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# Reflections on the Potential of Gender Theory for North American Pentecostal History

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## **Abstract**

In this article we show how gender is a useful category of analysis for students of North American pentecostal history. First, we provide a working definition of the term *gender* (a term with a plethora of meanings!). Then we cite a few examples from current scholarship that demonstrate how gender as a theoretical construct illuminates certain aspects of the North American movement. Finally, we reflect on the potential benefit of using gender to recount a variety of pentecostal histories, both North American and beyond.

## **Keywords**

pentecostal history – gender – theory – women

## **The Purpose of this Article**

The purpose of this article is to show the potential in gender theory for finding helpful responses to classic questions about the place of women in the move-

ment's trajectory. For example, why did a movement that was hospitable to a few talented female ministers fail to incorporate them into their institutions' bureaucracies? Why, in a movement that claims that the Holy Spirit is the one that calls and empowers, are women continually the exception and not the rule?

There are numerous potential explanations, but we argue that gender history holds particular promise for these inquiries. Gender history leads us to a clearer definition and more precise contextualization of the movement and a fuller explanation of Pentecostalism's pragmatism. In addition, gender history nuances the simple mission of recovering the "great" women of pentecostal history and invites scholars to investigate the relationships of power between pentecostal men and women in ministry. Studying Pentecostalism through the lens of gender does not simply resurrect and celebrate stories of a few female leaders. The study of gender invites scholars to examine closely *how* women were able to succeed even as they occupied roles that were considered "inappropriate" for women (according to the times). At the same time, gender studies has the power to explain how and why women were sometimes unable and even unwilling to transcend traditional gendered limitations.

### Definition of Gender History

Gender is a highly theorized term.<sup>1</sup> In historical circles, many associate the study of gender exclusively with the study of women and describe women's history as gender history. Although women's history is a valuable field, it is distinct from gender studies. Women's history emerged among academic historians in the 1970s and 1980s out of scholarship informed by the ideology of the second-wave women's movement. In the early stages, women's history was an attempt to answer the simple question: what about the women? The agenda of that early scholarship was a clear recipe: "Add women. Stir." That recovery mission, begun somewhat later in pentecostal circles, is still making an impact with many welcome additions and increasing numbers of books, theses, and

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1 While we focus on history, the study of gender as a theoretical category is multidisciplinary. Some examples include sociology: Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, *Handbook of Sociology, Social Research* (New York: Springer, 2006); psychology: Mary Crawford, *Transformations: Women, Gender, and Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012); and political theory: Judith Squires, *Gender and Political Theory*, *Social Institutions and Social Change* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000).



articles by scholars such as Estrelida Alexander and Abraham Ruelas, among others.<sup>2</sup>

Understanding women's role in the making of Pentecostalism is important, but Natalie Zemon Davis, an American feminist historian, famously asserted that in order to understand the history of women, one needed to study the sexes in relation to each other. Davis boldly asserted, "Our goal is to discover the range in sex roles and in sexual symbolism in different societies and periods, to find out what meaning they had and how they functioned to maintain the social order or to promote its change."<sup>3</sup>

The call for attention to both sexes has given way to a plethora of works that go far beyond women's history and fall instead under the umbrella of gender studies.

Moreover, the study of gender is not just a study of the two sexes' differing experiences, but it is the study of how the very ideas of "maleness" and "femaleness" are defined and expressed and how their meanings change according to time and place. Scholars of gender assert that "masculinity and femininity—acquire meaning in relation to one another. Theoretical and empirical studies of gender are concerned with examining this relationship, particularly the inequalities and hierarchies of authority and power that have underpinned relations between women and men."<sup>4</sup> Because it helps us to understand the continual reconstitution of gender roles, gender history has the potential to offer North American pentecostal studies more complex answers to the questions of equality and inequality between the sexes.

Daniel Boyarin provides a helpful definition of gender as the "praxis and process by which people are interpellated into a two (or for some cultures more) sex system that is made to seem as if it were nature, that is, something

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2 Estrelida Alexander, *The Women of Azusa Street* (Cleveland, TN: Pilgrim Press, 2005); and her *Limited Liberty: The Legacy of Four Pentecostal Women Pioneers* (Cleveland, TN: Pilgrim Press, 2008); Estrelida Alexander, ed., *Philip's Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009); Dana L. Robert, ed., *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); Abraham Ruelas, *Women and the Landscape of American Higher Education: Wesleyan Holiness and Pentecostal Founders* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010); Kristen Dayle Welch, *'Women with the Good News': The Rhetorical Heritage of Pentecostal Holiness Women Preachers* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010).

3 Natalie Davis, cited in Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 29.

4 Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, *Gender and History in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishers, 1996), 1.



that always existed.”<sup>5</sup> In this definition, gender is not a preexisting quality into which humans are born, but rather a series of processes and practices that divide humans, and indeed the known world, into a two- (or more) gendered system. In other words, gender is a social construct, and the “interplanetary model” of gender, that “men are from Mars and women are from Venus,” is not a given, but rather a creation of popular culture.<sup>6</sup> We argue that this notion has been reinforced in many church cultures but, rather than accepting that the sexes occupy different worlds, gender history challenges this essentialism and questions the validity of simply accepting and reinforcing what the culture is dictating to us about how different men and women are (or should be).

Judith Butler wrote that gender is a “performance with clearly punitive consequences,” and clearly delineated rewards.<sup>7</sup> According to Butler, a person’s gender is the sum total of his or her rhetoric, vocal patterns, “bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, the study of gender is the study of what acts make women women and men men in any given culture, as well as how women and men are regularly rewarded for practicing their gender well and punished for failing to act and/or speak in suitably feminine or masculine ways.

Attention to the ways in which gender roles have been rewarded and reinforced also helps to reveal the ways in which power is exercised in personal and social relationships. Joan Wallach Scott’s now classic definition of gender history focuses on power as a central concern for gender studies and offers a two-part definition of gender with the twin propositions that “Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes”; and that “Gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”<sup>9</sup> The study of the gendering process reveals how one gender (usually maleness) is assigned dominance while another gender (femaleness) is assigned submissiveness.<sup>10</sup> It is analysis of how maleness has been historically assigned strength and virtue, and how femaleness has been assigned weakness and vice.

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5 Daniel Boyarin, “Gender,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 117.

6 Michael S. Kimmel, “Introduction: Human Beings: An Engendered Species,” in *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1–16.

7 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 522.

8 *Ibid.*, 519.

9 Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 42–44.

10 Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘the Mystic East’* (London New York: Routledge, 1999), 13.



## What Gender History Contributes to Pentecostal Studies

A gendered approach to North American pentecostal history means that we examine the public image, rhetoric, and gestures of pentecostal women and men in comparison with their female and male counterparts in other movements. Researchers of the early generations of American Pentecostalism take interest in how gender was created and repeated in the United States through specific acts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (1890–1935). We offer three ways in which the study of the practices and processes that have made and continue to make men men and women women illuminates the history of American and Canadian Pentecostalism.

First, a gendered approach puts the onus of defining Pentecostalism upon practice rather than upon belief. Here, the concept of “lived religion” can usefully be applied to pentecostal practices because it provides an analytical paradigm for exploring gender norms.<sup>11</sup> Pentecostalism, like gender, has many meanings and many definitions. Some, such as Grant Wacker, describe it as “radical evangelicalism.”<sup>12</sup> Others, such as Matthew Sutton, see Pentecostalism as lively fundamentalism.<sup>13</sup> While these positions have merit, they are not ideal for the study of Pentecostalism, because evangelicalism and fundamentalism are “isms” that are most commonly used to describe a certain set of beliefs. Fundamentalists are said to emphasize the inerrancy of Scripture, evangelicals are said to emphasize the centrality of the cross, and so on.<sup>14</sup>

The problem with framing the historic trajectory of the pentecostal movement in theological terms is that Pentecostalism is notoriously slippery when it comes to defining it as a particular belief system. Although they themselves argued that theology had no place in their work, early Pentecostals drew from a variety of theological traditions to inform their practices.<sup>15</sup> For example, Aimee

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11 Robert Orsi, “Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion,” in David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997): 3–21; Meredith McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

12 Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 4.

13 Matthew Avery Sutton, “‘Between the Refrigerator and the Wildfire’: Aimee Semple McPherson, Pentecostalism and the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy,” *Church History* 72, no. 1 (2003): 159–188.

14 Lynn Bridgers, *The American Religious Experience: A Concise History* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 59; John R.W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 23–50.

15 Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 18.



Semple McPherson drew upon her Salvation Army and Methodist roots as well as upon A.B. Simpson's Presbyterian-ish fourfold gospel.<sup>16</sup> Maria Woodworth-ETter counted the Disciples of Christ, the Holiness movement, Methodists, and many other denominations among her influences.<sup>17</sup> Not only did they combine various theologies in their ministries, but many pentecostal leaders also switched movements several times during their careers (sometimes voluntarily, sometimes involuntarily). For example, Woodworth-ETter was a Holiness preacher, a minister in the Church of God, and a nondenominational pentecostal pastor. In addition, women and men from a variety of theological backgrounds, from Presbyterian to Catholic to Quaker to Wesleyan, contributed to the movement's construction.<sup>18</sup> Simply put, the diversity of Pentecostalism makes its historical classification in terms of belief difficult if not impossible.<sup>19</sup>

A gendered approach invites historians to investigate practices, processes, and power. Rather than trying to find a set of beliefs that are essential to the movement, it is more useful to look at what Pentecostals *did*, how they organized their practices into process, and which people benefitted (or received power) from these practices. Therefore, it is helpful to define Pentecostalism not as a certain set of beliefs, but as a kind of classic American practice: revivalism.<sup>20</sup> The practice of reviving or "awakening" American Protestantism had

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- 16 Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 191.
- 17 Maria Beulah Woodworth-ETter, *Marvels and Miracles God Wrought in the Ministry for Forty-Five Years* (Indianapolis, IN: Mrs. M.B.W. ETter, 1922), 1.
- 18 Douglas G. Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 22, 42, 246.
- 19 Michael Wilkinson, ed., *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Michael Wilkinson and Peter Althouse, eds., *Winds from the North: Canadian Contributions to the Pentecostal Movement* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010); David A. Reed, *"In Jesus' Name": The History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2008).
- 20 Michael James McClymond, *Embodying the Spirit: New Perspectives on North American Revivalism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 125; Douglas G. Jacobsen, *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology: Voices from the First Generation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 6. Jon Butler, noting that Puritan, Anglican, Quaker, Baptist, Presbyterian, and African American folk religion all contributed to American revivalist culture, argues that the revivalist impulse in American Protestantism is so theologically diverse that it defies theological categorization. Jon Butler, "The Plural Origins of American Revivalism," in his *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).



roots as far back as the eighteenth century during a period commonly known as the "Great Awakening."<sup>21</sup> Although the theological trends changed as years passed, Protestants remained concerned with breathing life into what they saw as ailing American Christianity. Revivalist efforts, whether in the North or South, Calvinist or Arminian, Baptist or Pentecostal, were theologically diverse but shared several common practices, including public individual conversions (often displayed during an "altar call"), enthusiasm (for example, crying, laughing, shouting, wailing, fainting, dancing, lifting hands, tongues), holy living, and what Charles Finney called "social religious meetings" or what we call "revivals."<sup>22</sup> Early pentecostal services included all of these practices and pentecostal ministers and movements were given authority based upon their ability to evoke these kinds of practices. Focusing on the praxis and process of Pentecostalism helps historians untangle themselves from the task of tracing every branch of the pentecostal theological family tree and concentrate instead on what makes Pentecostals distinct from their Protestant cousins and brothers and sisters: the practice of reviving.<sup>23</sup>

This practice of reviving, as any performed act,<sup>24</sup> has gendered qualities. In addition to helping define the movement, the second contribution that gender theory brings to North American pentecostal history is to further contextualize it in its gendered context. For example, gender analysis helps to explain why many turn-of-the-twentieth-century Americans rejected pentecostal revivalism. Many have noted that race and class prejudice were present in early criticism of the movement,<sup>25</sup> but gender also played a role. When the

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21 See William Gerald McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977*, Chicago History of American Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1; McClymond, *Embodying the Spirit: New Perspectives on North American Revivalism*, 2. Leigh Eric Schmidt traces the roots of this style of worship to post-Reformation Scotland in Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fair: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

22 George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), iv; Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer and Randall Herbert Balmer, *Modern Christian Revivals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), xi; McClymond, *Embodying the Spirit*, 6. Marsden credits Finney's nineteenth-century *New Measures* with introducing the importance of group meetings in revivalism, although the impulse can be traced as far back to Whitefield's seventeenth-century outdoor revival meetings.

23 McClymond defines revivalism as "an ongoing negotiation over the use of means or techniques." See McClymond, *Embodying the Spirit*, 16.

24 Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 522.

25 See for example: Iain MacRobert, *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism*



pentecostal movement was born in the Progressive era, power, authority, dominance, strength, reason, rationality, intelligence, aggression, and professionalism in the public sphere were considered to be the ideal traits of masculinity.<sup>26</sup> Men were expected to display this in a number of ways: developing muscular physiques, adopting “take-no-prisoners” business practices, and even going to war. Womanly women, on the other hand, were those who exhibited humility, submission, subordination, weakness, emotion, and domesticity in the private sphere.<sup>27</sup>

This process of gendering the world applied to institutions as well as human beings. Americans wanted anything in the public sphere—their politics, economics, foreign policy, and race relations—to be masculine.<sup>28</sup> Progressive and Interwar-Era newspapers testified to this concern for the “maintenance of the manhood of our men” and carried appeals for manliness to be exhibited through wars, fiscal policies, recreation, physical fitness, and so forth.<sup>29</sup> Count-

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*in the USA* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Anthea D. Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992); Cheryl Jeanne Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture*, Religion in America Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

26 Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*, Women in Culture and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 116.

27 *Ibid.*, 84.

28 See Rotundo's discussion of manliness and the military, politics, and competitive sports in “Passionate Manhood,” in E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). See also Bederman's examination of masculinity, race, and politics in Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

29 “Get Manhood in a Week,” *The San Francisco Call*, February 17 1898; “American Manhood,” *The Conservative*, November 1 1900; “Political Pot-Pie,” *The Seattle Republican*, January 13, 1905; “The Manhood of Men,” *The Evening Missourian*, November 6, 1917; P.S. Gage, “American ‘Boys’ Find Manhood in Untamed Wilds as Members of Forest Conservation Groups,” *Christian Science Monitor*, November 23, 1933; Leonard Merrill, “Millions in Manhood,” *Los Angeles Herald*, June 1, 1905. Kevin P. Murphy elaborates on the negotiation of American manhood in the political sphere. See Kevin P. Murphy, *Political Manhood: Red Bloods, Mollycoddles, and the Politics of Progressive Era Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Ilene DeVault discusses masculinity and work in the Progressive Era in Ilene A. DeVault, “‘Give the Boys a Trade’: Gender and Job Choice,” in *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).



less clubs, fraternal orders, and lodges sprang up promising a haven for men to revel in their manliness.<sup>30</sup> Manliness, masculinity, and manhood were the watchwords of early twentieth-century public life. The worst thing for any given institution, product, or policy was to be considered “feminine.”

Americans also wanted their churches to be masculine and, for the most part, American ministers did not resist the manliness movement. They were arguably some of the most enthusiastic supporters of the trend.<sup>31</sup> As Charles Hershey argued in 1910, ministers should be interested in two things: a “rise in manhood and the cause of our Christ.”<sup>32</sup> A common metaphor of the era was that men should be “soldiers for the Lord.” The most popular ministers of these eras—D.L. Moody, J. Frank Norris, Harry Fosdick, Mark Matthews, and Billy Sunday—had diverse theological commitments, but they all agreed on one thing: they promoted a masculine expression of Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

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30 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 16; Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 62.

31 Although historians such as James Turner and E. Anthony Rotundo portray Protestantism as a bastion of femininity (see, e.g., James Turner, *Without God, without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*, New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985]; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 206), recent studies of masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have demonstrated that an underlying anxiety among American Protestants was that Christians were facing a masculine scientific era and encroaching secularism armed with nothing but the hopelessly effeminate brand of Victorian Christianity that they inherited from the previous generation. Aspects of Victorian Protestantism particularly associated with effeminacy included sentimental depictions of Jesus and the Bible and the association of Christianity with the Victorian domestic sphere. See Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 17; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 222–283; Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4. There were opponents to the muscular Christianity movement: for example, Christian Church minister Dr. A.F. Moore’s article critiquing the new American masculinity as the “strongest possible exercise of the human will” (see Dr. A.F. Moore, “Spirituality,” *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 103, nos. 27–52 [1911]). Harry Fosdick, although at first a strong proponent of the movement, rejected it after the Great War. As Putney, Bederman, and Bendroth demonstrate, these dissenting voices were in the minority.

32 Charles B. Hershey, “Wiping Off Boundary Lines,” *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 102, no. 14 (1910).

33 Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 2, 59, 187; Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 65; Andrew Nolan, “Making Modern Men: The Scopes Trial, Masculinity and Progress in the 1920s United States,” *Gender and History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 122–142.



At the same time, Pentecostalism was out of step with many of the most vital qualities associated with manliness.<sup>34</sup> Its emphasis on the need to submit to the Spirit<sup>35</sup> and its emotive (sometimes out of control) services went against the standard rational, manly behaviors.<sup>36</sup> During the decades surrounding the birth of Pentecostalism, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Protestants believed they were facing a masculine scientific era and encroaching secularism while they were armed with nothing but the hopelessly effeminate brand of Victorian Christianity inherited from the previous generation.<sup>37</sup> Most argued that manliness was essential for the future of the church.<sup>38</sup> “The work of soul-saving,” wrote Wesleyan Jonas Oramel Peck in 1894, “will develop the most robust qualities of manhood [in the pastor].”<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, in his 1909 publication *How to Preach with Power* revivalist William Henry Young instructed preachers that “Effeminate habits of voice, of manner, of thought, of method or language should therefore be eschewed.”<sup>40</sup> The pentecostal penchant for practices that led women and men to weep, to cry out, or to lose control of their physical bodies and claim to have been “slain in the spirit”<sup>41</sup> clashed with the masculine ideal of bodily strength and rational self-control.<sup>42</sup>

In addition, pentecostal rhetoric was out of sync with muscular Christian language. Pentecostals commonly referred to themselves not only as “soldiers for God,” but also as “brides of Christ.”<sup>43</sup> The contrast between these two images

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- 34 “Women with Men Embrace: White and Blacks Mix in a Religious Frenzy; Wives Say They Left Husbands to Follow Preacher; Disgusting Scenes at Azusa Street Church,” *The Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1906.
- 35 Although outside the scope of this essay, Jane Soothill’s *Gender, Change, and Spiritual Power* offers additional analysis of the ways in which masculinity is expected to submit to the Spirit. See Jane Soothill, *Gender, Change, and Spiritual Power: Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1–34.
- 36 Nolan, “Making Modern Men: The Scopes Trial, Masculinity and Progress in the 1920s United States,” 123–124.
- 37 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 17; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 222–283; Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1920*, 4.
- 38 Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 81.
- 39 J.O. Peck, *The Revival and the Pastor* (New York, Hunt & Eaton; Cincinnati: Cranston & Curts, 1894), 40.
- 40 William Henry Young, *How to Preach with Power*, 3rd ed. (Athens, GA: How Publishing Co., 1909), 276.
- 41 Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 108.
- 42 Leah Payne, “‘The Roar of Thunder and the Sweetness of a Woman’: Gender and Twentieth Century American Revivalism,” Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2012, 46.
- 43 Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement*, 102–103.



is stark. One is a paragon of masculinity and the other is the epitome of femininity. It is no wonder, then, that so many were uncomfortable with the movement. By focusing on gender in comparing the practices that characterized Pentecostalism to other forms of early twentieth-century Protestantism, we gain insight into how it differed from other brands of revivalism as well as why pentecostal meetings were criticized for their "indelicacy" and their mixed gender audiences were categorized as an "immodest way" of worshipping.<sup>44</sup>

The third way in which gender theory enriches our study of Pentecostalism is that it further highlights the "pragmatic" impulse present in the movement.<sup>45</sup> Gender theory invites us to look beyond the "Spirit"-oriented rhetoric to the processes and practices typically employed by female and male pentecostal ministers. When we do this, we can gain new appreciation for their work and for the obstacles that they overcame. For example, first-generation Holiness-turned-Pentecostal Maria Woodworth-Etter was no doubt a talented, charismatic preacher who was convinced that she was an instrument of God. She was also her own biographer, a businesswoman, a skilled fundraiser, and a publicist. Woodworth-Etter presented herself in a way that allowed followers to accept her as an authoritative minister as well as an ideal woman—no small task. Her accomplishments are all the more extraordinary when we understand the ways in which her contemporaries struggled (with limited success) to escape relegation to the private sphere.<sup>46</sup> Gender theory helps us understand her actions in their context and appreciate the obstacles that she overcame to follow her calling.

Gender history research on Canadian pentecostal women between the 1910s and the 1950s complements this work on American Pentecostals in the Progressive and Interwar Eras. In addition to helping define the movement, contextualize it, and analyze its pragmatism, gender history can make at least three other contributions. First, it can take us beyond the "great woman" approach to history by looking at more than recovering the stories of the outstanding or

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44 Muscular Christian criticism of the North American pentecostal movement from the likes of Harry Ironside and A.T. Pierson has been well documented by pentecostal historians. See Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 146; Grant Wacker, "Travail of a Broken Family," in *Pentecostal Currents in American Protestantism*, ed. Edith Blumhofer et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 40.

45 Wacker, *Heaven Below*, 13.

46 Nancy Schrom Dye, "Introduction," in *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era*, ed. Noralee Frankel and Nancy Schrom Dye (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 4.



atypical women in the movement. Second, it can help us to understand how pentecostal men and women interacted in their ministry work and how the roles that were deemed appropriate for each sex were determined. And finally, gender history can help us uncover more about how power and authority were established in the movement. Looking at the biographies of several different pentecostal women, Canadian scholarship has tackled these three problems.

Aimee Semple McPherson, undoubtedly the best-known woman in North American pentecostal history, was Canadian.<sup>47</sup> But it has long been understood that while Semple McPherson was unmatched as the most flamboyant character in the history of Pentecostalism, she was only one of many women in public ministry. Far too little attention has been paid to the history of these lesser-known women who were her contemporaries. Although relatively little has been published on these “other” Canadian women, there is no shortage of them to be explored. Initial research in the archives of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada archives has revealed several dozen such women whose stories are still largely untold. None were as famous as Sister Aimee, and while many of them worked in conjunction with husbands or fathers, almost as many were single women. Knowing more about the lives of such women as Zelma Argue, Ellen Hebden, Beulah Argue Smith, Alice Belle Garrigus, Susie and Carro Davis, and scores more like them is serving to enrich and nuance our understanding of what it meant to be a pentecostal woman in Canada in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>48</sup> Adding the stories of these other pentecostal foremothers to the historical record is an important task because women of today need to see role models and celebrate their heroes. Adding such women to the “hall of fame” of Canadian pentecostal leaders not only allows us to con-

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47 Edith L. Blumhofer, “Canada’s Gift to the Sawdust Trail: The Canadian Face of Aimee Semple McPherson,” in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. G.A. Rawlyk (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997): 387–402.

48 Pamela Holmes, “Ministering Women in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada: A Canadian Pentecostal Feminist Exploration,” in Wilkinson, ed., *Canadian Pentecostals*, 171–194; Adam Stewart, “A Canadian Azusa? The Implications of the Hebden Mission for Pentecostal Historiography,” in Wilkinson and Althouse, eds., *Winds from the North*, 17–37; J.A. Hewitt, “Garrigus, Alice Belle,” in *The International Dictionary of Pentecostal Charismatic Movements*, Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 661; Patricia Pickard, *The Davis Sisters: Their Influences and Their Impact* (Bangor, ME: Patricia P. Pickard, 2009); Burton K. Janes, *The Lady Who Came: The Biography of Alice Belle Garrigus, Newfoundland’s First Pentecostal Pioneer, Volume One: 1858–1908* (St. John’s: Good Tidings Press, 1982) and *The Lady Who Stayed: The Biography of Alice Belle Garrigus, Newfoundland’s First Pentecostal Pioneer, Volume Two: 1908–1949* (St. John’s: Good Tidings Press, 1983).



sider the experiences of these early heroines of the faith in their own right, but also demonstrates why pentecostal history lends itself to feminist exploration through a gendered lens. As one recovers and analyzes the experiences of these lesser-known women, the ways in which they defied prescribed gender roles are unmistakable. Considering the ministries of two Winnipeg sisters, Zelma Argue and Beulah (Argue) Smith, Ambrose concluded that "gender history can help to explain how and why these early women made their contributions. Placing the Argue sisters into the complex web of their family ties and ministry connections is an important first step in understanding the roles they played."<sup>49</sup>

This brings us to the second premise about what Canadian gender history can add to our understanding, namely, that Pentecostalism has never been about only one sex or the other. Gender history draws our attention to both women and men. Pentecostals can rightly claim that from the very beginning, the inclusion of ministering women was a distinctive feature of the new movement, grounded as it was in an acute awareness that the prophetic promises of Joel 2 were being fulfilled in their very midst. Those idyllic roots, where sons and daughters were to minister side by side in fulfillment of the promise without discrimination based on sex, invite feminist historians to question why it was, then, that as the twentieth century unfolded, pentecostal women did not continue to enjoy a long and uninterrupted history of equality with their brothers.

To explore this question of how women and men ministered in relation to one another in the past, again the story of the Argue family of Winnipeg provides a useful case study. Zelma Argue, the daughter of A.H. Argue, was a travelling evangelist who never married but nevertheless worked very closely with men, especially her father and her brothers. Ambrose concluded that Zelma's role was like that of a wife because "while technically she never did step into the role of evangelist's or pastor's wife, during her years of travel with her father and her brother, [she] fulfilled the role of helpmeet while at the same time firmly establishing her own individual ministry."<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, her sister Beulah married a very prominent Canadian pentecostal leader, C.B. Smith, yet she did not relinquish her solo ministry of travelling and preaching, even after she became a mother. Therefore, both of these women defied stereotypes through the roles they adopted in ministry, and while their family connections with men who were prominent in the Canadian pentecostal movement undoubtedly opened doors for them, there is more to their story than that. These two women had

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49 Linda M. Ambrose, "Zelma and Beulah Argue: Sisters in the Canadian Pentecostal Movement," in *Winds from the North*, 123.

50 Ibid, 115.



important role models for ministry in the persons of Woodworth-Etter and Semple McPherson, whom they had personally encountered in ministry settings. And though she largely rarely participated publicly in the family ministry because of poor health, their own mother, Eva Argue, also remained a forceful presence in her daughters' lives and encouraged them in their public ministries. The lives of the Argue sisters demonstrate the complex webs of men and women working together in partnerships, and while Zelma and Beulah sometimes appeared to be unconventional, at other times, they were the epitome of conformity to prescribed gender roles.<sup>51</sup>

In answer to the question of where gender studies can take the field of pentecostal studies, it seems clear that gender history can accomplish more than adding the women back into the story of Pentecostalism or arguing for greater equality for women in pentecostal churches (though both of these are admirable and important goals in their own right). Gender history can bring new complexities to the issue of the roles that are deemed appropriate for each sex in pentecostal circles.

Influenced by the trends of social history that moved the emphasis from the famous to the everyday, gender history also asks about the roles that have been constructed for men. Informed by trends in cultural studies that, among other things, explore notions of the performed self, gender historians pose new questions such as: How and why did the ideals and expectations for pentecostal women and men change over time? How were these changes a reflection of the larger culture in which the church found itself operating? For example, sometimes the church unconsciously fell right in step with the larger culture as it did in the postwar years when the church placed a new emphasis on separate spheres, diverting their women's ministries toward acts of domesticity while men confirmed their own monopoly over governance and finance. At other times, Pentecostals consciously reacted against the broader culture, as when the women's movement gained support in the last decades of the century in the secular world, and some churches cited the dangers of "worldly" feminist infiltration into the church<sup>52</sup> and thus entrenched more conservative views of women's roles.

With some variation according to a continuum of conservatism, various expressions of Pentecostalism have staked out their own positions about how restrictive or how inclusive they are prepared to be vis-à-vis women's and

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51 Ibid, 123-124.

52 Following the PAOC decision in August 1984 to approve the ordination of women, the December 1984 issue, entitled "The Gospel Has No Gender ... Either!" celebrated the



men's appropriate roles. Indeed, even within one particular expression of Pentecostalism, the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, for example, one finds different stances being taken on such questions as female ordination, women preaching, and women in local church governance. And all too often, there may be an official policy of openness to welcome the giftings of women, but the practice in reality is quite different. Variations in practice at the local (that is, regional and congregational) levels should not be overlooked. To cite but one issue, debates about female ordination have resurfaced over the decades in pentecostal circles, and among the many different expressions of Pentecostalism, one can find a variety of positions on the questions around women's roles in the church. There is more to this than the simple acknowledgement that Pentecostals are not homogenous. What is up for exploration here is the fundamental question of how Pentecostals organize themselves in terms of gender relations. How do those assumptions about appropriate roles for each sex translate into practices of ministry, church programs, and even private family life in pentecostal circles?

While the obvious place to begin this exploration is the public ministry of the church, the point here is to go behind closed doors (whether those are the front doors of private homes, the study doors of ordained clergy, or the board room doors of decision-making bodies) to explore how gender construction operates to dictate codes of acceptable behavior for pentecostal people in church life and private life. And gender historians will be particularly interested in how and when these behaviors change over time.

The third place to which gender history can take pentecostal scholars is beneath the foundations of church structure. As the majority of North American pentecostal women could testify, the last bastion of male power in pentecostal circles is in the realm of church governance. While Pentecostals have expressed various degrees of openness to women in pulpit ministry, there has been less openness to women at the board tables of local churches and regional and national decision-making bodies. The last bastion of patriarchy, then, seems to be in this area of governance. Gender history opens a conversation about how and when decision-making and church leadership come to be gendered as male.

It is not a new argument that the more institutionalized the pentecostal movement became, the more exclusion women and other "disadvantaged"

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decision and the contributions of women in ministry. Readers' negative reactions to that issue included "Worldly Cover" (May 1985), 9; "Influenced by Modern-Day Feminism" (April 1985), 43; and "Jesus Called Only Men" (April 1985), 44.



people experienced.<sup>53</sup> But that institutionalization thesis, what Barfoot and Sheppard called a socio-theological approach,<sup>54</sup> should be revisited. Questions about how and why men gained power in the movement while at the same time women became more excluded need to be reconsidered through the lens of gender. That kind of inquiry can take us some distance toward exploring the gendered construction sites of power. Here the literature of gender historians such as Christopher Dummitt may prove helpful. In his book *The Manly Modern*, Dummitt pointed to the postwar emphasis on “expert” opinions and the hierarchies of power they created, not just between women and men, but also among men.<sup>55</sup> Men who were the most highly regarded in postwar society were those who could claim professional “expertise” by virtual of their education or vocational training. As Dummitt points out, what these experts were mostly concerned with was risk management. In church circles, a parallel exists with Bible college-educated pastors being held in high regard. Because the Bible colleges typically assumed that women would serve as overseas missionaries, pastors’ wives, or children’s workers, their training did not concentrate as much on training for pulpit ministry or church governance. A closer consideration of the gendered nature of pentecostal Bible colleges may be able to uncover important trends in the training that women received. The Winnipeg Bible College, which operated between 1925 and 1950, is proving to be a rich case study in this regard. Based on alumni profiles from the archives of the PAOC, one is able to reconstruct a composite profile of the male and female students who followed expected paths of ministry after graduation and those whose work departed from those trends.<sup>56</sup> As for lay people in pentecostal congregations, the shared assumptions about why men were regarded as more suited than women to make decisions about church business deserve further exploration.

There are, of course, notable exceptions to these patterns. Two examples from the Maritime region of Canada illustrate that women sometimes did take

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53 Charles H. Barfoot and Gerald T. Sheppard. “Prophetic vs. Priestly Religion: the Changing Role of Women Clergy in Classical Pentecostal Churches,” *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 1 (1980): 2–17.

54 *Ibid.*, 16.

55 Christopher Dummitt, *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

56 Linda M. Ambrose and David Scott, “Anti-modern Message, Modern Messengers? Women at Canadian Pentecostal Bible Colleges, 1925–1960,” unpublished paper presented at the 17th Biennial Conference of the Canadian History of Education Association/Association canadienne de l’histoire de l’éducation, Vancouver, October 19, 2012.



very prominent leadership roles.<sup>57</sup> The first example is that of Alice Belle Garrigus, whose name is synonymous with Pentecostalism throughout Newfoundland.<sup>58</sup> The story of how this middle-aged woman relocated from America to a British Maritime colony previously unknown to her and became the force behind Pentecostalism there is one of folkloric proportion to Newfoundlanders.<sup>59</sup> Yet, interestingly, when Garrigus's congregation in St. John's grew and when the work spread to various communities across Newfoundland, she consistently promoted men as the leaders, both within the original work in the capital city and for the works in various outpost communities that were established under her watch spanning out from St. John's. Her work has been well documented by her enthusiastic biographer, Burton Janes, and yet the question of how and why she interacted as she did with her male coworkers has been largely unexplored. A second Maritime example is the case of two American sisters from Georgia, Carro and Susie Davis, who established an important pentecostal work in Saint John, New Brunswick.<sup>60</sup> This pair copastored their church, the Full Gospel Church of Saint John, for almost four decades, keeping it independent of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada despite many visits from prominent PAOC leaders. For many years their church held the distinction of being the largest pentecostal work in Canada east of Montreal.<sup>61</sup> The Davis sisters wielded important power in their congregation, defying gender conventions by their very presence and longevity, by resisting the persistent invitations of the PAOC to come under that administrative umbrella and by remaining steadfastly committed to Oneness teaching. Despite this independent stance, both administratively and theologically, the Davis sisters mentored and encouraged several different young men (not women) from their church to take up leadership roles in their congregation and to become pastors under the auspices of the PAOC after attending PAOC Bible schools.

This curious mix of autonomy and conformity makes the gendered nature of these Canadian Maritime women and their ministries very intriguing case studies that beg further exploration. Their stories remind us that it would be

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57 Linda M. Ambrose, "Pentecostal Women in Atlantic Canada: Remembering the Founding Mothers," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society for Studies in Religion, Fredericton, NB, May 30, 2011.

58 Hewitt, "Garrigus, Alice Belle," 661.

59 Janes, *The Lady Who Came: The Biography of Alice Belle Garrigus, Newfoundland's First Pentecostal Pioneer*.

60 Pickard, *The Davis Sisters: Their Influences and Their Impact*.

61 S.D. Feltmate, "History of Pentecost in the Maritimes," *The Pentecostal Testimony*, August 1972, 7.



disingenuous to speak only about unconventionality and thus paint pentecostal women exclusively as promoters of women's rights or proto-feminists. On the other hand, to note their gender conformity at other times does not negate the fact that they personally performed outside the realm of what was regarded as usual feminine behavior. When Garrigus and the Davises chose to promote young men and not young women as ministers of the gospel, they were conforming to the gender norms of mid-twentieth-century culture and demonstrating pragmatism because they realized that in order to promote the gospel message most efficiently in a culture that valued trained professional men above women, sometimes the best means of doing so was to send forth young men who held promise for ministry.

### Why This Matters for Pentecostal Studies

It is not enough to say that pentecostal women are empowered for ministry. Many denominations of various kinds allow for female ministers, and yet studies of both mainline and evangelical denominations show that no North American denomination systematically empowers them.<sup>62</sup> Gender historians have an opportunity to shed some light on this by examining the processes in place for ordination and the practices that make ministers ministers. Once we understand what practices and processes yield a male ministry and male denominational bureaucracies, we can identify concrete ways in which we can expand these practices and processes to include women.

Gender history also has the potential to move North American pentecostal studies beyond essentialist notions about men and women. Some culture-bound believers might find this challenge to essentialism very disconcerting, even heretical. Appealing to traditional literal readings of Pauline instructions concerning appropriate women's conduct about head coverings, silence in church, refraining from teaching men, and so forth, some theologians and lay people have constructed tight confines and limitations for women. But because one distinctive of the pentecostal movement is the emphasis on spirit-empowered women, it seems that pentecostal studies are well positioned to take up these questions of essentialism and explore how and why, by the twenty-first century, many pentecostal churches have become sites of such

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62 Paula D. Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Elizabeth G. Muir and Marilyn F. Whiteley, eds. *The Changing Roles of Women in the Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

stringent and tightly restricted cultural definitions of behaviors that are deemed appropriately male or female. Gender studies press us to explore these roles and ask questions about which are the acceptable and welcome behaviors and roles for women and men, which are not, and who decides. In other words, gender history has the potential to take pentecostal studies behind closed doors (where policies and practices, both formal and informal are created) to reexamine how male-female relationships have operated within North American pentecostal church culture—both public and private—over the decades.

In addition, gender history can provide emerging female pentecostal leaders with strategies for their own ministries. A close examination of the practices employed by successful female ancestors can give future generations more than a recovery of the past. Gender history can give women leaders specific ideas about how to thrive, and at the same time it serves as a cautionary tale that women in ministry have always faced particular gendered challenges.

Finally, gender history has potential for crosscultural comparative work. This article has demonstrated that by putting American Pentecostalism in conversation with Canadian, the historical analysis is enriched. Enlarging that exchange to encompass other national and cultural contexts will continue to nuance further our understanding of the central place that gender occupies in Pentecostalism.