestant Christianity for Latin America." Only four women came to this meeting. This conference tepidly denounced economic policy. One of the matters dealt with was "the female element."

The II CELA took place July 20–August 6, 1961, in Lima, Peru, with the theme of "Christ, the Hope for Latin America." The theme was based on the historical observation of social injustice, economic imperialism, and the complex issues of its native populations (II Conferencia Evangélica 1961). Its themes were "Our Message" and "Our Unfinished Task." Two hundred people participated, among them 33 women, from most of the Latin American countries. Melano and her husband were present at this conference. Melano reflected on the fact that "the Church in Latin America must faithfully discover its responsibility in the rapid and revolutionary social change … [R]ather than remaining at an elite distance from the world's ferment, it could discover, over the course of time, the existence of a prophetic community for God's task in the world" (Melano 1961, 21). Melano's participation in the Christian Student Movement (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 20, 2017) and her relationships with members of other Christian traditions permitted her to have a wider vision of the Church's mission in Latin America.[3]

The III CELA took place from July 13–19, 1969, in Buenos Aires. The theme was "Debtors to the World" (III Conferencia Evangélica 1969). This conference touched on this relevant theme, among others, because it recognized that Protestant churches had a debt toward all social groups and now included Latin American women. In the paper presented by Olga B. de Ramírez, "Our Debt as Protestants to

Latin American Women," it was recognized that traditional religious conditions favored the submission of women. Popular religiosity placed them in a situation of dependency and marginality. These situations are contrary to God's will (III CELA 1969, 11–36). Furthermore, they warned the churches that they should be a prophetic voice and physical presence to confront the inhumane actions that were part of institutional violence on the American continent.

In 1967, two years before the III CELA, the Rev. Emilio Castro, as coordinator of *Unidad Evangélica Latinoamericana* (UNELAM), called for a consultation. He was motivated by the preoccupation with women's low participation in the Latin American ecumenical movement and the demand that Protestant and Catholic churches respond creatively to rapid social changes. This consultation, entitled "The Role of Women in the Church and in Society" was unique. It was the first time that women gathered from almost all Latin American countries. Melano was invited, and she presented a lecture titled "Man and Woman in God's Mission." For her, the Christian task is to become human, "become flesh of the other and this is pointing out something more than a genital relationship" (Melano 1968, 77). Melano explains that to "become flesh" has to do with a greater critical consciousness, greater knowledge and greater responsibility with oneself and with the cosmos. As to this, she states:

> [W]e live in a time of abundance and of great hunger, of demographic explosion and the power to control births. The danger lies in that man, capable of annihilating germs and ending death causing diseases, lets millions living in infrahuman conditions, in ignorance and exploited, die from starvation. Modern man can produce synthetic food, housing, clothing, can transmit knowledge and news in massive ways, predict and compute facts. This is the epoch of discovering the individual and collective subconscious with all its defense mechanisms and possibilities to recreate; the epoch of the patience of God and the impatience of man; the epoch of great awakenings and of tremendous blindness. (Melano 1968, 79)

The challenge to all human beings, Christian or not, was tremendous, because they lived in an epoch that biblically hearkened to the desert and the Exodus. Melano reflected on how women and men had the mission of discovering themselves as people immersed in a culture. With this discovery, they should be able to free themselves from prejudices and customs that impeded them from becoming persons. She thus proposed that the task should be carried out jointly, by both men and women, through a profound dialogue. Both could carry out the responsibilities as co-inheritors of a new humanity that inhabits the earth that sustains them as part of the entire cosmos created by God.

Some Theological Proposals

The Foundations for Melano's Biblical Interpretation

Rosino Gibellini has gathered some theological proposals from the "Theology in the Americas" conference that took place in Detroit in 1975, in which Melano participated, and stated:

> [I]n Latin America, we underline the importance of the starting point, of the praxis and use of social sciences to analyze our historical-political situation. In this sense, I am totally in agreement with my male colleagues, but with a quantitative difference: I underline the need of pointing out the importance of the different cultural forms which express oppression, as well as the ideology which divides us not only as a class, but also as a race and sex. Racism and sexism are oppressive ideologies that need to be dealt with in a specific way in the sphere of liberation theology. (Gibellini 1998, 629)

Since 1975, Melano carried out theological analysis in the two categories of race and sex. She states: "Today all of these groups begin to create theology. We have a very interesting new one in Native American theology, and in North American and South African Black theology, as well as feminist theology in Europe and in the United States, incipient in Latin America" (Melano 1979, 134). As to sex, she says, "… as if humanity had been created for sex and not sex for humanity" (Melano 1973, 69). That is why racism and sexism, from a theological perspective, must be the starting point for all historical-political and theological analysis. The analysis of the category of sex is important because it influences how people are socially construed. This has repercussions in the ministries, which have been relegated to women within churches in ways that reflect prevailing prejudices over biblical truth.

In this sense, she affirms that "our interpretation must try to be conscious of the limitations imposed by the structures of the society in which we live, that is, the thought and life patterns that condition our very thoughts, our very imagination and our actions" (Melano 1979, 116). From that standpoint, she began her theological task by analyzing biblical language. She exposed the damage that dualism has created through the use of words because these words in themselves exclude not only women but all groups that are not within the dominant hegemony. Thus, the life experience of women and other groups contains different faith perspectives from which they interpret biblical language, and they become the theological subject and place of a new hermeneutic, a new theology, and a new liberating paradigm.

Reflection, action, and the social sciences were, for her, the basis of a new proposal for biblical interpretation. Her theology attempted to go beyond the traditional interpretation shared by Protestant missionaries who arrived in the latter half of the 19th century with conservative beliefs and religious practices. In fact, the ideology of the missionaries could not be cataloged as "theological thought" as such, but rather as forms of Protestant thought whose sources were the evangelization manuals with a fundamentalist or traditional emphasis (Alves 1973, 88–96).

The Prejudices Between Men and Women are the Expression of Sin

In 1967, in her lecture, "Man and Woman in God's Mission" (Melano 1968, 75–91), Melano explained that men and women constituted God's humanity even in Genesis. Both men and women were mandated to work in unity to become one flesh, not only in the genital sense but in discovering one with the other. For her, Marxists were the first to recognize woman as the "first slave, the first laborer, the first proletariat" (Melano 1968, 78) and that the situation went against the divine plan. As she speaks of Marxism, it becomes clear that the theological methodology she uses is not traditional. This is due to her affirmation that biblical interpretation must incorporate tools from the social sciences. With these tools, it is evident that God's Word is insisting that women and men should not create barriers that separate. Instead, they should be united in Christ and live under the aegis of the divine will. Their bonds are vital for the perpetuation of creation in accord with God's mission. Because of this, she states, "woman cannot nor must act separately from man as a self-sufficient entity prescinding from the other part of humanity, since in the very act of creation, God created one humanity: male and female … God gave the entire creation to the entirety of humanity … and mandated it to work in unity also" (Melano 1968, 75–7).

She emphasizes that men, as well as women, are unfaithful because they have not been able to discover a way to confront and overcome the struggle that has separated them for centuries with respect to sex and the social construct which has resulted from this. She warns that they must go together to get water from the well of life that God has given them.

When she talks about the political or historical implications, she emphasizes that dialogue is needed. It is necessary because our dialogue partners can only be humanized when we come to know how they think. Thus, together, they can contribute toward the creation of new roles, whose conformation and

construction will be the foundations of a new way of relating and the creation of a new humanity.

She insists that to free oneself of prejudices and enter into dialogue is a calling from God. "In the case of man, the generally subconscious prejudice in the presence of woman, in terms of collaboration or co-participation in the sphere of thought and action … means he cannot easily get rid of his ancestral subconscious and conscious baggage, which has dominated humanity during the twenty centuries in which woman was considered and used as an object … servant, instrument" (Melano 1968, 87).

Melano says that this separation of the sexes is an expression of sin within the church. The church continues to be held back by prejudices that, in other spheres, have been overcome. That is why she challenges the churches to revise their dogmas and not separate what God has united. She invites women, themselves, to not have prejudices against other women. She asks people to reflect on a ministry that is not just masculine but instead integrated and open to women and men. Together, men and women can reflect theologically on the significance of obedience and faithfulness to God, for the creation of a humanity dearly loved by God, its creator (Melano 1968, 86).

Christ Overcomes the Barriers that Separate Humanity

In her book *La mujer y la Iglesia* ("Woman and the Church"), published in 1973, she describes her participation in the Second Iberian Ecumenical Encounter of Women in Madrid in 1971. Protestant and Catholic women, traditional and liberal, came to this meeting from all over the Iberian Peninsula. The focus of her lectures was based on three aspects:

- some biblical and theological bases to achieve a perspective on the place and mission of women in the Church;
- the barriers that have impeded women's full participation in said mission;
- the challenge that the Gospel and the world face today, demanding a deeper comprehension of the role of women in the Church and its commitment to the furthering of God's purposes in our time (Melano 1973, 9).

Her interest in publishing her lectures in Latin America consisted in the fact that she hoped they would resonate for women all over the continent, as occurred with the Spanish and Portuguese women. The purpose was to create a consciousness of the necessity to restate the role of women in the contemporary Church (Melano 1973, 10). One of her theses is that the resurrection of Christ helps us discover that he destroys the walls that divide and separate human beings from God and one

another; walls mostly construed from prejudices, tradition, or custom, and which fundamentally are an expression of sin (Melano 1973, 13).

Melano affirms that, theologically, Jesus annulled all divisions. She recognizes that it was difficult for Jews to comprehend and accept that God also accepts gentiles (Acts 11:17). She suggests that the same difficulty exists in the majority of men and many women, who cannot accept that God created them equally, and that the priesthood is for all who believe. Sadly, overcoming prejudice against women has not yet been achieved (Melano 1973, 18).

In like manner, she invites Christians to review the myths, cultural prejudices, and customs that obscure the message of the Gospel. She also exhorts Christians, who as daughters and sons of God should reflect on what Paul said to the Romans: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God–what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). She challenges men and women to reflect on "What does it mean to be a new-man-in-relation-to-women from a theological perspective?" (Melano 1973, 29). The divide is seen as natural in some men as in some women. Hence, she asks the questions: "Can a human being be free or achieve complete freedom while their fellow human being remains a slave?" and "Can a woman and a man be free without taking the other into account?" (Melano 1973, 30). By not entering into a dialogue about this, one is negating God's purpose and the unity of all humankind. At the same time, God's redemption is not allowed. God desires the unity of humankind in its diversity for the fullness of life and the reign of life.

Furthermore, she reminds us that "a fundamental tenet of the Early Church was equality in Christ" (Gal. 3:28), whose main point is that male and female, free and slave are considered persons. Rank, class, and race are overcome. Through the Lord, all people are equal. She remits us to the biblical story to remind us that "women in the Early Church held four positions: prophetic, liturgical, teaching and charity" (Melano 1973, 37).

She points out that it is necessary to review the apostle Paul's suggestions, because "his theology goes beyond that of his tradition, it penetrates deeper than the customs of his society… he underlines once and again, the unity and equality of both in Christ" (Gal. 3:27–8; Ef. 2:11–22) (Melano 1973, 40–1). She points out that Paul did not diminish the roles that women had. On the contrary, he insisted that they must not "… become slaves of human masters" (I Cor. 7:23) and "each one, male or female, [should] respond to the Lord faithfully, according to the gifts and the vocation to which he was called" (Melano 1973, 43).

Specifically, she speaks about women and myth "as a traditional story referring to events that occurred in the beginnings of time; a story through which the human being tries to understand itself within its own world" (Melano 1973, 50). These myths have to do with a woman's sexuality and body, considering her tainted,

impure, untouchable, dangerous, tempting, and inferior. Melano says, "these myths play a role in the subconscious of the human race. This is proven by the irrational reactions of men and women when they question certain male and female roles within the Church and society" (Melano 1973, 56–7). She speaks of at least seven consequences of these myths in women's lives and the limitations that are generated that impede them from developing their full potential, with women's activities reduced to those of certain primitive societies–children, the kitchen, the church–as their only possible destiny:

- The practice among Christians of a so-called double standard, with a more benign judgment on "Don Juan"-type men, whereas women are severely judged.
- The concept of the intellectual inferiority of women, and legal and juridical discrimination.
- Economic inequality in the labor force, besides the "invisible work" carried out in the home and without any remuneration.
- The persistence of the buying and selling of women as a "sexual object."
- Single women are belittled, branded pejoratively as "spinsters," stigmatized as not fully realized, incomplete and less valuable beings.
- The activities assigned to women within the parishes and other ecclesiastical institutions are of a secondary nature. Women continue to serve men, therefore, they perform fixed roles that presuppose that God's daughters have no other interests or capacities. Co-participation is almost null. Only the male has been assigned fixed and immovable values, such as intellectual capacity and the roles of theologian or priest, among others (Melano 1973, 65–9).

Therefore, the most important ecclesiological implication for her was the priesthood of all believers (Melano 1973, 80), because "each member of the church is a priest. Each person has the responsibility to interpret, teach, and preach the Word, giving glory only to God following the basic principles of the Reformation." For her, this "expresses the risk of the Protestant Reformation" (Melano 1999, 154). To be consequent with the Reformed principles of *sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, and *sola gratia* (by scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone) is truly a challenge to all Christian churches worldwide to reconsider their existence and task in the 21st Century.

The New Reformation of the Church

In "Potential Contributions of Reformed Theology for Ecumenical Discussion and Practice," Melano points out that theology is inseparable from history. *Sola fide,*

sola gratia, sola scriptura continue to be challenging mainly for the churches which came out of the Reformation. For her, the danger of the Reformation is that the Protestant churches will not understand their human responsibility and follow the call, because they must respond to what God demands, since "we are living in a time when coveting power and love of power predominate. The glorification of the human being generates institutionalized violence" (Melano 1999, 154).

The basic principles of the Reformation were devised by the reformers in the 16th century as a response to the historic context of their time.

> To the Reformers … the hermeneutical key of *sola Scriptura* was Jesus Christ himself, in his liberating and redeeming work for the earth and all humankind. This … prevents us from falling prey to biblicism and social absenteeism[, which are how] the church loses its authority … as it reproduces the reality of a torn humanity in its own interior. … And the question … is of asking ourselves whether or not we are their [the reformers'] true heirs. (Melano 1999, 154–5)

To reflect on this, she proposes the following elements:

1. The renewal of biblical hermeneutics: This renewal assists us in going back to our source (*sola scriptura*) because it is a matter of being freed from false interpretations which became dogmas in the past and whose weight is still present among us. Therefore, a hermeneutical renewal is necessary to be faithful to the principles of the Reformed theologians. Likewise, the problem of biblical interpretation divides our contemporary theology due to confessional barriers. We must consider that the Christian message is not so much a collection of dogmas and doctrines. Yahweh is a historical God.
2. A renovated Church: For Melano, a Reformation of solidarity with all those people who live in subhuman situations is necessary. This is because, in the midst of so much confusion, the Holy Spirit creates a community of worship, proclamation, and solidary service. When the proclaimed word is not paired with a visible solidarity with those who have been relegated by society, it runs the risk of becoming empty words without meaning. Service is an intrinsic part of the reason for the existence of the Church. For Melano, the reformed church, always reforming, must act through three aspects:

    1. *A Prophetic Community:* She asks herself, what is the response of the church in the face of a humanity that lives in subhuman conditions; in the face of the dispossessed, exploited, prisoners, oppressed, powerless, voiceless? In this sense, Christians do not have a message, but are the message.

2. *An Ecumenical Community — A Frontier for Unity and Reconciliation:* The divisions and subdivisions that happen in Christian churches are a scandal, which are added to that of the cross. The labels that are used to identify us separate all the church from the rest of non-Christian human beings.
3. *A Community of Incarnate Non-violence: A Frontier for Peace.* In light of the macro-structural violence that mutilates minimal basic rights, the messianic community cannot remain in a neutral stance, in cowardice, or in the acceptance of this type of situation (Melano 1999, 162–4).

From the standpoint of her interest in creating a new hermeneutic, she formulated a methodology with a liberation orientation. She suggested a plan in which men and women must cast off the prejudices and customs that alienate them from their humanity. She proposed that dialogue, as a basic tool, could allow them to fulfill their responsibility in the world and allow them to participate in the construction of a new humanity.

From her hermeneutical proposal, she saw the need to articulate a new language for interpreting the biblical text. Biblical interpretation should lead to the truth as something to be done, not only believed, from philosophical, theological, and historical stances. Her proposal to analyze biblical language for interpretation is still timely because the very force of the written word in the biblical text expresses significant and favorable elements for the overcoming of legalistic and patriarchal interpretations. She states: "The Gospel of Jesus Christ has theological roots in the Hebrew prophets, rather than in priestly, legalistic Judaism. Nevertheless, the churches sometimes do not know whether they are heirs of the Hebrew prophets or legalistic Judaism" (Melano 1979, 120). Likewise, she highlights the need to recuperate a feminine semantic for all theological formulation. For example, in the Psalms, a feminist interpretation makes evident the ways in which biblical language transcends patriarchy from the first story in Genesis (1:27)–a text which tells how God created a humanity in God's image, not a patriarchal humanity (Melano 1979, 125).

Unfortunately, her theological-philosophical reflections were largely ignored because there was no response from Latin American Protestant communities at that time. However, as Mary Hunt says, "If she was ignored in a certain measure in Latin America, she was taken seriously in the United States and Europe as a feminist theologian" (Mary Hunt, pers. comm., September 18, 2017). Melano decided to make her residence in her home in Montevideo for a time, until she died on May 29, 2004 (Campertoni 2012, 146).

Melano is an example or paradigm for every Christian person who seeks a solid and pertinent theological education that takes into account the ample demands of

one's historic moment. From her perspective as a theologian, exegete, and feminist, Christ's church in Latin America and throughout the world must define its ministries, since it must become incarnate in a historic reality as a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. It must maintain its capacity for wonder in the midst of so many signs of death and act consequently. Melano was convinced that faith in praxis must make the churches return to scripture to guide their prophetic, ecumenical, and incarnational action.

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Notes

1. This chapter is an abbreviated version of Martha González Pérez's article, "Beatriz Melano, primera doctora en Teología de ámbito protestante latinoamericano," in *Revista Iberoamericana de Teología* 27 (July–December 2018): 43–80, *revistas.ibero.mx/ribet/uploads/volumenes/28/pdf/RIBET_27_WEB.pdf*. Translated by Cherie R. White.
2. As to the question of Melano's influence on her theological training and other areas of her life, Marcela Bosch expressed: "It helped me to see a woman who was attacked by her colleagues, suffering sexism at ISEDET. Like no one else, she was able to explain hermeneutics to me. As so many other intelligent, brilliant and pioneering women, she was stigmatized as being crazy. She taught me that to forge roads anywhere, we must struggle. And that only women who are 'daddy's girl,' that is to say, who are reconciled with patriarchy or flirt with it, are the ones who triumph quickly and maintain their positions because they do not deal with the root causes of their power. She taught me this without saying one word, nor complaining. But I have eyes to see and deconstruct" (Bosch, pers. communication, August 13, 2017).
3. The CSM was part of the World Federation of Christian Student Movements (WFCSM).

CHAPTER 5

Bertha Mae Lillenas

How Women Are Lost to History

MELISA ORTIZ BERRY

How do women become lost to history? The story of Nazarene hymnist and evangelist Bertha Mae Wilson Lillenas (March 1, 1889–April 13, 1945) provides us with an opportunity not only to reclaim the life of an early twentieth-century preacher and hymnist, but to examine how she was written out of the historical narrative. She was not considered an activist during her lifetime. However, recovering her story and tracing her erasure from history becomes an act of scholarly activism. The current historical narrative focuses on Bertha Mae's[1] famous husband, Haldor, who authored more than three thousand songs and created the first Nazarene hymnals. While Bertha Mae was not as prolific a writer or organizer as her husband, she was nonetheless a popular hymnist. She was also an early Nazarene church planter, preacher, and evangelist. At a time when most women focused on the home, Bertha Mae shared the same occupation as the select group of less than 0.004 percent of women in the 1920 U.S. Census listed as "clergymen" (U.S. Dept. of Commerce 1923, vol. 4, chap. 2, table 4).[2]

Ordained as an elder in the Church of the Nazarene at the age of twenty-three in 1912, from 1910 to 1925 Bertha Mae preached and pastored in the western and midwestern United States (*Herald of Holiness* 1945; "Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). In an age

when men dominated the pulpit and the public square, those who heard her seemed to be universally shocked that a woman would preach so well. They consistently reported her as being a preacher with "unusual ability" or as notably "talented" (*The Nazarene Young People's Societies Journal*, "Who's Who in Junior N. Y. P. S. Circles," January 1930; "Haldor Lillenas, Mus. D., A Life Sketch" 1941, 5, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Nevertheless, while Haldor praised and recorded his wife's ministry activity in his autobiography, his biographers either limited their mention of, or erased, her ministerial roles from the historical narrative, only mentioning her as a wife and hymnist. The biographers who limited her mention provide an example of how Haldor's fame overshadowed Bertha Mae. The biographers who erased her work may have thought that Haldor's biography would be more attractive to a conservative religious audience if Bertha Mae were presented as a helper who preached only because her husband was unavailable and not because she was a co-minister. This is a possible motivation in light of the publication dates (1978) and the Nazarene church's identification with broader conservative evangelicalism during the culture wars of this time. Recovering the life and ministry of Bertha Mae Lillenas thus not only recovers a lost herstory, but creates an opportunity to investigate the process by which many women have been written out of history.

Early Life and Influences

Although Bertha Mae romantically reminisced that her life began "among the wildflowers and field larks" in a log home near the village of Hanson, Kentucky, her childhood was marked by tragedy ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 5, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Her mother, Eliza Jones (1867–1893), died of typhoid fever when Bertha Mae was only four years old. Eliza was said to be "large, robust, outgoing, and loudly demonstrative in her religious expressions," and even on her deathbed implored her husband to remain faithful to holiness doctrine. In her last moments, she allegedly took each child, looked as if she was praying over each one, and then died saying, "Bless God," (Wilson 1995, sec. 5). Whether a prophetic word or a charge laid on her as a child, Bertha Mae indeed went on to spend her life seeking to "bless God" with it.

After Eliza Jane's death, Bertha Mae's father, W. C. Wilson, took his young children (the youngest was four months old) to live with Bertha Mae's maternal aunt. As a zealous young Methodist holiness minister and circuit rider, he could not afford a horse, so his descendant and biographer called him a circuit "walker." Because of his duties, W. C., as he was known, was unable to care for his children until he remarried (Wilson 1995, sec. 5). Although Bertha Mae loved her aunt and

looked to her as a second mother, she was overjoyed when, three years after Eliza's death, her father married a young schoolteacher named Sarah Ragsdale. "How my heart swelled with pride to think that now I had a mama too as other little girls did," wrote Bertha Mae after W. C. arrived home in a carriage with Bertha Mae's new stepmother ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 7, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file; Wilson 1995, sec. 7).

With a minister for a father in the Methodist tradition that frequently assigned pastors to new churches, the family moved often, a pattern Bertha Mae would later continue. Methodist holiness ministers like her father were accustomed to this peregrinating life, even embracing it for offering them more opportunities to share their holiness beliefs. As a holiness minister, W. C. not only pastored but at times held or traveled with revivals. When he became more successful, he was invited to speak along with other noted holiness leaders (Wilson 1995, sec. 6).

W. C. eventually fell out with his denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church, over one of these revivals and joined one of the newly formed holiness denominations, the Church of the Nazarene. In its early days, it was centered in Los Angeles and led by Phineas Bresee. The Church of the Nazarene ordained W. C. as an elder in 1903. Two years later, he traveled to Los Angeles from the Midwest to meet Phineas. Subsequently, W. C. agreed to pastor a church in Upland, California. When the letter came to Illinois announcing the move, Sarah said to the children, "Let's sell the furniture and pack before he changes his mind!" (Wilson 1995, sec. 8). When he wrote again saying he had indeed changed his mind, she responded that it was too late. They had already sold everything and packed. They would see him soon.

Through his actions and connections, W. C. set the example for his daughter of a preacher and a revivalist who practiced an egalitarian ministry. Holiness evangelists and singers sisters Carrie Crow and Lulu Kell were not only friends from Kentucky but also entered the ministry through W. C.'s encouragement and preached in his Upland church (Wilson 1995, 10; R. Pierce, "Some Things Done at the General Assembly," *Nazarene Messenger,* October 31, 1907, 2; A. H. Higgens, "Correspondence: Peabody, Mass.," *Nazarene Messenger,* March 5, 1908, 4). Of Lulu and her other sister, Nora, a comment was made about their leading music at a revival, "For ability and anointed ministry in song, these girls are second to none I know" (C. W. Raymond, "Correspondence: Ayburn, IL," *Nazarene Messenger,* November 21, 1907, 4). Two other female ministers Bertha Mae would have seen in her father's church were Minnie Staples and Lulu Rogers, who helped lead a revival in W. C.'s Upland, California church in 1908 (Wilson 1995, sec. 10). As her pastor, W. C. encouraged Minnie to become an ordained elder and licensed minister in the Church of the Nazarene (Edwards and Edwards 1907, 1–3). After ministering to

local Japanese fruit-pickers, Minnie learned the language and moved to Japan as a missionary (Wilson 1995, sec. 9).

As part of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, Bertha Mae therefore grew up seeing ministry as a calling for both men and women. It is not surprising then, that, as a first-year college student, Bertha Mae wrote enthusiastically in the *Nazarene Messenger* that, since leaving Kentucky, "God has saved and sanctified me, and today the way seems clearer and more glorious than ever before" (Bertha Mae Wilson, "Deets Pacific Bible College," *Nazarene Messenger*, December 26, 1907).

Education

Education was important in the Wilson family, with Bertha Mae being educated as a child under the attentive eyes of her schoolteacher stepmother and then overseen through college by her father. Despite her father's itinerant ministry and the many moves made by the family, Bertha Mae finished grammar school and a year of high school by the age of sixteen. She also recalled that, by this time, she "was quite proficient in instrumental music" ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 8, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Her primary and secondary education complete for her era, Bertha Mae prepared for college.

Early picture of Bertha Mae Lillenas (Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).

With Bertha Mae's family waving their hankies like "white flags," she boarded a train at the age of seventeen ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 9, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).[3] The train took her about forty miles west to Deets Pacific Bible College in Hollywood, California, the college started by Phineas Bresee (Wilson 1995, sec. 13). It was so named because one of W. C.'s church members, Jackson Deets, donated the money to purchase and start its first campus. The school would go through a series of name changes and moves over the twentieth century. It was finally named Point Loma Nazarene University and found its home in San Diego, California. A developing leader in this denomination, W. C. himself later taught at the school and then served as a trustee (sec. 1). Haldor recalled it being a very small school, with only sixty-five students enrolled in the first semester (H. Lillenas 1953, 23).

Bertha Mae flourished at Deets. During her time there, she rarely saw her family because of her involvement with the school's singing group that traveled to churches on weekends and her focus on her studies (Wilson 1995, sec. 12). Of her last year, she said, "After nine months of hard work … I received [the] highest credits of any student during the four years and also [while] taking a post graduate

course," ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 10, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Her senior year included pastoral ministry; in her final six months of school, she was given a small Los Angeles church to pastor (11).

Life and Career

Although, after graduation, her denomination sent her to Northern California as an evangelist, she would soon return to Southern California to marry. During her last year in school, she met a new student, Haldor Lillenas. She wrote about that meeting in her diary a year after their marriage. With a special flourish drawn under the section she entitled "Love and Marriage," Bertha Mae recalled going to meet the new students at the beginning of her final year of school. Of those students, "One was standing alone, a tall slender young man of twenty-three, with brown hair and hazel eyes. I was especially attracted to him because he seemed to be alone and a stranger" ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 13, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Of him and their relationship, she said, "I found Mr. Lillenas to be [a] firm Christian young man and a sociable companion. Our friendship deepened, soon we became engaged" (14). A Norwegian immigrant, Haldor had worked in ministry and as a composer of hymns. A family member wrote of their courtship that, "When summer came, he called on Bertha at home, and the family could hear them in the parlor singing and playing the piano. They decided to marry the following summer." The family member also noted, "Haldor did not have a regular job, but he had saved over $100 from various sources, including the proceeds from songs he had written and sold" (Wilson 1995, sec. 12). Of their meeting, Haldor wrote, "During the school year I became acquainted with a fine young woman, Bertha Mae Wilson, who had a rich and powerful contralto voice and exceptional ability as an evangelistic piano player" and that "She was an eloquent and gifted preacher of the gospel." Of their relationship, he said, "We soon learned that our voices blended well and so we arranged it that our lives should also be blended" (H. Lillenas 1953, 24).

Bertha Mae and Haldor combined their ministerial calling and worked together as partners. This was a unique position for the couple, since their denomination trained both men and women to become ministers and evangelists. For Bertha Mae, the issue was not if she "could" accept her calling–an issue with which many of the female preachers who came before and after her struggled–but if she "would." Affirmed from a young age in her call to preach, the confidence of Bertha Mae reflects a first generation of Wesleyan-Holiness women encouraged and trained as female clergy. Because of this training and affirmation, for the next

fifteen years, Bertha Mae and Haldor co-pastored churches and led evangelistic revivals. During this time, Bertha Mae gave birth to two children, Evangeline Mae Lillenas (1911–84) and Wendell Lillenas (1915–65), while Haldor was writing and publishing music.

Bertha Mae and Haldor Lillenas (Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).

These were busy years for them as they followed the Methodist tradition of an itinerant ministry. Their frequent transition between pastorates and evangelistic tours was the lived reality of many Nazarene pastors at this time (Ingersol 2004). To do this, they embraced poverty for the sake of Christ. Bertha Mae keenly recalled a moment when they arrived in Jackson, California to do evangelistic work but had no building in which to meet. After dinner at the hotel, they went outside to hold a service on the street, which she said became a "novelty" and attracted a crowd. They sang and preached and, at the end, Haldor announced that his wife would take the offering. She said, "I had never taken an offering on the street so with a deathlike grip on my will and a looser one on the gray hat I started." Moving through the crowd seemed to take a very long time because she was nervous, recalling, "How every one stared at me and my clothing! I was a beggar and felt it keenly. That night I rec'd $1.95 and I surely deserved it. My battle was fought"

("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 20, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). She had allowed herself to become a "beggar" to help raise funds to rent a hall and to eat, giving up one identity for another.

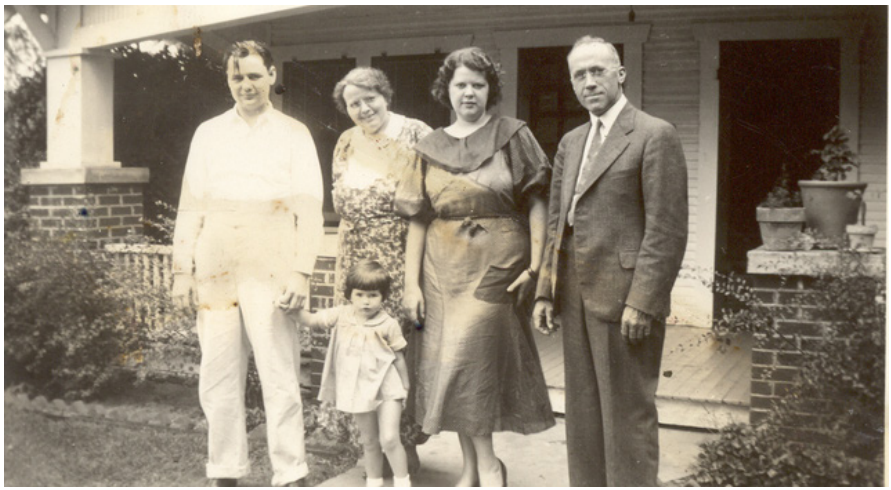
During this time, Bertha Mae also found that there was an increasing need for her to preach and minister because, the more time Haldor devoted to writing and publishing music, partly in an effort to earn money for his family, the less time he had for pastoral ministry. The reality of their partnership meant that, because of Haldor's passion for music, preaching was not an occasional or special task for Bertha Mae but one of her main ministerial duties. In her diary, she frequently and casually mentions herself preaching. In his portion of the diary, Haldor does the same. Often Haldor's words reveal his excitement to build choirs and work on his music, followed by a casual mention that Bertha Mae was doing the preaching ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 48–9, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). Family memory supports this as Debby Pueschel recalled that "Uncle Haldor was a magnificent songwriter and song evangelist. He was a good preacher. But apparently, from what I understand, Bertha was a slam dunk, hellfire and damnation preacher. She would tell Uncle Haldor, 'Haldor, you just do the songs and lead the music, and I will do the preaching'" (D. Pueschel, pers. comm., May 21, 2020).

At least early on in their ministry, Haldor seemed to prefer an itinerant evangelistic life. On October 22, 1913, he mentioned that "one of the worst disappointments of my life" was when they decided to take a pastorate again. However, because of the baby, his health, and that particular church's great need for a pastor, "we took the position" ("Bertha Mae Lillenas' Diary 1911 and Haldor Lillenas' Diary 1913," 50, Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file). On the other hand, Bertha Mae was likely excited about the turn of events. For her, evangelistic work meant the sacrifice of a stable home and the opportunity to be a housewife. In the diary account of their itinerant first year traveling and eating at hotels, it seemed that when she could be a housewife, she enjoyed it. One day she wrote, "I enjoyed my housework. How pleasant it was after years of college life to be able to be a housewife! How I delighted in preparing dainty and delicious dishes for Haldor!" (17).

Despite their personal desires, their sense of ministerial calling persisted. During their fifteen years in evangelistic and pastoral ministry, they not only preached at revivals but led churches in Lompoc, Pomona, and Redlands, California, as well as in Auburn, Illinois, Peniel, Texas, and Indianapolis, Indiana. Of Bertha Mae, it was said that "Her ministry was anointed of God, and she became a powerful and effective minister of the gospel and a soul winner of more than ordinary gifts" (*Herald of Holiness* 1945).

The Lillenas' lives changed dramatically in 1925, when Bertha Mae's health took a sudden turn for the worse. At this time, they were co-leading a church in Indianapolis, which was their most successful pastorate. In 1924, a year before she became sick with an unrecorded illness, Haldor had started the Lillenas Publishing Company to begin publishing hymnody himself (H. Lillenas 1953, 41). This, of course, meant that Bertha Mae was doing even more of the preaching. Although it is not stated directly, her inability to work and preach due to her illness was likely a key reason they resigned from their pastorate in 1926. Without Bertha Mae to preach and pastor–and her family recalls that she did both in their shared ministerial work–Haldor was not able to both minister there and continue with his work in sacred music (Pueschel 2020).

Now settled in a house in Missouri so that Haldor could work with the publishing company, Bertha Mae had time to work on her projects. Around 1930, Bertha Mae served as the second vice-president of the Women's General Missionary Council, focusing on youth. As part of this role, she helped organize and excite youth in their denomination to raise money for missions. One method of doing this was her service as the editor for the "Junior Light Bearers" newsletter. In this work, she raised funds by bringing missions to life for the youth. She listed the names of thirty-eight children under fifteen years of age who were in the mission field with their parents. She asked the young people who read the newsletter to remember the missionary children in their giving (Church of the Nazarene 2019).



Top row, left to right: Reginald Williams, Bertha Mae Lillenas, Evangeline Lillenas Williams, Haldor Lillenas. Bottom: Tatia Williams (Bertha Mae Lillenas personal file).

Although those in her denomination may have been familiar with Bertha Mae's name and work through the Women's General Missionary Council and the "Junior Light Bearers" newsletter, it was through the world of music that Christians across denominations or just listening on the radio typically encountered her. Bertha Mae's music not only found its way into a variety of hymnals but onto the radio and into the recording industry. Radio was a new medium, and Christians were quickly adapting their ministries to it.

One pioneer of the Christian music industry was Homer Rodeheaver. Raised in a Methodist home, Homer rose to fame while traveling with Billy Sunday as his music director and transformed the Christian music industry by incorporating entertainment practices with church music and then monetizing this through starting one of the first Christian recording labels (Cusic 1990, 70). He took cheerful songs that could be secular, meaning they did not necessarily mention God but had Christian values, and included them in his revivals. These simple songs with catchy melodies sold well on records. By combining secular and sacred music, he sold more records and popularized new hymns, such as "The Old Rugged Cross" (Roger Butterfield, "Homer Rodeheaver," *Time Magazine,* September 3, 1945, 61; Cusic 1990, 74). However, Homer was not content with records, revivals, and music recitals. He took his ministry to the air, becoming a national radio figure ("Famous Singer Charms Hearers: Homer Rodeheaver Gives Diversified Program for Union Mission Before Appreciative Audience," *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*, December 19, 1933; "Advertisement for Homer Rodeheaver Record: At Carson's an Album of Sacred Music," *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 1941, sec. 1). When Homer adopted one of Bertha Mae's songs, "Jesus Took My Burden," he brought the name of Bertha Mae Lillenas before the masses (H. Lillenas 1953, 43–4).

Bertha Mae's work was also making its way into the hands of other popular Christian artists, such as Edward MacHugh. A Scottish immigrant, Edward started in radio in the 1920s singing Christian hymns ("'Gospel Singer' Dies in Florida," *Bridgeport Telegram*, February 4, 1957, 2). His baritone voice became so popular that the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) sponsored him nationwide for six broadcasts a week from 1933 to 1943 ("Edward MacHugh, Radio Gospel Singer Who Had Network Shows, 1933–1943, Dies," *New York Times*, February 5, 1957, 23). So well-loved was his program that, upon the release of his 1937 hymnal, *Edward MacHugh's Treasury of Gospel Hymns and Poems*, 43,000 listeners requested a copy (MacHugh 1938; "Behind the Scenes: About Programs and People," *New York Times,* January 24, 1937, 160). MacHugh was a businessman and familiar with the push and pull of business; he chose music he liked as well as what the public requested. Although Haldor authored more than three thousand songs, it was Bertha Mae's work, not Haldor's, that made it into this popular book of music–"Jesus Is Always There" and "Jesus

Took My Burden" (Young 1978, 33; MacHugh 1938, 42, 47). She may not have been as prolific of a writer or composer as her husband, but what she wrote had mass popular appeal. Some of the other songs she wrote or composed that became popular in that era were, "He Will Not Forget," "Leave Your Burden at the Place of Prayer," and "Saved by the Blood" (*Herald of Holiness* 1945).

In addition, arranging hymnals was not solely Haldor's area of expertise but also Bertha Mae's. In 1929, she served as an editor for one of Haldor's published hymnals, *Great Gospel Songs* (H. Lillenas 1929). When Bertha Mae died of cancer in 1945, Haldor published Bertha Mae's own hymnal that she had just finished, *Fireside Hymns*. In the foreword, Haldor wrote that no one had suspected that this work would be her last work, but he noted that "her songs will sing on in the hearts of a multitude of people everywhere" (B. M. Lillenas 1945).

Why Have We Not Heard of Bertha Mae Lillenas?

Like many notable women with famous spouses, Bertha Mae's talents, at least in the historical record, were eclipsed by those of her husband. Haldor's contributions to sacred music were voluminous and have made him the subject of many articles and books. The music publishing house he started grew quickly. In its first few years, there were 700,000 copies of his hymnal in circulation. However, due to financial setbacks, in 1930 he sold the company to the Church of the Nazarene, agreeing to let them use his name while he stayed on to manage the business. Over the course of his life, he had 1,535 copyrights, and his publication became the official Nazarene hymnal. The history of the hymnal itself reveals his lasting, though declining, influence. We find that, in 1931, 81 of the hymns in the denominational hymnal were his own. The 1952 version contained 34 and, in 1972, 19 remained (Young 1978, 56–57). The 1993 fourth edition contained 18 of his songs (Bible 1993, 776).

Haldor was not just prolific, he is also remembered for the theological impact of his hymnody. Upon Haldor's death in 1959, D. I. Vanderpool, a former Nazarene Los Angeles District superintendent, pointed to Haldor's Christocentric theological focus. He said, "There was a constant flow of sacred song springing from the fountain of his poetic soul, which made him the outstanding sacred song writer of his day," and that "Christ was always exalted in his songs as the source of strength for the weak, comfort for the sorrowing, and deliverance for the enslaved" (Young 1978, 61). Another superintendent, G. B. Williamson, said, "Furthermore, in the context of his times and their religious mood, Haldor Lillenas has been to Nazarenes what Charles Wesley was to beginning Methodists. Inescapably, both of

these men have had influence far beyond the groups with which they were identified and far beyond the day in which they have lived and labored" (Young 1978, 62; Cunningham 1992, 70). We see the broad appeal of his music by noting that Haldor's song "Behold the Coming Savior Stands," could be found in a variety of hymnals used by denominations such as the Christian and Missionary Alliance to the Pentecostal Assemblies (*Hymns of the Christian Life* 1936; Benson 1920). Likewise, his song "Coming to Jesus My Savior I Found" was included in hymnals sponsored by Mennonites (Derstine 1925), the Evangelical Covenant Church of America (Swedish) (*The Covenant Hymnal* 1931), the Free Methodists (*Free Methodist Hymnal* 1976), and the Baptist General Conference (Baptist General Conference of America 1950). When people looked at the Lillenases, their eyes passed over the "unusually talented" wife to the husband compared to Charles Wesley. Bertha Mae's legacy had been overshadowed by that of her husband.

In Haldor's lifetime, but after Bertha Mae had died, a few short articles on him completely ignored the fact that they had been co-pastors. In the *Herald of Holiness,* two side-by-side articles retold his story in almost the same words. One said, "By the time of his pastorate in Indianapolis his hymn writing had become a major service, and he faced the choice between that and continued preaching. Feeling it to be God's leading for him, he resigned his pastoral work and began to devote full time to the service of song" (Georgia M. Anderson, "A Service of Song," *Herald of Holiness,* June 26, 1950). The article next to it, ironically entitled, "Honor to Whom Honor is Due," said that he went to Deets Bible College and did not know if he should pursue the pastorate or music ministry. It then jumped to a decade later when he and Bertha Mae were pastoring in Indianapolis, saying he chose "the right way" and left the pastorate to focus on his music. The articles make no mention of Bertha Mae. It was always presented as his ministry and his pastorate, and the decisions he made were for the benefit of his music ministry (A. E. Sanner, "Honor to Whom Honor Is Due," *Herald of Holiness,* June 16, 1950, 4).

In 1961, two years after Haldor's death, James McGraw, a professor at Nazarene Theological Seminary, wrote a short biography on Haldor called, "The Preaching of Haldor Lillenas," (*Preacher's Magazine*, May 1961). The biography was like many written before it. McGraw started by saying that most people would remember Haldor for his music, "yet he served for about fifteen years as pastor of several churches, the latter two of which grew under his leadership until within three years they had doubled in size" (5). When McGraw later mentioned their most successful pastorates, he again excluded Bertha Mae by only referencing Haldor: "In his last two pastorates–Redlands, California; and Indianapolis, Indiana–the membership grew steadily to more than double the size of these churches when he began there" (7–8). While McGraw briefly mentioned Bertha Mae by saying that "as a team they preached, sang, and composed songs" (6), her role in

that list and those churches was ambiguous at best. For these writers and the public who read their words, these were Haldor's pastorates; Bertha Mae's leadership was lost to history.

Subsequent biographers followed the pattern of these first omissions by continuing to edit Bertha Mae out of the couple's shared ministry to focus on Haldor. Grace Ramquist (1960) wrote the first biography after his death, *The Boy with the Singing Heart: The Story of Haldor Lillenas*. Her work closely summarized Haldor's and has a primary focus on his youth. The book did mention Bertha Mae, saying that, at their first church, he primarily preached and she "accepted calls to hold revival meetings in nearby towns" (26). It also noted that, in Indianapolis, "Mrs. Lillenas continued to preach" while he focused on his music ministry (28). Bertha Mae then disappeared from the biography, with no reference to her death. Another work was written by Elaine Cunningham (1992), which also closely followed Haldor's autobiography, but read more as historical fiction for young adults. The book did mention that Bertha Mae preached and included new source material from family records.

In these references, Haldor's work overshadows Bertha Mae's ministerial work. In Bill Young's (1978) book, we see it erased. Young's direct and purposeful omissions of Bertha Mae's ministry highlight a trend of historical revision minimizing the role of women. While Young clearly stated that his work was "The Story of Haldor Lillenas," it is still significant that he chose to rewrite history in such a way as to exclude Bertha Mae.

Consider the way Haldor mentioned ministerial calling in his autobiography. He used phrases like, "*my wife and I* accepted a call at Lompoc"; "While living in Olivet *we* conducted revival services"; and "In the latter part of 1916 *we* were called to pastor the church at Auburn" [emphasis added] (H. Lillenas 1953, 32). In contrast, Young, who wrote an almost identical chronicle based on Haldor's original work, altered the references to omit Bertha Mae. When Young cited the same events quoted above, he changed the wording to, "*Haldor's* first pastorate in Lopoc;" "While living in Olivet, *Haldor* conducted revivals;" and "Toward the end of 1916, *Haldor* was called to pastor the church at Auburn" [emphasis added] (Young 1978, 38). Each time, Young removed any mention of Bertha Mae. Another example is Young's revision of Haldor's words, "During 1918, my wife served the church at Auburn, as pastor, while I traveled much of the time as a singing evangelist" (H. Lillenas 1953, 32–3), to "During the entire year of 1918, *because* of the heavy traveling schedule that Haldor had, Mrs. Lillenas served as the pastor" [emphasis added] (Young 1978, 42). While this is a true statement, the wording and previous exclusions make it sound like more of an exception than the daily reality of a ministerial partnership. Likewise, Haldor had titled a sub-section "*Our* Most Successful Pastorate" to describe their time in Indianapolis, saying "*We* received a

call to the pastorate" and "*Our* three years spent in this field were very fruitful" [emphasis added] (H. Lillenas 1953, 40–1). Young reinterpreted Haldor's words, saying, "Dr. Lillenas looked back at *his* time as a pastor of Indianapolis First Church as *his* most successful pastorate" [emphasis added] (Young 1978, 45). As before, there was no hint or mention of Bertha Mae's co-leadership. In this piece and others on Haldor, Bertha Mae's work was deliberately erased.

Why might Young have omitted Bertha Mae when the Church of the Nazarene has been open to women's pastoral leadership since its inception? Catherine Brekus explored how women disappear from the history of Christianity, highlighting the pattern of historians and editors who, in chronicling a movement or man, find it makes the history more respectable to omit female evangelists and ministers (C. Brekus 2009, 27–8). Likewise, Susan Juster traced women's early involvement in an egalitarian Baptist governance. She found a subsequent removal of history about women's involvement with the increasing desire for respectability for their male peers during and after the Revolutionary War (S. Juster 1994, 4, 7, 11, 76-108).

Similarly, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the phrase the "politics of respectability" in her consideration of the way Black church women negotiated sexism and racism. These women embraced the "bourgeois values" of the wider society in pursuit of racial uplift (Higginbotham 1994). Higginbotham's phrase, the "politics of respectability," helped to explain why women have been removed from historical narratives. Perhaps to Young, it seemed that Haldor's biography would be more fitting for youth if it did not encourage or affirm the ordination and preaching of women. Or he might have thought it would be more attractive to a broader audience of parents and church leaders who would purchase the books if Bertha Mae were a helper who preached only because her husband was unavailable and not because she was a lifelong ministry partner and co-minister. This is a possible motivation in light of the fact that he published in 1978, when the culture wars were raging between feminists and conservative women over the Equal Rights Amendment and evangelical churches began vocalizing an emphasis on female submission.

In support of this, Ed Robinson, a former president of MidAmerica Nazarene University, in 2000 attributed the decline in female pastors to "institutionalization." He said, "Authoritative women at the front of our dynamic movement have been slowly but surely replaced by men in organizational positions of authority." He added that "our present hesitance and opposition to women in pastoral and church leadership roles aren't biblical or theological, but cultural, pure and simple" (Robinson 2000). In fact, the percentage of female clergy in the Nazarene denomination dropped from a high of 20.7 percent in 1930, to 16.7 percent in 1950,

to a low of 5–6.7 percent from 1975 to 1999 during the peak of the rhetoric towards female submission in popular evangelical culture (Houseal 2003, 10).

The significance of Bertha Mae Wilson Lillenas as a female evangelist and composer makes her notable in her own right. The subsequent overshadowing of her work in favor of remembering and honoring her husband highlights one manner in which accomplished women have been lost to history. The likelihood that Bertha Mae was written out because of the political battle between feminists and conservatives is significant and should be acknowledged. However, in order to reclaim Bertha Mae's lost herstory and others like it, our attention needs to shift to methodology.

Bertha Mae's story highlights how reclaiming women's contributions and voices involves more than creatively piecing together a variety of sources. Historians and scholars of religion also need to value the sources that remain in their entirety. Bertha Mae chose to record her burgeoning young love for her husband in the midst of her retelling of her first years in ministry. She shared that she was excited to cook dainties next to stories of evangelistic courage. To dismiss this as historically frivolous is to privilege "great-man history" over social history and studies in popular culture. Hers is the story of how a young woman embraced evangelistic ministry and family life, amidst the tensions of gendered stereotypes and roles. She wanted to be a housewife, but she wanted to be an evangelist *more*. Bertha Mae Lillenas' story highlights not only the archival and textual work that needs to be done to redress the historical narrative, but a scholarly shift to esteem women and "women's work" along with each woman's particular legacy.

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Notes

1. Because of the many family members sharing last names, and in an effort to represent Bertha Mae as an individual distinct from her famous father and husband, this historical narrative will use first names to reference all historical actors.
2. In 1920, only .0034 percent of "females" were recorded as "clergymen" in the US Census records. Although not listed as a female "clergyman," the 1920 census does have her listed as "Bertha A. Lillenas" married to "Haldor Lillenas" living in Hunt, Texas with an occupation of "ministry." The census taker noted her husband's occupation as "minister," although they co-pastored churches and both preached and played music at evangelistic events (U.S. Department of Commerce 1923, Justice Precinct 1, Hunt, TX, Roll T625_1820, p. 3B, Enumeration District 118). She may have fallen outside of the options the census taker understood for women, thus listing them with different occupations.
3. In her diary, she does not say that they were hankies; my reading of the text led to this conclusion.

CHAPTER 6

Yvonne V. Delk

A "Soul on Fire" for Justice

MARY C. "POLLY" HAMLEN

In 1989, the Rev. Dr. Yvonne Virginia Delk was nominated for president of the United Church of Christ (UCC), becoming the first and, to date, the only woman nominated to lead the denomination. Her nomination came not through the formal nominations committee, but was brought from the floor of the General Synod by delegates. While the effort to elect her was not ultimately successful, it was a measure of how far Delk had moved the needle on the possibilities for ministry for women in the UCC. The first Black woman ordained in the UCC, she has been a trailblazer in ministry for almost sixty years. In local congregational settings, at the national level, and as an executive of a community-based organization, Delk established a reputation as a "soul on fire" for justice (Delk, "A Soul on Fire," *Sojourners*, September-October 2001). She was the second woman to head a national instrumentality for the UCC. She took on leadership roles in ecumenical efforts, including the National Conference of Black Christians, Black Theology Project, World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism, and *Sojourner*'s Call to Renewal. She is an inspiring preacher, a prophetic voice on issues of racial justice, an educator, an organizer, a social justice champion, and a voice for the marginalized and oppressed. Her career intertwines with changes in the church as well as in the wider society, including the civil rights

movements, urban ministries, education for liberation, anti-racism efforts, social justice movements, and the history of women's ordination. Her career and life story offers important insights about the experience of African American women in ministry.

It is no exaggeration to say that Delk was a trailblazer in her ministry. In 1963, when Delk graduated from seminary, the possibility that she would one day be nominated to lead the UCC–a predominantly White Protestant denomination with roughly one million members in 1989–would have seemed far-fetched. Nevertheless, through the years, her path continually led her to new opportunities in ministry, breaking through glass ceilings along the way. In 1969, she became the first African American woman to hold a program staff position on the United Church Board of Homeland Ministries (UCBHM). She was the first African American woman to be ordained to the ministry in the UCC. In 1981, she became the first woman of color in the UCC to lead a national instrumentality, as director of the Office of Church in Society (OCIS). Had she become president, she would have been the first woman to lead a mainline Protestant denomination in the United States. After twenty years serving at the national level of her denomination, she moved to Chicago to head the Community Renewal Society, becoming the first woman and person of color to lead CRS in its 110-year history. She was named one of the "15 Greatest Black Women Preachers" in the United States in *Ebony* magazine (Joy Bennett Kinnon, "15 Greatest Black Women Preachers," *Ebony,* Nov 1997, 110). In 2020, she will be given a lifetime award in ecumenism by the Virginia Council of Churches–the first woman to be so honored by the council.

Yet Delk's life story, the breadth of her ministry, and her many contributions to church and society are not widely known. This paper will examine the Rev. Dr. Delk's ministry as a leader within the UCC as a Christian educator and social justice advocate, her contributions to ecumenical efforts and community organizing, and her preaching, organizing, and mentoring. Her story lies at the intersection of two important "hidden histories" within the UCC (Zikmund 1984). One is the history of African Americans in the UCC. The second is the history of women within the denomination, especially as ordained leaders. One of the problematic tendencies of writing American history is to lionize the "first" person who achieved a position of leadership. In framing the history of women and African Americans this way, selecting only a few exceptional individuals who achieved firsts, we run the risk of overlooking the significant contributions of many African American women. White women and African American men often achieved access to positions of power before African American women did because of the double barrier of racism and sexism. Historic surveys that discuss the ordination of women often highlight the first White woman ordained in a tradition and neglect to examine the ministries of women of color who may have been ordained in more recent years.

Documenting the contributions of women of color to their religious traditions deepens our understanding of religious experience and how our faith traditions function in the world. In particular, African American women's religious leadership in social justice movements is an area of research that deserves further study. Bettye Collier-Thomas addresses this gap in her landmark text, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice* (2010). She notes, "As scholars have continued to focus almost exclusively on a select few of the individual histories of black and white organizations and their personnel, they have overlooked the very rich and complex history of organizing networks and the ways in which women functioned in, among, and across black and white, male and female, religious and secular organizations" (xxiii). Works by Emilie Townes (1995), Marcia Riggs (1997), and Mary R. Sawyer (2000), which have highlighted the activism of lay and ordained women in the Black Church, are important resources. More recent scholarship has expanded our understanding of the role of women in the civil rights movement (Olson 2001; Holsaert et al. 2010; Bell 2018; Houck and Dixon 2009). Biographies of Pauli Murray (Rosenberg 2017) and Anna Arnold Hedgeman (Scanlon 2016) provide analyses of the way Murray and Hedgeman's religious leadership dovetailed with their advocacy for civil rights and social change. These scholarly works help fill in the gaps of our understanding about the intersection of African American women's spirituality and activism.

Like Hedgeman and Murray, the Rev. Dr. Delk played a critical role in ecumenical and denominational movements for justice in the second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. When interviewed for this project, she said of herself, "I am just an ordinary person" (Y. Delk, pers. comm., October 25, 2019). Indeed, it is the work of "ordinary" women like Delk that has fueled faith-based social justice ministries for generations. Their impact on the churches and society has greater significance than is often recognized in histories that focus on charismatic personalities, or "great persons."

Image 1: The Rev. Dr. Yvonne Virginia Delk at New Macedonia Christian UCC in 2019 (courtesy of Yvonne V. Delk).

Biographical Sketch

Early Years: Nurtured by Family and Church

Yvonne Delk's parents, Cora Elizabeth Chambers Delk and Marcus Thomas Delk, married in 1930 in Norfolk, Virginia (Y. Delk, pers. comm., August 10, 2020). Tragically, the Delks' second child, Audrey Marie, born in 1937, died of pneumonia at three months old (Y. Delk, pers. comm., March 2, 2020). Cora Delk was broken-hearted and bereft after the loss of her daughter. She thought perhaps she might be losing her mind. When she found out she was pregnant again, it was a powerful re-affirmation of life. She decided to do everything in her power to make sure this life growing inside her would live. Raised in the Baptist Church, Cora Delk's home church was too far away to make the journey safely while she was pregnant. Instead, she went across the street to Macedonia Afro-Christian Church and joined the congregation for support during her pregnancy. Macedonia was part of the Convention of the South, an association of Black churches affiliated with the Congregational Christian Church. Many of these churches were Afro-Christian congregations established during slavery or after Emancipation. After 1957, when

the Congregational Christian Church merged with the Evangelical and Reformed Church to become the United Church of Christ, most congregations in the Convention of the South joined the UCC. In this way, Delk's mother's decision rooted her in the traditions and worship experience of the Afro-Christian Church, which eventually became a "fifth strand" within the United Church of Christ.

Growing up, Yvonne was told the story of how her own birth on April 15, 1939 (Y. Delk. pers. comm, August 10, 2020) had helped heal the wounds of her mother's earlier loss. Delk recalls,

> There was something about the pregnancy–the life force growing in her, that enabled her to reconnect to the divine as well as her connected consciousness with the past and the present. The life force growing in her was healing the pain of her loss. Once again, she flowed the boundaries–receiving and connecting to the life and spirit of those who had come before her–the living and the dead. She channeled that spirit and connection into the life force that now was in her. Audrey Marie's death would have meaning if the baby within her could live. (Y. Delk, pers. comm., March 2, 2020)

This story had a profound effect on Yvonne and her self-understanding. She was always a little different from her siblings. As a child, she was quiet and inwardly reflective. When she was ten, she liked to climb atop a log pile that her father kept in the backyard. There, she would talk aloud to God, whom she believed was just above in the sky. Her mother got calls from the neighbors telling her to "go get Yvonne," because the neighborhood would think she needed psychiatric help, talking to herself. "My mother would always laugh about that," she recalls, "because she knew that the seeds had been planted in my spirit for a kind of spiritual connection, that I continue to live by, even though I didn't make some of the connections until much later" (Y. Delk, pers. comm., March 2, 2020).

The Delks lived in Norfolk's "red-light district," surrounded by the bars and nightlife that attracted sailors. Outside their home, the realities of life in Norfolk were oppressive. Jim Crow laws, redlining, employment barriers, and the brutal violence of the Klu Klux Klan made daily existence a struggle. For the Black community in Norfolk, survival was the priority. Marcus Delk worked as hard as he could to feed the family and to make sure that Mother Delk could be at home to care for the children. He cut wood, dug graves, worked in the Navy yard as a laborer in WWII, and was on the maintenance staff of Norfolk State University. Although Delk's mother worked for a time as a domestic servant, her husband's efforts allowed her to stay home with her children. Cora Delk prayed over her children, each one by name, every day before they left for school. She gave her children a sense of pride in who they were and modeled a faithful and God-

centered life. Delk recalls, "My mother's words are deep within me–'no matter where life takes you, Yvonne, remember who you are and whose you are'" (Delk 2004, x). On her father's side, Delk was influenced by her grandmother, Julia Anna Pope Delk–a minister in the United Holy Church who co-founded their Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Department in 1917 (Obrion 2015). While her theology was different, her example as a minister served as an inspiration for Delk in later years as she considered ordination for herself.

In addition, the Black church served as an antidote to the ever-present racism around her. "I grew up in a strong faith tradition," she says, "that affirmed me as a daughter of God, and created in me a powerful sense that nothing and nobody can, once you have been named in the image of God, name you in a lesser way" (Comstock 2001, 256). She understood that Christian discipleship included service to others and to God and required a wholehearted commitment. She joined the church at age ten, already ready to commit her life to God. While she did not envision becoming an ordained minister, Delk understood herself to be someone who would serve God with her gifts and talents. She later had to rethink some of the assumptions she learned in church, including its stance on homosexuality and the patriarchal models of church leadership. Over time, as she matured in her faith and grew in her career, she would be both a vocal advocate for the importance of the Black church and a loving but honest critic of its flaws.

Coming of Age: Franklinton Center and Norfolk College

Delk was fortunate also to have the opportunity to spend summers at Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, North Carolina. Formerly a college established for freed slaves, Franklinton was an important institution in the history of the Afro-Christian Church (Stanley 1978, 62; Alston 1984). By the 1940s, it served as a camp and conference center for the Convention of the South. Delk started attending Franklinton at age seven. She attended every summer and eventually became a camp counselor. As she grew, she found herself increasingly drawn to the history of the enslaved people who had once inhabited the site. She would walk to the neighboring cotton fields and ponder their suffering, struggles, resilience, and strength. That sense of being part of a long line of ancestors and connected to a people struggling for dignity, a better life, education, and freedom–all became part of her experience at Franklinton and shaped her perspective on the world.

Delk also was fortunate to develop close relationships with two key mentors, both leaders in the field of Christian education. Franklinton offered a three-year Christian education training program developed by Leila Waite Anderson, a staff member for the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries. Anderson was an

itinerant Christian educator and she traveled throughout the South during the civil rights years of 1953–56, "preaching and teaching at hundreds of local churches" ("Antoinette Brown Awards," *A.D.*, June 1981: 35). Anderson stayed with the Delk family one summer. In the evenings, she and Delk would sit on the porch and talk. Anderson was the first White adult to be genuinely interested in her. She took Delk seriously, listened to her questions, and encouraged her interest in Christian education (Delk 2008). Franklinton also served to connect Delk with another significant mentor, the Rev. Percel O. Alston, who was the superintendent of Christian education for the Convention of the South. Alston recognized Delk's potential and made it possible for her to attend conferences so that she could connect with the wider church. Such was the segregated nature of her world that Delk was shocked to find out that her denomination included White congregations! The same year that she graduated high school, Delk completed the three-year program in Christian education. While in college, she spent her summers teaching Vacation Bible School programs and Christian education programs in rural Black churches in Virginia. This allowed her to earn money for college while giving her valuable teaching experience.

In 1957, Delk graduated from high school and began attending Norfolk State College (today known as Norfolk State University), an historically Black college established in 1935 (Y. Delk, pers. comm., October 25, 2019). Living at home while in school, she majored in sociology and minored in psychology (Myers 1991, 90). The sociology department, under the leadership of Dr. Titus Blue, was very strong (Brooks 1983). Through her studies and as a student leader, she became more aware of the civil rights struggle in the South. The winter of 1960 was particularly significant. After the Greensboro, North Carolina, sit-ins at Woolworth's lunch counter sparked a national movement, a whole generation of students began to take similar actions (Joseph 2014, 9). Students at Norfolk State began organizing sit-ins in downtown Norfolk, led by Milton Gay, Jr., a Norfolk State student and president of Virginia's Youth Council of the NAACP (Littlejohn 2008, 333). Delk, in her junior year, was serving on the student council and supported the sit-ins. She recalls having a disagreement with her father about it. He was deeply concerned about the likelihood of a violent response from Whites (Delk, pers. comm., November 23, 2019). Norfolk civil rights workers had been firebombed by the Ku Klux Klan and there had been "massive resistance" to school desegregation (Littlejohn and Ford 2012, 83). Tensions were still very high.

Delk, while recognizing the risks, was not deterred. She was inspired by Cassius Clay, who later changed his name to Muhammad Ali after converting to Islam. In a speech to Norfolk State College students, Clay challenged them not to wait for others to make change, but to do it themselves. Delk participated in the first non-violence training sessions and joined the rotation of students who took turns sitting

at counters downtown. In a 1990 *Chicago Tribune* article (Michael Hirsley, "Her Life's Work a Symbol of Hope," April 20, 1990), she recalls "shaking in her boots." Despite her fears, she was determined to be an active part of the liberation movement. After months of struggle, demonstrations, sit-ins, and arrests for trespassing, on July 23rd, the lunch counters at the three main department stores in Norfolk were formally desegregated (Littlejohn 2008, 340). The success of the movement energized students all across the nation.

The 1960s: Discerning Her Call

When her college career ended in the Spring of 1961, Delk was faced with a decision that would shape the course of her life. Delk was offered a full scholarship for a master's degree program in social work at the Atlanta University School of Social Work (Delk 2004, xi). However, the Rev. Alston was urging her to consider a career in Christian education and to attend Andover Newton Theological Seminary (ANTS) in Newton, MA, his alma mater. ANTS, a UCC-affiliated seminary, offered a Master of Religious Education degree. Having skilled Christian education leaders was vital for the Black churches. Alston wanted Delk to gain the highest professional credentials for a future role in Christian education among the churches back home.

After much prayer and soul-searching, Delk decided to attend seminary in far-away Boston. The deadline for applications for the incoming class had already passed but, with a last-minute exception, Andover Newton Seminary admitted Delk. She was one of only thirteen women in her class and the only African American woman. Delk felt the absence of her family and church community keenly as she struggled in the predominantly White environment of a Northern seminary. The campus was still a few years away from the student advocacy and agitation of the late 60s that would increase the representation of African Americans and women on the faculty (Bendroth 2018, 185). She notes, "I was trying to find my way; I had to take a risk and reach beyond my comfort zone, and I cried every step of the way" (Vicky Waltz, "Minister's Faith Supports Her in Life of Battle for Human Rights," *Athens News*, February 1, 2001). She considered quitting, but her mother encouraged her to persevere. Her community supported her as well. She received care packages from Macedonia and churches for whom she had served as a Christian education teacher. With much community support and encouragement, Delk persevered.

In the summer of 1962, Delk, several of her ANTS classmates, and other seminarians from across Boston drove south to join the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) Eastern Shores desegregation campaign in

Cambridge, Maryland. The situation in Cambridge was tense. Delk recalls getting off the bus and seeing police everywhere, including officers with dogs. In one particular instance, as soon as the students entered, the restaurant was immediately closed. After the students took their seats at the lunch counter, some of the men in the restaurant started pushing and hitting the male students, Black and White, causing a scuffle. The police came in and arrested all the men, although they allowed the female students to leave (Delk, pers. comm., November 23, 2019). Delk came to respect her fellow students for their willingness to participate in the struggle and put their bodies on the line. Returning to campus for her second year, Delk began participating in local ecumenical efforts to address racial injustice and economic disparity in Boston, which helped fuel her sense of purpose. She graduated in the spring of 1963, earning her master's degree in religious education. However, the experience also underscored the ways in which the seminary was not providing for the needs of students of color–a problem she would return to and address later in her career.

As she neared graduation, Delk faced a daunting proposition regarding employment. She knew that it would be hard to find a church that could afford to hire her. The congregations in the Southern Conference that had come from the Afro-Christian Church were too poor to pay for a Christian education director. Because of their relative affluence, the Black Congregational Churches were more likely to have the resources needed. The Rev. Alston personally contacted five pastors, including the senior pastor of First Congregational Church in Atlanta, the Rev. Homer C. McEwen. An historic Black church, First Congregational Church was established by the American Missionary Association in 1867. The largest Congregational Church in the South, it was the church home of many prominent and well-to-do African Americans. The church had played a significant role in the Black community throughout its history, and several members, including Andrew Young, were leaders in the civil rights movement. McEwen was looking for a Sunday school director and agreed to hire Delk for a nominal amount of money and housing. She arrived in August 1963, just as Dr. King was speaking at the March for Jobs and Justice in Washington, DC. Delk spent the next two years learning the ropes and building up the Christian education program. She also had opportunities to speak publicly and preach. As a new staff member, she was invited to preach on Women's Sunday, a major event in the life of the church. Although she received only last-minute notice, she gave a rousing sermon, at the end of which the church stood and applauded (Rose Marie Berger, "The World as God Intends," *Sojourners*, May-June 1999, 21).

After two years, Delk accepted a new opportunity as the community outreach minister at the First Reformed Church, UCC, in Cincinnati, Ohio. A predominantly White congregation from the German Reformed tradition, First Reformed was

seeking to transition into being a multi-racial urban church. Delk was excited about the opportunity to serve on an inter-racial staff, inspired by the vision of building the "beloved community" about which Dr. King preached. This would be her first staff position in a predominantly White church. Before starting, she had the summer months free, so she worked as a field worker for the Migrant Ministry of the National Council of Churches in Michigan. Run by the local Council of Churches, Michigan's Migrant Ministry was one of the largest in the country. Delk provided Christian education programming for children of agricultural workers, who lived in poor housing conditions with few resources.

In the fall of 1965, Delk moved to Cincinnati to begin her new role. The city was changing demographically, as "White flight" meant that affluent Whites moved to the suburbs in large numbers, and poor Whites and African Americans from the South moved into the inner-city neighborhoods. The staff at First Reformed was working hard to build relationships with newer neighborhood residents, but it was an uphill battle, given the mood in the country. Unrest erupted in Cincinnati in June 1967, as in many other cities that summer, and again in 1968, in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Delk still vividly recalls the night of King's death. She opened her apartment to the youth of her church that night. Together, they took shelter as much of the neighborhood was burned. The next day, they discovered that the church building had been spared, perhaps out of respect for First Reformed's outreach efforts in the community. Later that year, Delk was invited by Cincinnati's mayor, Eugene Peter Ruehlmann, to join a commission that met to address the racial and economic issues that led to the crisis (Y. Delk, pers. comm., November 23, 2019).

In 1968, Delk received an invitation to join the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC)[1] as a result of her work in the community. NCBC emerged in the mid–60s, as debates surfaced around the emerging Black power movement. Some leading Black clergy felt that their White colleagues' critical reactions to the Black power movement necessitated a response. NCBC began "to interpret black power to an outraged white religious establishment, and to more closely align the institutional Black Church with the sentiments of its more progressively inclined leaders" (Sawyer 1994, 68). NCBC served as a vehicle for Black ecumenism and challenged the institutional church on its racism and a-political stances. NCBC emphasized the importance of political and economic access for Blacks and called the churches to be responsive. Delk was one of a handful of women actively involved with NCBC in its early years, which included Anna Hedgeman as a founding member. Delk would later serve on its board. She remained involved for many years, sharing her expertise on urban ministry and raising consciousness around poor Black women's concerns.

Joining the National Staff of the UCC

Delk left Cincinnati in the summer of 1969 to join the staff on the United Church Board for Homeland Ministry (UCBHM) in the Division for Christian Education, becoming the first Black woman to hold a program staff role at the national level (Y. Delk, pers. comm., March 2, 2020). As secretary for urban and Black church education, Delk stepped into a vital program position that had been established as a result of Black ecumenical advocacy. A new awareness of the needs of Black churches had emerged in the late 60s as an outgrowth of the civil rights and Black power movements. Delk quickly became a leader in developing Afro-centric Christian educational materials for use in churches. Traveling around the country, she worked with Black churches to develop educational programs that celebrated Black culture, history, and identity. Among others, she worked with the Revs. Jeremiah Wright and Barbara Allen at Trinity Church UCC in Chicago. With their collaboration, she developed new educational materials for the congregation, in keeping with Trinity's affirmation of being "unashamedly Black and unapologetically Christian" (Billingsley 1999, 180).

Her first General Synod as a national staff member, just months after accepting her new position, turned out to be a tumultuous one, resonant with the call to address racism in the church. The Ministers for Racial and Social Justice (MRSJ) were deeply angered over the UCC participation in an injunction against James Forman, sponsor of the Black Manifesto, for his take-over of the Interchurch Office on Riverside Drive in New York City. Delk had just arrived at the hotel when she ran into the Rev. William Land, a civil rights activist and influential member of the MRSJ. Land invited her to attend an emergency meeting that evening. At the meeting, the ministers decided not to allow the Synod to proceed until the denomination lifted the injunction against Forman. The clergy planned to march along with Forman to the podium and support him as he presented the Manifesto to the delegates. For Delk, this plan created a dilemma. According to the prepared schedule, Delk was due to be introduced as a new staff member by the Rev. Howard Sprague, head of the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries (UCBHM), on the second day.

Delk was faced with a choice. Would she keep to the original arrangement to be introduced by the Rev. Sprague, or would she march in protest with the Black clergy on the opening day? Delk was no stranger to these kinds of difficult choices as a veteran of sit-ins and civil rights struggle. She was aware of her junior status as a new staff member and cognizant that there could be criticism of her actions and perhaps more serious repercussions. As she recalls, "It was one of those moments where you have to decide, "How are you going to walk?" (Y. Delk, pers. comm., November 23, 2019). Delk understood the importance of the demand for

reparations. She had seen the brutal effect of racism and systemic oppression on the lives of Black people. Furthermore, she had been part of the discussions at NCBC when the organization decided to support the Black Manifesto, and she understood both the urgency of the moment and the risks of backlash from moderate Whites who were uncomfortable with Forman's aggressive tactics. Despite the possible ramifications, Delk knew what she must do. The UCC minutes from the Synod note that, as the Synod was getting underway, the proceedings were interrupted and Forman was "escorted by Ministers for Racial and Social Justice and others of the Black community" to present the Black Manifesto (UCC General Synod 1969, 16). One of the "others" with him was the newest United Church Board for Homeland Ministry staff member, Yvonne Delk, walking in solidarity with Forman and the senior clergy.

Delk's participation in that moment and her challenging remarks on racism, which she delivered as part of UCBHM's report, helped bring her to the attention of church leaders. Following the Synod, she was invited to give the charge to incoming President Robert V. Moss, Jr. at his installation service. Delk was surprised by the invitation. Many senior and well-respected Black clergy, including the Rev. Edwin R. Edmund and the Rev. Charles Cobb, had been working on racial justice issues for years. She felt her selection reflected the UCC's desire to improve their "optics." As Delk wryly notes, "They needed a woman" (Y. Delk, pers. comm., November 23, 2019). Yet her selection as the person to charge the incoming president with a mandate for social justice foreshadowed her work in the denomination for the next twenty years. A photo of Moss at his installation shows him wearing a heavy set of leg irons, symbolizing the chains worn by the enslaved. Delk laid the chains on his shoulders as a symbol of the charge. This was the first of many symbolic moments when she stood before the church as a prophet and guide. After Moss passed away in 1976, Delk was invited to give the charge to Avery D. Post at his installation service as the next president of the UCC. "Be a drum major for justice," she charged Post. "Be one who sees life in its wholeness and calls us to be whole" ("A Celebration of the United Church of Christ, Including the Installation of Avery D. Post as its Fourth President," *A.D.*, December 1977/January 1978: A-D). As her career progressed, she would be called upon to speak at many denominational and church settings, inspiring people to work for justice, while also challenging the church to look honestly at the places where it was falling short.

In 1970, Delk traveled to Africa for the first time. The four-month-long trip was a profoundly moving experience that empowered her and reinforced her pride in her African heritage. She traveled to Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia at a time when liberation movements were reshaping the continent. She experienced warm hospitality in all the churches she visited and shared in their vibrant, spirit-filled worship. She listened to drum choirs and had the opportunity

to teach her hosts to sing "Oh Mary Don't You Weep"–one of the spirituals she had learned growing up. The trip's impact on Delk was profound, both for her own self-understanding and for connecting her to the transatlantic struggle for Black liberation. Africa would become an important focus of Delk's social justice work in later years, especially the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa. Though tempted to stay in Africa permanently, she returned to her work in New York, convinced by the Rev. Alston of its continuing importance (Rose Marie Berger, "The World as God Intends," *Sojourners,* May-June 1999, 22).

By 1973, Delk had become the head of the Black Church Education Team for Joint Education Development (JED), an ecumenical effort to develop church curriculum. Under Delk's leadership, the team developed an ecumenical "pro-Black" Christian education curriculum that could be used in Black congregations. Affirming God's intention for *shalom*—a just peace—was at the heart of JED's educational efforts. In an interview, Delk emphasized the centrality of education for liberation, rather than an emphasis on individualistic salvation. "Black educators agreed that the church's educational programs with proper leadership, can make a substantial contribution to the liberation of black people and the development of the black community" ("JED Pushes for Liberation of Blacks," *Bay State Banner*, December 20, 1973, 21). Influenced by Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Black educators encouraged consciousness-raising as part of the education for liberation model. Education for liberation would "help people to understand what oppression is in their country, in their nation, and in the world, and to move toward the rejection of oppression and the development of liberated persons" (Stokes 1973). Delk was energized by the work. "It was, for me, a very pregnant and wonderful time for me in the 70s. We were concerned about helping Black children to see themselves as subjects and no longer as objects" (Dease Lee 2012, 70).

Accepting the Call to Ordination

By this time, Delk's views on her ministry began to shift. For years, she had been struggling with issues of identity, authority, and call. "I kept saying, 'No, God, not me … How will I do it? I'm female. How am I going to respond in the midst of a male-dominated world and all the other pieces of it?' … I found all the reasons for no, but God's yes was louder than my 'No'" (Myers 1994, 19). In her wrestling over the question of ordination, Delk drew inspiration from other women who had gone before her, including Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Their example gave her the courage to say "Yes" to God's call. However, when Delk did decide to pursue ordination, she ran into a new obstacle. UCC polity

at the time required that all candidates for ordination have a call from a local church. Delk's ministry was at the national level and not connected to any one local church. As a result, the Church on Ministry Committee for the Eastern Virginia Association of the Southern Conference, UCC, felt they could not approve Delk for ordination. To overcome this new obstacle, several Black churches in Virginia joined together to offer Delk a call as a shared Christian education director for their churches. Approval for ordination was granted. A new precedent was set in the UCC that opened doors for others to pursue a three-way covenantal arrangement for ordination (Y. Delk, pers. comm., March 2, 2020).

Delk was ordained on November 17, 1974 at Fellowship UCC in Chesapeake, Virginia, with her parents, family, and friends in attendance. Also participating in the service were colleagues from the national and regional settings, including Thomas, Sprague, and Alston ("Ordination of Rev. Yvonne Delk," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 16, 1974, B3). In 1978, Delk achieved another milestone when she completed her doctorate in ministry at New York Theological Seminary. The following year, at General Synod, Delk was recognized by the United Church of Christ with the Antoinette Brown Award for her "unflagging commitment to the life and ministry of the church" (UCC General Synod 1979, 22). The award was established in 1975 to honor "UCC clergywomen who exemplify Brown's spirit of trailblazing leadership in church and society" ("Antoinette Brown Award," *UCC*, www.ucc.org/women_abawards). Delk, like Vincent Harding and others, was part of a larger movement in the 70s to include Black church studies in the curricula of seminaries and the academy. In 1972, Delk joined a team of consultants to help ANTS evaluate their seminary curriculum and improve their offerings related to Black church studies. She also taught classes in the Boston Theological Institute on Black church and urban ministries. While pursuing her degree, she taught classes at Harvard Divinity School on "Education in Urban Churches" and "Black and Third World Perspectives in Education." She helped White students understand that their perspective was not universal, and she supported the efforts of Black students to confront White supremacy in their institutions.

Delk also founded and led networks for African Americans and women within the UCC for support of individuals and as a means to create change within the church. She chaired the United Black Caucus, established in 1978 to "exert influence on church policy" ("Black UCC's Form Caucus," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 18, 1979). She also organized the UCC's Black Staff Group. She was part of the Women's Interstaff Team and helped plan the UCC's first Women's Convention in 1979. She was one of 100 women clergy who presided over communion at the historic gathering. As was typical with Delk, her remarks at the gathering drew connections between the spiritual and the political. "With the global vision we get

from our local church," she said, "we can become a political force for public policy and justice" (Benz and Cunningham 1979, 41).

Working to Create Just Peace: Office of Church in Society Years

In 1978, Delk began serving in the UCC's newly constituted Office of Church in Society as an associate for constituency development ("Keeping You Posted," *A.D.*, December 1977/January 1978, 64). In this role, she began to speak more broadly on issues of justice, highlighting the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. Like many Black women in her time, she was initially skeptical of the White feminist movement, especially when it overlooked race as a critical factor in women's lives. She and Valerie Russell, an African American colleague working on women's issues in the UCC, found themselves often debating which was the more important issue, racism or sexism. For Delk, racism was paramount in her ministry. However, she also understood the challenges women faced and personally had experienced the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism. As she moved through the 70s, and especially after her ordination, she began to speak about these related issues. In 1979, she wrote, "We must be willing to be women who have not forgotten what it is to dream. We must be able to see that what *is* is not necessarily the way it is supposed to be. We do not have to live with unemployment, hunger, inadequate housing, inadequate health care, inferior education, and violations of human rights. We do not have to live with a permanent underclass in our society" (Delk 1979, 29). Delk also mentored and encouraged other women to take on leadership roles and advocated for greater gender parity at all levels of church governance.

A more profound shift occurred around her views on the full inclusion of LGBTQ Christians in the church. In an interview, she acknowledged that, as a young person, she was very homophobic (Comstock 2001, 264). Years later, her close friend Jan Griesinger came out to her. This was a turning point. Their deep friendship and Jan's openness to talking about her sexuality helped change Delk's perspective. In time, Delk would become known within the UCC as a straight ally for queer rights. She was vocal in encouraging churches to be Open and Affirming —a UCC designation for churches that are welcoming to LGBTQ members (Comstock 2001, 262).

On January 1, 1980, Delk became the UCC's affirmative action officer, a new position that had been established by the Twelfth General Synod ("Affirmative Action Officer Named," *A.D.*, March 1980: 43). A key to her approach to affirmative action was to help people see a broader vision for the church, rather than thinking in terms of quotas. "I tried to move outside of a numbers game by talking about

gifts and about the church and the community that we can create through faith. I tried to erase the boundaries that we've built up around fear and to create another vision of a church that celebrates the gifts of all folk, where the gifts would be enriching and renewing us" (Comstock 2001, 262). She advised the Executive Council in its adoption of an affirmative action statement that included protections on sexual orientation for the first time.

Delk was elected as the executive director of the Office of Church in Society for the UCC in 1981, another historic first. She became the first African American elected to head a national instrumentality in the UCC and, at the time, was considered the first woman to lead a national instrumentality for the United Church of Christ.[2] In this highly visible leadership role, she became a spokesperson on behalf of the UCC. In the nine years she held this post, she spoke out and organized on a wide range of issues, including peace and nuclear disarmament, welfare reform, childhood poverty, ending apartheid in South Africa, women's reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, and more. Delk's ministry was grounded in the belief that Christian faith requires action to make the love of Christ real in the world and to create a just peace.

In her advocacy efforts, Delk made it a priority to raise up the voices of poor, especially poor women of color. In 1984, OCIS organized a "National Consultation on Economic Justice for Women Who Are Poor." In Washington, DC, welfare reform was an area of particular concern along with growing childhood poverty ("Confab to Focus on Women's Issues," *Washington Informer,* January 25, 1984, 22). Delk chaired a National Planning Committee on Children in Poverty (NPCCP) —a coalition of twenty religious and secular organizations. The NPCCP organized hearings on the topic "Who Speaks for the Children?" across the country to assess the situation of children living in poverty by listening to people directly affected (UCC, *Keeping You Posted Newsletter*, March 1988, 2). Delk presented on the findings at a US House of Representatives committee hearing (U.S. House of Representatives 1988, 107). These issues continued to be a concern for Delk throughout her ministry. In 1993, she served on the advisory board for the Black Community Crusade for Children, sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund (Hoots 1993, 66).

Image 2: The Rev. Dr. Delk speaks at a conference sponsored by UCC Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice (courtesy of Yvonne. V. Delk).

Delk's work with the Office of Church in Society also included interpreting policy issues for local UCC congregations. Three major issues within the UCC on which she took leadership during her tenure were: developing resources on what it means to be a Just Peace Church; encouraging churches to be Open and Affirming; and the use of inclusive language in worship. In 1981, she spoke at the Language and Liturgy Convocation, organized by the Women's Task Force of the Consultation on Christian Union. She affirmed, "Once we have found our words, our names, *Nobody*–no institution, no cultural practice, no tradition can reduce us to namelessness again. Language and liturgies give us an identity. They give us a mission and a purpose in the world" (Delk 1983, 4).

Organizing against Racism: Ecumenical Engagements

In the 1980s, Delk continued to be active in ecumenical work with a focus on racial justice. For many years, Delk was actively involved in the Black Theology Project

(BTP) established in 1976. It was self-described as an "ecumenical, North American, Christian organization devoted to the discovery, development and promotion of historic and contemporary Black religious thought and action" ("Priorities of Black Church Addressed at Convocation," *Washington Informer*, February 22, 1984, 50). James Cone's 1969 book *Black Theology and Black Power* launched the field of Black theology, which emerged from "a conscious investigation of the socio-religious experience of Black people in the struggle for freedom and dignity" (Essex 1989, 48). The BTP served to bridge a gap between the academy and the church, encouraging the development of education materials on Black theology and also pushing theologians to be relevant to and in conversation with the concerns of the community. Women were in the minority in the project, but their involvement was significant (Sawyer 2000, 311). Delk was chair of the board of directors from 1981 to 1982, working closely with Cornell West, who was executive director. She also served as co-chair from 1987 to 1989 and chair from 1990 to 1993 (Sawyer 1994, 129). She taught workshops and helped plan the annual BTP convocations, serving as co-chair of the convocation held in 1986. Other key women leaders included Olivia Stokes, Sr. Shaun Copeland, Jualynne Dodson, and Iva Caruthers.

In 1984, Delk was appointed by Avery Post to serve as the UCC representative on the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) for the World Council of Churches. She was involved with the PCR for the next 15 years. In 1991, when the Honorable Justice Annie Jiagge from Ghana stepped down as moderator, Delk would succeed her. A major focus of the PCR in the 80s was to end the apartheid system in South Africa, and Delk was an outspoken anti-apartheid activist. At a protest in front of the South African embassy in 1985, Delk proclaimed, "We refuse to remain silent while 24 million black brothers and sisters are denied their inherent worth. It is not enough for us to sit in our pews and pray" (Karlyn Barker and John Ward Anderson, "8 Arrested Peacefully at Antiapartheid Rally; Fear of Disruption Reduces Protest's Size," *Washington Post,* April 20, 1985). As a member of the PCR, Delk traveled to Lusaka, Zambia, in May 1987 for a historic consultation, which led to the Lusaka statement issued by the PCR. WCC leaders met representatives from the African National Congress, PAC, and SWAPO, along with African church leaders like Desmond Tutu. Representatives of the resistance movements underscored the brutality of the apartheid system and the urgency of the need for liberation (Jiagge 1989, 34). The financial support that PCR offered to liberation groups was controversial. Because they embraced armed struggle, the ANC, SWAPO, and PAC were considered by many Christians in the US and Europe to be terrorists. They were also labeled as communists. Delk understood that these groups were fighting for the liberation of their people and that their voices were important. She continued to be an outspoken advocate for church engagement in

the anti-apartheid movement and financial support for liberation efforts, both in her work with the WCC and also in her own denomination.

Delk also challenged the UCC to do more to combat racism internally. In an essay entitled "The Unfinished Agenda: Racism," published on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Amistad uprising, she called on the church to name racism when they saw it. Delk also called on the church to reject any denial of continuing problems. She urged the church to conversion, repentance, and action. She challenged the faithful to stand with the victims of racism, to work for change in the political realm, and to take a leadership role in ecumenical anti-racism work. Finally, she called on the church to critique economic models that create inequity and oppression. "In obedience to Jesus Christ, we are called to offer economic visions, theories and policies that are more faithful with the Gospel" (Delk 1989, 44).

Stepping Forward: Nomination for UCC President

When Avery Post announced his intention to step down as president of the UCC, a national search was initiated to find a successor. Delk was one of six final candidates given serious consideration for the position and the only woman and person of color (Marjorie Hyer, "6 Listed for Church of Christ Job," *The Washington Post*, February 4, 1989). After interviews with all candidates, the nominations committee selected Paul Sherry, the executive director of the Community Renewal Society in Chicago, IL. Colleagues at United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Sherry and Delk knew each other well. Delk was committed to unity in the church and arrived at Synod determined to support the committee's nominee. As in 1969, a surprise encounter the night before Synod changed her course. She met a young Black girl, Wiletra Burwell, who challenged Delk and other Black elders at a pre-Synod gathering. She urged them to offer her hope that she might "see herself" in the leadership of the church. After wrestling mightily with the young woman's words, Delk decided to allow her nomination to be brought from the floor.

Delk's name was submitted by the Rev. G. William Webber, co-founder of the East Harlem Protestant Parish and long-time president of New York Seminary. The nomination was seconded in speeches by Ms. Gretchen Eick, an anti-apartheid and social justice activist from the Central Atlantic Conference, and the Rev. Clyde Miller, Rocky Mountain Conference minister and a civil rights leader (UCC General Synod 1989, 30). In a speech to delegates, Delk shared the story of her encounter with Burwell and the impact it had on her decision to stand for election. She concluded with a characteristic challenge and hope for the future.

> I thank God for the diversity that is within us and the vision that beckons and calls us … I am inspired with the fervent hope that despite the brokenness and divisions within our church and our world, oneness in Christ is possible. (UCC General Synod 1989, 48)

In the end, Sherry won the election. Delk was gracious in defeat, and Sherry was supportive of her. They embraced on stage in an intentional show of unity and, by agreement, the final vote tally was not released.

Moving On: Chicago and Beyond

The aftermath of the election was a challenging time for Delk. She had put herself forward, challenging the authority of the nomination committee in the process, and been defeated. While she understood the importance of her participation in the election, she now had to deal with the results. After twenty years of leadership and prophetic witness, she found herself at a crossroads. It was time to move on to something new. Delk moved to Chicago to begin serving as executive director of the Community Renewal Society, the position Sherry had recently left. Delk became the first woman and first person of color to lead the organization in its long history (Michael Hirsley, "Her Life's Work a Symbol of Hope," April 20, 1990). Reflecting on her work at the national level, she wrote, "In spite of 20 years of engaging in denominational ministries, I came to the conclusion that the goal of justice, equality and freedom was continuing to elude our reach. A few things had changed for the better for a few, but for the many and the masses, things had gotten worse." Delk wanted to make a difference where it would count. She wrote, "[W]ith the Bible in one hand, a newspaper in the other, and a committed spirit, I decided to move to the streets of the city" ("The Hospitality of the City Extends to the Poor," *Living Pulpit,* April-June 2002, 10). In her years in Chicago, she tackled homelessness and poverty, systemic racism, community health issues, and affordable housing (Rhonda Anderson, "Tearing Down the Walls of Society," *Chicago Tribune,* January 31, 1992; Herbert G. McCann, "Service Agency in Right Direction," *Philadelphia Tribune,* July 21, 1992). During Chicago's redevelopment, she insisted that city and federal officials listen to public housing residents directly and fought the destruction of public housing units desperately needed by low-income families (Tonita Cheatham, "The Voice of the Voiceless," *Sojourners*, May-June 1999). She made it a priority to shift CMR away from charitable support only to being pro-active in tackling the roots of the problems in the city.

Delk also continued to take a leadership role in ecumenical and interfaith efforts for social justice, locally and globally. As moderator of the World Council of

Chuches' Programme to Combat Racism, she was part of the planning team for the Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation held by the World Council of Churches in Seoul, Korea. This major global conference brought Christians from around the world together to discuss ways to affirm common social justice commitments. Controversially, the conference also included participants from liberation and social justice movements. Delk was supportive of the inclusion of these groups at the table, believing that those who worked at the grassroots level should be heard (Delk, pers. comm., November 23, 2019). Delk consistently tried to center the voices of the marginalized and disadvantaged in her advocacy work.

Throughout the 90s, she was actively involved with *Sojourners,* serving on the editorial board, as a leader in the Call to Renewal movement, and as a contributor ("A Moment of Turning: An African-American Vision for the K*airos* of 1992," *Sojourners*, October 1991; "To Move beyond Denial," *Sojourners*, July 1992). After the Rodney King beating and subsequent urban uprisings in Los Angeles in 1992, she helped organize a visit to LA for the leaders of the World Council of Churches (Larry B. Stammer, "World Churches to Focus on L. A. Unrest," *Los Angeles Times,* June 27, 1992). She served on the interfaith planning team for the Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago in 1993 and moderated one of the sessions (Delk, pers. comm., November 23, 2019). In 1997, Delk was named in *Ebony* as one of the fifteen best Black women preachers in the US and recognized for her "bold, courageous explicit articulation of the Gospel" (Joy Bennett Kinnon, "15 Greatest Black Women Preachers," *Ebony,* Nov 1997, 110). UCC General Minister and President John C. Dorhauer heard Delk speak for the first time when, as a new UCC minister, he attended the Impact Briefing—now known as Ecumenical Advocacy Days—in Washington, DC. He recalls, "[O]ne of the keynoters was Yvonne Delk. Never heard of her, all I knew was she was UCC, and when she finished the keynote, everybody in the room was just grateful that they were there and were never going to forget that moment. And I remember listening to her, thinking so this is what it means to be UCC and just being so proud that I had chosen this as my pathway" (John Dorhauer, pers. comm., November 5, 2019).

While progress has been made in opening doors to women of color in the UCC, work remains to be done. "The challenge for the church is to be open and affirming in not only receiving their gifts but being open and assertive in the placement of these gifts. Racism and sexism were barriers 40 years ago, and they are barriers today," Delk notes (Anthony Moujaes, "Celebrating Yvonne Delk and 40 Years of Service to UCC," *United Church News*, October 7, 2014). Throughout her career, Delk built shared networks and regular gatherings for women in ministry. She helped launch the SISTERS network in North America—a program within the World Council of Churches' Women under Racism program. At the first

gathering of the SISTERS network in North America–the *Women Under Racism: SISTERS North America Conference* held in Albuquerque, New Mexico on February 26, 1998– she presented an opening meditation on the theme "A Safe Space" (WUR-SISTERS North America Box, WCC Archives, Geneva). Speaking to the women gathered, she noted a connection between the experience of being wounded by racism and the drive to make the world better for others. With Bernice Powell Jackson, Delk co-founded the African American Women in Ministry Conference in the early 1980s, which has been held bi-annually ever since.

Delk retired from her position at the Community Renewal Society in 1998. She founded the Center for African American Theological Studies and taught classes through the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE) in Chicago. A few years later, she moved back to Norfolk, Virginia, to be closer to her extended family. In her 80s, she continues to speak at churches and conferences and to participate in organizing efforts on social justice issues. She served on the UCC's Historical Council and spearheaded a project to preserve the history of the Afro-Christian Churches. She also serves on the board of the UCC's Council for Health and Human Services.

Despite ongoing challenges, for Delk, her faith gives her hope for the future. It also calls her to stay engaged and to continue to work for a just world. "I grew up with the notion that the Christ we serve is a wounded Christ, not one who has it all together in terms of one strength, but strong in different ways than we think of. So when I have moved through the struggles, pain, and wounds like I have had to move through, I've looked at them as part of what it means to be a part of the community of Jesus Christ … It is the place of woundedness where even the Christ figure takes on the wounds of the world; therefore we take unto ourselves the wounds of the Other" (Comstock 2001, 258).

Conclusion

Delk's ministry spanned more than four decades and intersected with many significant trends and movements within church and society. While her ministry within the UCC is the primary focus of this paper, many other aspects of her life and ministry deserve study. Her activism in ecumenical and interfaith settings reflects the ways in which women, lay and ordained, have sustained social justice movements by providing key organizational support. Her sermons and writings provide rich resources that could be analyzed for insights on Black women's preaching, rhetorical styles, and the spiritual sources from which they draw strength. Delk's love of the arts and her creative use of arts in her ministry are topics not covered in this paper but ones well worth exploring. Her connections to

Africa and the ways that influenced her ministry is another topic given too little attention in this chapter. As a leader, Delk was a natural bridge builder, and she always sought to ensure that diverse voices were "at the table." Her style of leadership could be examined for insights into non-hierarchical leadership models. Her recent ministry as a "spirit guide" is a good example of the inter-generational transmission of spiritual values by African American women, a topic discussed by Teresa Fry Brown in her book *God Don't Like Ugly* (2000). Delk's writings on racism are still highly relevant today and worth revisiting.

Nevertheless, a few concluding observations can serve to shed light on her notability. Delk's ordination helped pave the way for African American women and women of color to enter ordained ministry. More specifically, the increasing visibility of her work at the national level provided members of the UCC the opportunity to see a Black woman clergy leader. For many, Delk was the first ordained Black woman they had ever seen. She inspired young women and tore down prejudices and biases. Her sociological and political awareness, grounded in her own experience facing racism, sexism, and classism, provided an important perspective on social justice issues. Her willingness to speak honestly about racism within the church has helped challenge the UCC to be more diligent in engaging this issue internally. Her articulate exposition of the theology that underlies her work helped other members of the UCC ground their work more deeply in spiritual truths.

Furthermore, as an advocate for the poor, especially poor women of color, she modeled an inclusive approach that centered the voices of poor women, allowing them to speak for themselves. This perspective is too often lost, especially in wealthy or middle-class churches. Her leadership on Black church curriculum development helped ensure that Black congregations could provide meaningful educational experiences for their congregants, affirming the vibrant history and culture of the Black church. Her preaching has challenged, uplifted, and sustained congregations. As a teacher, she prepared students for ministry in urban and Black churches as well as for social justice advocacy. In her early work as an affirmative action officer, she challenged barriers in hiring practices. As a spirit guide, she has nurtured younger clergy, many of them African American, and helped support their ministry within the UCC. Her participation on the Historical Council and her advocacy for the Franklinton Center have raised the visibility of Black church traditions within UCC history, a topic still underrepresented in the denominational literature. Throughout her ministry, she has been a friend and inspiration to many. Like many African American women in the church, her preaching and activism have been impactful on the lives of hundreds who may never make it into the history books, but who make up the majority of the faithful in the pews. Her ministry will have continuing ripple effects for generations to come.

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Notes

1. The organization later changed its name to the National Conference of Black Christians.
2. Marilyn Breitling, executive director of the United Church of Christ's Coordinating Center for Women, has since been rightly recognized as the first woman to lead a national instrumentality in the UCC. The Center was established in 1979, but not fully recognized as a national instrumentality until 1987 (Connie Larkman, "UCC Mourns Marilyn Breitling, Denomination's First Woman National Executive," *United Church News,* May 28, 2018).

CHAPTER 7

Ida Weis Friend

Living Her Best Century

ROSALIND HINTON, PHD

Ida Weis Friend of New Orleans was one of two Jewish women representatives from Louisiana at the Jewish Women's Congress of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions held at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. The Parliament is "often seen as the beginning of the modern interfaith movement" (Braybrooke 2014, 1, 70). Friend most certainly voted aye on the resolution that created what would become the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) ("New York World's Fair – National Advisory Committees – Women's Participation – Mrs. Joseph Friend (Louisiana)," Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library). Bringing her national and international experiences back home, she helped found the New Orleans section of the NCJW and became its president from 1910 to 1916 and again in 1924. She was the national president of the NCJW from 1926 to 1932 (NCJW New Orleans Section 2017). As a founder and leader of numerous Jewish and civic organizations, she crossed denominational and racial lines and worked with women and men of many religious traditions. A letter from the New Orleans Business and Professional Women's Club (BPW) to the Loving Cup Committee of the Times Picayune Publishing Co. in 1946 (Ida Weis Friend Papers) noted that Friend was president of the local, regional, and state-wide Federation of Women's Clubs, the life president of the Home for the Incurables, president of the Travelers Aid Society and the Consumer League of New Orleans from at least 1922 to 1946, and a co-founder of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Urban

League. A true club woman, she was called "Mrs. Madam President of New Orleans" by the *Times Picayune* newspaper ("Everybody Wanted Her for President," *Times Picayune*, March 3, 1955). Her life is a rare window into Reform Jewish women in New Orleans, their influence on the public sphere, and their role in building a more welcoming and vibrant city.

Image 1: Ida Weis Friend in her forties, c. 1900s (NCJWGNO Records).

Steeped in the wisdom of the NCJW's founding women, Friend fully embraced Judaism and Americanism and seemed unapologetic about her intellect and inherited wealth, which she generously shared through philanthropic endeavors. As a first principle, Friend was unapologetic about her Judaism. She took to heart the sentiment of Mary Newbury Adams, who proclaimed from the lectern of the Jewish Women's Congress in 1893 that Queen Isabella sent a "Moorish botanist and a learned Hebrew navigator with Columbus that she might have accurate knowledge of the new lands he was to find" (Adams 1893). A second "essential principle" of the NCJW that Friend embraced in word and deed was to "continue to serve as the interpreter of America to the foreign-born Jewess, and of Judaism to America" (Brenner 1922, 54). A third principle that Friend brought to her work was

articulated by Hannah Solomon, known as the founder of the NCJW, in her Presidential report in 1894:

> Let us insist upon the most scientific methods. Let us pay more for salaries and proper investigation, for that work is better done by those for whom it is a vocation than by those for whom it is a pastime. This does not render friendly service superfluous but makes the work of the volunteer more efficient and secures juster methods of relief and aid. (Solomon 1921, 47)

Perspectives and Sources in Writing Women into History

In the past, women's history was often thought of as family history because the connections, clubs, and contexts that women create do not closely follow the patriarchal models of greatness. History from above looks at the presidents and politicians, the generals, and the singular men who make and influence history. This is an impoverished form of history. History happens to all people, and all people are a part of making history. We are not simply the victims or beneficiaries of great (White) men. Viewing history from this perspective gives us a distorted view of power as something others have, rather than embedded in communities, organizations, institutions, and systems that we shape and are shaped by. Patriarchal constructions of history make it difficult to see how small gestures, collaborations, and footwork build a synagogue, a health system, a city, or a national movement. Ida Weis Friend was the corresponding secretary of as many male-led organizations as she was president of women's organizations. Men are often remembered more than women who served, even though, as was often the case, they just pounded the gavel that opened the meeting. No matter what role she played, this biographical sketch shows that Friend was relied upon for both her vision and her attention to details.

Ida Weis Friend undoubtedly learned from watching both her parents how to pound the gavel and attend to the details of community efforts. Her father, a self-made man, German immigrant, and peddler of rags who traded his way up to a membership on the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, understood the importance of women. From an unpublished autobiography in Ida Weis Friend's papers ("Autobiography of Julius Weis"), we get to know him, in many ways, better than his daughter. As President of Touro Infirmary in 1880, he oversaw "the efforts to raise means" for building a new hospital. In this endeavor, he makes note that the "first step I took was to call the ladies together with my wife who organized and held a fair that raised $23,000." With the fair proceeds, a lottery that raffled off the

old hospital land, and the sale of bonds, Julius Friend raised the $90,000 for the new hospital building and an extra wing (23–4). Friend's view of leadership was influenced both by her father's and her mother's leadership. She witnessed women's agency and influence from an early age. She could see women's initiative in bricks-and-mortar projects like Touro Infirmary and other religious and public institutions.

I came first to the Jewish Community and this project as an oral historian post-Katrina. As part of the Katrina Jewish Voices project, I interviewed close to eighty men and women who chose to return to the city and rebuild their lives, their synagogues, their schools, their neighborhoods, their businesses and the city that they loved.[1] I learned through this project that Jewish women, trained by and involved with the NCJW, were instrumental leaders in much of this work. These women were presidents of synagogues, public and charter schools, hospitals, and NGOs, like the United Way and Second Harvest, that were critical for returning residents and post-Katrina reconstruction efforts. Inspired by their work, I continued exploring Jewish women by mounting a Tricentennial Exhibition of New Orleans Jewish Women in 2018. I was so impressed with the steady leadership of these women during Katrina that I had to look back from the present to the past, which brought me to Ida Weis Friend.

I chose to write about Ida Weis Friend because she exceeded traditional Wikipedia notability standards as a founder of the NCJW and numerous other clubs and because she had a substantial collection in the archives at Tulane University. Armed with reliable sources, I thought her story would be easy to write. However, writing women's history is often a challenge. While Friend thought enough of herself to collect her papers, she saved letters others wrote to her, but not carbons of the letters she sent. Friend kept diaries (that are very hard to read) and collected brochures, literary pamphlets, and organizational booklets that we must assume she saved because they meant something to her thinking, her interests, and her advocacy. Even though her letters to others are not in the archives, the letters she received hint at her importance. The archives include letters from Louisiana Governor John Parker, leader of the National Women's Party Alice Paul, US Speaker of the House Hale Boggs, Fanny Brice, Dorothy Day, and Mayor deLesseps S. Morrison. A 1947 note from the *New Orleans Item* executive editor, Clayton Fritchey, asked her for pre-publication comments on an editorial laying out a program for "Europe and Mankind" (Ida Weis Friend Papers). These documents provide a sense of the issues she cared about and her importance as an influencer.

Other notes point to Friend's humanity: a poor lady thanking Friend for her husband's headstone, or a man expressing sorrow for the untimely death of Friend's son coupled with thank you letters for Bunny Park, a city park Friend

established in her son's name. She saved brochures that outlined the plans for a new home for the incurables. She was lifetime president of the home and wanted the most vulnerable to live with dignity. Luckily, Friend saved the Business and Professional Women's (BPW) letter of nomination for the *Times Picayune* Loving Cup, an annual award to a man or woman who had contributed significantly to the city. It is a gold mine pointing to all of her memberships in organizations that helped build New Orleans. Friend, an independently wealthy club woman and philanthropist, was different demographically from the working members of the BPW. Nevertheless, they meticulously compiled her organizational memberships and submitted her nomination. This list is the starting point for future historians and a challenge to reconsider what it takes to live a noteworthy life (Ida Weis Friend Papers).

There are copies of a few typed speeches that are quite formal and guarded. However, what might be her most revealing sentiment was not written in her own words. She authored a book review in a 1922 edition of the NCJW's publication, *The Jewish Woman*. There, Friend reviewed a book entitled, "*The Voice of Jerusalem*, by Israel Zangwill." Friend's strongest thoughts on Judaism and Zionism are revealed when she quotes from Zangwill speaking of the carnage of World War I. "Who, remembering this ghastly quinquennium, have raised their voices to temper the frenzy and brutality of Christendom? I am moved to believe that we Jews are today the only race that would not crucify Jesus." Friend, prescient in 1922 after only one world war, highlights, in the same review, Zangwill's essay calling for territorial Zionism as "the only statesmanlike contribution to the political solution of the Jewish Problem" (Friend 1922, 12, 22).

Ida Weis Friend struggled to bring back the New Orleans Opera House and supported the Little Theatre and other cultural activities and belonged to a literary group of women who wrote poetry called the Ramblers. These were important cultural pursuits. However, in this biographical sketch, I focus on her social activism, raising up her leadership and participation in organizations that invoke the spirit and sentiments of the most progressive founders of the NCJW. It was Friend's economic, international, political, and racial interests that drew her to involvement with the National Consumers League (NCL), the local and national NCJW, politics, and her work with the Committee on Interracial Cooperation and the Urban League. These are the avenues through which Jewish women established their version of America, expressed their Jewish values, and created a vibrant, inclusive, and international spirit in a closed-minded and parochial Jim Crow South.

Consumer's League

When Ida Weis Friend founded the Consumer's League in New Orleans, she covertly brought a social-democratic agenda into the South. Its national leader, Francis Kelly, was an open socialist and, in the early days of the organization, a proponent of minimum wages and maximum hours for women and girls and a ban on child labor. Labor laws that protected female workers and children from exploitation were of particular interest to Friend. A 1963 letter from the member secretary of the National Child Labor Committee thanked Friend for her 43 years of service that "enabled us to see the abolition of child labor in all major industries except migratory agriculture" (James Myers to Mrs. Joseph E. Friend, August 21, 1963, Ida Weis Friend Papers). The local section also established science and social work as early as 1912 as the basis for volunteerism and philanthropy. While it did not erase all bias, social work replaced the unsubstantiated opinion, White supremacist ideologies, and biological determinism that underlay most assumptions of the "other" that were prevalent in the North and the South.

In a survey of leadership from the 1930s, historian Landon Storrs claims that "women who led the National Consumer League (NCL) were on the radical edge of the reform spectrum" (Storrs 2000, 264–5). Storrs noted that, as early as the 1920s, there were only two Southern chapters of the Consumers League, one in New Orleans and the other in Kentucky. The National Consumers League came into ascendancy during the Great Depression when Franklin Roosevelt named Charlotte Perkins as labor secretary. During the 1930s, the NCL and its chapters came out against a two-tier pay structure in the National Recovery Act that discriminated against African Americans. As well, the NCL was the only organization that fought against racial discrimination in the New Deal (104). In the survey previously mentioned, Storrs also notes that Friend was a Liberal Democrat who believed in racial equality (264–5). These facts put her on the radical edge of Southern men and women and indicate that the local Consumers League was committed to the national agenda. While he does not name Friend specifically, Storrs also claims, "Those few wage and hour laws that did pass in the southern states–notably in Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Louisiana–were won largely through the efforts of small groups of progressive white women" (154). Friend, who was not afraid to agitate, influence legislation, or litigate, was most likely one of these progressive women along with members of the local Equal Rights for All Club (ERA) to which she also belonged.

National Council of Jewish Women

Ida Weis Friend's most documented work comes from the 1920s and 30s in the local section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), where Friend was a founder, leader, and significant influencer. Between the two world wars, the NCJW's chief focus was immigration. With the creation of Travelers Aid–an association of clubs and volunteer organizations–the work of immigration also gained a city-wide focus. Friend became the Travelers Aid president in 1930 and brought her NCJW troops with her (New Orleans Business and Professional Women to the Loving Cup *Times Picayune* Publishing Co., letter of nomination dated September 6, 1946, Ida Weis Friend Papers). Travelers Aid assisted eastern Europeans, and Jewish, Italian, and German immigrants who came through the port of New Orleans.

During the time of Friend's National NCJW Presidency, from 1926 to 1932, the NCJW's immigration work took place within a context of White nationalism that had dire consequences for European Jews fleeing the pogroms and persecution that led to the rise of Hitler and Nazism's "Final Solution"–the Holocaust. The *Emergency Quota Act* of 1921 and the *National Origins Act* of 1924 staunched the flow of eastern and southern Europeans to the US. The *Asian Exclusion Act* of 1924 served the same purpose for Asian immigration. White nationalism was also the basis of systematic lynching and the Great Migration as African Americans quit the South in search of better opportunities in northern and western cities. Between the wars, the New Orleans section of the NCJW worked to settle Jewish immigrants who obtained precious but limited visas into the US ("NCJW Refugee Document: Frankel Family," March 29, 1940, NCJWGNO Records).

Women influenced and guided by Friend augmented and continued her focus on immigration at the local level. This work flourished after World War II when another NCJW leader, Clara Marx Schultz, ran the citywide Port and Dock Initiative that settled war refugees of every denomination, each denomination serving their own. In 1946, Mrs. Louis Slater reported that the NCJW Port and Dock Committee in New Orleans met 14 ships and 74 Jewish immigrants that had been interned in concentration camps and "in their own words stepped out of hell into paradise." Another NCJW member trained by Friend, Gladys Cahn (who was national NCJW president from 1955 to 1959), visited displaced persons camps in 1952 in Europe after World War II and, upon returning home, devised a seven-state southern Jewish strategy to educate European Jewish women in US universities, enabling them to return to Europe to help their communities ("Gladys Freeman Cahn (1901–1964)" n.d.). The NCJW later put forward a fact sheet advocating for the *Lehman Bill*, which finally passed as the *1965 Immigration Bill* that set up a system of preferences based on family reunification known today, pejoratively, as

chain migration. Liberal Southern women from the racist South had the ear of House Majority Whip and then-Speaker Hale Boggs of Louisiana for the passage of progressive legislation through the civil rights movement. When Boggs disappeared over Alaska in 1972, his wife, Lindy Boggs, continued working with New Orleans women's groups on progressive legislation ("Boggs' Plane Down Missing," *Times Picayune*, October 17, 1972).

Many clubwomen in New Orleans were certainly involved in a process of Americanization of immigrants, but Jewish clubwomen like Friend, in contrast to the Draconian immigration bills, were more optimistic about immigration than the general public and felt the US could manage the influx of immigrants. Another difference between the NCJW and other women's clubs–even Jewish male-led groups–was, as historian Seth Korelitz notes, "NCJW's position on the place of women in society. NCJW consciously advocated for the expansion of women's role in the public sphere, both for themselves and for the women they helped" (Korelitz 1995, 177–203). For instance, Jewish women attributed the growing sex trade not to migrant women's inherent inferiority, but to their vulnerability and ignorance of urban life. Traveling alone, migrant women were often cut off from institutions such as family and church. Jewish women like Friend connected single women to the larger Jewish community (Rogow 1993, 35).

Politics

Image 2: Ida Weis Friend at Mayor deLesseps "Chep" Morrison's victory, c. 1946 (NCJWGNO Records).

Friend also had a keen interest in politics and suffrage. She was named the first woman from Louisiana in the women's auxiliary membership of the Democratic National Committee; unfortunately, the year is missing from the letter. This letter from J. Walker Ross to Mrs. Friend notes that she was chosen because the suffrage elements in the state were divided and she did not give offense to either side. One delegate was chosen from every state and was to "cooperate with the National Committee and be a factor in the shaping of policies and furthering of all causes in which woman was interested" (J. Walker Ross to Mrs. Joseph Friend, April 17 [no year], Ida Weis Friend Papers). Friend was also one of two women delegates from each state at the 1924 Democratic National Convention in New York. She was an ardent peace advocate and a true Wilsonian internationalist. During her NCJW national presidency from 1926 to 1932, the NCJW advocated for global military disarmament, a world court, the Pan-American Treaty of Arbitration, and Wilson's League of Nations. The national NCJW also came out against the militarization of secondary schools, because "such training tends to stress war psychology in the

minds of our adolescents" ("Decisions of the Twelfth Triennial Convention," 1926, 11, 15–16, Ida Weis Friend Papers).

Friend, an intellectual with many interests, was interested in community theater, opera, the symphony, and several intellectual salons. She used her board memberships in some of these organizations as a platform for peace and justice. She brought a League of Nations dignitary to New Orleans for one of her salons (Pierre Lemieux to Mrs. Friend, April 7, 1929, Ida Weis Friend Papers) and, in 1929, she secured Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day for another speaker salon (Dorothy Day to Mrs. Friend, December 17, 1929, Ida Weis Friend Papers). In 1951, she invited her friends and colleagues to her home to hear a Norwegian board member of the Atlantic Union Committee, the precursor to the European Union (invitation from Ida Weis Friend to hear Lithgow Osborne, March 30, 1951, Ida Weis Friend Papers). As President of the Lyceum in 1946, she brought her political agenda to the Thursday night events of the Lyceum Association. A letter from a lyceum member shows how politeness and White male privilege were culturally linked to squelch liberal democratic views. The member wrote that her choices did not "remain true to the tradition of remaining true to no entangling alliances political or otherwise. In other words stick to your knitting, and we won't have any darns" (John W. Craddock to Ida Weis Friend, June 28, 1946, Ida Weis Friend Papers). It is not clear how Friend responded, but she kept the letter for posterity.

On another front, Friend was an ardent supporter of suffrage as a member of the ERA (Equal Rights for All) Club, founded in 1898 by Kate and Jean Gordon (Jean Gordon to Ida Weis Friend, March 18, 1915, Ida Weis Friend Papers). Friend claimed that the Gordon sisters "taught her the 'new outlook for women' at the turn of the century" ("Everybody Wanted Her for President," *Times Picayune*, March 3, 1955). A 1915 letter from Jean Gordon to Ida Weis Friend shows the ERA Club shared issues that were dear to Friend. These shared interests included enforceable child labor laws, factory inspectors, a juvenile court, legalizing the signature of a woman, and admission of women to Tulane Medical School. These are listed as "Some Fruits From The Era's Club Policy of Initiation and Agitation" on the letterhead (Jean Gordon to Ida Weis Friend, March 18, 1915, Ida Weis Friend Papers).

Historian Pamela Tyler tells us that Kate Gordon "ranked as the most outspokenly Negrophobic of the prominent southern suffragists" (Tyler 2009, 21). Gordon went on to found the Southern States Women's Suffrage Conference (SSWSC), dedicated to White women suffrage (22). Kate Gordon was a divisive figure in the Louisiana and national suffrage movement. Friend does not appear to have followed Gordon's racial views. After the passage of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the vote without Louisiana's endorsement, Louisiana Governor John Parker named Friend as one of three women–"2 housewives and 1 newspaper

woman"–out of 149 delegates at the 1921 Louisiana State Constitutional Convention. Friend, a less contentious figure than Kate Gordon, most likely influenced the progressive era reforms to the constitution that consolidated the education system under one board of education. The new constitution also removed "the sex qualification" for voting and authorized absentee voting. Absentee voting was important because many White women thought it unladylike to go to the polls (Tyler 2009, 22; Berdahl 1921, 565–8). This same constitution restricted the voting rights of African Americans, showing how White women could advance without taking other ethnic groups with them.

In another 1921 letter to Ida Weis Friend, Governor John Parker placed the appointment of the entire board of the Louisiana Industrial and Vocational Training School for Women and Girls in Friend's hands (Permelia Shields to Ida Weis Friend, March 18, 1921, Ida Weis Friend Papers). Parker's note of thanks also brings up the constitutional conventions and shows both Friend's power in the public sphere and how that power was circumscribed:

> When you and Mrs. Wilkinson were appointed as members of the Constitutional Convention a number of letters were received by me vigorously protesting the idea of having women appointed to this most important body.
>
> Permit me to write to express not only my most cordial thanks and appreciation for the magnificent work you have accomplished, but to express the sincere belief that your presence in the Convention was of untold good, a most refining influence and has created a profound impression that women, earnest, thoughtful and patriotic, are fully as well qualified to serve the State as are men.

Ida Weis Friend and the NCJW remained active in politics and, in 1946, Friend was influential in breaking the Huey P. Long machine as a leader of the "Broom Brigade." Pamela Tyler notes that the non-threatening brooms symbolized a clean sweep of city hall while maintaining the image of middle-class White domesticity. Tyler also states that the "1940s brought New Orleans women into political participation in significant numbers with much of the leadership for reform movements coming from them" (Tyler 2009, 166). Friend worked with the International Women's Organization (IWO) that abandoned non-partisan politics for "sweeping" reform and support of the candidacy of deLesseps "Chep" Morrison. The women of the IWO registered voters in a state where registration was difficult. Voters had to re-register every election, and machine politicians often threw out the registration forms of independent voters. IWO members canvassed, poll-watched, and got out the vote. The women of the IWO, lead by Friend and

others, were credited with the victory of reform mayoral candidate Morrison over machine incumbent Robert Maestri. Historian Tyler expresses the enormity of the win:

> To label the outcome "surprising" fails to covey the enormity of the shock … A poll worker commented, "About three o'clock it began to snow, and the Old Regular ladies they said, 'go home, Mrs. Bruder, you know you are whipped."
>
> "No," I said, "we will be dancing in this snow at 3 o'clock in the morning to celebrate our victory, and we did dance in the streets. It was a miracle." (Tyler 2009, 148–50)

After the election, the IWO became a permanent organization, with Friend as one of the founding members of its governing board. The IWO, with the help of many NCJW cross-over members, continues today in fights for civil rights, equal pay, family leave, gender parity, LGBTQ rights, and pro-choice politics. While the IWO expanded White voter rolls, voter registration and representation of African Americans would take longer. Friend's efforts laid the groundwork for civil rights.

Across the Racial Divide

Ida Weis Friend, along with other Jewish women, were some of the first to reach across the racial divide. She helped bring the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) to New Orleans in 1932 and the Urban League to New Orleans in 1938. Friend was a wealthy philanthropist, and it is possible that her money helped establish these organizations (New Orleans Business and Professional Women's Club to the Loving Cup Committee, *Times Picayune* Publishing Co., nomination letter dated September 6, 1946, Ida Weis Friend Papers; "Everybody Wanted Her for President," *Times Picayune*, March 3, 1955). White leaders in Atlanta founded the CIC in 1919 to quell racial unrest from Black men who were returning from service in the military. The CIC leadership carried racist stereotypes and sought cooperation, not integration or equality. Historian William Cole (1943, 456–63) notes that the New Orleans CIC existed in the 1920s but did nothing because of racist leadership. So it appears that Friend was involved in the reinvigoration of the CIC in 1932. She was also a member of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching and an unwavering leader in the local Consumer League. Landon Storrs (2000, 8) states that, by the time of the Great Depression, the National Consumer League "concluded that racial inequality was the linchpin of the South's separate political economy and that the unreformed South was

blocking the path to American social democracy." It seems Friend's grassroots activism with the Consumers League and anti-lynching work brought her to similar conclusions. By the 1940s, she was attending an Atlanta conference presided over by Black sociologist Charles S. Johnson. The conference participants created a

> framework within which we covenant together (and) must comprehend a concept and a charter which guarantees equality of opportunity for all people. This means more specifically as bearing upon the burden of our present counseling that the Negro in the United States and in every region is entitled to and should have every guarantee of equal opportunity that every other citizen of the United States has under the framework of the American democratic system of government. ("Atlanta Conference of Race Relations Report," n.d., Ida Weis Friend Papers)

Unfortunately, equality of opportunity still meant separate but equal to many Whites.

As president of the Urban League, Ida Weis Friend was able to gain membership of the Urban League to the Community Chest, the precursor of United Way. Indeed, this helped the local Urban League fundraise. A 1942 letter from Jessie Thomas of the National Urban League states,

> Your name Friend symbolizes the true relationship you have had to the New Orleans Urban League from its foundation. There were some others who were doubtful of its future who severed their official connections with it at a time when it really needed friends. In those days when slow was the pace, you stood by and never evidenced a desire or disposition to "abandon ship." (Jessie O. Thomas, Washington DC, to Mrs. Joseph E. Friend, November 18, 1942, Ida Weis Friend Papers)

Both the CIC, founded in 1919, and the Urban League, founded in 1911, have a middle-class liberal agenda. This more conservative agenda stands apart from a sea of radical communists, Garveyites, and the NAACP, founded in 1905 by freedom fighters W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida Wells-Barnett, Archibald Grimke, and Mary Church Terrell. The NAACP championed racial equality from the start as well as an anti-lynching agenda. But, in the South, the CIC and the Urban League gave liberal Whites, like Friend, a place to coalesce against the Ku Klux Klan and join anti-lynching campaigns. These organizations were an incubator for political leadership and activism in the 1960s Southern civil rights campaigns. They were a place for Black and White to get to know one another and hatch plans for future political campaigns. By the 1950s, this leadership also cross-pollinated other organizations, such as Save Our Schools (SOS), that worked for public school education and integration after *Brown vs. Board.* Was this enough? Had White people worked

across racial lines in coalitions at an earlier time, would they have had more radical agendas? In the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, New Orleans was controlled by racists and segregationists. White liberals, often segregationists themselves, worked with African American middle-class leadership to win a few concessions. Through Friend and the NCJW leadership, we see a continuous but painfully gradual foothold in racial justice that continues today.

Women's History as a Resource for Today

Image 3: Ida Weis Friend mentoring younger woman, c. 1950 (NCJWGNO Records).

Returning to an opening question: What does this look into Ida Weis Friend's life tell us about early 20th-century advocacy as a resource for today? Certainly, we need to leave behind the class and race supremacy that has not yet been addressed even today. Leaving these behind means addressing how privilege entrenches itself in every generation and becomes a blinding bias. The gradualism of the past is a limitation. Gradualism has not dismantled an unjust system. It works as a form of

tokenism when unjust laws are overturned without securing rights and freedoms for all times. We see this with the rise of global populism and its anti-immigrant, racist, misogynistic, and anti-Semitic agenda.

Even so, Friend's life points to several strategies that are useful for justice work today. With the Consumer's League and immigration work, Friend tied her philanthropy to grassroots work with marginalized communities. This on-the-ground attention to detail helped her grow and evolve in a way that allowed for continuity and change as the times changed. She lived a long time and was really never outdated and always seemed to be on top of the next progressive strategy, pushing some from behind and willingly leading others. Another feature of her work was creating local organizations attached to national organizations and national movements. Indeed, national connections were one key to resilience post-Katrina (Usdin 2014). My own post-Katrina interviews showed that Jewish, Catholic, Episcopalian, and Methodist denominations with national and international networks had many more resources at their disposal than African Americans in small independent churches without resources. In the racist Jim Crow South of Friend's time, this cross-fertilization between local and national organizations was critical to the flow of progressive ideas and resource development. Friend also worked collectively, through organizations, on teams, and with friends. Friend's causes were the NCJW's causes. People who knew one another worked out of each other's houses, donated to each other's volunteer and activist causes, and created a culture of care that influenced their children and helped re-instill Jewish values in every generation.

Ida Weis Friend had a constituency. Followers sought her advice, which made her what we would today call a "thought leader" in the community. She worked across a wide range of issues and sought changes using mutually reinforcing strategies that tied direct services to legislative and political advocacy. This comprehensive engagement in the community leads to my last point: Ida Weis Friend had a global reach. Her gaze was international. Influenced by her German immigrant father and spending two formative years in Frankfurt and Nice as a young woman, she looked beyond New Orleans and paid attention to world events. She was an avid clipper of the *New York Times* and followed the rise of Hitler and every invasion. Friend, like many African Americans, looked beyond provincial White-owned newspapers to publications with global perspectives. The local White papers could be quite parochial, running lead articles that affirmed Jim Crow politics, sensationalized Black crime, justified lynching, and praised Black musical talent as a quaint cultural anomaly. In contrast, Friend brought global perspectives to the local community. She went well beyond the local paper and brought an international perspective to local events, contextualizing local events in this larger

framework. Her curiosity and sense of herself as a global player brought a much-needed liberal impulse to a very mean and parochial Jim Crow South.

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Notes

1. Katrina's Jewish Voices was an initiative of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring Woldenberg Institute for Southern Jewish Life.

CHAPTER 8

Shundō Aoyama Rōshi

Nurturing the Seeds of Zen

KARMA LEKSHE TSOMO

Shundō Aoyama Rōshi was born in 1933 in Aichi Province, Nagoya Prefecture, a few hundred kilometers south of Tokyo. Considered by her mother to be a gift from the Buddha, she arrived at Muryō Temple in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture at the age of five (Aoyama 2019, 91). She began her religious training under the careful and compassionate guidance of her aunt (Aoyama 2019, 110). As she was growing up, she not only studied scriptures, rituals, and meditation, but also the way of tea (*chadō*), the way of flower ornamentation (*kadō*), the way of calligraphy (*shodō*), and other traditional Japanese arts (Arai 1990, 43–7; 1999, 53, 144).

In 1948, at the age of fifteen, Aoyama Rōshi became a nun and continued her monastic training as a novice at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō in Nagoya. She was one of the very first nuns to receive higher academic education, graduating with a master's degree from the prestigious Komazawa University, flagship of the Sōtō School of Zen. In 1976, she became abbess of Aichi Senmon Nisodo, where she took up the task of training novices (Arai 1990, 40). In 1984, she became abbess of Tokubetsu Nisodo, responsible for training special monastics to become teachers of the tradition.

In 1984, she was appointed abbess of Tokubetsu Nisōdō at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, where she was authorized to train nuns, give Dharma transmission, and designate her own Dharma heir. Today, she also serves as the abbess of two other temples, oversees numerous Buddhist activities, lectures widely throughout Japan, and has authored many books. She is recognized internationally as a prominent Zen master; a recent article in a leading North American Buddhist magazine regards her as "the highest ranking nun in the history of Soto Zen" (Ruff and Yamada 2019, 70).

Aoyama Rōshi's legacy and her place in the Buddhist world are unique. Situated within a notably patriarchal tradition, she has been a leader in the struggle for gender parity in contemporary Japan. Due to her unflagging efforts, nuns in the Sōtō Zen tradition have now achieved unprecedented visibility and independence. According to religious studies scholar Paula Arai, the leading contemporary scholar of Sōtō Zen laywomen and nuns, "the nuns now control their own religious training, enjoy educational and ceremonial rights, and have … appropriate titles and religious robes" (Arai 1999, 74). Today, at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, Aoyama Rōshi not only directs the leading training program for Zen nuns in Japan, but also conducts regular classes and meditation programs for laypeople. Every Sunday, she opens the monastery to the public and delivers two talks, along with sessions of *zazen,* formal *oriyoki* meals, and, periodically, tea meditation (*chazen*) (Arai 1990, 38). By training a generation of highly qualified nuns and dedicated female teachers from Japan and around the world, she has ensured the continuity of a monastic lineage that was believed to be in precipitous decline. As a lineage holder, she epitomizes three generations of twentieth-century female Zen practitioners who have valiantly embodied, and thereby preserved, the tradition.

Image 1: Aoyama Rōshi (photo by Tomomi Ito).

Early Steps on the Path

Aoyama Rōshi's connection with Buddhism began when she was very young, in her mother's womb, when her mother resolved to dedicate her to the Buddha. At a tender age, the child reached Muryō-ji Temple, where she came under the care of her aunt, Shuzan, an old nun, and Shuzan's cousin Senshu, a compassionate and exacting teacher. The temple is located on the plains surrounding the Japan Alps, in the small town of Shiojiri in Nagano Prefecture. In the freezing Buddha hall of this country temple, she learned the *sūtra*s and the stories of great Zen masters, through strict discipline and their example. She saw her mother only occasionally and, from a young age, deeply committed to the path of Dharma, felt no attachment to her. Her mother cried the first year her young daughter was away at the temple, but soon realized that she truly had offered her to the Buddha. Rōshi remembers:

> For the child with whom she had spent so little time, my mother raised silkworms, spun the thread, wove the cloth, and made all the clothing I would need for the rest of my life, including the ceremonial robes, surplices, kimonos, and even obi sashes for kimonos. Clad in the embrace of the handwoven garments my mother made so devotedly with fervent prayer, I have earnestly followed the Buddhist Way for fifty-one years, since I entered the temple at the age of five. (Aoyama 2019, 111)

Two years after she arrived at the temple, after suffering from illness most of his life, her father passed away. He enjoined her to become a nun and "do my part of the practice as well," which deepened her commitment to the religious life. Her gratitude for entering the path with ease extends beyond her natal family:

> When I look at my own life, I feel happy that the hopes and prayers and help of my parents, grandparents, and the many ancestors before them came together in this one living body of mine. Thus, I feel strongly that I must never neglect my religious faith, which is a gift from the Buddha. While praying that I may be allowed to live single-mindedly according to the Buddha's teachings, these days I find myself asking "Is this enough, Father? Have I managed to do your part as well?" (Aoyama 2019, 111–12)

Aoyama Rōshi recalls a singular incident that decisively shaped her practice. At the age of 18, in her third year of training, she attended a rather stylized question-and-answer session led by a self-effacing professor and Zen master named Ryōun Ōbora as part of a precepts ceremony where she was serving. Throwing caution to the wind, she quoted a verse by Dōgen and posed the question: "What does it mean to say 'Life and death, as they are, is nirvana?'" Ōbora Rōshi responded, "Practice for thirty years and then come back; then ask me again." Although he would have been 108 years old by that time, while regretting her lack of understanding, she took his "severe words" as encouragement, as his "last will and testament" to her (Aoyama 2019, 117).

Aoyama Rōshi became quite critical of disingenuous Buddhist priests, whom she compares to "black clouds covering the sun" (Aoyama 2019, 99). Rejecting such an insincere life, she spent her youth in search of the true path. Finally, after many twists and turns, she found solace in the Buddha's words of counsel to the layman (*upāsaka*) Atula. These words are recounted in the *Dhammapāda:* "neither one who speaks too much, speaks too little, or remains silent can escape blame in this world" (99). Later, after completing her studies at Komazawa University and recovering from a bout of disillusionment over corruption in the clergy, she returned to her home temple with "a new sense of admiration for the profundity and splendor of the Way" (95). With the unfailing support of her two

nun teachers, she began leading annual Zen retreats at her home temple attended by up to two hundred participants. She narrates how, in order to express her gratitude to her teachers, she once insisted on cooking for an intensive retreat, toiling in the kitchen from early morning to late at night.

In 1966, when she was 33, Aoyama Rōshi stumbled over rocks along a mountain path on a rainy pitch-black night to attend a *sesshin* (intensive meditation retreat) at Antai-ji (Purple Bamboo Grove Monastery). After arriving, she called out and, getting no response, she narrowly escaped opening a door on a batch of trainee monks who were bathing. At last, she was kindly welcomed by Kōshō Uchiyama, the respected Zen master who was leading the silent five-day *sesshin*. Despite having a bad cold, she followed the tightly regulated meditation schedule, facing the wall in the freezing meditation hall. She persevered because she believes that Zen as practiced at Antai-ji is the ideal, kind method of sitting meditation (*zazen*), "the true way human beings should live" (Aoyama 2019, 123).

Negotiating Tradition and Modernity

Aoyama Rōshi came of age in an era of greater freedom, expanded opportunities, and improvements in the status of Sōtō Zen nuns. As documented in the work of Paula Arai, Zen nuns made great strides in the twentieth century. There are currently about 1,000 Sōtō Zen nuns in Japan–the largest number of any sect–who are celibate practitioners and observe the *bodhisattva* precepts of the *Brahmajala Sūtra*.[1] The nuns' strategy has been to follow strict standards of monastic discipline, and this practice has given them the confidence to deal with institutionalized inequalities. The fact that nuns were held to a stricter standard of discipline than the monks has had the unanticipated consequence of preparing nuns to be the keepers of tradition and models of the Zen lifestyle. "The weight of monastic tradition helped establish the legitimacy of institutionalized equality" (Arai 1999, 16). The nuns' struggle to transform discriminatory institutional structures was fostered by the egalitarian stance of Dōgen (1200–53), founder of the Sōtō Zen School, who affirmed that women and men were equally capable of practicing *zazen*. Through the efforts of these pioneers who struggled to establish equal regulations for male and female practitioners, nuns were eventually able to create and maintain their own institutions and "to achieve ranks commensurate with their competence within the Buddhist hierarchy" (16).

In the late nineteenth century, the status of nuns in Japanese society was low, apart from a few who belonged to the imperial family. However, perhaps because of Dōgen's unequivocal statement regarding the equal capabilities of women and men, monastic schools began to be established specifically to improve the quality

of education for nuns, first in Gifu Prefecture (1881), followed by schools in Aichi (1887), Kyoto (1888), Tokyo (1889), and Toyama (1892). At these schools, constructed and managed by nuns, novices studied Buddhist texts, chanting, classical Chinese, and calligraphy, in addition to regular secular subjects. In 1902, the Sōtō Zen School passed regulations that allowed monastic schools for nuns to officially grant degrees that were eventually recognized by the Ministry of Education (Arai 1999, 53).

The primary impetus for these advances was a group of four nuns who worked diligently to alter the status quo. Their sincerity and hard work resulted in incremental institutional changes. In 1901, Mizuno Jōrin received the title *ni-oshō* (nun preceptor) from the leading Zen master of Eihei-ji Temple, even though "sect regulations did not permit nuns to be granted this title" (Arai 1999, 54). Three other nuns subsequently received this prestigious title: Hori Mitsujō in 1910, and Andō Dōkai and Yamagushi Kokan in 1911. These four nuns were especially concerned with improving educational facilities for nuns and worked together to establish a monastic training school for nuns (*nigakurin*). This training school, currently known as Aichi Senmon Nisōdō (Novitiate Monastery for the Sōtō Zen Nuns of Aichi Prefecture), was founded in 1903 (55). There, the nuns followed the rules of daily life of Dōgen Zenji and Keizan Zenji, the founders of Sōtō Zen in Japan, and seriously dedicated themselves to learning and meditation practice.

At the time of its founding, the living conditions at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō were minimal. Twenty-two novice nuns and eight teachers lived together in two six-mat rooms with no electricity, eating barley and salty soup. Despite the lack of amenities, the novices applied themselves conscientiously to both traditional subjects–such as classical Chinese, Sōtō Zen texts, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and calligraphy–and modern subjects, such as science and math. In the following years, the number of student nuns steadily grew, and the monastery moved to a more suitable location on a hill in an especially pleasant part of Nagoya, where it continues today. By 1941, despite many obstacles, the monastery had expanded to provide education to 140 nuns. Tragically, it burned to the ground during a World War II air raid in May 1945 (Arai 1999, 59). Again, the nuns persevered and worked diligently to reconstruct the monastery under difficult post-war economic conditions. After 1948, many of the nuns embarked on university studies at Aichi Gakuin, a local, private, Sōtō-affiliated university. As a community, the nuns raised funds to construct a meditation hall, which was completed in 1950.

Aoyama Rōshi quickly rose to prominence as a recognized Zen master. As mentioned, in 1976, she was appointed the abbess of Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, responsible for training novices, and, in 1984, became the abbess of Tokubetsu Nisodo, responsible for training future teachers. Since 1984, she has also been

responsible for overseeing two other temples, Shōbō-ji and Muryō-ji. Shōbō-ji is a fully functioning temple on the grounds of Aichi Senmon Nisōdō in Nagoya. The main hall (*hondō*) for the monastery also serves the function of caring for parishioners (*danka*) and houses the memorial tablets (*ihai*) of those who have passed away. The nuns who train at the monastery also gain experience by visiting parishioners and counseling them in their homes. Home visits are a mainstay of a nun's practice. The formal activity is for a nun to chant the requisite *sūtra*s at a family's home altar on the monthly death anniversary (*meinichi*) of a deceased family member. After the rituals are performed, being in the privacy a parishioners' home provides an opportunity for a parishioner, usually a woman, to seek spiritual guidance. Often over tea, the confidential exchanges are regularly welcome and intimate. Aoyama Rōshi stresses the importance of these interpersonal exchanges, indicating they are a vital dimension of training to be a nun.

> The foundation of nuns' responsibility, conscience, and honor is to have been granted the role to support the spiritual dimensions of the efforts of women who bear the responsibility–granted by the gods and the Buddhas–to give birth to and raise the people of tomorrow who will saddle the world on their shoulders. We must exert ourselves unremittingly. This is the only path on which we must continuously advance. (Arai 1999, viii)

Nuns who reside at Muryō-ji, the temple where Aoyama Rōshi was raised, also engage with the parishioners of that temple, in addition to tending an extensive garden. Aoyama Rōshi frequently travels back and forth between the large city of Nagoya and the small town of Shiojiri to personally oversee the training and education of the nuns there. Some develop a master-disciple relationship with her and receive Dharma transmission from her, thereby becoming teachers themselves. Despite Aoyama Rōshi's very traditional Zen training, her attitude toward monastic life is quite progressive: "If one is a Buddhist monk or priest, one must throw aside one's robes and become involved in the world in order to weep, suffer, and laugh with other people. Gradually people will become aware of the true Way and be drawn toward it" (Aoyama 2019, 130).

Over the years, Aoyama Rōshi has become a leading scholar of Sōtō Zen and a distinguished author, having written more than 50 books on a range of topics. The titles in themselves give a strong sense of her approach to life. Some are very poetic, such as *Quiet Conversations on Zen Tea: Listening to the Wind in the Pines* (2007) and *Flowers of Compassion* (1997). Others are straightforward accounts of Chinese and Japanese Zen masters. Some of her books are based on early Buddhist texts, such as *Flower Garlands of the Dharma: A Taste of the Dhammapāda* (1984) and *Stories of the Heart of Wisdom Sūtra* (2002), while others are based on later Zen

texts, such as *Zen Wisdom: Lessons Learned from the Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki* (1994) and *Instructions from the Cook* (1995). Some are teachings on living a life of harmony, purity, and tranquility, such as *Becoming a Beautiful Person: The Words of a Nun Living Zen* (2004) and *Polishing Life as an Offering: Illuminated by Zen* (2015). Other books, such as *A Journey to Another Me* (1997) and *How to Cook My Life* (2001) offer Zen-inspired guidelines for personal nourishment. Her humility and her concern for the many challenges women face on the path are evident in *The Path is a Little Far* (1998) and *Because There is Mud, Flowers Bloom* (2016). Her written work, reflecting on life from different angles, conveys how deeply her path has been informed by Buddhist teachings and demonstrates how creatively she applies those teachings.

International Engagement

Aoyama Rōshi is one of the very few Japanese women who have actively engaged in religious dialogue in the international community. In 1987, she participated in the Third East-West Spiritual Exchange, in which a group of 28 monks and nuns of all three schools of Zen monasticism–Obaku, Rinzai, and Zen–lived in Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in Europe (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain) for almost a month. The exchange included a visit to the tomb of St. Benedict, a private audience with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican on September 9, and an interreligious prayer gathering for peace in Assisi. The monastics not only engaged in deep dialogue but, as the Pope noted, shared liturgies, meditation, and a "silent encounter within the interior of their monasteries" (Augustine 1989, 249). Although she was one of only a few Zen nuns involved in the encounter, she played an active role in moving Zen beyond the confines of Japanese culture and bringing it to the forefront of constructive, heartfelt interreligious dialogue.

Aoyama Rōshi has been an influential figure both nationally in Japan and internationally. She has traveled widely and taught abroad, visiting the Buddhist sacred sites of India and numerous Zen centers in the United States and Europe. Aoyama Rōshi was featured on the long-running French series *Sagesses bouddhistes* on France 2 (*Sagesses bouddhistes* 2010). Even at an advanced age, she made an effort to participate in international conferences–a rarity among Japanese nuns. In 2004, she attended the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, held in Seoul, South Korea on the theme, "Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women Past and Present." In 2008, she delivered the keynote address at the 10th Sakyadhita, held in Ulaanbataar, Mongolia, where she spoke on the theme, "Buddhism in Transition: Tradition, Changes, and Challenges." The conference was disrupted by political events following a disputed election in which

six people were killed the very day after her keynote. However, she remained serene and attentive throughout the conference proceedings. Her calm presence helped to reassure the other conference participants in a time of great uncertainty with few lines of communication open beyond the conference venue. In 2011, Rōshi attended the 12th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, held in Bangkok, Thailand on the theme, "Leading to Liberation." The organizers and participants were honored by the presence of a nun of her stature and deeply impressed by her warmth, humility, and elegance. Her presence was especially appreciated given the Fukushima nuclear disaster that had racked Japan just a few months earlier. Japanese women are often missing in international gatherings, whether due to language barriers, cultural isolation, social and religious responsibilities in Japan, personal reticence, or other factors. By standing in for Japanese Buddhist women at these historical international gatherings, she helped fill a critical gap by representing Japan among the Buddhists of the world (Arai 1990, 40; Arai 1999, 74–5, 78).

Aoyama Rōshi has played a major part in expanding the influence of Sōtō Zen internationally by training teachers who take their experience of Zen practice back to their home countries and thereby expand awareness of Japanese culture and meditation around the world. Aoyama Rōshi has overseen the training of nuns from around the world who come to Nagoya to practice *zazen* and experience an authentic Zen monastic lifestyle. In this way, she has nurtured students who return to their home countries to establish Zen centers and become teachers in their own right, training students of their own. One example is Monja Coen Rōshi (Cláudia Coên), who trained at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō and returned to Brazil in 1995. After teaching at Busshinji Temple in São Paulo for some time, she established Zendo Brasil, trained her own students, wrote numerous popular books on Zen, and became a well-known public figure (Tsomo 2017, 252).

Image 2: Monja Coen with Aoyama Rōshi (courtesy of Monja Coen).

Another example is Paula Kane Robinson Arai, an eminent Japanese American scholar of Sōtō Zen, who credits Aoyama Rōshi with providing the "indispensable gift" of her trust. This enabled Arai "to live in the monastery and interview the novices in training," freely gather information, and benefit from the "necessary challenges" (Arai 1999, x). Aoyama Rōshi wrote a preface to the book that resulted from this extended participant-observer research experience, titled *Reflections on Women Encountering Buddhism across Cultures and Time* (vii–viii).

Yet another example is Gesshin Claire Greenwood, an American woman who completed three years of intensive training at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō. During her training, she was installed as a head trainee (*hossenshiki*) in a ceremony that involves ritual bowing and a question-and-answer exchange sometimes characterized as "Dharma combat." She recalls Aoyama Rōshi's patience and insight:

> Aoyama Rōshi once said in a Dharma talk that true selflessness is unaware of itself. True selflessness, she said, is like a person in a house up in the mountains lighting a lamp in their room; a traveler wandering through the valley below, lost and frightened in the dark, who then looks up and sees

> that light and feels comforted. The person lighting the lamp doesn't know someone else can see the light, doesn't know anyone feels comforted by it. That, she said, is true selflessness. (Greenwood, 29)

True selflessness, then, is awareness that is not self-reflexive but naturally, spontaneously illuminating. The image of a person who un-self-consciously lights a lamp in the darkness and unknowingly comforts others is an apt metaphor for Aoyama Rōshi's unassuming yet illuminating presence in the lives of her students. In this way, she has nurtured many women as future leaders.

Living Awareness

Aoyama Rōshi grew up in an era of intense and dramatic social and political changes. As a Buddhist nun, she was trained in a uniquely Japanese cultural context and speaks from a realm of experience that contrasts sharply with many contemporary interpretations of Dharma. Nevertheless, in contrast to most nuns of her day, who carefully avoided public attention, she has appeared on national television, in popular magazines, and has quietly pursued an illustrious teaching career. Her erudition, congeniality, cultural refinement, and many accomplishments are widely acknowledged. Her weekly lectures on Zen and *sesshin* sessions attract consistently large groups of sincere seekers. Her message is at once prosaic and sublime, encouraging listeners to embrace the difficulties of the human condition as a welcome, strengthening practice.

As evidence of Aoyama Rōshi's scholarly prominence, Einin Kumamoto, an associate professor of Buddhist studies at Komazawa University and an ordained Sōtō Zen priest, selects her as one of three contemporary scholars of Zen whose work he subjects to critical analysis in his article, "Shut up, Zen Priest." Yet in comparison to the scathing critiques he levels against the other two authors, his evaluation of Aoyama Rōshi and her 1987 book, *Ima ni Inochi Moyashite* (Burning with Life, Now) is quite laudatory: "There is no particular need for me to introduce Aoyama, beyond noting that today she is a nun who is able to speak not only for the Soto sect, but also for the whole of Japanese Buddhism. I have no intention whatsoever to criticize Aoyama's activities here. The half-a-lifetime described in her book is the true life of a Zen priest, pious and lacking in any point to criticize" (Kumamoto, 476–7). Kumamoto's first observation about Aoyama Rōshi's work concerns her conviction that karmic connections from the past enabled her to pursue the Buddhist path with relative ease from a young age. Unfortunately, Kumamoto confuses the Buddha's teachings on actions–the law of cause and effect –with the "will of Heaven," an unmistakably Confucian concept. His second

observation concerns gender structures and renunciation; in agreement with Aoyama, he concludes by endorsing her critical stance on clerical marriage. Kumamoto's acknowledgment of Aoyama's stature in the sphere of Zen scholarship is unusual in Zen's male-dominated hierarchy.

Aoyama Rōshi and her students have won accolades in Japan and abroad for their learning and leadership. Writing in 2018, the American Zen teacher Tenku Ruff said, "Not long ago, Shundō Aoyama Rōshi, the abbess of the women's monastery in Nagoya, received the highest rank a woman has ever held in the Soto Zen monastic system. At around the same time, two of her disciples also crossed gender barriers: Yusho Sasaki Roshi became the first female Soto Zen bishop (of Europe) and Yuko Wakayama Osho was invited to teach monks on Dogen at Eiheiji, the monastery established by Eihei Dogen Zenji himself and one of the two head monasteries of Soto Zen" (Ruff 2018). In contrast to the low status of nuns during the time Aoyama was growing up, the achievements of Aoyama Rōshi and her students represent major flash points in Japanese religious history.

Aoyama Rōshi is known for emphasizing the value of beauty in daily living (Arai 2011, 201). She embodies this appreciation for beauty not only in her practice of the traditional Japanese arts of tea, calligraphy, and flower arrangement, but also in the words, gestures, and ordinary activities of everyday life. "Without bifurcating 'sacred' and 'profane' realms, as is found in several other cultures, concrete everyday activities are ultimate. Therefore, cleaning floors and cooking food can be done as supreme acts of importance. With this context, meaning is abundant in daily life" (Arai 2011, 109). The attention she gives to ordinary everyday activities resonates with women, who are often responsible for daily chores while caring for their families. In dealing with human relationships, she playfully recommends that people who are angry with each other bow with folded hands before they start to argue (Arai 1999, 159).

Image 3: Aoyama Rōshi calligraphy (courtesy of Monja Coen).

Among the activities of everyday life, Aoyama Rōshi is especially attentive to the power of words in conveying meaning, nuance, and beauty. Even a few words expounding the true teachings can be a turning point that transforms our thinking. Speech may simply be innocent noise, but inconsiderate words have the power to wound people for the rest of their lives. She explains that the Buddha was always careful to speak honestly, for the benefit of the hearer, at the appropriate time and place. Her heartfelt view is, "Beautiful words spring naturally from a considerate and beautiful life" (Aoyama 2019, 32). She feels great sympathy for the frustrations, regrets, and sadness that plague many people in the world today. She repeatedly reminds her disciples about the reality of death and says, "The best offering to the departed is for us, those left behind, to live meaningful lives so that they need not worry about us and can continue tranquilly on their journey in the afterlife or peacefully attain buddhahood" (106).

Although Aoyama Rōshi has always lived a traditional Zen nun's life, she is keenly sensitive to the needs of laywomen and laymen seeking to find their way through the vicissitudes of life in challenging times. As Paula Arai expresses it, Aoyama Rōshi's primary concern is shaping the heart through following the Buddhist path: "The Way is made up of the formal disciplines (kata) of daily tasks like eating, cleaning, and bathing … These disciplines are not arbitrary but are based on what is needed to care for each object" (Arai 2011, 36). The general public appreciates her wisdom and compassion, and interviews with her frequently

appear in the media. Aoyama Rōshi has been heard to say that "women are designed to be mothers." She believes that "women have an advantage over men, because women's bodies have wombs, which 'are a place of deep peace, pure compassion, a source of life, like the ocean is the womb of earth'" (121). She includes all women in this expansive statement, not just biological mothers. She believes that all beings have a wish to return to their mother, meaning that they wish to return to their heart-mind or their true nature. Paula Arai notes that many Zen rituals are associated with conception, birth, and the well-being of children and families. Examples include writing prayers on wooden plaques (*ema*) for protection and healing, going on pilgrimage (*meguri*), chanting, and copying *sūtra*s (*shakyō*). There are also special events such as the Daihannya ritual, which combines thunderous sounds, rhythms, visuals, and sensations to convey the inseparability of dependent arising and emptiness–the inseparability of this present moment and the universe (121). Aoyama Rōshi refers to these ritualized activities as occurring in "circle time" (*ensō jikan*), endless and beginningless in each complete present moment (144).

Notable Contributions of a Female Zen Master

Aoyama Rōshi helped to elevate the social status of women in many important ways. Her writings inform our understanding of the contributions and increasing visibility of Sōtō Zen nuns in modern times. Stereotypes about women abounded during the Tokugawa era (1600–1868), including preconceptions about the impurity of women, which required expiation. At that time, it was believed that women needed to counteract the negative karmic consequences of menstruation and childbirth through specific ritual practices. The primary means of offsetting these transgressions of pollution taboos was to commission Sōtō Zen priests to ritually intercede to free women from the horrors of the Blood Pool Hell by reciting an apocryphal text titled the *Blood Pool Hell Sūtra* (Ketsubonkyō) (Meeks 2020a; 2020b).[2] These texts are non-canonical and draw heavily on folk traditions to convey "messages of sin and salvation" to society in general. Nonetheless, the messages they sent about the inherent flaws of the female body were widely influential in shaping attitudes toward women (Ambros 2016, 4).

Through her teachings and the example of her life, Aoyama Rōshi has played a pivotal role in transforming attitudes toward women in contemporary Japanese society. She has accomplished this through her skillful and persistent work to train a new generation of female Zen masters and through her generosity and kindness in teaching and personally interacting with the lay Buddhist community, especially women. Her life's work coincided with major changes in the status of women in

Japan overall and Sōtō Zen in particular. Despite Dōgen Zenji's egalitarian attitude, during the Tokugawa era, nuns' activities were strictly curtailed (Uchino 1983, 178–9). Although the Meiji era (1868–1912) brought modernization and many changes in education and religion, the status of Sōtō Zen nuns did not improve. However, three schools were established where nuns could get some education. After the Taishō Era (1912–25), progressive ideas about democracy and women proliferated, and Sōtō nuns gathered to petition the sect authorities for greater rights (181–5). After World War II, changes in Sōtō Zen policies brought improvements both for nuns and for temple wives (185–93).

As religious studies scholars Barbara R. Ambros (2016) and Paula R. K. Arai (2000) have documented, Aoyama Rōshi and the nuns at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō have played a pivotal role in sustaining the Anan Kōshiki–a ritual expressing gratitude to Ānanda, the Buddha's close disciple who advocated for the admission of women to the Buddhist monastic order. In 2003, to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Aichi Senmon Nisōdō, a quorum of specially trained nuns performed the lengthy ritual, establishing an historical link of continuity with the courageous nuns who insisted on equal representation in the sangha. Devotional practices and offerings by nuns to commemorate Ānanda's compassion for women can be traced to India, as documented in the annals of the Chinese monks Faxian (337–422) and Xuanzang (602–64) (Ambros 2016, 209). The performance of the ritual is said to elicit a response in the form of protection and blessings for women from Ānanda, who is believed to answer their prayers (213). Aoyama Rōshi reprinted the ritual text twice, once in 1985 and again in 2003, and also permitted the filming of the ritual.

In 2009, Aoyama Rōshi became the first nun to be appointed to the rank of Daikyōshi (Great Teacher) in the Sōtō Zen School. The concept of lineage in Japanese Zen is disputed. In one sense, it is simply the chronological transmission of a school of practice from one generation to the next. In another sense, it involves a passing of authority. A talented or realized disciple is authorized to teach or recognized as a successor by a teacher. For others, it is a sense of presence or an experience of awakening, often precipitated by a personal encounter between master and disciple. In this latter sense, lineage is sometimes known as "mind-to-mind transmission" of wisdom or even of enlightenment that is thought to be traceable all the way back to Buddha Śākyamuni himself. Sōtō Zen lineage to date includes over ninety patriarchs, though it is impossible to verify an unbroken continuity or even that all these figures were historical personages. During the Tokugawa era, the notion of lineage became incorporated into precept ordination ceremonies (*jukai e*) attended by large numbers of lay and ordained followers, female and male. As Duncan Ryūken Williams notes in *The Other Side of Zen*, the ordinants received a name (*kaimyō*) and a lineage chart (*kechimyaku*) that linked

them in an unbroken succession that began with Buddha Śākyamuni (Williams 2004, 26–7). However, one thing is certain: women are very conspicuously missing from the lineage of Sōtō Zen masters. To address this lacuna, several Western Buddhist centers have created lineages of matriarchs. The names of these women are chanted in place of the traditional lineages of Zen patriarchs. These new female lineages begin with Mahāprajāpatī, the Buddha's foster mother who became the first Buddhist nun, and memorialize female masters up to modern times. In *Women of the Way: Discovering 2,500 Years of Buddhist Wisdom*, author Sallie Tisdale (2006) imagines a lineage that begins with "mythical ancestors" in India and winds through China and Japan until it reaches Boston and Los Angeles.

Image 4: Aoyama Rōshi at Aichi Senmon Nisōdō (photo by Tomomi Ito).

Over her lifetime, Aoyama Rōshi earned a reputation for her unique contributions in upholding a time-honored lineage of Zen aesthetics. Her artistic sensibility is evident in the covers of her books, which are refined and aesthetically pleasing. Some of these covers are light-hearted and contemporary, almost whimsical, but almost all of them reference the natural world. The cover image of *Quiet Talks on Zen Tea: Twelve Tales of Tea* portrays a rock garden emblematic of Japanese Zen minimalism, and the calligraphy used for the book's title is itself a

work of art. On the cover of her book *Fully Living Sky and Earth*, is an evocative painting in Chinese style featuring a willow tree against a surrealistic moonscape. The cover of the popular book *The Path is a Little Far* features photographs of two flower arrangements, both in a rather modernistic style, but with the title in a traditional calligraphic brushwork. Perhaps most traditional of all is the graphic selected for the cover of *Zen Wisdom: Lessons Learned from the Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*, Aoyama Rōshi's reflections on the discourses of Eihei Dōgen Zenji (1200–53), founder of the Sōtō School. The graphic is a simple circle (*enso*) symbolizing the emptiness that encompasses totality–a profound paradox. In this case, instead of the wispy freestyle calligraphy typical of the genre, we find a very solid circle that seems to signal endurance as well as immediacy. These qualities of endurance and immediacy are evident not only in the material aspects of Zen culture with which Aoyama Rōshi surrounds herself, but also in the graciousness and beauty that she manifests in every movement and interaction.

Aoyama Rōshi has received numerous awards in recognition of her leadership and valuable contributions to Japanese society and Buddhist culture. In 2006, she received the 40th Bukkyō Dendō Bunka Award–a lifetime achievement award for transmitting Buddhist teachings and culture (Kōeki Zaidan Hōjin). This prestigious award is presented by the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) to those who advance the Buddhist teachings and transmit the tradition with meritorious achievement. The award honored Aoyama Rōshi as a leader of nuns, notable for her numerous writings and public presentations that connect women with the Dharma. This is just one of the many accolades that Aoyama Rōshi has received. At the 50th anniversary of the All Japan Nuns' Association, held in Tokyo in 2010, she was undoubtedly one of the most highly revered among the senior nuns, respected by her peers and by the younger generation of nuns as well.

Image 5: Aoyama Rōshi at the 50th anniversary of the All Japan Nuns' Association in Tokyo, 2010 (photo by Tomomi Ito).

Empathy and Discipline

Shundō Aoyama Rōshi trained from early childhood as an acolyte in a Zen temple, became a respected Buddhist scholar, and spearheaded a rigorous training center for nuns, emerging as a leading figure in the hyper-masculine world of mid-twentieth century Japanese Zen. In her role as a Zen master, she has been a major force in the spiritual formation of countless devoted seekers of wisdom from across Japan and around the world. She faithfully conveys the heart of the Sōtō Zen lineage, while simultaneously creating space for ordinary women to grow in both understanding and experience. As a spiritual master, she empathizes with the inevitable difficulties of life and teaches her followers to face the tragedies of the human experience with insight and fortitude. Recalling the hardships that Buddha Śākyamuni underwent in his quest for liberation, she enjoins her students to accept every situation as a blessing, "just as it is" (Aoyama 2019, 51). Aoyama Rōshi's admonition to embrace the difficulties of life may appear a bit extreme or

anachronistic for modern people. Yet her responses to human weakness, illness, and tragedy are dignified and courageous. She sincerely believes that, with effort, all difficulties can be overcome, and she speaks from experience.

Now, in an era of greater prominence for Buddhist women, Aoyama Rōshi unquestionably occupies a respected place as a teacher and pioneer. Considering the near-invisibility of female teachers during the twentieth century, her many achievements are especially remarkable. Under her leadership, Aichi Senmon Nisōdō has become a model Zen training center for women, attracting highly qualified, dedicated practitioners. The importance of her contributions toward ensuring the survival and flourishing of Sōtō Zen monasticism cannot be overestimated, and her concerted efforts to educate and train female practitioners from around the world are especially notable. Aoyama Rōshi uses the metaphor of a valley stream to connote the steady flow of the Buddha's teachings, which fortunate sentient beings can access and transmit in accordance with their affinities. With insight and sincerity, she sheds light on the beauty of timeless truths in the phenomenal world–the blessings of the Buddha reflected in a single remarkable flower.

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Notes

1. Another category of female Sōtō Zen practitioner is the *jizoku*, or priest's wife. See Noriko Kawahashi, "*Jizoku* (Priests' Wives) in Sōtō Zen Buddhism: An Ambiguous Category," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22:1–2 (1995): 161–83.
2. Beata Grant and Wilt L. Idema, *Escape from Blood Pond Hell: The Tales of Mulian and Woman Huang* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011) includes translations of two such texts written in Chinese. As Grant and Idema note, these texts were recited and shaped the religious worldviews of women in imperial China. In medieval Japan, too, preconceptions about women's karmic hindrances, moral failings, and bodily pollution became widespread. See also Barbara R. Ambros, *Women in Japanese Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 84–9.

CHAPTER 9

Margaret Peoples Shirer

Explorer, Translator, and Proclaimer

ROSEMARIE DAHER KOWALSKI

Margaret Peoples Shirer[1] (1897–1983) earns a place in herstory as an influencer of multiple nations through her faith, adaptability, and tenacity. She was an amateur anthropologist, an enthusiastic and unashamed advocate for Christianity, and a promoter of whole-being wellness, including the spiritual, physical, mental, and social health of those she served. She also created a writing system for a previously illiterate people group and translated scriptures into several African languages.

In the early twentieth century, Protestant women, as well as men, proclaimed the Gospel with an urgency driven by their expectation of Christ's imminent return and the lostness of humanity. In letters, speeches, and articles, female missionaries wrote that they considered their work necessary because of their call to missions. Their missionary service was inescapable and undisputable because they considered their call a righteous cause. Difficulties in crossing cultures, leadership constraints, and other challenges they faced are buried in numerous reports of mission results, fundraising, and recruitment of new missionaries. Margaret's letters and updates are no exception. She was a prolific writer; there are over 600 pieces of her writing in the Assemblies of God (AG) missionary archives and the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center (FPHC) in Springfield, Missouri.[2]

Historically, Pentecostalism has been a movement that relies on personal experience and hearing from God and scriptural texts. Thus, Pentecostal men and women could equally feel called to become missionaries. If they had experienced Spirit baptism as described in the biblical account in Acts 2, they could go abroad into Christian missions. From the early stages of the twentieth-century Pentecostal revival (approximately 1905–25), the movement's leaders began to define men's and women's roles with some distinctions of where and how that call should be carried out. Margaret Peoples Shirer began her international career before the rules governing her denomination (the Assemblies of God) were established. She carved out a life of service on her terms.

Margaret Peoples began her cross-cultural service with a four-year term in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) as a single woman. During her second term, she married Lloyd Shirer. She was ordained in 1925 and worked in West Africa until 1947. Years later, she and Lloyd spent time in Haiti as well, teaching and training residents in childcare and family health and well-being. Margaret was known as a big personality and an outstanding speaker at many conferences at a time when women were not often given the opportunity. She remained a missions recruiter into her eighties.

Her Story and Expectations

Early Life and Conversion

Margaret Peoples Shirer was born in Ireland in 1897. Margaret's father, a farmer, refused to let her continue her education beyond grammar school, reckoning that further learning would be wasted on a girl. She trained as a domestic servant in Ireland and later in Philadelphia. For two years during her teens, she set a lifelong pattern for self-learning, rising at four in the morning to study scripture until six. Margaret memorized and assimilated the Bible, hiding the reading light under the bed covers to keep from disturbing her family, according to her application to AG missions ("Application for Endorsement as a Missionary: Foreign Missions Committee of the General Council of the Assemblies of God," November 11, 1919, AGWM Archives).

Margaret was influenced in her faith by strong female leaders such as Irish female evangelist Miss Bell Malseed from Donegal, Margaret's home county. Malseed's general influence was demonstrated by her signature on the Ulster Covenant Women's Declaration of September 28, 1912, opposing the home rule of Ireland (Malseed n.d.; PRONI). Following Malseed's example, Margaret felt called

to be an African missionary when she was fifteen years old and called to preach the following year. She stayed in touch with Malseed after she immigrated to the United States, listing the evangelist on her missionary application as one of her personal references.

Call and Application to Foreign Missions

By 1917, when she immigrated to Philadelphia to live near her sister, Margaret thoroughly knew the Bible, though she continued to study it on her own. In Philadelphia, Peoples found Christian friends and sought the baptism of the Holy Spirit. She was home alone when she received her Spirit baptism, but it was confirmed in public with a message in tongues during a church service. Her church promised to support her as a faith missionary. She remembered:

> It was an independent Pentecostal church that sent me to Africa. The Spirit had just fallen and it was a brand new church. I told the pastor and others that I had a call to Africa; I didn't know where. They said, 'Go, make your preparations and come back and tell us when you are ready. We will stand behind you with our support.' So I studied the Bible at night and made my preparations. (Margaret Peoples Shirer, interview with Adele Flower Dalton, "Interview with Margaret Peoples Shirer: Upper Volta," 2, FPHC)

According to her missionary application, she considered herself optimistic and able to work with others (Peoples, "Application," AGWM Archives). She worked two jobs, demonstrating the vigor with which she would tackle missionary obligations in later years. She received an enthusiastic written endorsement from the first AG general superintendent, Eudorus (E. N.) Bell (1866–1923), on her application–even though she indicated a "grammar school" education and that she had previously won few people to Christ.

Single Woman Missionary in Africa

Peoples began missions in Upper Volta, also known as Burkina Faso, as a twenty-two-year-old single woman in 1919. En route to Africa, she met three like-minded others on a stopover in Liverpool, England: Mrs. Jenny Farnsworth and Mr. and Mrs. Leeper. Together, the foursome traveled to Sierra Leone and onward to Burkina Faso. High fever struck her on her arrival in Africa, but she made the difficult boat journey upriver to Upper Volta with the rest. The missionaries set up their portable organ to sing and testify at every stop, from boat landings to railroad stations (Wright 1921, 19; M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC). In a recent history of Pentecostalism in Africa, Margaret is mentioned as one of "two single

women" who, along with Wilbur Taylor and Harry Wright and their wives, "arrived in Mossi Land on January 1, 1921. Because they did not know anything concerning this tribe, they had to question people on their journey. The emperor of the Moose [formerly called Mossi] sent them to one of his ministers so that he could take care of them" (Roamba 2016, 58).

She was an adventurer with a big personality, always up to learn something new or try something different. Margaret remarked:

> Being young, for me everything was fun. In the daytime, I talked with the people on my side of the boat, watched the people play in the water. … We were on these boats for 21 days, down the Niger. Then we changed boats and went from another town, 3 days, to a place called Mopti. … Now, real travel began. (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC)

It took twenty-eight days of all-day travel to reach the outpost of Ouagadougou. Margaret reported that, after sundown, "we would set up camp, light fires, and do our cooking" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 2, FPHC).

Upon arrival at her first mission station, Margaret was given her choice of transport: hammock, bicycle, or horseback. The intrepid Peoples chose horseback and was sent into town to buy a horse, though she had not ridden before. She reported with some glee that the spirited, unbroken animal threw her "off about three times, but I learned to ride him." Locals affectionately nicknamed her "Madame Horse's Tail" because her hair was so long. Margaret began to settle in by finding shelter for herself and her newly acquired horse. She hired a "horse boy" to tire out the horse each day before mounting the horse to travel to villages (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC).

Though Peoples remembered every experience as an adventure, she may have seemed high-spirited to older missionaries. She remarked, "Mrs. Farnsworth was a teacher, but she never learned the language. She was past her age and didn't have the ability to learn. She was staid and set in her ways; I was young. We were good friends, but were never really close" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 4, FPHC).

Acclimation and Culture

On the other hand, Margaret was a keen observer and quick learner. She began to document the life and interests of the Mossi people where she stayed. She had no formal language training but quickly picked up languages, observed customs, and adapted her preaching style to local culture. Margaret's respect for Indigenous customs opened many doors (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, FPHC). Her adaptability and ease among Africans earned her a place of honor from village leaders. She observed:

> It was my custom to honor the chief of the village even if he weren't a Christian. … When I would go into a village, I would first go to the chief. He would say to his people, "Beat the drums and tell my children that the white woman is here and has something to tell them." While they went to beat the drum, I would sit and talk with the chief. So many of them said to me, "White woman, … we are old now, but we want you to take our sons and teach them." (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 9, FPHC)

Early Pentecostals had mixed educational backgrounds. For example, Ruby Nicodem, a missionary to India, listed her average grade in Bible college as 95 percent, so she was an exceptional and gifted student. Less-educated women also became outstanding missionaries. Margaret Peoples' application seemed average, without special qualities that would make her a good missionary beyond a personal call of "God laid it [missionary service] on my heart" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 1, FPHC).

On missionary applications, it was not always apparent whether a woman would be successful. Margaret appeared to be the ordinary daughter of an Irish farmer, with only a grammar school education. Her application indicated that she loved to study and was a hard worker, holding two jobs daily as a domestic servant. She knew no language besides English, could not play a musical instrument, and her Bible training was informal, consisting of "a persistent study of the Bible since saved." She had wanted to be a missionary for three and a half years by the time she submitted her application, indicating that she felt God wanted her in Africa and that she had been part of the Africa Inland Mission and read their literature. She was not ordained and did not know of anyone she had won to Christ, listing her results of personal efforts to bring others to Christ: "Sorry to say not much as far as I know. I've always worked with others" (Peoples, "Application," AGWM). However, her call was strong and personal. She completed her first term as a single missionary and enthusiastic proponent of Pentecostal missions.

Like her peers, Margaret Peoples believed in divine healing as a continuation of the biblical account. She referred to scriptural precedents while praying for a young boy who was dying: "Oh God … in the days when your apostles began to preach, you healed the people and now I want you to heal this boy." The boy recovered, to the amazement of his tribe (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 5, FPHC).

Female missionaries often mentioned their love for the people they served, becoming emotionally involved with their mission fields. They passionately and sentimentally described the beauty and worth of their field in reports filled with observations of daily life and surroundings. Margaret enjoyed Africa and the

African peoples. Her updates are full of colorful descriptions and, sometimes, pure joy and excitement.

The earliest Pentecostals expected glossolalia, the gift of speaking in other languages that accompanied their Spirit baptism, to be xenolalia, the ability to immediately speak and preach in Indigenous languages. To the surprise of many missionaries, glossolalia did not provide an easy ability to speak in foreign tongues.

The time needed to learn the local language allowed missionaries to study the culture and begin to incarnate the Gospel into the new setting: Harvey Cox notes:

> It did not take long for tongues–construed as the ability to speak foreign languages and expected as the only infallible sign of Spirit baptism–to assume a less commanding place in Pentecostal belief. [It gave those] who did not have the strength or the fluency to pray with their own words direct access to God through the Spirit. (Cox 1995, 87)

When Margaret Peoples landed in West Africa, none of the missionaries knew the language of the Mossi tribe where they were headed, though the coastal tribal languages were familiar to one of the couples, the Wrights. Bernice Lee, serving similarly in India, wrote home to ask for prayer so that she and her companions would learn the language, indicating that missionaries like Peoples and the Wrights no longer expected or depended on xenolalia, as had the first Pentecostals (Bernice Lee, "The Indian Pentecostal Convention at Uska Bazar," *Pentecostal Evangel*, January 31, 1925, 11).

Language, Travel, and Dependence on Men

Margaret became a gifted linguist, translator, and informal anthropologist, sharing observations of life abroad through her writing. She was the first Westerner to understand Moré, the Mossi language. It was a challenge because, like many African languages, Moré uses pitch (how high or low a tone is) to distinguish meanings. Shirer said:

> I cried myself to sleep every night, praying, "Lord, what shall I do?" One morning at 2 o'clock God said to me, "Have I ever failed you?" … In our village there was a place where each evening the women went to grind their grain between two stones. I got some stones and grain and went to grind with them. As I listened to their conversation, I began to understand what they were saying, and I wrote down everything I heard. When I had enough words I wrote little stories in Moré in order to teach the women to read. Then I translated." (AG Department of Foreign Missions, *Upper Volta*, June 1981, 3–4, AGWM Archives)

She gradually learned the language as women commented on her hair, clothes, and mannerisms. From there, she formed an alphabet, wrote a simple dictionary, taught the Mossi tribe to read, and began to translate scripture. She was not only a learner but also a teacher; as Adele Dalton writes, "Margaret taught reading classes, and as the pages of the Bible were printed by mimeograph, the delighted Mossi read by lantern light until the oil ran out. Then they used cornstalk torches to keep reading. Today a strong national church exists in that area" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC).

While she learned the language, Margaret began to preach in Mossi villages nearby. By the time she was in her mid-twenties, she translated the Gospel of Mark into local Moré "because it was the shortest book" and preached from it (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 3, FPHC).

Travel was no simple matter and took its toll on the health and strength of missionaries. They were regarded as curiosities by the Indigenous people and endured close examination by those they set out to serve. Peoples and coworker Jenny Farnsworth traveled away from their first mission station "twenty days … a very profitable trip, both to the testifying of saving grace and acquainting themselves with the language" (John Perkins, "Three Days in a Heathen Town," *Latter Rain Evangel*, August 1910, 21).

Though female missionaries appealed for young men to join the work, women continued to dominate the early Pentecostal missionary force (Peoples, "Many Young Men Needed," *Pentecostal Evangel*, May 19, 1923, 13). Before she married, Margaret Peoples wrote of the worries among single female missionaries if the few men in the field got ill. Men did maintenance and handled heavier loads than women could manage alone. Margaret wrote:

> It caused us no little anxiety [when Brother Taylor had Blackwater fever] … for he is the only man here. He overworked hauling the baggage when he first came … to get it here before the rains. Then he just lay down and for a week he was not able to take interest in anything. (Peoples, "Fruit from the Sudan," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 10, 1923, 13)

Her future husband, Lloyd Shirer, had a reputation and skills as a handyman. He was in demand by many missionaries, repairing cars, fixing homes, and building new things (M. P. Shirer to Sister Jones, Ellicott City, MD, February 13, 1978, FPHC; Lloyd Shirer, "A Prosperous Journey: French Sudan Party Nears Destination," *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 28, 1925, 10). Before and after their marriage, Margaret greatly admired and supported him: "[Lloyd] was a man of many talents. He could do almost anything. He was the one who started printing in Ghana" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 12, FPHC).

Meanwhile, Margaret's decisions continued to show inventiveness and spunk, just as had her initial choice of a horse when she'd never ridden before. Margaret used the transportation that would be most useful. She rode her bicycle through the jungle and remarked that, when she would ride her bicycle to the village, "I would see a lion by the roadside. As I came near he would just give a roar and go off into the forest. … I went to villages, forests, without any idea of fear. The fact that I was doing the will of God, took care of my fear. I expected God to look after me" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 10, FPHC).

At a conference in the USA, she recounted an experience meant to illustrate the lostness of humanity and sinners' need for the light of the gospel. She had set off down a jungle path on her bicycle one evening to pray for a sick African child. Darkness fell, and a tropical downpour began while she was in the hut. She hung a lantern on her bike handles and set off for home but became lost. "That gives a very peculiar feeling to one in the heart of Africa, to realize you are lost in the darkness, with wild animals all around you and no natives passing that hour of the night. So I stood there in the midnight darkness and thought, 'What shall I do?'" (Margaret Peoples Shirer, "Shall We Give Them the Light: Stone Church Convention Speech," *Latter Rain Evangel*, August 1937, 20). She looked for a light, prayed for guidance, and followed a faint beam to a native hut where she asked for directions. "He told me to go a certain distance 'this way' and a certain distance the 'other way,' till I would come to the main road that led to the station. I thanked him and was off, pushing my bicycle till I came to the main road and finally I reached our home" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC).

Subsequently, she improved her transportation, purchasing a motorcycle. David Womack, who arrived years later as a missionary to Ghana, remarked on a concrete ramp going into the Ghanaian kitchen where she had lived. Upon his inquiry, "they told him it was for Margaret's motorcycle" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 2–4, FPHC). That kept the bike from being stolen. In 1939, when she and Lloyd went to support Indigenous workers in a Pentecostal revival in Nigeria, the Shirers traveled over nine hundred miles from the Gold Coast with their house-trailer (Lloyd Shirer, "Modern Miracles," *Pentecostal Evangel*, February 25, 1939, 9).

For early twentieth-century Pentecostal female missionaries, the life of faith missions meant suffering, ostracism, and hardship. They launched their ministries with the expectation of the imminent return of Christ (Bernice Lee, "Pentecost among the Presbyterians," *Latter Rain Evangel*, July 1924, 6).[3] "This is the last of the last hour, but it is also the hour of great victory in the battle for the Lord Jesus before the coming of the anti-Christ," warned B. B. Anderson in 1913 ("The Last Hour," *Word and Witness*, May 20, 1913, 2). The urgency of Christ's return impacted Margaret Shirer's party. "We are trying our best to work with the thought that this is our last term or chance to snatch precious souls from the enemy before

Jesus comes. Surely he will not delay much longer" (H. M. Wright, "Missionary Party Arrives Safely," *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 19, 1921, 19).

Ordination, Marriage, and Family Life

During her first furlough, about 1925, Margaret was ordained by E. S. Williams, her pastor in Philadelphia. She spent three months in the United States. On her way back for a second term, she spent nine months in France, learning French because the French were taking over Upper Volta.

Upon her return to Africa, she met and married fellow missionary Lloyd Shirer. She added his name to hers, which was very unusual at the time. She was already known because of frequent updates to supporters. She became known as Margaret Peoples Shirer to friends and supporters. Margaret and Lloyd were both feisty, dedicated, and innovative. She waited to get her wedding dress from her sister in Philadelphia and then married him in a ceremony using their four languages: Bamb, Moré, English, and French (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 2, FPHC).

As a married missionary, Margaret continued to evangelize and teach:

> Even after my husband and I were together, I went into these villages by myself. We were both missionaries and he was very wise to know that I was more than a housewife. He knew that I was a missionary as well as he was and he wasn't going to stop me. Any time that we went preaching … he would drive to the farthest town. He would let me off at the first town, and someone else at the next town, or vise [sic] versa, so that we were preaching in several places. (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC)

The Shirers had a son and daughter their first term. They opened missions stations as the first AG missionaries in Gold Coast (Ghana), starting at Yendi. From that base, around 1938–39, Lloyd and Margaret traveled to Nigeria to minister after the outpouring of the Spirit there (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 7, FPHC).

Harvey Cox attributes the rapid spread of Pentecostalism in great part to the work of women who considered themselves empowered by the Spirit, set free from American cultural and religious constraints for ministry and proclamation (Cox 1995, 121). The Shirers found that a couple in missions could multiply their effectiveness.

On the other hand, Lloyd Shirer stated bluntly, "Some wonderful missionaries' lives have been wrecked by their wives." One of the couples who accompanied Margaret on her first missionary term returned to the United States after they had their first child; apparently, the wife was unwilling to raise a child in Africa. "After this, they had to leave the field" (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, FPHC).

Childbearing and child-rearing in the tropics could be daunting and draining. Children fell ill, died, or were put in harm's way. A pregnant Shirer arrived on the mission field on July 24, 1927, and birthed her daughter in Ouagadougou on October 22. When she left on preaching tours, she arranged for local women to care for the children (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 10, FPHC).

Always interested in education, Margaret homeschooled her own children with Calvert, a standardized curriculum from the States. Margaret was a very strict teacher. When the school bell rang and she entered the room, the children stood as a sign of respect for their teacher (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 8, FPHC).

Around 1933, after their furlough, the children stayed behind in the United States while Lloyd and Margaret returned for a third term. The separation was difficult for the whole family. The children lived with their uncle for five years before a warm family reunion in 1942. Margaret said, "The next day our children took us through the streets of the little town where they have lived the past five years so that we could meet their boy and girl friends, and to show these friends that they really had a daddy and mamma" ("How We Flew Home from Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 5, 1942).

Physical Challenges

Missionary suffering included natural disasters and skirmishes with wildlife. Peoples sent an early, curious request to supporters regarding destructive African ants. "The white ants have destroyed my Bible and so I must have a new one. Will you please send me one?" ("Fruit from the Sudan," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 10, 1923, 13). Years later, a sixteen-foot python entered the front opening of the house at night while Margaret's husband had gone for supplies. She called in six villagers to kill it, was happy that her children slept through the event, and kept the snakeskin as a souvenir after the locals poked the snake outside and then beat it to death (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 10, FPHC).

Like many other missionary women, Margaret became involved in caring for the whole person. To care for physical needs, she acquired basic medical skills. She operated a clinic in most areas of service. She was respected as a healer by African men and women alike, teaching hygiene and health to locals (Lloyd Shirer, "Recent Progress in the Gold Coast," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 20, 1948, 11). This work continued in Haiti decades later.

However, missionary women also needed healing or physical intervention for themselves and their families. They became ill due to unsanitary surroundings, extreme temperatures, and unfamiliar foods (Anna Reiff, "From the Firing Line," *Latter Rain Evangel*, May 1917, 13). Margaret was thankful that both Shirer children were spared permanent disability by God's healing power. Margaret and nine-month-old Marguerite were struck by lightning, but the baby revived after a

half-hour of fervent prayers by natives and missionaries. The Shirers' six-year-old son was severely injured with multiple broken bones after falling from a tree. He required a month's hospitalization and was sent home with the expectation that he would be permanently disabled. Margaret prayed over him and, to the surprise of his doctors, he was completely healed with no after-effects (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 9, FPHC).

Sometimes local skeptics demanded that God prove his power. Subsequent miraculous healings brought about a willingness to listen to the missionary's message. Shirer wrote,

> We had another public burning of fetish objects. Three more have been saved, several babies have been dedicated to the Lord, and many have been prayed for having all kinds of diseases. … We pray that all that is found in the Scriptures may be manifested to these primitive people who depend on their fetishes for help until the light of Christ shines in upon their darkened souls. (W. L. Shirer, "Fetishes Burned Publically," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 3, 1934, 10)

What Pentecostal missionaries found especially difficult to understand was the indifference of people at home. The desperation of some missionaries comes through in their communications, seeing their countries ready for a spiritual harvest without enough coworkers and the unfinished task of evangelism (Lillian Garr, "Hearts Burdened for China," *Latter Rain Evangel*, April 1911, 8). At missions conferences and on furloughs, the Shirers and others pleaded for individuals to sacrifice home comforts and complacency to reach the lost. If those in the United States would not go, missionaries appealed for their generous support so representatives could work effectively in the field (L. Shirer, "Interesting News from the Gold Coast, W. Africa," *Pentecostal Evangel,* February 6, 1937, 11, 16).

Both Margaret and Lloyd boosted the efforts of locals. Margaret's first "horse boy" was converted and went to his village after working for her for three years. She went to preach in his village after he shared the Gospel and found thousands of Africans waiting to ask questions. The Shirers also admired the effective preaching, evangelization, and miraculous confirmations of the Gospel message through Indigenous missionaries like Prophet Harris and his heir apparent Oppom (Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, "Crying for Help," *Pentecostal Evangel*, March 21, 1931, 5).[4]

Margaret was also an excellent preacher. She and Lloyd alternated preaching in churches while on furloughs in the United States as well as in Africa. As one observer noted: "Both Mr. and Mrs. Shirer preached the Word with unction and power. The church was blessed and considerably revived, while quite a number of lost souls were saved to the glory of God" (William A. Coxe, "Profitable Services at Zion," *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 7, 1929, 16). She recounted that God would

give her words of knowledge through parables, African proverbs, and stories that highlighted scriptural truths (Lloyd Shirer, "Fetishes Burned Publically," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 3, 1934, 10).

Expansion into West Africa

Starting in 1931 as the first AG missionaries in Gold Coast (Ghana), Margaret and Lloyd opened mission stations in Yendi, Tamad, in Burkina Faso under their ministry (Roamba 2016, 63).

Margaret ran a Sunday school for children at the Yendi mission station and hosted incoming missionaries. Meanwhile, she continued to translate scripture, helped standardize the spelling of the Dagbani language, and wrote a grammar book and dictionary. Eventually, she translated the books of Matthew, Mark, Acts, Ephesians, and 1 Peter. She wrote of her feelings of urgency in translating: "We spent nearly the entire month on translation work as the boys who are saved are so anxious to get the Scriptures in their own language" (Lloyd and Margaret Shirer, "Yendi, Gold Coast," *Pentecostal Evangel*, November 25, 1933, 7). From there, around 1938–39, the couple traveled to Nigeria to minister after an outpouring of the Spirit (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 11, FPHC).

The Shirers briefly pastored a church in Washington, DC, before resigning in 1947 to return to Africa for the last time. While in DC, Margaret Shirer experienced the trauma of an unfaithful spouse. Despite Lloyd's moral failure, Margaret kept the family together and remained his partner in life and ministry (M. P. Shirer, interview with Dalton, 6–8, 11–12, FPHC). They lost their AG missionary appointment and subsequently worked for the governments of Ghana and the Congo (Onyinah 2016, 40).

Haiti and Beyond

Margaret's missionary appointment file shows that she continued her interest in whole-person well-being. She taught healthcare and helped with literacy in Haiti from 1968–71 while she and Lloyd were based at a Bible college. R. C. Cunningham mentions Lloyd's involvement with the Haitian government's literacy program and the Bible society ("Mission to Haiti," *Pentecostal Evangel*, December 28, 1969, 17). After Lloyd died in 1972, Margaret returned to full-time ministry, preaching and recruiting young missionaries in the United States well into her eighties. Margaret held meetings in several churches in Springfield, Missouri. In 1976, a church leader encouraged other ministers to make room for her. His note reads: "Margaret … is

a terrific preacher. … [She] stayed with him all through the years and kept her home together. … She is a beautiful Christian lady who deserves any recognition we may give her" (Jim Bryant to unknown recipient, November 7, 1976, AGWM Archives).

Margaret continued to encourage young people to serve and give their life for missions. She died of a stroke on September 25, 1983 ("Ministerial Status Report" 1983).

Conclusion and Summary

Early twentieth-century Pentecostal women regarded their baptism of the Holy Spirit as a continuation of the New Testament outpouring–a personal revelation of God's power, sufficiency, and permission to fulfill their call to global missions. Margaret Peoples Shirer acted on her belief that anyone empowered and called by the Spirit should serve. Expecting the imminent return of Christ, she opened herself to groundbreaking ministries. She gave up the comforts of home, risked her life, and suffered opposition, persecution, and natural disasters. She held steady through hardships and disappointment and shared her challenges with supporters.

Margaret, like other early Pentecostals, felt herself individually called to proclaim the Gospel. Most missionary women remembered exactly when and where they had sensed God's calling to missions. Some had specific destinations in mind; others were open to serve any field that needed workers. Many married women considered their call to missions as personal and important as God's call on their spouses, as did Margaret. Amid severe challenges, they competently opened fields and helped administer missionary projects with their husbands. They raised children, often ministering to orphans and abandoned children alongside their own. Their hospitality and care for the personal needs of others were vital to the survival of missionaries, as well as practical demonstrations of the Gospel to Indigenous Peoples.

The courageous legacies of early Pentecostal female missionaries continue to demonstrate the power of the Spirit working through women. Margaret's life indicates that women made opportunities for God to work. She believed God had equipped her through the baptism of the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts. Her belief in prophecy, tongues, and miracles enabled her to minister beyond the boundaries and constrictions of nineteenth-century Protestantism. She and her husband proclaimed the Gospel "with signs following," ministering to those in need of God's touch and guidance. In other words, they practiced genuine New Testament ministry. God used her passion, obedience, and self-sacrifice to win Christian

converts and to help take the Pentecostal outpouring and the work of the AG church and mission into Africa.

In the end, for Margaret as for her peers, the call to Pentecostal missions, Christ's presence, and the hope of his imminent return were enough (Bernice Lee, "One Long Thanksgiving Day," *Latter Rain Evangel*, November 1937, 3). Carolyn Tennant remarks on the impact of the women missionaries who believed Jesus could return at any moment, "Though often misunderstood, many women indeed have been pioneers. They set out into unmarked territory, stretching beyond their comfort level to follow the call of God" (Tennant 2001, 50).

Margaret Peoples Shirer was a heroine to many who came to faith through her work. She was a role model for those she inspired to serve and an inspiration for her supporters. She engaged her surroundings with bold curiosity and respectful inclusion of customs and worldviews. As a lifelong learner and an enthusiastic teacher, she created language structures and translations that pioneered reading and writing for a large people group. Her life is a milestone in herstory because of it.

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Notes

1. Margaret Peoples Shirer will be referred to variously: as Margaret for general activity, as Peoples while single, and as Shirer after her marriage.
2. *archives.ifphc.org*. Please note that the historical language of the original correspondence is herein included. It accurately reflects early twentieth-century colonial culture but is not intended to offend today's readers.
3. John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) codified seven "dispensations" of the church, including a Church Age that would be ended by the rapture of the Church. Late nineteenth-century Evangelicals and early-twentieth century Pentecostals believed they were living in the final days of Darby's Church dispensation. Pentecostals considered that the outpouring of the Spirit in the Pentecostal revivals empowered the Church for evangelization before Christ's return. Cyrus Scofield (1843–1921) popularized Darby's views in his correspondence Bible studies, which were then incorporated into the commentary in his Scofield Reference Bible in 1909 (revised in 1917). Pentecostal periodicals advertised the Scofield Bible, thus promoting its theology to many Pentecostals.
4. Later missionaries were less keen, noting that Harris traveled with several wives and allowed polygamy.

CHAPTER 10

Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ

A Life of Transforming Grace

MARY ELLEN CHOWN

The life of Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ is distinguished by the grace with which she has woven together fidelity to her vocation as a Sister of St. Joseph, a passion for theological learning and teaching, and Catholic feminist activism. As a respected systematic theologian and author, Dr. Leonard's work has made a significant contribution to the academy. Her deeply held belief in the dignity of each person, made in God's image, and her recognition of experience, particularly the intersectional complexity of women's lived experience as a source for theology, is at the heart of her excellence in teaching and mentoring. Sister Ellen's integrity and wisdom have enabled her to hold in tension her lively participation in the life of her religious and academic communities while also co-founding a Canadian Catholic feminist reform movement in 1981 that continues today.[1]

This portrayal of Sister Ellen's life is organized around five broad strands: i) her family life and religious vocation with the Sisters of St. Joseph; ii) the impact of the Second Vatican Council; iii) learning, teaching and mentoring at the University of St. Michael's College; iv) her feminist theological activism; and v) her awards and accolades. A questionnaire was emailed to colleagues and former students of Sister Ellen's to capture qualitative examples of the profound influence she has had in

their lives and beyond. The metaphor of 'weaving' is used throughout to emphasize how Sister Ellen continually integrates the multiple strands of her life into a rich tapestry of transforming grace.

Image 1: Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ at the University of St. Michael's College (USMC), University of Toronto, 2001 (Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph [CSJT] Archives, used by permission.)

Strong Threads: Toward a Religious Vocation

Family Life

The eldest of two daughters to Hugh and Mary (née Barry) Leonard, Ellen Leonard was born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1933 "under the eye of Sister Vincentia," a Sister of St. Joseph at St. Michael's Hospital ("Sister Ellen Leonard, CSJ Ministry Records," CSJT Archives). The Leonard family were fourth- and fifth-generation Canadians of Irish ancestry. They had a strong Catholic identity within the triad of

home, school, and parish in their north Toronto neighbourhood (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

Ellen and her younger sister Anne had a happy childhood. Ellen, who was a responsible and kind older sibling, often invited Anne to tag along when she played with her friends in the nearby ravine. The girls grew up during the Great Depression, when one in five Canadians depended on government relief for survival (Canadian Museum of History n.d.). While Ellen and Anne knew that money was not plentiful in the family, they never felt deprived. Ellen's practical mother sewed most of her daughters' clothing and Ellen's father succeeded in keeping his job through the Depression, although his income was significantly diminished (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

Ellen went to the local elementary school run by Loretto sisters. For high school, however, Ellen's mother preferred that her daughters attend St. Joseph's College School. Mary Leonard had high esteem for the Sisters of St. Joseph, having herself been educated at St. Joseph's Academy, Lindsay, Ontario. She soon learned that this religious order would play a central role in her eldest daughter's life.

In a feature about Sister Ellen published for the Sisters of St. Joseph on the occasion of their 150th Anniversary, ("Feature: Sister Ellen Leonard," 2001, 19-20, CSJT Archives), Ellen recalled that, during her high school years, she was "impressed by the kindness, competence and dedication" of the Sisters of St. Joseph. She excelled as a student and was a gifted pianist, earning her Grade 10 piano certificate from the Royal Conservatory of Music of Toronto in 1949. In a speech on the occasion of the publication of a *Festschrift* in Sister Ellen's honour in 2000, Mechtilde O'Mara, CSJ recalled the time she spent with the Leonard family: "During my years as a student in Toronto, the family welcomed me often for a home-cooked meal and delightful conversation: Ellen's father, especially, was a great story-teller" (O'Mara, "Ellen Leonard," CSJT Archives). Anne Leonard recalls that, although her mother would not have defined herself as a feminist, her kind, unflagging encouragement of her daughters was an affirming foundation for both young women (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto

Strong family roots and the charism of the Sisters of St. Joseph planted a seed within Ellen that gradually blossomed into a religious vocation. Her decision to enter the convent at the end of high school in 1951, at age 17, was difficult for Ellen's parents, who wondered if she was too young to make a lifelong commitment. Anne was devastated to lose the presence of her older sister at home, especially since the strictures of religious formation only permitted family

visits once per month (A. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020). Although Ellen missed her family deeply during the years of formation, she had a profound desire to live her Christian calling in a religious community and she gradually adjusted to the expectations of her new life. Ellen completed the mandatory six-month postulancy period and entered the novitiate, receiving her religious habit and the name "Sister Loyola" on March 19, 1952. Over the next three years, she immersed herself in the life of her religious community, learning about Catholic teaching, growing spiritually, and making lifelong friendships within her community (E. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

Sister Loyola (Ellen) came "from a long line of women educators" (Anderson and O'Mara 2000, 5). Her mother and three paternal aunts were all respected schoolteachers. After completing teacher's college at Toronto Normal School (1954–55), Sister Loyola was an elementary school teacher, principal, and religion resource teacher in Niagara and the Greater Toronto Area for most of the next 18 years (1955–73). She remembers that, at Holy Rosary School in Toronto (1955-1957), "When I started to teach, we had large classes. I had 51 children in Grade One."[2] Sister Ellen also recalls that, when she was an elementary school teacher at St. James Catholic school in Colgan, Ontario (1957–59), a small town northwest of Toronto, the school and convent were next door to each other. Sometimes, after school, children would knock on the door of the convent to ask if "Sister Loyola could come out to play" (E. Leonard, pers. comm., January 17, 2020).

Image 2: Sister Loyola teaching Grade 1 at St. James School, Colgan, Ontario in 1958 (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

Sister Loyola continued to teach elementary school at St. Joseph's in Merritton, Ontario (1959–62) and at Holy Spirit School in Agincourt, Ontario, where she became principal (1962–69). Over the years, it became apparent to Sister Loyola that some of her students did not have the strong foundation and opportunities she had been given, which sparked in her a lifelong commitment to social justice. While working as a full-time teacher, Sister Loyola pursued undergraduate studies on evenings, weekends, and in the summer, completing her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Toronto in 1967. As Ellen's colleagues would later note: "Her pedagogical training, and her experience in the challenges of introducing children to the concepts and skills on which their whole education would be based has borne fruit in the excellence of her teaching at the university level" (Anderson and O'Mara 2000, 5).

Weaving a New Vision: The Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council refers to meetings of the world's Catholic bishops from 1962–65 that resulted in the promulgation of sixteen documents. However, it is more accurate to see Vatican II as a movement of renewal that began decades before and has yet to be fully realized. Vatican II encouraged a dual dynamism in the church of *ressourcement* ('a return to authoritative sources') and *aggiornamento* ('bringing up to date') (Lavin 2012, 3–4).[3] Regarding religious life, the Vatican II document "Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life" stated: "The adaptation and renewal of the religious life includes both the constant return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time" (*Perfectae caritatis*, 2).[4]

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto embraced this dynamic of *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*. As Sister Ellen states: "We replaced the attitude of rejection and suspicion of the world that had characterized pre-Vatican II religious life with one of solidarity with the world and all humanity. This was in keeping with the vision of our founder and the first sisters, who reached out in service to the 'dear neighbour'" (E. Leonard 2007, 236). In the years following Vatican II, Sister Ellen participated in the restructuring of religious life within her community. In a video interview conducted by Mary Klein and Shaunagh Gravelines ("Paths of Transformation: Sister Ellen Leonard," June 11, 2009, CSJT Archives), she says that aspects of this time were "painful because many of the things that had been important in my life were being questioned." She later recognized that this discomfort was a necessary stage in personal transformation. While there was loss of the familiar, there was also exhilaration at the possibilities these changes opened up for women. Furthermore, the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" positioned religious life within the "life and holiness" of the church but outside the "hierarchical structure of the Church" (*Lumen gentium,* 44). Sister Ellen notes that many women religious preferred to see their vocation aligned with the laity. Others, however, felt excluded from the hierarchy and unsure of their place in this new way of "being church" (E. Leonard 2007, 237). Although the changes of Vatican II did result in a significant number of priests and nuns leaving their religious vocations, in Sister Ellen's experience of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, "reception of Vatican II was well done within the order" (E. Leonard, pers. comm., November 15, 2019). Sister Ellen sums up the watershed experience of Vatican II in her own life: "I exchanged my religious name, Sister Loyola, for my baptismal name, Ellen; I set aside the distinctive habit and veil to join the rest of God's people; I moved from the big motherhouse on Bayview to a small

community of six sisters; and I left elementary education for the study of theology" ("Feature: Sister Ellen Leonard," 2001, 19-20, CSJT Archives).

Strands of Learning, Teaching, and Mentoring

After Vatican II, catechists at the Toronto Metropolitan Separate School Board were encouraged to update their religious education. Sister Ellen took advantage of this opportunity by enrolling in a master's degree program in religious studies at Manhattan College, New York, New York (1970–71). Classmate Margaret Small recalls, "it was certainly exciting for all of us to be studying together, asking questions, and wondering about the future shape of church and theology" (M. Small, pers. comm., February 1, 2020). It was during this time that Sister Ellen developed a love for theology, and she returned to Toronto with newfound biblical and theological insights to assist religious education teachers with integrating the changes of Vatican II. Increasingly, Sister Ellen felt called to further studies in theology and, in the fall of 1974, she enrolled in a PhD program at the University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. Sister Ellen was among the first women in Canada to study systematic theology.

While doing her doctoral work, Sister Ellen began her teaching career at the University of Toronto. She was appointed to the Department of Religious Studies as a teaching assistant in 1974. In the last year of her PhD program, she was appointed as a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael's College (USMC). She progressed to be an assistant professor in 1978, an associate professor four years later, and a full-tenured professor at USMC from 1991–97. To supervise graduate work, she was cross-appointed to the Graduate Faculty at the Centre for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, in 1994. Sister Ellen continued teaching as a professor emerita at USMC from 1999–2007 (Anderson and D'Angelo 2000, 5).

Catholic Modernism

It is not surprising that Sister Ellen developed an interest in Catholic modernism, because the questions that modernism raised about Catholicism "in some ways anticipated the Second Vatican Council" (Leonard 2010, 828). Modernism, a label first used pejoratively by Pius X, was an intellectual orientation among Catholic scholars primarily in England, France, Italy, and Germany (1890–1910) as they grappled with the advances of science, philosophical ideas about individual autonomy, and changing methods of biblical interpretation. Sister Ellen began her

exploration of modernism by exploring the work of George Tyrrell (1869–1909), an Irish-born Jesuit priest, theologian, and philosopher. She identified Tyrell as "one of the persons most committed to the reinterpretation of Catholicism in response to the challenge of (biblical) historical criticism and what he considered the legitimate demands of the modern world" (E. Leonard 1979, 6). Tyrrell was the topic of Sister Ellen's PhD dissertation (1978), which formed the basis for her 1982 book, *George Tyrrell and the Catholic Tradition.*

Sister Ellen's book discusses George Tyrrell's ideas on "the place of the episcopacy within the universal Church, a more active role for the laity, a clear recognition of the limits of ecclesiastical authority, and the acceptance of criticism and dissent within the Church" (E. Leonard 1979, 12). Sister Ellen argues that Tyrrell's impetus was essentially a pastoral response, rather than a systematic theology for reform, and his "greatest contribution to an understanding of Catholicism was his vision of what Catholicism *could* be" (13).[5] Tyrrell experienced harsh ecclesiastical censure for his ideas. He was expelled from the Jesuits in 1906, excommunicated in 1908, and denied burial in a Catholic cemetery after his death. Yet, as Sister Ellen points out, "Tyrrell boldly tackled many of the difficult questions concerning ecclesiastical authority with which the Roman Catholic Church still wrestles" (E. Leonard 1982, 120). Sister Ellen first presented a paper on George Tyrrell as a member of the Working Group on Roman Catholic Modernism at the American Academy of Religion conference in 1979. Over the next 30 years, Sister Ellen presented conference papers and wrote several essays in refereed journals on aspects of modernism.[6]

Ellen Leonard's second book on modernism was *Unresting Transformation: The Theology and Spirituality of Maude Petre* (1991). Maude Dominica Mary Petre (1863–1942) is often mentioned tangentially as the friend and literary executor of George Tyrrell. Sister Ellen's extensive research of Petre's personal journals, her numerous published books, more than 90 essays, and her extensive correspondence with other modernists reveals, however, that Petre herself made a significant contribution to the modernist movement (E. Leonard 1991, 2). Ellen Leonard's work about Petre contributes to "the search by feminist historians and theologians for women's stories which either have not been told or which have presented women as supportive of and secondary to men" (1). Sister Ellen discusses the chronological evolution of Petre's theology and spirituality and her evolving feminism, modernism, and political thought in the "cultural matrix" of her times. Sister Ellen notes that Petre published extensively and was active in issues of social justice despite the limits that Victorian society placed on women. Like her friend George Tyrrell, Maude Petre experienced the Catholic Church hierarchy's censure for her ideas and was deprived of receiving the sacraments.

Sister Ellen concludes her book on Maude Petre by listing aspects of Petre's theology and spirituality that are relevant in the contemporary context:

> a trust in her own experience as a source for theology, a mystical approach to God and prayer, a practical rather than a theoretical or dogmatic approach to truth, a sense of the political, social and economic implications of Christianity, a dialogical openness to the experiences of other persons, traditions, and world-views combined with a refusal to limit God to particular categories, and an integration of loyalty and criticism with a spirit of independence and freedom. In many ways she was a pioneer, moving ahead of the Church and society in her response to the events of her day. (E. Leonard 1991, 207)

Sister Ellen's third book on modernism was about the life and work of Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852–1925), a Roman Catholic independent theologian. *Creative Tension: The Spiritual Legacy of Friedrich von Hügel* (2005) details Von Hügel's life and the theological and spiritual implications of his ideas. Sister Ellen focuses on Von Hügel's work *Mystical Elements of Religion: As Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and her Friends* because it is central to Von Hügel's philosophy of mysticism. Von Hügel saw three interconnected elements as vital to religious thought and human existence: the historical/institutional, the intellectual/speculative, and the mystical/experiential. Sister Ellen's biography of the Austrian-born aristocrat discusses his theoretical and practical influence as both a scholar with "access to the Western European ecclesiastical and scholarly world" and a "spiritual guide in the movement" (E. Leonard 2010, 1296).

Study of these modernists allowed Sister Ellen to reflect on how she might participate in the theological and ecclesial questions of renewal in her own time. The modernists' faithfulness to their convictions inspired Sister Ellen to be "open to transformation" and "willing to be surprised" ("Paths of Transformation," CSJT Archives).

Ecumenism

The Second Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio,* reflected a renewed enthusiasm for ecumenical collaboration. Father Elliott Bernard Allen, CSB, the dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of St. Michael's College, was instrumental in harnessing that enthusiasm to cooperate in developing the Toronto School of Theology (TST). TST consists of seven colleges from Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, and United Church denominations and, in Sister Ellen's experience, it made for fertile ground for ecumenical collaboration

between colleagues. For students, it meant that elective courses could be taken from affiliated colleges.[7] Dean Allen also appointed several women to the faculty at St. Michael's during his tenure (1969–80), and Sister Ellen has remained grateful for his encouragement. Professor Emerita Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM (Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary), a close colleague of Sister Ellen's at USMC, describes the positive atmosphere at TST in the 1970s:

> It was a magnificent time in the history of the TST. We were well appreciated and accepted by our Dean, Elliott Allen, CSB and our male colleagues. There were several women professors at the other TST Colleges, too, and we got to know each other through our shared departmental meetings. We shared leadership for these regular departmental meetings and within our Colleges with our male colleagues. We were well trained in our fields, and particularly in the Vatican II agenda that we knew was so important to convey to the current generation of students … (M. E. Sheehan, IHM, pers. comm., April 2, 2020)

In recognition of her commitment to ecumenism, Sister Ellen was appointed by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops to serve from 1975–84 as a member of the Roman Catholic-United Church National Dialogue. As an accredited visitor, she attended the Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Vancouver, Canada (1983), and in Canberra, Australia (1991). Unfortunately, she was not a voting delegate because the Roman Catholic Church was, and is not, a member of the WCC. Reflecting on the Vancouver Assembly, Sister Ellen said: "Women from Africa, Latin America, Asia, Europe, as well as North America made valuable contributions to the Assembly. The voices of women speaking on behalf of their people and especially of their children were very moving. It is these voices which remain with me" ("A Message from the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Vancouver 1983," *Community Update 1, Sisters of St. Joseph,* CSJT Archives).

In her 2006 article "Feminist Voices in Theology," Sister Ellen describes her experience at the opening of the 1991 WCC Canberra Assembly. Chung Hyun Kyung, a young Korean theologian, engaged the Assembly, asking them to acknowledge that they were on "holy ground" by removing their shoes. Kyung then incorporated Aboriginal Australian dancers as well as Korean dancers in a ritual calling on the spirits of the ancestors. Since the assembly occurred during the time of the Gulf War, Kyung followed with an inclusive litany invoking spirits past and present who had died due to violence. The names were then ceremonially burned. Kyung's message was a call to "metanoia: a change from anthropocentrism to life centrism, from dualism to interconnection, and from a culture of death to a culture of life" (E. Leonard 2006, 53). For Sister Ellen, this

experience reinforced the need for Western feminist theologians to acknowledge and critique "the traditional Eurocentric approach to theology" by listening to and learning from feminist theological voices worldwide (54). She quotes theologian Kwok Pui-lan's 2005 essay, "Feminist Theology as Intercultural Discourse," saying "feminist theology will be strengthened by the multicultural, multivocal and multireligious character of women's expressions of faith that bear witness to the inclusive compassion of God" (56).

Feminist Approaches to Systematic Theology

During Professor Ellen Leonard's career, she taught courses in feminist theology, Christology, ecclesiology, dogma, historical consciousness, sacramental theology, and "Religious Life and Lay Communities" (Anderson and D'Angelo 2000, 5). She accorded both women and men the utmost respect and encouragement in their studies. In her course entitled Feminist Approaches to Systematic Theology, students had the opportunity to become familiar with a diverse range of feminist critiques of Christianity. They assessed feminist methodologies and practiced applying these methodologies in assignments. Students were also encouraged to read the texts in the light of their own experience. Many of the women who took this course went on to doctoral work in feminist theology and pastoral ministry. Some were ordained in other denominations and worked in the areas of social justice and feminist activism, including becoming members of Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination/Catholic Network for Women's Equality.

Dr. Leonard's own feminist theological research focuses on the themes of lived experience as a source for theology and recognition of emerging voices in theology and Christology, particularly Canadian voices. In her 1990 essay "Experience as a Source for Theology: A Canadian and Feminist Perspective" for the journal *Studies in Religion,* she defined experience as "all that contributes to our situation, both our political and personal contexts and our near and distant histories." Furthermore, she quotes theologian Karl Rahner, who said "any authentic experience can be interpreted as an experience of God" (E. Leonard 1990, 143–5). Christian scripture and tradition as "codified collective human experience," a term Dr. Leonard draws from theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether's 1993 book, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology*, is continually "renewed or discarded through the test of present experience" (E. Leonard 1990, 144). Sister Ellen also asks the vital question posed by theologian Monika Hellwig: "Whose experience counts in theological reflection?" This question is significant because when marginalized persons or groups share their experience, it challenges the

dominant narratives of Western theology that had been presumed to be normative (E. Leonard 1990, 148).

Dr. Leonard's emphasis on experience as "pluralistic and deeply influenced not only by gender but also by race, class and culture" brings her to a hope-filled stance. She says, "Across all differences, women's ways of being in the world, often ignored, denied, or subsumed under male experience, are becoming a resource for new understandings of human life and new insights into the Christian tradition" (E. Leonard 2016, 49). In her 2006 essay highlighting feminist voices in theology, she recognizes the work of Chung Hyun Kyung (Korea), María Pilar Aquino (Mexico), Ivone Gebara (Brazil), Stella Baltazar (India), and Kwok Pui-lan (United States), as well as the "Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians." She discusses the contribution of eco-feminists Heather Eaton (Canada) and Sally McFague (United States). Reflecting on her own experience with the neurological disease Parkinson's, Dr. Leonard also looks to the work of Elizabeth Stuart (England) who challenges the Church to see "the full humanity of the disabled person and their place in the body of Christ" (E. Leonard 2006, 58–71).[8]

Just as Dr. Leonard recognizes that there is a diversity of feminist *theologies,* she also asks if our Christologies are inclusive of the diverse experiences of women, of interfaith dialogue, and of urgent ecological concerns. She recognizes that Christological ideas held by individuals, the academy, or faith communities have a function in people's experience of faith. The dualist worldview prevalent in Western Christology for centuries made the ideal of 'maleness' normative. It ascribed to the male the realms of spirit, objective rationality, power in the public sphere, and, ultimately, divinity. In this patriarchal framework, women are seen as inferior and often associated with sin and evil. Sister Ellen quotes from the work of feminist theologian Rita Nakashima Brock: "The doctrine that only a perfect male form can incarnate God fully and be salvific makes our individual lives in female bodies a prison against God and denies our actual, sensual, changing selves as the locus of divine activity" (E. Leonard 2016, 49). Furthermore, Dr. Leonard sees that a Christology that calls Christians to emulate a model of Christ as a passive victim, or that emphasizes the doctrine of atonement (God as father, handing over his son to death), is harmful and, in the context of intimate partner violence, can be dangerous for women (E. Leonard 2016, 49–50). In her 2000 essay, "Contemporary Christologies in Response to Feminist and Ecological Challenges," she says: "As we enter the second millennium and reflect on the history of Western Christian thought, we must acknowledge how Christology has contributed to both human oppression and the destruction of nature. The Christ symbol needs to be redeemed if it is to offer salvation. The task of redeeming the name of Christ is a serious challenge to theologians …" (E. Leonard 2000, 24).

In Dr. Leonard's 2008 essay "The Emergence of Canadian Contextual Feminist Theologies," published as the lead article in the book *Feminist Theologies with a Canadian Accent,* edited by Mary-Ann Beavis with Elaine Guillemin and Barbara Pell, Sister Ellen notes, "Although Canadian feminist theologies are indebted to the pioneering work of our sisters in the United States, our history is different" (E. Leonard 2008, 24). She analyzed the years 1970–2000 in Canada and the influence of Canadian Christian feminist groups in giving women a sense of solidarity as they navigated a religious tradition with deep patriarchal roots. Sister Ellen also cites the 1976 ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Canada and the election of Lois Wilson as the first woman moderator of the United Church of Canada as pivotal moments in the history of women's religious participation in Canada. Secondly, she highlights the work of academics in developing courses in feminist theology and feminist methodologies, such as the application of a hermeneutic of suspicion with biblical texts in which women have not been named or seem to have been omitted. Professor Leonard also describes the rich variety of doctoral theses that Canadian theology students have developed in examining aspects of their lives and their research through a feminist lens. Her essay concludes with a reflection on the controversial sculpture 'Crucified Woman,' erected on the grounds of Emmanuel College at the University of Toronto. This sculpture has become a place of gathering to remember the fourteen women massacred by an anti-feminist gunman while the woman attended their engineering class at Polytechnique Montréal in 1989 in Montréal, Quebec.

Interweaving Teaching, Mentoring, and Collaborating

The transformative impact of Professor Leonard's teaching, mentoring, and collaboration with students and colleagues within the Toronto School of Theology was a consistent thread in every questionnaire response received for this biographical essay. Regarding Sister Ellen's teaching, Margaret Small says "she seemed to have a talent for summarizing and explaining abstract concepts. Her thinking was precise, and so were her words" (M. Small, pers. comm., February 1, 2020). Dr. Veronica Dunne, RNDM (Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions), adds: "Ellen was not a flashy or a fiery lecturer, but a comprehensive teacher, a personable communicator of emerging horizons, and a caring guide to the new terrain. In addition to all I learned from Ellen, I also came to recognize and deeply value that she cared for me/us as persons–not just students making a quick pass through her classroom. She personified what she taught" (V. Dunne, RNDM, pers. comm., March 28, 2020). St. Mary's College, Notre Dame Professor Emerita Phyllis Kaminski, whose doctoral committee Sister Ellen chaired, says: "Her interest in my

work and in that of all her students embodied for me that theological education is relational to the core" (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020). The priority of relationship for Sister Ellen was rooted in her Catholic/Christian faith and spirituality that instilled in her a profound respect for the human person. Sister Ellen continued to supervise students as a professor emerita, and former student Bertha Yetman, PhD, notes: "True to her reputation, when I submitted my thesis to the Toronto School of Theology, one Friday in June, early the next week, before the sun rose she had it thoroughly read, examined, commented on and returned to the Toronto School of Theology" (B. Yetman, pers. comm., January 29, 2020). Sister Ellen says of her own teaching experience: "When I taught elementary school, I taught Grade 1 and teaching people to read is a very empowering thing to do. It's the same kind of thing in terms of learning theology and feeling comfortable doing your own theology" ("Paths of Transformation," CSJT Archives).

As Sister Ellen also recalled in the 2009 video interview, there were women students who, in the words of American feminist theologian and civil rights activist Nelle Morton, needed to be "heard into speech" ("Paths of Transformation," CSJT Archives). Sister Ellen was well aware, however, that opportunities for Catholic women graduates were limited. In the newspaper article "RC Women Assail Church Stand" by Patti Tasko in the *Globe and Mail* on August 13, 1983, Sister Ellen says: "The Catholic men are going to be ordained, and the Protestant men and Protestant women are going to be ordained–and the Catholic women … aren't sure what they're going to be. They have the same education … but there's no sort of official recognition of the fact that they are people who have prepared for the ministry and there's no kind of structures that are waiting to receive them" (Tasko 1983).

Sister Ellen's teaching and mentorship offered women the opportunity to understand their experience in the light of feminist theology. Former student Sylvia Skrepichuk says, "It was through Ellen and other feminist scholars that I began to understand in a more systematic way, the patriarchy of Church structures, the need for women to claim their own voice and to be in leadership positions and the call of all the baptized to priesthood. Her influence changed my worldview and encouraged me to continue growing on this journey" (S. Skrepichuk, pers. comm., February 3, 2020). Furthermore, Veronica Dunne, RNDM, comments: "While I was a student, Ellen taught several courses in feminist liberation theologies (a theological discipline I was just discovering), and I took them all. One of the places Ellen steered me was to the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and her vision of an *Ekklesia* of Wo/men, and how that is lived out in a discipleship community of equals. Even more, I saw how Ellen was embodying that Ekklesia" (V. Dunne, pers. comm., March 28, 2020).[9]

Sister Ellen lamented the elitism and financial and bureaucratic burdens that prevented some women from studying theology. She encouraged students to apply for scholarships and advocated for the development of part-time studies for women with busy careers and family responsibilities.

In the article "Feminists at Work: Collaborative Relationships Among Women Faculty," authors Sagaria and Dickens point to four ways that feminist academics collaborate. They are: pedagogical (mentoring), instrumental (working collectively to complete an academic project), professional (a shared research agenda), and intimate (friendship) collaboration (Sagaria and Dickens 1997, 71). Sister Ellen engaged in all of these forms of collaboration during her career.

Within the USMC faculty, colleague Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM recalls: "Along with Margaret O'Gara, Ellen and I offered courses in Feminist Theology so that there was at least one offered each semester. We all worked together on planning those courses" (M. E. Sheehan, pers. comm., April 2, 2020). Regarding Professor Leonard's initiation of a *Festschrift* in memory of beloved colleague Professor Joanne McWilliam, her co-editor Kate Merriman says, "Ellen is a remarkably modest person with a great capacity to keep a healthy perspective and stay focussed on the larger goal. Our collaboration on the *Festschrift* could not have gone more smoothly" (K. Merriman, pers. comm., January 29, 2020).

Professor Emeritus Dennis O'Hara, who had Professor Leonard as his doctoral thesis co-chair and became her USMC colleague, recounted her academic and ecclesial collaboration at the convocation where she received an honorary degree in 2014:

> She was a board member of the Catholic Theological Society of America for several years and she served for seven years as a representative of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on the Churches' Council on Theological Education in Canada (1993–99). Sister Ellen also was a member of the Association of Theological Schools's Council on Theological Scholarship and Research. Sister Ellen chaired the theology department of the Toronto School of Theology for two years and served on many, many committees at both the Faculty of Theology and the Toronto School of Theology. (O'Hara 2014, 2)

Sister Ellen realized the importance of support as she journeyed through the changes in her own life, saying in the 2009 video interview by Klein and Gravelines: "That's an important part of transformation, that you are not by yourself, you need other people in order to pass through these stages" ("Paths of Transformation," CSJT Archives). This capacity for relationship extended to Sister Ellen's life outside of academia as well. She enjoyed biking, cross country skiing, tennis, films with friends, and a regular bridge group. She also continues to celebrate milestones in

the lives of her religious sisters and friends (M. Small, pers. comm., February 1, 2020).

Image 3: Dr. Ellen Leonard, CSJ, with students at the University of St. Michael's College, Toronto in the 1990s (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

Feminist Theological Activism

An Evolving Feminist Consciousness

With gratitude, Sister Ellen often says that she "came along at the right time" in terms of the expanding opportunities for women in the post-Vatican II theological academy and Canadian society. She states, "For me, Vatican II, the study of theology and the women's movement all came together to completely transform my life" (E. Leonard 2011, 1). She speaks of these events as being experiences of "transforming grace." This expression is borrowed from the work of feminist theologian Anne Carr, who argues that, while women's experience is incompatible with *patriarchal* models of Christianity, it is not incompatible with the Christian message itself. For Carr, as for Sister Ellen, a feminist understanding of Christianity

can be a "transforming grace" in the lives of individuals and the life of the church (Carr 1996, 214).

As early as Grade 8, Sister Ellen recalls that she had a sense that girls and women did not have the same opportunities as boys and men (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020). In a video made about the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE) in 2013, Sister Ellen says: "I was interested, and had always been interested, actually, in ordination and would have liked to have been ordained. I told my mother I would like to be a Jesuit. She said I would be a good one. Anyway, this was not a realistic aim for me, but it was something that was central to my heart" (Catholic Network for Women's Equality, 2013). Furthermore, Sister Ellen recalls:

> My study of theology and a growing feminist consciousness came together in the seventies. As a graduate student, I joined a group reading Mary Daly's powerful critique *Beyond God the Father*. Increasingly I saw the need for a feminist critique of the tradition and for the reconstruction of theology. With Rosemary Radford Ruether, I realized that it was not simply that feminist theology should have a piece of the theological pie but that a new recipe was required. (E. Leonard 2006, 55)

The Canadian Context

Western countries experienced second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. It is helpful to highlight some of these societal and ecclesial changes to contextualize Sister Ellen's feminist activism in the 1980s. At the international level, the United Nations (UN) signed the *Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* in 1967, which was adopted as a UN convention in 1979. International Women's Year was celebrated in 1975 with a UN world conference on women in Mexico City, followed by the inauguration of the UN Decade for Women (1976–85) (De Haan n.d.). In Canada, women's groups lobbied the federal government for a public inquiry into the status of women. In 1967, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was established, which led to significant legislative reforms toward equal rights for women in Canadian society (Canada's Human Rights History 2020).

In the Canadian Catholic ecclesial context, a coalition called Edmonton Catholic Women's Groups asked the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) to recommend to the 1971 Vatican Synod of Bishops the establishment of a representative commission to study "the question of ministries for women in the Church" (Dias 2019, 6). In response, the Holy See established the Study

Commission on Women in Society and in the Church in 1973. As Dr. Cathy Holtmann, a former student of Sister Ellen's and CNWE member argues, "The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops had been at the forefront among the Catholic hierarchy in the world calling the institution to transform itself in terms of gender equality from the early 1970s to the 1980s" (Holtmann 2008, 201). The CCCB responded to the Vatican's study commission by developing a survey for parishes regarding women's participation in the Church. More than a decade later, the CCCB published a follow-up discussion kit, *Women in the Church: Discussion Papers* (1984). The kit was designed to offer parishioners the opportunity to reflect on their lived experience, examine that experience in the light of scripture and church teaching, and then consider actions to be taken (Dias 2019, 19).[10]

The Pontifical Biblical Commission concluded in 1976 that women's ordination could not be ruled out on the basis of scripture. Yet, that same year, in reaction to the growing support for women's ordination, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the declaration *Inter Insigniores*. It stated that the hierarchy was not authorized to ordain women because male-only ordination belonged to the constant tradition of the Church. It also argued that the ontological and symbolic significance of priesthood only permitted men to function *in persona Christi* (*Inter Insigniores* 5:15).

Concurrent with secular feminism in the 1970s was a movement among Catholic women in North America and Europe for the ordination of women. The 'irregular' ordination of Episcopal women in the United States in 1974, who became known as "The Philadelphia Eleven," and the ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Canada in 1976 bolstered Catholic feminists' optimism (Dunne 2002, 90). Sister Ellen hoped that ordination for women in the Catholic Church was imminent and she enthusiastically attended the first Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) gathering of over 1900 participants in Detroit, Michigan, in 1975. She notes, "Many of the participants, like myself, were Catholic sisters, women with excellent academic backgrounds and years of pastoral experience." Sister Ellen was sent by Dean Elliott Allen to attend WOC conferences, which, she says, "indicates the climate at the time" (E. Leonard 2011, 1).

Founding Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination

When Sister Ellen began lecturing at the University of St. Michael's College in 1977, most of the students enrolled in the Master of Divinity program were Catholic male seminarians. When married laywoman Alexina Murphy took Sister Ellen's sacramental theology course a few years later, she brought her husband Marcus to the class to participate in the seminar on the sacrament of marriage. Sister Ellen

saw this as evidence that opening the study of theology to lay people enhanced the classroom experience, making it more reflective of the church as the *whole* people of God. When Alexina invited Sister Ellen to her home and suggested planning a conference about women's ordination in the Catholic Church, Sister Ellen remembers that they broke out a bottle of champagne to celebrate that "something new was being born" (E. Leonard 2011, 1).

Sister Ellen and Alexina Murphy joined with Bernadette McMahon of Toronto and Judy Maier of Ottawa to send the following invitation, entitled "Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination," in January 1981 to contacts across Canada:

> We are writing to share with you our plan to start a Canadian organization to work for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. We are four women studying theology and active in ministry. We each know several other women keenly interested in the ordination of women and willing to be drawn into active support of the issue. We judge the time to be ripe for some formal structuring of our enthusiasm and for a concerted effort to reach out to all other individuals and groups who are ready to support each other and promote the ordination of women. (CNWE fonds)

This invitation led to a gathering of 30 women from across Canada in Toronto, July 3–5, 1981. As CCWO/CNWE member Pamela Roth said at the 2001 CNWE National Conference in Toronto, "Prayer and ritual, serious deliberation and joyful celebration marked this weekend and twenty-two pages of carefully recorded minutes speak to the vision of these women for a renewed Catholic Church" ("The CNWE Story: A Presentation at the 2001 Twentieth Anniversary Celebration," June 9, 2001, CNWE fonds). The final statement and press release, "Ordain Women or Stop Baptizing Them," (1981) said:

> We, the Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination affirm women's personhood in Christ's church. We recognize our equality in Christ. We desire that all have the opportunity to participate in the life of the Church. We maintain that this participation requires the ordination of women to Sacramental Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. We witness to the presence of priestly ministry. We, therefore, ask our sisters and brothers: Will you publicly support the ordination of women to Sacramental Ministry in the Roman Catholic Church? Will you work towards the ordination of women in our Church? (CNWE fonds)

Over the next seven years, Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination (CCWO) local groups sprang up across the country. Organizers developed a committee framework and a newsletter and contacted Catholic women's ordination organizations in other countries. Sister Ellen was a core group member

of CCWO and, in 1982, she was part of a delegation that met with Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter of Toronto to share CCWO's vision of a renewed church. After the meeting, Sister Ellen remarked in a letter to member Joyce Kennedy, dated June 16, 1982, "You would have been proud of us–quiet and determined" (CNWE fonds).

Sister Ellen was instrumental in getting the word out about feminist theology beyond academia's walls to the broader Catholic community. She offered a parish workshop with Dr. Mary Malone in 1982, entitled "Woman and Roman Catholic: What Does it Mean?" In the article mentioned above in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper (Tasko 1983), Sister Ellen is quoted: "I don't see it as a women's problem. I see it as a problem facing our church. How do we use the gifts of the whole community? Do we eliminate 50 percent without looking at them?" Sister Ellen also presented the second annual CCWO public lecture, "Women and Catholic: New Visions," at St. Paul's University, Ottawa, in 1984 (CNWE fonds). In April 1986, fifteen CCWO members demonstrated with placards and pamphlets outside Varsity Arena, where Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was the speaker for the inaugural St. Michael's College Lecture Series. Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination garnered national media attention and "mixed reactions from the waiting crowd" (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation n.d.).

While Professor Leonard's full-time teaching and research at St. Michael's College required that she step down from the core group of CCWO in 1986, she continued to introduce interested Catholic women students and some members of her religious community to the movement. As Veronica Dunne, RNDM, summarizes: "Ellen was an engaged academic–i.e., she took the insights of gender studies and early feminist theologians and forged those new awarenesses into action for gender justice with other women and men. Being a founding member of CCWO/CNWE is a classic example of her praxis" (V. Dunne, pers. comm., March 28, 2020).

Catholic Network for Women's Equality

Sister Ellen notes that, by the mid–1980s, it "became obvious that ordination was not the only theological issue that needed to be addressed by feminist Christians. There are deeper theological questions about the nature of humanness, the nature and mission of the church, and even the ways we think and talk about God" (E. Leonard 2011, 3). Veronica Dunne, RNDM, adds, "The same conviction that originally brought women to CCWO and launched a nationwide effort to open the priesthood to Roman Catholic women now led them to question the *kyriarchal* structures of ordained ministry itself, which seemed contrary to the spirit of Jesus Christ" (Dunne 2002, 103).[11] After a process of discernment that was, at times,

contentious, members voted at the CCWO conference in 1988 to change the name of "Canadian Catholics for Women's Ordination" to the "Catholic Network for Women's Equality" (CNWE). Members ratified a constitution in 1990 that established a federated model, with a collaborative national work group responsible for collecting and disbursing membership fees, coordinating annual conferences, and representing CNWE in the media. Regular CNWE gatherings at the local level continue to involve feminist learning, prayer and ritual, and planning for initiatives according to regional charisms. The initiatives range from dialogue with bishops to petitions and protests against the Church's exclusion of women, as well as broader initiatives to raise awareness about human trafficking and to support refugees, women's shelters, Indigenous reconciliation, and environmental sustainability.

Sister Ellen was a keynote speaker at the 20th anniversary CNWE conference in 2001. She was also featured in a video about CNWE developed for the 2013 conference in Sudbury. At the 2015 CNWE conference in Toronto, "Women Rising: Shaping a Way Forward," she was enthusiastically honoured as a co-founder. She was lauded for her pioneering work by keynote speaker and Canadian author, journalist, and human rights advocate Sally Armstrong. Sister Ellen continues to support CNWE with her membership and by encouraging individual members as they strive to continue her legacy.

Dr. Becky Lee, in her 2016 article "On the Margins of Church and Society: Roman Catholic Feminisms in English-Speaking Canada," draws on African American feminist bell hook's idea that groups on the margins, like CCWO/CNWE, have the vantage point of being both insiders and outsiders (Lee 2016, 3). Most CNWE members have grown up steeped in Catholicism, making them insiders. However, their feminist consciousness also makes them outsiders in the patriarchal structures of the Catholic church. As both insiders and outsiders, they are able to critique systemic sexism and misogyny in the church from a place of having experienced aspects of it. The intransigence of the Catholic Church hierarchy toward opening ordination and decision-making roles to women has led many women and men to leave the Catholic Church in frustration. However, Sister Ellen has found a silver lining in the context of her own life: "The fact that our tradition has refused to even consider ordaining us has actually forced us to look at these deeper issues. I would probably not be a theologian today if I could have been ordained in my own tradition" (E. Leonard 2011, 3).

CNWE currently faces the challenges of an aging and declining membership and the limitations of an organization largely comprised of middle-class, educated, White, cisgender women. Sister Ellen's example of welcoming culturally diverse, ecumenical, interfaith, secular, and younger feminist voices is an ongoing inspiration for CNWE itself to explore new ways to be inclusive and relevant. As

Sister Ellen observes with hope, "Communities of women have always existed within the church, sometimes almost submerged by the male hierarchical structures, but never totally submerged" (E. Leonard 2011, 4).

A Rich Tapestry of "Transforming Grace"

Dr. Ellen Leonard was a productive scholar who authored three books, ten chapters in books, twenty articles in refereed journals, and numerous papers in refereed conference proceedings on topics related to Catholic modernism, feminist theology, Christology, ecclesial religious communities, and the role of experience in theology. She was a lecturer, professor, and professor emerita for 33 years, chairing 15 doctoral theses, 12 master's theses, and serving on 30 doctoral examination committees (O'Hara 2014, 2). According to this list of achievements, her life's work is notable by any standard. However, Sister Ellen's capacity for generous mentoring and collaboration, rooted in a faith-filled and joyful desire to encourage women in theology, is equally worthy of notability. Phyllis Kaminski says, "Ellen's contribution to theology through her research, her teaching and her life call for recognition beyond our professional societies and national boundaries" (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020).

Woven into the very fabric of her being is Sister Ellen's vocation as a Sister of St. Joseph. Colleague Dr. Marilyn Legge, professor emerita at Emmanuel College of Victoria University, Toronto School of Theology, concurs, "Wherever she has been and goes as a Sister of St. Joseph, Sister Ellen contributes with deep integrity the charism of her community" (M. Legge, pers. comm., January 21, 2020). On the occasion of the Congregation's 150th anniversary celebrations in 2001, Sister Ellen said: "My membership in the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph during the past fifty years has given me the opportunity to develop my gifts and to share them with others through my ministry of theological education. I am grateful for this rich ministry and for my sisters with whom I live in community who continue to inspire me" ("Feature: Sister Ellen Leonard," 2001, 19-20, CSJT Archives). Sister Ellen has welcomed the transition of religious communities "from a triumphal image of people set apart and immune to the world, to a people who are in solidarity with the whole struggling people of God, and with all humankind in its fragility and pain. Today we include not only humankind but all of creation" (E. Leonard 2000, 178).

In 1997, Sister Ellen was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, yet she continued to teach for ten more years. As Veronica Dunne, RNDM, recalls: "Ellen did not seek to hide her illness, nor did she broadcast it. She simply lived it with quiet courage and determination. She also learned from it–ever a student as well as a teacher" (V.

Dunne, pers. comm., March 28, 2020). Former student and colleague Phyllis Kaminski notes, "I have been most inspired by Ellen's spirit as her teaching career ended and she continued to grow in wisdom and grace within the increasing limits of Parkinson's" (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020).

A *Festschrift* in honour of Ellen M. Leonard, CSJ, was published in the *Toronto Journal of Theology* in 2000 to recognize her significant contribution to the life of the Toronto School of Theology. As stated in the introduction of the *Festschrift*, "Loyalty and a continued interest in those whose lives she has touched is a highly predictable quality in Ellen" (Anderson and O'Mara 2000, 5). Although Parkinson's disease currently presents formidable challenges for Sister Ellen, many of her former students, colleagues, the women of her religious community, and co-activists keep in touch with her. Bertha Yetman says about Sister Ellen, "She continues to encourage and inspire women to study theology, to advocate for women's equality in the Church, and do what their heart and spirit urges them to do for the sake of the good of all" (B. Yetman 2020, pers. comm., January 29, 2020).

Sister Ellen was the 2004 recipient of the Ann O'Hara Graff Award from the Women's Seminar in Constructive Theology of the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA). The award recognizes women who integrate their faith, scholarship, and mentorship of and advocacy for women in the "broadest sense of church," and who contribute to the "renewal of theology." As noted in the CTSA Women's Seminar minutes, "Dr. Leonard was praised for her scholarly efforts to integrate studies in modernism, feminism and ecumenism as well as her patient mentoring of graduate students" (P. Kaminski, pers. comm., February 3, 2020).

In 2005, Sister Ellen was one of eight women to receive a YWCA Women of Distinction Award in Toronto. She was recognized for her advocacy of women in the church and in academia. A former award recipient and student of Sister Ellen's, Brigid O'Reilly, commented in the *Catholic New Times* (Sheila M. Dabu, "A Woman of Distinction: Sr. Ellen Leonard," April 10, 2005, 13), "She has opened new doors to women in ministry, in theological scholarship and in coming to an understanding of God through the lenses of feminism."

Image 4: Sister Ellen receiving the YWCA Women of Distinction Award, May 31, 2005, at the Metro Convention Centre, Toronto, Ontario (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

As reported on the Sisters of St. Joseph website "What's New" news for 2012, Sister Ellen received the inaugural Becoming Neighbours Annual Margaret Myatt, CSJ, Recognition Award, named in honour of Sr. Margaret Myatt, CSJ, who worked in collaborative ministry to assist newcomers to Canada. Sister Ellen was a prayer partner and companion to newcomers and developed and facilitated a monthly process of theological reflection for participants. She did not let her stature as a distinguished professor prevent her from being of service to the "dear neighbour."

Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard received a Doctor of Sacred Letters degree (*honoris causa*) from the University of St. Michael's College (USMC), Toronto, Ontario, in 2014 which was followed by a prolonged standing ovation from family, friends, colleagues, her religious community, and CNWE members. This was an affirmation of her contributions to the academy, her enrichment of the lives of students, and her enduring legacy as an advocate and visionary for the full participation of women in the life of the Catholic Church. Sister Ellen had experienced USMC as "a welcoming place, an exciting place to come to do

theology" ("Paths of Transformation," CSJT Archives). During her tenure, Professor Leonard offered the same in return to her students.

Image 5: Dr. Ellen Leonard, CSJ, after receiving the Doctor of Sacred Letters degree, *honoris causa*, at the Convocation for the Faculty of Theology of the University of St. Michael's College, November 8, 2014, at St. Basil's Church. Sister Ellen is surrounded by CNWE members (L to R): Rita Patenaude, Aileen Smith, Thelma D'Souza, Mary Ellen Chown, Bonnie O'Brien, Phyllis Parr, Joanne Kelly, Anne Leonard, and Brigid O'Reilly (CSJT Archives, used by permission).

In conclusion, Mary Rose D'Angelo, Professor Emerita of New Testament and Christian Origins, University of Notre Dame, a colleague of Sister Ellen's at USMC (1980–83) and a long-time friend, offers a succinct description of the breadth of Dr. Leonard's academic life work:

> Ellen Leonard's theological investigations began with her studies of Roman Catholic Modernism and ranged through the renewal of Church life and theology through the Second Vatican Council, the commitments of liberation theology, and the emergence of feminist theology and Canadian theology. From her first explorations, she was engaged by theological thinking that recognized the centrality of history and human experience in the search for the divine. The thread that connects her work is that focus on experience as a source of theology, with increasing focus on the specificity

and particularity of the experience of the marginalized and especially of women. (M. R. D'Angelo, pers. comm., April 8, 2020)

Sister Ellen's deep commitment to feminist theology and praxis continues to be amplified by her legacy of work in the academy and by the students and movement she has inspired. Her ongoing focus on relationship above all else offers one a sense of joy and belonging in her presence. As her friend and colleague Mary Ellen Sheehan, IHM, concludes, "Perhaps the most important thing I could say about my friendship with Ellen is the utter amazement I have for her courage. She has always been a kind of "even" person in temperament, but as I see her now, she is radiant to me as a witness to her love of God in the radical acceptance of her illness" (M. E. Sheehan, pers. comm., April 2, 2020). The threads of Sister Ellen's influence continue to be woven into the lives of all who know her and beyond, ensuring that her gifts as a Canadian scholar, mentor, and feminist activist will be a "transforming grace" for generations to come.

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Notes

1. Since 1970, members of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto have been referred to by their baptismal names, i.e., "Sister Ellen." While it might be customary for a biographical essay to refer to Ellen Leonard as "Sr. Leonard or "Leonard," Sister Ellen's preference for this essay is to be called as she is known (E. Leonard, pers. comm., March 9, 2020). This usage is in no way intended to diminish her distinguished stature as a professor and theologian but rather to include her identity as a Sister of St. Joseph. In this essay, Ellen Leonard is referred to as "Ellen" through 1952, as "Sister Loyola" during her elementary school teaching years (before Vatican II), and otherwise as "Sister Ellen" or "Dr. Leonard."
2. By comparison, current provincial education legislation in Ontario caps Grade 1 class size at 23 students (Province of Ontario Education Act 2019, 5:1).
3. Throughout this essay, the word 'church' is used in two ways, differentiated by the use of a lower case 'c' and an upper case 'C'. The lower case "church" is used to describe the Vatican II understanding of church as the whole "people of God" (*Lumen gentium*, 13) and the upper case "Church" is used to refer to the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy.
4. Sister Ellen points out that, although the majority of Catholic religious were women, they were not permitted to formally participate in the development of *Perfectae caritatis*. She does note, however, that by the third session of the Council in 1964, 23 women were permitted as auditors, including USMC graduate Carmel McEnroy, RSM, author of *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* (1996). The women auditors had a significant influence in the crafting of "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," *Gaudium et spes* (Leonard 2007, 234).
5. In 1907, the Vatican's Holy Office issued *Lamentabili sane exitu,* a syllabus condemning as heretical 65 "errors of the modernists," followed two months later by Pius X's lengthy encyclical, "On the Doctrines of the Modernists," *Pascendi dominici gregis*. In 1910, Pius X issued an "Oath Against Modernism" that was required to be taken by priests and was only formally cancelled by Pope Paul VI in 1967.
6. Sister Ellen took a research leave in 1983–84 in England, Scotland, and France to research modernism, and she was a visiting fellow at St. Edmund's College, Cambridge, during the Lent term of 1988 and the Easter term of 1991.

7. Even before Canadian Confederation (1867), Toronto had established, church-sponsored higher learning institutions. St. Michael's College (Roman Catholic), as well as Knox College (Presbyterian) and Wycliffe and Trinity Colleges (Anglican), were permitted in 1887 to federate with the non-sectarian University of Toronto. Emmanuel College (United Church of Canada), St. Augustine's Roman Catholic seminary, and Regis College–a Jesuit seminary at the time–were all similarly established in the twentieth century. The Toronto School of Theology was incorporated in 1970 as an ecumenical centre of theological studies in North America, consisting of St. Michael's, Knox, Wycliffe, Trinity, Emmanuel, St. Augustine's, and Regis Colleges.
8. Sister Ellen recognizes that her particular social location as a White, middle-class, Catholic woman religious, teaching theology in an ecumenical setting in central Canada, both shapes and limits the theological questions she asks (E. Leonard 2016, 48).
9. In her subsequent PhD dissertation, "A Cyberspace Room of Our Own: On the Significance of Cyberspace for Feminist Ecclesial Communities," Dr. Veronica Dunne, RNDM, draws on the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in *Bread Not Stone* (1984, 1995, Boston: Beacon Press, 174), who differentiates two understandings of "church" from ancient Greek: *ekklesia* ("democratic assembly of full citizens") and *kyriarke* ("belonging to the Lord Master"). It is this second meaning of church as *kyriarke* that Catholic feminists claim needs reform, to become an 'ekklesia' (Dunne 2002, 4).
10. Reception of the discussion kit by bishops was mixed. This negatively impacted the effectiveness of the kits. Only 32 of 70 dioceses appointed a "contact person for women's issues" as recommended and, in the end, only 19 of 70 dioceses submitted a report about using the kit (Dias 2019, 21).
11. cf. Note #9.

Contributors

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Mary Ellen Chown, MEd, MDiv, is a retired elementary school educator who currently facilitates workshops related to contemporary progressive theology and spirituality for Catholic educators and students, Christian faith communities, and women's groups. She is an active member and past national coordinator of the Catholic Network for Women's Equality (CNWE), Canada. Presently, she also enjoys being a member of the Christian Education and Worship Committees of the Anglican Church of the Incarnation, Oakville, Ontario, Canada. She is grateful to all those who contributed to her biographical essay about Dr. Ellen Margaret Leonard, CSJ, particularly Ellen and her sister, Anne Leonard.

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Martha González Pérez (Mexico, 1956) is an educator, author, and workshop leader. She has a BA in education from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional and an MA in theology and the contemporary world from the Universidad Iberoamericana. She has also taken courses at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the Theological Community of Mexico. As part of her MA requirements, she wrote the article "Beatriz Melano, primera doctora en teología en el ámbito protestante latinoamericano (Beatriz Melano: First Female Doctor in Theology within Protestantism in Latin America)," published in *Ribet*, the journal of the Universidad Iberoamericana. She has also published two other articles on Melano. González Pérez has taught classes on gender theology in seminaries and churches in Mexico and has led workshops for women in urban and marginalized areas.

Mary C. "Polly" Hamlen, MDiv, is an independent scholar whose research interests include the history of interfaith movements and women's religious leadership. As a member of the 1000 Women in Religion WikiProject, she edits Wikipedia regularly, adding and improving articles on women religious leaders. She managed executive education courses at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School for eight years and mediates pro bono with the Harvard Mediation Program. Previously, as a researcher for the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, she developed an interfaith case study for use in religion courses. A lay member of the United Church of Christ (UCC), she has served as secretary and board member for the Massachusetts Council of Churches. She holds a Master of Advanced Studies degree in ecumenical studies from the University of Geneva, Switzerland, and a Master of Divinity degree from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.

Colleen D. Hartung, PhD, is co-founder and chair of the 1000 Women in Religion Wikipedia Project, where she works to develop global programs to address gender bias on digital platforms like Wikipedia. She teaches people around the globe how to edit and write biographical entries about women in religion. She is the author of a contribution to *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, titled "Faith and

Polydoxy in the Whirlwind" (Routledge, 2012). She is also a homilist at Holy Wisdom Monastery outside of Madison, WI.

Rosalind Hinton is an oral historian, educator, community organizer, grant writer, and non-profit consultant. Skilled in research, she has mounted online and physical exhibitions and recently co-curated *l'dor v'dor: Jewish Women's Leadership and Their Impact on New Orleans* for the New Orleans tricentennial. She initiated the LAOUTLOUD and NOLAJEWISHWOMEN websites, dedicated to bringing forward the voices of progressive women activists in New Orleans and Louisiana. She was senior program manager for *Music Rising*, a regional studies initiative at the Center for the Gulf South at Tulane University, which she helped to re-open post-Katrina. She documented the Jewish Community of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and the Gulf Coast for *Katrina's Jewish Voices* for the Jewish Women's Archive. She is currently a non-profit consultant for Julep Consulting, bringing resources to environmental, arts, and criminal justice organizations. Experienced in cross-cultural discussions of ethics, values, and religious beliefs, she has a PhD in religious studies from Northwestern University and has taught multiculturalism, feminist theology, and African American religions at DePaul University in Chicago and at Tulane and Loyola Universities in New Orleans.

Rosemarie Daher Kowalski, PhD, lives in Indonesia and teaches across Southeast Asia. Her specialties over the past twenty years include theology, practical theology, intercultural studies, and research writing. She has written three books (series title: *What Made Them Think They Could?*) about how disempowered groups feel empowered to serve abroad. Her ongoing interest in synchronizing theology, praxis, and cross-cultural work has led to articles for the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology, AG Heritage,* and other publications. She loves writing, art, and learning from students in many cultures. She considers it a privilege to serve locals, expats, and travelers.

Janice Poss is a PhD candidate in women's studies in religion at Claremont Graduate University. She holds an MA in theology from Loyola Marymount University and a BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is a member of the AAR/SBL Women's Caucus Leadership. She is currently writing her dissertation. From the beginning, she has contributed to 1000 Women in Red (Religion) by building databases of women without Wikipedia pages, increasing women's presence on Wikipedia, Wikidata, and Atla's multi-volume companion project of women's biographies. She is coordinator at CGU of the Pat Reif, IHM, Memorial Lecture, now in its eighteenth year. She recently returned from Sarnath, India to study Tibetan. She contributed interviews with women in Gaborone,

Botswana, to the Women's Living History project at CGU. Her love of education is attributed to the religious women who taught her–RSMs, RSHMs, CSJs, IHMs, and IHCs.

Karma Lekshe Tsomo is a professor of theology and religious studies at the University of San Diego, where she teaches Buddhist thought and culture, world religions, death and dying, images of enlightenment, and other subjects. Her research interests include Buddhist feminist philosophy, Buddhism and bioethics, comparative religious ethics, religion and politics, and Buddhist social theory. Her publications include *Women in Buddhist Traditions; Into the Jaws of Yama: Buddhism, Bioethics, and Death*; *Sisters in Solitude: Two Traditions of Monastic Ethics for Women*; and numerous edited volumes on women in Buddhism.

Elizabeth Ursic, PhD, is professor of religious studies at Mesa Community College. She is also adjunct faculty at the California Institute of Integral Studies. Her book, *Women, Ritual and Power: Placing Female Imagery in Christian Worship*, is named one of the top 100 books in contemporary women's spirituality. She serves as co-chair of the American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature Women's Caucus.

Women in Religion

This series, *Women in Religion*, is an outgrowth of "1000 Women in Religion"—a project of the Women's Caucus of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. This project is part of an initiative to create, update, and improve the online biographical presence of the lives and contributions of cis- and transgender women who are notable as scholars, activists, and practitioners in the world's religious, spiritual, and wisdom traditions. This series of biographical collections about women in religion explores and rethinks the various, and often biased, guidelines and principles that govern digital content creation about women.

Volume one of this series, *Claiming Notability for Women Activists in Religion*, presents the biographies of women activists who have worked as coalition builders, collaborators, mentors, and facilitators of resistance movements. This volume focuses on the concept of notability, used as a standard for inclusion on the Wikipedia platform. Authors variously challenge and extend this benchmark in their coverage of unrecognized, yet noteworthy, women. This critical engagement helps to move the dial on gender bias within the biographical coverage of women.

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