

Reclaiming and Reconciling What Was Originally Ours—Christianity and Feminism: A Concise
History

A Senior Project

presented to

the Faculty of the History Department

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Arts

by

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March, 2015

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The Church has a rich and vibrant history of compassion and activism—and yes, over the years, many people have taken up the cause of women’s rights worldwide, even the label of feminist, again, precisely because of their deep Christian faith...I believe we are a part of the trajectory of the redemption story for women in our churches, in our homes, in our marriages, in our parenting, in our friendships, and in our public lives. This trajectory impacts the story of humanity.¹ –Sarah Bessey, 2013

The Christian church has a long history of theological battles discussing the nature of “biblical manhood and womanhood,” egalitarianism vs. complementarianism, and what to do if suddenly a woman decides that she wants to be a pastor instead of sitting quietly in the pews.² Recently, feminist ideology has been reacquainted with American Christianity, but many Americans, especially American Christian women, are not aware of how their Christian ancestors played a role in the fight for equal rights—behind the pulpit and out on the streets. In twentieth-century America, the narrative that was written about religious history, taught for many years in the education system and reinforced by societal norms, excluded women and their religious views.³ This narrative, biased toward both male and secular perspectives, continues today, but historically, religious evangelical women were writing a different, subversive narrative to the “traditional” when they acted on their beliefs in God and social justice.

Sarah Bessey, a self-proclaimed “happy-clappy Christian” and contemporary bestselling author, defines a woman who believes that patriarchy is not God’s original design for humanity as a “Jesus feminist.”⁴ This term would never have been used in the past by women who we would consider “feminist” today, but historians have retroactively labeled the period between

¹ Sarah Bessey, *Jesus Feminist: An Invitation to Revisit the Bible’s View of Women: Exploring God’s Radical Notion That Women Are People, Too* (New York: Howard Books, 2013), 30-31.

² John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991); Rachel Held Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband “Master”* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012); Jonathan Parnell and Owen Stratchan, *Good: The Joy of Christian Manhood and Womanhood* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Desiring God, 2014). Bessey also talks about these concepts in her book, and there are several other “third-wave” publications that discuss the notion of biblical manhood and womanhood, I did not want to include an exhaustive list here due to issues of space.

³ Ann Braude, “Women’s History is American Religious History,” in Thomas A. Tweed, ed. *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 87.

⁴ Bessey, *Jesus Feminist*, 14-16.

1848 and 1920 as “first-wave feminism.”⁵ On July nineteenth and twentieth, 1848, in Seneca Falls, New York Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Martha C. Wright, Mary Ann McClintock, and Jane C. Hunt drafted the “Declaration of Sentiments” at the Seneca Falls Convention. This document included their grievances and resolutions about how men had barred them from their civil, political, and religious rights.⁶ What is interesting about this document is that four out of five women who planned this “First Convention Ever to Discuss the Civil and Political Rights of Women” were ardent Quakers and fought for both the antislavery movement and what historian Howard Zinn considers a “clear feminist movement.”⁷ This so-called “first-wave” focused on gaining suffrage for all American women. Although many women of color including the famous Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells were also a part of this “first wave feminism,” the white middle class women who championed this movement excluded men and women who wanted to push for black, male suffrage instead of women’s suffrage. Instead of inviting others to join the conversation on human rights, these white, well-educated, middle-class women picketed the White House and starved in jail to gain the right to vote.⁸ On August 18, 1920, their dream was accomplished when U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby signed the 19th Amendment to the Constitution—guaranteeing suffrage for women.⁹

According to Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Harvard professor and author of *Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, second-wave feminism, like first-wave feminism, “developed out

⁵ Kathleen A. Laughlin, et al., “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” *Feminist Formations*, 22, no. 1(Spring 2010), 76-135.

⁶ Lucretia Mott, et al., “The First Convention Ever Called to Discuss the Civil and Political Rights of Women, Seneca Falls, N. Y., July 19, 20, 1848,” in *Miller NAWSA Scrapbooks 1897-191*, (Library of Congress), 1.

⁷ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States 1492-Present* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 117.

⁸ Charlotte Krollokke and Anne Scott Sorenson, “Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls” in *Gender Communication Theories & Analyses: From Performance to Silence* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 3-4.

⁹ “Text of the Proclamation Signed by Colby Certifying Ratification of the 19th Amendment,” *New York Times*, August 27, 1920.

of the ferment of racial conflict and the frustrations of educated women denied full participation in public life.”¹⁰ Most scholars associate second-wave feminism with the late 1960s and early 1970s when radical protests and demands for equality took place all over the nation. Women were tired of waiting for their rights and being “second-best” in the eyes of the law. The second wave transitioned into the third wave when women who were excluded from the second and first wave of feminism, decided to speak up and declare their grievances, as Sojourner Truth had several hundred years before them at a conference in Akron, Ohio with her speech entitled “Ain’t I A Woman?”¹¹ In the 1980s and 1990s, black, lesbian, and working-class feminists decided to voice their opinions and discuss how they had been oppressed by the patriarchy for far too long.¹² Third-wave feminism continues today and has evolved into a push for human rights because it includes both men and women of all races, genders, economic statuses, and religions. At its core, feminism has become an ideology that welcomes everyone who believes that “women are people, too.”¹³

By grouping the feminist movement into three waves, it has been easier for historians to grasp the complexity of a movement that continues to grow in breadth and depth. What is problematic with the wave analogy is that it fails to account for the many different types of religious American women who have been fighting for their rights as early as 1638. Anne Hutchinson, a Quaker woman, preached the doctrine of grace instead of works to men and women in her home until the Puritan church tried and excommunicated her because of her beliefs

¹⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York, Vintage Books, 2007), 193.

¹¹ National Parks Service, “Ain’t I A Woman?” by Sojourner Truth (Women’s Rights Convention, Akron, Ohio, 1851), <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/sojourner-truth.htm>.

¹² Krolokke and Sorenson, “Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls,” 12.

¹³ Bessey, *Jesus Feminist*, 13.

of spiritual equality and access to God.¹⁴ Another problematic feature of the three-wave analogy is that by categorizing “second-wave feminism” to include radical social movements that took place during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s to protest against “traditional” men’s and women’s roles, other groups including men, women of color, and lower-class women were inevitably excluded from joining the re-emerging feminist movement.¹⁵ Additionally, the wave analogy of feminism only looks at the “dramatic wave of revolutionary activism” and “obscures as much as it organizes the past into a neat package.”¹⁶ The three waves of feminism do not give credit to the smaller moments of activism and the women who fought for women’s rights not only in society, but also in their place of worship.

Ann Braude, in her article entitled “Women’s History is American Religious History,” discusses how American Christian women have been involved in a paradox: they have been the biggest supporters of an institution that has oppressed them. The church has empowered women to fight for social justice, but also has barred them from certain leadership roles, thereby causing internal dissent.¹⁷ Braude further elaborates that her essay “focuses on women’s role as the backbone of the vast majority of well-established groups” and continues with her bold argument stating “women’s history *is* American religious history.”¹⁸ She believes that American religious history is marked by primarily female participants, so they should be considered the main perspective of this narrative.¹⁹ Although I agree with Braude’s belief that women were major supporters of many American religious institutions and applaud her specific focus on Christian women, I do not agree with her provocative statement above. Excluding men from the picture

¹⁴ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 25.

¹⁵ Laughlin et al., “Is It Time to Jump Ship?” 77.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Braude, “Women’s History is American Religious History,” 88, 90.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 88, 90.

and characterizing them as going to church “as a secondary effect of women’s piety” not only contradicts her original intent of focusing on American women in religion, but also stereotypes men into a homogenous group.²⁰ She also fails to mention how race and class have affected women’s church participation in America. Braude accomplishes her aim to be “provocative, not conclusive,” but fails to delve into the intricacies of who Protestant and Catholic participants were and how they influenced American religious history.²¹ Similarly, the wave analogy that many historians use to interpret the feminist movement is flawed because of its brevity and tendency to focus on “movements” rather than “moments.” I call the periodization established by the three waves of feminism into question for this reason. This wave analogy is helpful in understanding important surges of activism within the movement and women who we have identified as “important” to this narrative, but it does not encapsulate the continued efforts throughout time that American evangelical women have made in regards to equality between the sexes.

The analysis of this paper aligns closely with the argument presented by Kathleen Laughlin and her colleagues in “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” where she argues that the wave metaphor reinforces patriarchal hegemony by categorizing the women’s movement into only three parts. History has been complicated by men and women of all ages, races, sexual orientations, and religious beliefs, so to talk about the feminist movement in only three waves is insufficient. Both the feminist movement and the Christian church have excluded and persecuted women of all races and ages, but as feminist lawyer, activist, and Episcopalian minister Pauli Murray states in her autobiography, “love is more powerful than hate—not a passive, submissive love, but a vigorous love which resisted

²⁰ Braude, 104.

²¹ Ibid, 107.

injustice without stooping to the level of hating the oppressor.”²² Murray is referring to the love of Jesus Christ and how, as the Bible states, it cannot be stopped through “life nor death, angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation.”²³ Through this love, religious women of all ages, sizes, races, and sexual orientations can reclaim their history and work with the men in their lives to achieve equality and social justice.

Because evangelical Christian women were (and still are) important in the development of twentieth-century American feminism, this paper is an attempt to holistically address both the past and the present. Through the use of newspaper articles, biblical passages, written resolutions, autobiographies, monographs, and secondary sources, I plan to further define Christianity and feminism in a more complimentary light and show how they have intersected, contradicted, and coincided throughout time. I want to gain insight into the stories of women who have fought for equality since the fight for women’s suffrage up until today. For many modern evangelical Christians there is a taboo nature to the term “feminist” and I, like Sarah Bessey and other Jesus Feminists, want to see the church, and especially church women, reclaim this term and reclaim the feminist history that is theirs.²⁴ Women were a part of American history and will continue to be movers and shakers in the institutions that have shaped them. Now is the time we stop pretending that they never existed.

Definitions

²² Pauli Murray, *The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 391.

²³ Romans 8:37-39 (New International Version).

²⁴ Bessey, *Jesus Feminist*, 12.

In an effort to see Christian women all over the United States reclaim the term feminist, I find it imperative that we define this term for the sake of discussion. When the term “feminist” is brought up in conversation, some people think about angry women who burn their bras and hate men. While there may have been one instance in 1968 when a group of 100 women protested the Miss America Pageant by throwing away their girdles, high heels, liquid detergent, Playboy magazine, and had a “symbolic bra-burning,” this event is more iconic than anything.²⁵ Although it represents the radical steps women took in order to prove their frustration with the patriarchy, it is not a good starting point to define the ideology that many Christian women have held even before the beginning of the American nation.

Rather, a better starting point is an article written in 1993 by Patrick Colm Hogan entitled “Feminism: efforts at definition.” This article “detail[s] the conceptual varieties of feminism” in order to “increase our comprehension of the issues involved and to sharpen and further focus the rational debates that are already taking place around these issues.”²⁶ What is important to recognize about Hogan’s argument is that it places feminism on a spectrum from radical leftist to conservative, much like any other ideology such as Marxism or fascism. Over time, when women have faced different circumstantial problems, “feminism” has had different meanings, but at its core, Hogan considers feminism to be based on a set of universal political aims that everyone who prescribes to it can agree upon. These goals include allowing women to have basic rights to health, nutrition, to exercise control over their reproductive health, equal compensation for equal work, and equality within their households and in their marriages. How these goals are achieved marks the differences between each type of feminism that Hogan details in his article,

²⁵ Charlotte Curtis, “Miss America Pageant Picketed by 100 Women,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1968, Special edition.

²⁶ Patrick Colm Hogan, “Feminism: efforts at definition,” *Critical Survey* 5, no. 1 (1993): 46.

but the political, social, and economic aims mentioned above are what he categorizes as *basic feminism*.²⁷ Someone who fulfills the requirements of this definition, whether in word or deed, will be considered a feminist and/or someone who fights for “women’s rights” in the confines of this argument.

Another term that needs to be addressed before moving forward is Christianity. Although this paper aims to delve into the ways in which the Bible has been used to define gender roles for many different generations, it is imperative to note what the belief system that a majority of women discussed in this paper professed. There are many different denominations of Christianity that have fought for women’s rights in the past, but this paper focuses mainly on the Protestant and specifically the evangelical traditions. Similar to feminist groups, different Christian groups have faced a tumultuous history in regards to women’s participation in the church and the various interpretations of the Bible that have shed light on men and women’s roles. Pamela Cochran, in her book titled *Evangelical Feminism: A History*, argues that after 1968 the evangelical church transitioned from believing the Bible to be the perfect word of God to believing in interpreting different passages of the bible based on the historical and social context. She also accurately points out that the history of evangelical feminism is more than just a “narrative of events.”²⁸ This trend can be seen in the primary sources written after 1968.

In 1968, college campuses exploded with anti-war protests, the Black Power movement started to gain momentum, and women recognized that they couldn’t be silent anymore.²⁹ Before this push for individuality and the beginnings of second-wave feminism, Cochran argues, women had little to do with the interpretation of scripture, and most evangelicals took the Bible

²⁷ Hogan, “Feminism: efforts at definition,” 46-47.

²⁸ Pamela Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism: A History* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2-7.

²⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, 191-192.

literally³⁰. Although I would agree with her discussion of the shift from literal to more contextual interpretation of scripture among feminists after the 1970s, Cochran is remiss to not talk about the women who used the Bible and their own interpretation of Christianity to fight for social justice. She covers “evangelical feminism” from 1973 onwards, but does not recognize that this movement is more than just a second- and third-wave phenomenon.

The term, “Jesus feminist,” as coined by Sarah Bessey, or what I would consider “Christian feminism” or “Jesus feminism,” is a more appropriate term for the activism and participation that American Christian women have had throughout the late nineteenth century and in contemporary America.³¹ It is more inclusive to women of all denominations, generations, ethnicities, marital statuses, because it allows for women to fulfill what Rachel Evans, an influential Christian writer and blogger, would consider her “highest calling”—to follow Christ at whatever stage of life she finds herself in.³² Although I would agree with Evans’s statement, many men and women in the Christian church have disagreed with this and have used scripture to strengthen their position that a woman’s highest calling is to be a wife and a mother.³³ Thus, the controversy continues.

The basis of the “feminist” controversy in the evangelical church lies in questions such as, how should the Bible be interpreted in regards to gender roles? Are men and women equal? Can they both have leadership positions in the church? Are women supposed to be submissive to their husbands in all things? These questions stem from several Biblical passages, but the some of the most commonly quoted verses come from epistles that the apostle Paul wrote. In 1 Timothy 2:11-15 he writes,

³⁰ Cochran, *Evangelical Feminism*, 4.

³¹ Bessey, 11.

³² Rachel Held Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, 180.

³³ *Ibid*, 178-179.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35, Paul states, “women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church.” What is interesting about these two passages is that they are written by the same author who wrote a letter to the Galatians reminding members of their church body, “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, and for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”³⁴ In his first letter to a church in Corinth, Paul also allows women to pray or prophesy in church as long as their heads are covered and he even gives authority to the church congregation to decide this matter for themselves when he writes, “Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?”³⁵ The Bible also has two books dedicated to the stories of women, mentions prophets such as Deborah who declared the words of God to the Israelites, details the stories of Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus, and chronicles the lives of several women who were influential in the early church. These examples are significant because they reveal how men and women are spiritually equal and in the church.

Women in the Bible were some of its most influential characters: Deborah was a prophetess and a warrior, Mary Magdalene was the first person to recognize Jesus after his death and resurrection, Mary of Nazareth carried the son of God in her womb for nine months and

³⁴ Galatians 3:26-28

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 11: 13

birthed him in a stable, and the women that Paul mentions were those who took care of the sick, poor, and risked their lives for the work of the Lord.³⁶ The difficult part about interpreting the Bible in regards to women's role in society and in the church is how to reconcile passages like those mentioned above that seem contradictory, and analyzing how those could fit with the biographies of the women mentioned who have been faithful to God since the time of Abraham and Moses. If Christians believe, as stated in 2nd Timothy, that the whole Bible is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness," then what does that mean for women?³⁷ This is where twentieth- and twenty-first century feminist theology has its place. Christian women of every denomination have wrestled with the passages that are difficult to interpret, and have decided for themselves whether they want to take all of Paul's words literally, or interpret them based on social and historical context.

From the Enlightenment to the Suffrage Movement: Feminist Beginnings

Another difficult task for the historian is to decide when this concept of "Jesus feminism" began. One of the first instances occurred in late nineteenth century America, where women publicly used their voices to discuss the "social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women," on July nineteenth and twentieth in Seneca Falls, New York, 1848.³⁸ As mentioned previously, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Frederick Douglass attended this radical conference that created what came to be known as the "Declaration of Sentiments." This

³⁶ Esther and Ruth are the two books of the Bible named after women. Deborah appears in the Bible in Judges 4-5; Mary's story and the birth of Jesus can be found in Luke 1:26-2:20; Mary Magdalene was the first to meet Jesus after his death and resurrection in John 20:1-18; A woman named Tabitha who was influential in the early church can be found in Acts 9:36-43 and Junia, the first woman to be named an apostle can be found in Romans 16 along with other women that Paul specifically names for their "work in the Lord." Some of these women are also mentioned in Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, 19-20, 69-73, 98, 115-119, 141-145, 221-223, 247-249; Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present*, (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1987), 20.

³⁷ 2 Timothy 3:16

³⁸ Mott, et al. "The First Convention Ever Called to Discuss the Civil and Political Rights of Women," 1.

document is intriguing not only because it mirrors the language from the earlier Declaration of Independence, but also because it declares men and women equals in politics, society, and religion—three spheres of life in which women were expected to have a limited voice, or stay quiet altogether. Although the women who attended this conference did not declare themselves to be feminists, I would argue that they paved the way for what we would consider “feminist” today.³⁹ The Declaration of Sentiments allowed for faith and feminism to intersect, something that biblical scholars and women’s rights activists have wrestled with throughout American history.

Women who signed the Declaration of Sentiments can be considered early “feminists” because their “sentiments” align with Patrick Colm Hogan’s definition of basic feminism, or the assertion that women have been systematically deprived of social, economic, and intellectual rights and freedoms that they truly deserve.⁴⁰ Lucretia Mott, Martha C. Wright, Mary Ann McClintock, and Jane C. Hunt (the drafters of this document) listed how men created an “establishment of an absolute tyranny” over women, including several grievances about women’s roles in the church.⁴¹ The writers of this document were upset that women could not participate in several church activities or teach theology without the permission of their husbands.⁴² Furthermore, they believed that men had “usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself,” thus barring women from the press and the pulpit.⁴³ These women did not stop writing after listing their grievances; they remembered to include resolutions to these documents that allow us to view how they wanted to solve the problem of inequality between men and women.

³⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “feminist.” This entry dates the term feminist back to 1852, so although these women did not use the term feminist to describe themselves and their political aims, they could have because it was developing around this time.

⁴⁰ Hogan, 46-47.

⁴¹ Mott et al. “The First Convention Ever Called to Discuss the Civil and Political Rights of Women,” 3.

⁴² Mott et al., 3.

⁴³ Ibid, 4.

The participants at this conference resolved that men and women are created equal, not only under the law, but under the eyes of the Creator, and demanded to be seen as such.⁴⁴ This statement hearkens back to the words of the apostle Paul when he wrote to the church in Galatia, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁵ They also declared that they should be able to participate in public and private speaking, teaching, and writing on moral and religious subjects. An excerpt of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s address attached to this document furthers this point when she says, “In every generation God calls some men and women for utterance of truth” and quotes the prophet Joel, “And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.”⁴⁶ The Declaration of Sentiments aligns with biblical principles of equality and its creators used these scriptures to prove their point—that men and women deserve to have the same political, social, civil, and religious rights. The fact that women in 1848 cared about their faith enough to fight the right to have a voice in church is astounding. Little did we know that the beginnings of the suffrage and feminist movements came from a religious background that would shape and inspire women’s rights activists for generations to come.

One of the biggest challenges for historians of feminism and Christianity is deciding how to bring these two narratives together when they have been considered to be exclusive and often, contradictory to each other. Ann Braude, a scholar of women’s religious history, argues that the claim that feminism and Christianity cannot coexist dates back to the French Revolution and has imbedded itself into the narrative of American history.⁴⁷ Many men saw women as their

⁴⁴ Mott, et al, 6.

⁴⁵ Galatians 3:28

⁴⁶ Joel 2:28

⁴⁷ Ann Braude, “Faith, Feminism, and History,” in *Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 234.

“inferiors in social and political life, but in matters of the spirit they [were] preeminent.”⁴⁸ These beliefs allowed for women to be major participants in religious spheres, but continued to perpetuate the idea that women could not be present in all aspects of the public sphere.

Although this idea was present, there were women like Mary Wollstonecraft who were skeptical of how religion was treated as a matter of “sentiment or taste” by men, instead of recognizing it as a way to learn the attributes that God has revealed in his word, such as wisdom, goodness, power, mercy and humility.⁴⁹ By claiming women as the true believers and men as not being true to the original vision of the Bible, Wollstonecraft makes a powerful argument for the religious origins of the feminist movement. Wollstonecraft was not an American woman, but her most famous contribution to women’s history titled, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is seen as central to the “self-image of western feminism” by Barbara Taylor, a critic of Wollstonecraft’s work. Taylor also mentions that by understanding Wollstonecraft and her theology, we can have “insights into the religious impulse as it has operated across the feminist tradition.”⁵⁰ Her argument about the religious origins of Wollstonecraft’s work is important to note because it reflects the eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals of equality and democracy that her American sisters, like Abigail Adams, shared during this time period.

If woman was supposed to love man similarly to the way that she loved God, then that put an implication on men to be humble and, “love [their] wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” like the apostle Paul commands in his letter to the Ephesians.⁵¹

Taylor makes an important point about the relationship between men and women and their

⁴⁸ Barbara Taylor, “The Religious Foundations of Mary Wollstonecraft’s Feminism,” reprinted in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 382.

⁴⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Deidre Shauna Lynch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 50; Micah 6:8; Galatians 5:22-23

⁵⁰ Barbara Taylor, “The Religious Foundations of Mary Wollstonecraft’s Feminism,” 381.

⁵¹ Ephesians 6:25

creator when she states, “We love God because he deserves our love, not because he commands it.”⁵² She further elaborates her point to include Wollstonecraft’s belief that human relationships should be based on this concept of free will and virtue, instead of a power struggle between the sexes.⁵³ These concepts are also reflected very clearly in Abigail Adams’s famous letter to her husband John Adams, written when he took part in drafting the Constitution. Adams states,

I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or Representation. That your Sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of friend...Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in intimation of the Supream Being make use of that power only for our happiness.⁵⁴

Abigail Adams wants for men and women to have the relationship of friends, rather than one of master and servant. She states that women will “foment a Rebellion” if they are not represented or given a voice in government. She also mentions a “Supream Being” much like Wollstonecraft mentions the divine and quotes the Bible in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Although these women have been considered religious, I would also shy away from labeling Mary Wollstonecraft and Abigail Adams “Christian” because many women who have referenced a supreme being, or have even quoted the Bible in their text (like Elizabeth Cady Stanton did at the “First Convention Ever to Discuss the Civil and the Political Rights of Women”) did not necessarily believe in the Judeo-Christian God.⁵⁵ Although their work did not specifically

⁵² Taylor, 390.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776. Documents that Made History, “Remember the Ladies,” Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

⁵⁵ Taylor, 379. Taylor labels Wollstonecraft as a feminist in her essay, and also mentions that religion was “central to her worldview,” but that her politics were mixed with Christianity and Rousseauism, not necessarily a strict adherence to biblical principles.

reference the Judeo-Christian God, it did not go in vain because their words paved a way for Christian women to find their voice and fight for their rights.

I would be remiss to discuss “Jesus feminists” and the modern evangelical church without discussing some of its earlier roots and similar denominations. The Society of Friends, more commonly known as Quakers, was a denomination in early seventeenth century America that advocated for women to be pastors and for the equality of men and women.⁵⁶ Many of these women were traveling ministers who were often single, but some of them often left their husbands and children at home, in order to follow the inner voice of the Holy Spirit. Charity Cook was a mother of seven children, when she left her husband Isaac to take care of the kids so she could be a traveling minister.⁵⁷ Out of 103 Quakers who visited Great Britain as traveling ministers, forty-two of them were women. This represents at least half of the traveling ministers who visited Great Britain between 1700 and 1800.⁵⁸

Quaker women often went through persecution and hardship in order to follow their religion. Mary Dyer was persecuted and hung by the Boston police for returning to the city after visiting other Quakers in jail.⁵⁹ Susanna Morris from Pennsylvania was shipwrecked three times during her ministry journeys and Patience Brayton crossed several rivers, climbed mountains in snowstorms, and often was lost in the woods.⁶⁰ These traveling ministers were some of the first to do missionary work and inspired later generations of Quaker women to fight for the antislavery and suffrage movements.

When American women were not allowed to speak in public during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Quaker women like Frances Wright, continued to tour the United States

⁵⁶ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, 11-12.

⁵⁷ Bacon, 36.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 34-35.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 37.

in front of mixed audiences about “antislavery and anticlerical attitudes.”⁶¹ Prudence Crandall even admitted some women of color to school that she taught, much to the parents’ dismay. When Connecticut legislature tried to ban education for black people from out of state, she fought this law and was jailed three times. Her opponents boycotted the stores, filled her well with manure, and set her school on fire.⁶² Although she did not win this battle, her story spread throughout the abolitionist community and inspired many.

Quaker women also were a part of the strongest and longest lasting abolition group called the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. In 1837, they organized the first anti-slavery convention of American women and several “famous” names in history attended including: Louisa May Alcott and Lucretia Mott. There were also several black women who attended this meeting like Harriet Forten Purvis, Grace Douglass, and Sarah Douglass—proving that religion, abolition, and women’s rights movements could be inclusive to all races and ethnicities.⁶³

Sarah and Angelina Grimke were two members of the Quaker church who also fought against slavery and had radical visions for advancing women’s social aims. They are important to the Jesus feminist movement because of their piety and deep commitment to thwarting the aims of a traditional patriarchal society. They believed that no one but Christ was their master and saw the redemptive power of Scripture for all Christians as a way to go against oppression.⁶⁴ In a letter to Jane Douglass quoted in *Women, Religion, and Social Change*, Sarah encourages her to not listen to the “traditions of men” but to study the Bible and learn about Jesus on her own. Sarah and Angelina also distrusted all forms of authority and structure that diminished

⁶¹ Bacon, 102.

⁶² Ibid, 102.

⁶³ Ibid, 103-104

⁶⁴ Frank G. Kirkpatrick, “From Shackles to Liberation: Religion, The Grimke Sisters and Dissent,” in *Women, Religion and Social Change* ed., Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 434.

human rights for her black friends and for women.⁶⁵ Angelina and Sarah saw slavery and oppression of women as concepts that were wholly contrary to the message of the Gospel, but linked in their cause like “the colors of the rainbow.”⁶⁶ More than sixty years after the abolition movement, this belief would prove to be wholly opposite to the views of radical suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was bitter about black men gaining the right to vote, but ignoring women’s plea for suffrage. The issue of race was always less important to her than gender, which proved to exclude several black women from the cause of feminism who felt that they had to choose between siding with the men in their lives, or their sisters in the cause.⁶⁷

In addition to fighting against slavery, feminists in the nineteenth-century Christian church also changed perceptions about sexuality and gender with the way that they conducted their personal lives. This is seen most clearly in a letter dated February 8, 1896 from Susan B. Anthony to Adelaide Johnson, an avid supporter of the suffrage movement. Anthony congratulates Johnson for having a woman officiate her marriage ceremony and for having a husband who is willing to take her last name. She also mentions that this was the first time in all of the marriages of the women’s rights movement that a couple decided to do this.⁶⁸ Several years earlier, in 1838, when Angelina and Theodore Weld were married, they invited a black minister to pray at their wedding and had several former slaves who attended. They did not want church recognition of their marriage, and believed in minimal recognition of the state to declare their marriage as legal.⁶⁹ These two weddings provide an example of the often liberal and even

⁶⁵ Kirkpatrick, “From Shackles to Liberation: Religion, The Grimke Sisters, and Dissent,” 443-444.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 437.

⁶⁷ Ulrich, 141.

⁶⁸ Susan B. Anthony to Adelaide Johnson, February 8, 1896, Susan B. Anthony Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

⁶⁹ Kirkpatrick, 450.

radical views that Christian women had about their place in society and how they enacted them in their personal lives.

Theologically, Sarah Grimke and Elizabeth Cady Stanton provide an example of defending equality between the sexes in their publications that they sent to or collaborated with friends to make. In a compilation of correspondence between Grimke and the president of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Boston, Mary S. Parker, Sarah Grimke discusses the condition of a woman's purpose and place in society using "solely the Bible."⁷⁰ She believes that what has been written about this topic is a direct result of the misinterpretation of Scripture and encourages Mary Parker and every woman to "search the Scriptures for themselves, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, and not be governed by the views of any man, or set of men."⁷¹ This aligns with her personal choice to not be married, unlike her sister Angelina. What is interesting about both of these texts is how they align on their views about the equality of men and women by interpreting the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis. The New International Version states that after God created Adam,

No suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."⁷²

Sarah Grimke interprets this passage similarly to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, not to mean that woman is subordinate to man, but created as a companion to man, "a free agent, gifted with intellect...not a partaker merely of his animal gratifications, but able to enter into his feelings as

⁷⁰ Sarah Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Woman; Addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 4.

⁷¹ Grimke, *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, 4.

⁷² Genesis 2:20-23

a moral and responsible being.”⁷³ When discussing the fall of Adam and Eve, Grimke considers that they fell from innocence, but not from equality because both of them ate from the tree of good and evil and even Adam did not choose to obey God when he was faced with temptation.⁷⁴ Although Grimke’s correspondence to Mary S. Parker aims to prove that men and women are equal and should fight for the cause of human rights, not just the rights of gender or race, *The Woman’s Bible* has commentary and interpretation on most books of the Bible aims to use scripture, science, and philosophy to declare the “eternity and equality of sex” as a way to maintain the equilibrium of the universe.⁷⁵

What is interesting about these two interpretations is that although they come to similar conclusions, the authors have very different perspectives and biases. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, although she was neither pious nor respectful of other races, uses the Bible to promote her feminist aims. Sarah Grimke, on the other hand, was a fervently religious Quaker who believed in Christ as her only Lord. She saw the inextricable natures of the woman’s movement and the push for black suffrage and sympathized with the plight of “her enslaved sisters” who were being raped and whipped by their masters. The Bible unites the cause of both of these feminists, who otherwise would not have associated with one another due to chronological and ideological constraints.

Before the Second Wave: Feminists Outside of the Traditional Trajectory

Although many scholars consider second-wave of feminism to start with the protests outside of the Miss America Pageant and the creation of the National Organization of Women in 1968, there are several women who do not fit into this periodization who aligned themselves

⁷³ Grimke, 5; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible: A Classic Feminist Perspective* (Mineola, Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), 21.

⁷⁴ Grimke, 7.

⁷⁵ Grimke, 53-54; Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible*, 15.

with both Christian and feminist ideals.⁷⁶ A woman named Grace Cook Kurz, who wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* on April 29, 1926, is one of the earliest examples of this. Kurz protested against the “assumption that any association of women has the right to voice the opinion of women in general.” The Eighteenth Amendment (regarding Prohibition) unsettled her because she did not consider it to be effective and considered herself to be a “moderate” and “conservative” citizen who was neither affected by “dryness or wetness.” She also stated that she did not want to be considered an “enemy of society and of morality” because of her opposition to the eighteenth amendment. She suggests that this law should be modified in order to be more reasonable, moral, and in line with the guidelines of the Constitution rather than an emotional reaction to the “evils of the liquor traffic and drunkenness” by banning all alcohol.⁷⁷

What is interesting about her letter is that she considered herself to be a “conservative” member of society and did not purchase alcohol, yet she was against women’s organizations who tried to advocate for the passage of the eighteenth amendment. She not only revealed her liberal political aims through her concern, but also the fact that many of the emerging women’s organizations during the turn of the century included a large number of women, there was no way that they could advocate for the beliefs and circumstances of everyone. By placing her concerns in a letter to the editor, Grace Cook Kurz not only identified herself as a woman with certain political aims, but also as a Christian.⁷⁸ Her example gives insight into how women have different religious and political beliefs that do not always align with the majority, or with a certain stereotype. Although many people have often associated a conservative political stance

⁷⁶ Krollokke and Sorenson, 8; Ulrich, 191-193; Martha Weinman Lear, “The Second Feminist Wave,” *New York Times*, March 10, 1968.

⁷⁷ Grace Cook Kurz, “A Protest Against the Claims of Churches and Women’s Organizations,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1926, Letter to the editor.

⁷⁸ Kurz, “A Protest Against the Claims of Churches and Women’s Organizations.”

with evangelical Christianity, we can see through the examples of Sarah Grimke and Grace Cook Kurz, that this is not always the case.⁷⁹

Another example of a Jesus feminist who doesn't fit within the normal wave analogy was Miss Georgia Harkness, a religion professor at Mt. Holyoke College. In a 1938 *Los Angeles Times* article titled "Church Women Make Demand: Methodist Speaker Asks Larger Share in Responsibility," she spoke at the largest Methodist gathering in American history located in Chicago. Harkness challenged the Methodist church about their discrimination against women and asked for more women to be included in the leadership.⁸⁰ Her story is impressive, not only because of how large the gathering was, but also because she is the only female to speak in front of a mixed audience, which many evangelicals considered to be improper at this time.

Many women involved in the church not only protested for religious rights, but also against the Italian-Ethiopian crisis in 1935. A group called the Southern California Council of Federated Churchwomen, mentioned in the *Los Angeles Times*, had Mrs. Cora A. Buley and Mrs. A. O. Schoefield, their president and secretary, send cablegrams to Benito Mussolini and Emperor Haile Selassie. These women encouraged both of these leaders to view a "picture" or short film entitled "Are We Civilized?" before they decided to "resort to actual hostilities." The text of this article describes the film as a dramatization of "the futility of war and glorifies the doctrine of tolerance in human relationships."⁸¹ Although the term "civilized" is very loaded and only two women out of the Southern California Council's five hundred thousand members wrote to the leaders of these countries, by encouraging Americans and those abroad to view this film, we are able to view the ways in which Jesus feminists at this time, associated their spiritual,

⁷⁹ Kirkpatrick, 433; Kurz, "A Protest Against the Claims of Churches and Women's Organizations."

⁸⁰ "Church Women Make Demand: Methodist Speaker Asks Larger Share in Responsibility," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1938.

⁸¹ "Churchwomen to use Picture as a Protest of War," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1935.

social, and political business together. For these women there was no divide between the spiritual and the secular.

Another example of Jesus feminists who advocated against war was recorded in the *New York Times* on August 14, 1933. This article mentions that 9,000 women including their leader, Carrie Chapman Catt, signed a letter that she read all over the United States in order to protest the persecution of Jews in Germany. Catt also formed a group named the Protest Committee of Non-Jewish Women Against the Persecution of Jews in Germany that sent this letter to the League of Nations and to circulate in German newspapers. This letter denounces the “pogrom against the Jews” and declares that this persecution “carr[ies] a Christian banner, but it is a subversion of all things Christian.”⁸² Other women mentioned in this article as noteworthy members include: Dr. Grace Abbott, Jane Addams, Dr. Mary E. Wooley, Judge Florence Allen, Zona Gale, Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Mrs. Gifford Pinchot. These women and the 9,000 others who signed this petition reveal a pacifist and global concern for human rights among them. They use “Christian sentiment” in order to “protect the Jewish minority.”⁸³ Although the words white, educated, and middle- to upper-class, describe the majority of these women they represent the “Jesus feminists” of their time. Other women who were not as privileged, due to societal discrimination during the suffrage movement and war protests, made themselves known in the second-wave movement.

Miss Georgia Harkness, the Southern California Council of Federated Church Women, and the women who protested the war in Germany have social, political, and religious goals that line up with Patrick Colm Hogan’s definition of feminism, and they use their faith to promote

⁸² “9,000 Women Sign Protest on Hitler: Mrs. Catt Forms a Non-Jewish Group to Carry Plea to League of Nations: All States Represented: Letter to be Sent to Countries Near Germany Denounces ‘Pogrom’ as Unchristian,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1933.

⁸³ “9,000 Women Sign Protest on Hitler.”

equal rights for everyone, thus making them Jesus feminists.⁸⁴ Although, they do not traditionally fit into first-wave feminism because their activism starts after 1920, they should not be discounted from the feminist movement due to a chronological detail. The examples of these women also show how the wave analogy discounts the diversity of political backgrounds and opinions that women at this time had, and instead lumps them into a homogenous group. The wave analogy continues to fail because it excludes women who do not fit into a certain time period, or who do not fit a certain stereotype.

The Second Wave: An Accurate Description?

Closely tied to what most historians consider the “second wave of feminism” is Betty Friedan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique*. Betty Friedan specifically writes about the American 1950s suburban housewife who has a “problem that has no name.”⁸⁵ She describes this problem as “buried, unspoken...a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered” and classified the typical suburban housewife experience with these words:

Each suburban housewife struggled with [the problem that has no name] alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—“Is this all?”

For these white, middle-class, suburban women, they wanted more than just a nice house, a loving husband, and the “American Dream.” Many women who worked outside of the home, like Betty Friedan, felt guilty for “undermining their husband’s masculinity and their own femininity and neglecting their children.”⁸⁶ Friedan calls this “strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform” the feminine

⁸⁴ Hogan, 45-52.

⁸⁵ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 15-32.

⁸⁶ Friedan, introduction to *The Feminine Mystique*, x.

mystique, hence the title of her book.⁸⁷ When many of the women that Friedan interviewed went to college, they saw themselves as wives and mothers first, and as students second.⁸⁸ She saw the marketing industry that advertised appliances and other products to housewives as “the business of deluding women of their real needs.”⁸⁹ Friedan also describes these suburban housewives as “status-seekers” and “sex-seekers” who expect their husbands to fulfill their desires when they arrive home from work, only to find that they are unsatisfied if they cannot be successful on the job, and in the bedroom.⁹⁰

By characterizing the “feminine mystique” as a problem for suburban housewives, she excluded several groups of women from second-wave feminism. Although her book is important because it reveals the struggle that one group of women were going through after World War II, I find her evidence from Freudian theories and studies by Alfred Kinney to be dangerous and hyperbolic. Friedan believes “the only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own.”⁹¹ This is how she suggests that the suburban housewife “begins to see through the delusions of the feminine mystique.”⁹² She continues to promote this image of women stepping outside of the home for the first time, and finding themselves in a working and mothering role, but neglects women who have different lifestyles. Friedan excludes single working mothers, single unmarried women, religious women, lesbians, and women of color. Her words paint an image that makes being a wife and a mother seem miserable, putting down the women who actually want to stay at home, as well. Although a step in the right direction, Friedan’s book only seems to have empowered a small minority of

⁸⁷ Friedan, 11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 207-208.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 271.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 344.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 338.

American women, and to have ignored the contradictions of the ideologies present in the post-war era.⁹³

One of the best examples of a woman who defied the stereotype of a domestic “post-war woman” and can also be retroactively classified as a Jesus feminist is Pauli Murray: a black activist, feminist, lawyer, priest, and poet.⁹⁴ Her story is interesting because she fit into the second-wave of feminism chronologically, but she did not fit the stereotype of a middle class, white housewife looking for an escape like Betty Friedan describes in *The Feminine Mystique*. Pauli Murray was born in 1909, in Baltimore Maryland, the same month and year that W.E. B. Dubois published *The Crisis*, and looking back on her life she recognized that her life matched the development and trajectory of the two biggest civil rights organizations in the United States, the NAACP and the National Urban League.⁹⁵

After reading her biography, it seems as if she had a life that developed at the right place and the right time. Not only did she grow up during the major crises in American History, but she had the resources, drive, and family support to attend Hunter College in New York. She stated that her experience with a history teacher, who ignored the messy history of slavery, Reconstruction, and the Civil War, inspired her to “become a passionate student of Negro history after college” and to “take [her] first tentative steps towards activism.”⁹⁶ She accepted her admission into Howard Law School in 1941 and learned effectively how to fight Jim Crow laws, as well as the gender discrimination she faced as one in two women in her law school student body. She cleverly named this problem “Jane Crow.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Beyond The Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 230, 238.

⁹⁴ Murray, *The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet*, front cover.

⁹⁵ Murray, 2.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 85.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 181-183.

In 1943, she and twenty other students staged a sit-in at the Little Palace Cafeteria outside of the Howard University campus, only to sit there for several hours and receive no service. Since many male students had to drop out of school during this time because of the war, the women at Howard University were able to exercise their full potential towards activism and leadership.⁹⁸ During this time in her life, Murray linked her own difficulties with racism and sexism with the struggle for abolition and women's rights within history. It is at this time that the black activist and lawyer parts of her identity, joined with the feminist side of her identity.⁹⁹ She worked with Eleanor Roosevelt, the NAACP, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and used her skills to not only promote civil rights, but equal rights for women as well.¹⁰⁰

Her biggest contribution to the feminist movement was when she, with 32 other women, formed the National Organization for Women on October 29-30, 1966.¹⁰¹ She worked alongside Betty Friedan to create this organization because both she and Friedan recognized the limitations of not having their own political organization.¹⁰² Murray's story fits perfectly where Friedan's left off because she had a deep Episcopalian faith that she pursued along with feminism. Where Friedan left out several women and did not relate to black, religious, or lower class women, Murray did. She struggled at first with her faith and feminism when she saw how the Episcopalian church gave certain privileges to men and not to women, and became so furious at one point that she needed to leave a church service during communion.¹⁰³ After this incident, she proposed to have women more involved in church leadership, and she found that there was no

⁹⁸ Murray, 206-208.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 214-215.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 189,222-228, 358.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 368.

¹⁰² Ibid., 366.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 369-371.

church law that barred women from participating in church positions in leadership, but that these positions had been taken by men for the sake of “tradition.”¹⁰⁴

Little did she know, that 10 years after she questioned the traditional roles for men and women in the church, she would become an Episcopalian minister.¹⁰⁵ In her autobiography, she discusses her calling to ministry, her ordination, and her first Holy Eucharist which resulted from a close friend’s death.¹⁰⁶ On February 13, 1977, she stated that “all of the strands of [her] life had come together” when she celebrated her first Holy Eucharist as an ordained minister. This event took place at Cross Chapel, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the same church where her grandmother had been baptized when she was a slave under Miss Mary Ruffian Smith. She had been fighting her whole life to reconcile her identities, and after her ordination she was “empowered to minister the sacrament of the One in whom there is no north or south, no black or white, no male or female—only the spirit of love and reconciliation drawing us all toward the goal of human wholeness.”¹⁰⁷ Pauli Murray, similar to many Jesus feminists, did not fit into traditional feminism, but reconciled her identities with the faith that she held so deeply.

Religion, Politics, and the ERA

Christian women have not traditionally been included in second-wave feminism, but a big issue that many religious women diverged on during this time period was the push for an Equal Rights Amendment, or ERA. The ERA was a proposed amendment to the Constitution that would guarantee equality under the law for both sexes.¹⁰⁸ In 1971, when it was first brought up to Congress, lawyer and anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly created a group called STOP ERA to

¹⁰⁴ Murray, 371.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 373.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 426.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 435.

¹⁰⁸ Russell Chandler, “ERA: God’s Will, or an Abomination?” *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1980.

oppose this amendment from being added to the constitution. Schlafly, a devout Catholic, had the support of several clergy, church women, and conservative politicians in her group, which is one of the reasons, that this article stereotypes the distrust of feminism among Christian conservatives as a “national trend.”¹⁰⁹

After a long political battle, Congress did not make the ERA an addition to the constitution. Many Christian women such as Beverly La Haye saw this as a sign to thank God. Another woman named Jo Ann Gaspar, editor of *Right Woman* magazine, and a speaker at conservative Catholic forums, believed that if the ERA passed, it would disrupt the concept of femininity they viewed women should hold. Not only did they feel this way about the ERA, but also about feminism. According to these anti-feminist religious women, “feminism undermines God’s design of the patriarchal system. And the ERA is the tool of the feminists to break up the nuclear family and destroy the authority of men over women.”¹¹⁰ On the opposing end, women such as Rev. Victoria Booth Demarest believed that the ERA was God’s will for America.¹¹¹ A newly formed group called the Evangelical Women’s Caucus agreed with this statement and saw the interpretation of the Bible as a way to reinforce the equality of men and women, who both submit to the authority of Christ.¹¹² These opposing views, according to Russell Chandler, show how religious women were divided at this time over the issue of feminism.¹¹³

Religious women in Illinois converged on the issue of the ERA, further complicating this binary narrative. In 1982, Kathleen Hendrix published an article in the *Los Angeles Times* detailing the efforts of a “handful of women” who decided to fast in Springfield, Illinois from

¹⁰⁹ Ulrich, 205; Chandler, “ERA: God’s Will, or an Abomination?”

¹¹⁰ Chandler, “ERA: God’s Will, or an Abomination?”

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

May 17 until June 30, when the time to ratify the ERA would run out.¹¹⁴ Sonia Johnson, a Mormon woman who was excommunicated for her beliefs about the ERA, started this fast and seven other religious women, mostly Catholics and other Mormons joined her. Even famous African-American comedian and activist Dick Gregory supported these women by fasting with them for five days, reflecting a shift towards including men as allies in the feminist movement.¹¹⁵

Although many believed this event to be a hunger strike similar to those promoted by suffragists, Johnson assured these women that the fast was a symbol of women's suffering and a way to focus their spiritual energy on this problem.¹¹⁶ Many of the women who fasted did not know each other before this occurrence and thought of the experience as a way to bond over their spiritual beliefs, which fueled their devotion to God, and also to feminism.¹¹⁷ Women from the League of Women Voters and NOW supported them in their fast, financially by giving them one-thousand dollars, and physically by providing chairs for them to sit in, standing in front of them with a banner, and marching for the ERA on their behalf.¹¹⁸ Although Congress never ratified the ERA, these women's spiritual fervor made an impact and proved to be a good case study for how feminism and Christianity can support one another, despite differing denominations.

American Christianity, Feminism, and the Concept of Race

Just as the "melting-pot" analogy for Americans promoted assimilation and minimized diversity, the waves metaphor for feminism excluded women of color.¹¹⁹ Although women like Mary Church Terrell, Sojourner Truth, Anna Cooper, Amanda Berry Smith, and Pauli Murray

¹¹⁴ Kathleen Hendrix, "Women Fasting for ERA and Hungering for Justice: Religious Zeal Sustains Illinois Demonstrators," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1982.

¹¹⁵ Hendrix, "Women Fasting for ERA and Hungering for Justice."

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Laughlin, *et al.*, 82-83.

mentioned their grievances about the status of black women in society and fought for women's rights, many other women of color were silenced. bell hooks, in *Ain't I A Woman*, echoes the words spoken by Sojourner Truth three hundred years earlier by mentioning how white men, white women, and black men have oppressed black women. She states that black women were "afraid to acknowledge that sexism could be just as oppressive as racism" and had to deny their femaleness in order to support members of their own race.¹²⁰

hooks, as well as other feminists, did not relate as much to the claims of sisterhood and solidarity that seem to characterize the second-wave activism of the 1960s and 1970s.¹²¹ These women, who questioned how second-wave feminism tended to privilege certain types of women and exclude others, have been considered "second-wave difference feminists."¹²² Although much of these publications came about during the 1980s, these women are still considered part of the second wave.

In *Ain't I A Woman*, hooks argues that historically, black women have faced sexist and racist oppression, and have not been included in feminism because the term "women" has referred to white women, and has not been challenged. This is best seen when the members of NOW (as mentioned previously) compared their movement to the NCAAP or Black Power, thus comparing themselves to black political movements, but not recognizing how the terms "black" and "women" could go together.¹²³ She reinforces this point when she states, "They [white feminists] could pay lip service to the idea of sisterhood and solidarity between women, but at

¹²⁰ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 1.

¹²¹ Krollokke and Sorenson, 10-12.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 4-8.

the same time dismiss black women.”¹²⁴ hooks also critiques the typical argument for the feminist movement reinforced by *The Feminine Mystique* with these words:

The racism and classism of white women’s liberationists was most apparent whenever they discussed work as the liberating force for women. In such discussions, it was always the middle class “housewife” who was depicted as the victim of sexist oppression, and not the poor black and non-black women who are most exploited by American economics.¹²⁵

Although second-wave feminists thought that race and sex were two separate issues, bell hooks and other black women display with their lives that these two issues are actually inseparable identities.¹²⁶

What is most interesting about her argument is that she mentions “although the focus is on the black female, our struggle for liberation has significance only if it takes place within a feminist movement that has as its fundamental goal the liberation of all people.”¹²⁷ Her words show the shift of some feminists during the 1980s who realized that like the name National Organization for Women that the feminist movement was started by women and was for them, but could be supported and could support other movements, not just the elimination of patriarchal structures in society. hooks also alludes to the complexity of the feminist movement in her argument and recognizes that the patriarchy not only harms women, but also “forces fathers to act as monsters, encourages husbands and lovers to be rapists in disguise; it teaches our blood brothers to feel ashamed that they care for us, and denies all men the emotional life that would act as a self-affirming force in their lives.”¹²⁸ Slowly but surely, women in the feminist movement started to recognize their solidarity, not only with other women, but with humankind in general.

¹²⁴ hooks, 9.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 146.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁸ hooks, 114.

Another publication that represents this historical moment of questioning the second-wave feminist movement is *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. This book is an anthology of writings by radical women of color and Moraga states that the Left “needs it” because of its “shabby record of commitment to women, period.”¹²⁹ She also believes that the feminist movement needs this book because she sees her “white sisters” as that they created *This Bridge Called My Back* to express to all women,

Especially to white-middle class women—the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice, and denial of differences within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definition that expands what “feminist” means to us.¹³⁰

It is a collection of poems, streams of consciousness, stories of childhood, identity, struggle, and victory.

Many of the women who contributed to this anthology write in their own vernacular, whether it is slang or a mix of Spanish and English words. At the end of the anthology, each contributor is given space to write a short biography about herself, and the results are breathtaking. These women mentioned by name are: Norma Alarcón, Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa, Barbara M. Cameron, Andrea R. Canaan, Jo Carrillo, Chrystos, Cheryl Clarke, Gabrielle Daniels, doris juanita davenport, hattie gossett, mary hope lee, Aurora Levins Morales, Genny Lim, Naomi Littlebear Morena, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Rosario Morales, Judit Moschkovich, Barbara Noda, Pat Parker, Mirtha Quintanales, Donna Kate Rushin, Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, Ms. Luisah Teish, Anita Valerio, Nellie Wong, Merle Woo, and Mitsuye Yamada.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown: Persephone Press, 1981.), xiii.

¹³⁰ Moraga and Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, xxiii.

¹³¹ Moraga and Anzaldúa, 246-250.

By only looking at these names, we can see that these are diverse women. The fact that all of these women are mentioned by name and given a chance to speak their mind in the vernacular makes a statement to the often homogenous and anonymous group of second-wave feminists who seem to all unite under Betty Friedan. Grammatically, many of them chose to spell their names with lowercase letters, thus rebelling against the traditional system. Ideologically and personally, many of these women write about their experiences as lesbians and how this is a direct slap in the face to the patriarchy because of its countercultural implications.¹³²

Their approach to writing and to feminism reveals how an anthology might be a better analogy for the feminist movement than a monograph, a diverse group of voices coming together to define, wrestle with, and provide solutions for a concept that is important to them. Comparing the feminist movement to an anthology provides more room for diversity, instead of a monograph, written by one author with one voice, essentially defining a concept for everyone else in the movement. What is interesting about the concept of an anthology is that the Bible is one, compiled of 66 different books, and can give insight for Jesus feminists into how to not only live out their faith, but also their feminism. Although bell hooks and the diverse authors of *This Bridge Called My Back* are not Christians, they provide a glimpse into a more inclusive, bottom-up strategy to feminism.

Third Wave: Reconciling Feminist Narratives

Literally “riding on the wave” of their predecessors, third-wave feminism emerged with the internet and all-girls punk bands in the early 1990s.¹³³ Third wave feminism can be described as not one, but many.¹³⁴ Rebecca Walker, as quoted in “Three Waves of Feminism: From Suffragettes to Grrls,” talks about how third wave feminists prefer ambiguity over certainty and

¹³² Moraga and Anzaldúa, 128.

¹³³ Krollokke and Sorenson, 15-16.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

prefer to engage in multiple positions, and to include and explore other perspectives. These women want to embrace a new type of womanhood that confronts issues such as gender, sexuality, race, class, and age.¹³⁵ I am skeptical to declare this as a new “wave” of feminism because it seems as if this wave continues what many “second-wave difference feminists” such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Cherríe Moraga wanted to see in the feminist movement.

Although “third-wave feminism” is a term that can be contested along with the whole wave analogy, the ideology described above goes along with what many women in the American evangelical church had been feeling since the 1970s. In 1975, the Evangelical Women’s Caucus met for the first time in Washington D.C. at a 4-H camp to talk about “supporting passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, the ordination of women, inclusive language in Bible translations, and Christian education materials, and an end to discrimination against women in Christian institutions.”¹³⁶ A book entitled *All Were Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today* describes what the authors Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty call “biblical feminism” or the belief that a truly Christian faith opposes all oppression whatsoever and sees the terms Christian and feminist as congruent, instead of antithetical.¹³⁷ They remind their readers that when considering the Bible as a whole, most of the authors who wrote it were men in patriarchal societies, the canon was defined by men, and reference works and exegesis has been conducted with a male bias for several centuries.¹³⁸

The authors of this work and other “biblical feminists” are frustrated with the way the Christian church has created the ideal of “the pious woman [who] is supposed to be retiring, self-effacing, always ready to offer her husband’s opinions rather than her own, to step aside

¹³⁵ Ibid, 17.

¹³⁶ Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, introduction to *All We’re Meant To Be: Biblical Feminism for Today*, third ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), xii.

¹³⁷ Scanzoni and Hardesty, 1.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 9.

from any position when a man becomes available for it, to make suggestions which male superiors can offer as their own.¹³⁹ Scanzoni and Hardesty suggest that we, like Paul mentions in his letters to the Galatians and Corinthians, learn to accept that we are all “one in Christ Jesus” and recognize that all things come from God.¹⁴⁰ They also strive to assert that woman are different than men, but that these differences should not be used “as the basis for judgments of superior/inferior, dominant/subordinate, wide choices/rigid roles, vast opportunities/ limited sphere.”¹⁴¹ Scanzoni and Hardesty acknowledge that “biblical feminists” are not trying to push men out of the way, but are trying to be recognized as “joint heirs in the grace of life” and “fellow workers in Christ Jesus.”¹⁴²

This concept of “biblical feminism” sent shockwaves throughout the twentieth-century American evangelical church, so much so that in 1991, a group of evangelical men and women wrote *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* and published it in order to “lead to a constructive solution to this controversy,” this controversy referring to evangelical or biblical feminism.¹⁴³ Although this publication intends to respond to the evangelical feminists in “sincerity and love,” it condemns them for their wrong interpretation of Scripture and sees their position as harmful to the family and the church.¹⁴⁴

This publication, and many other contemporary evangelical opinions about the nature of “manhood” and “womanhood,” come from the complementarian position that men and women are meant to complement each other, but they are essentially different from one another, and have different roles in the family and the church. They endorse men as being the “head” of the

¹³⁹ Scanzoni and Hardesty, 278.

¹⁴⁰ Scanzoni and Hardesty, 316; Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 11: 11-12

¹⁴¹ Scanzoni and Hardesty, 317.

¹⁴² Scanzoni and Hardesty, 318; 1 Peter 3:7; Romans 16:3

¹⁴³ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 9-10.

¹⁴⁴ Piper and Grudem, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 10.

household just as Christ is “head” of the church. Complementarians also describe male and female characteristics, as “not just biological,” but at “the root of our personhood.”¹⁴⁵ I find the concept of biological sex as a fundamental characteristic of a person’s identity for evangelical Christianity to be problematic because although men and women were created distinctly by God, for Christians, the identity of “children of God,” should be more central than biological sex if one believes that their ultimate purpose is to bring glory to Christ.¹⁴⁶

In a similar, more recent publication by Jonathan Parnell and Owen Strachan called *Good: The Joy of Christian Manhood and Womanhood*, one chapter in particular stood out above the rest. In this chapter Courtney Reissig, evangelical pastor’s wife and writer, discusses her “recovery from feminism.”¹⁴⁷ What is interesting about this terminology is that she speaks about feminism as if it is a disease that she needs to recover from. She believes that contemporary feminism has pushed “beyond equality” and that women want to be above men.¹⁴⁸ Reissig compares feminism to the “fall of mankind” and states that Eve was the “mother of feminism.” She believes that feminism is a “heart attitude inside of us that thinks men don’t really know what they are doing” and that “we are all feminists in need of recovery.”¹⁴⁹ The former statement is similar to nineteenth-century feminist rhetoric, but the latter seems troublesome. Reissig’s argument is problematic because she seems to exaggerate what feminism really means, and doesn’t quite understand its definition entirely. She also oversimplifies the history of the feminist movement, and of the Bible, because Eve would have never called herself a feminist. Reissig’s

¹⁴⁵ Piper and Grudem, 25.

¹⁴⁶ 1 John 3:1; Ephesians 2:10

¹⁴⁷ Courtney Reissig, “My Recovery from Feminism,” in *Good: The Joy of Christian Manhood and Womanhood*, eds., Jonathan Parnell and Owen Strachan (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2014), 125.

¹⁴⁸ Reissig, “My Recovery from Feminism,” 126.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

argument is invalid because she takes feminism out of its historical context and doesn't realize that it is more than just an attitude of the heart.

For both of these evangelical anti-feminist publications, the concepts of “biblical womanhood” and “biblical manhood” come up. But what do these terms really mean? For Rachel Held Evans, a popular evangelical writer, blogger, and feminist, she wanted to find out for herself what “biblical womanhood” really meant. In her book, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How a Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband “Master,”* she takes on the challenge to take all of the Bible's passages regarding women and interpret them literally, as a social experiment for one year.¹⁵⁰ This experiment allows her to see if there really is one formula for “biblical womanhood” and if God really has one definitive opinion about certain concepts. Her questions about this topic are insightful. She states,

This is why the notion of “biblical womanhood” so intrigued me. Could an ancient collection of sacred texts, spanning multiple genres and assembled over thousands of years in cultures very different from our own, really offer a single cohesive formula for how to be a woman? And do all of the woman in Scripture fit into this same mold? Must I?¹⁵¹

Throughout the year, she gives herself ten commandments for how to live her life and chooses one virtue to practice each month including gentleness, domesticity, obedience, valor, beauty, modesty, purity, fertility, submission, justice, silence, and grace.¹⁵² By taking the bible literally, she has some pretty interesting experiences, including camping out on her front lawn during her period, blowing a traditional shofar horn for the Passover dinner, taking care of a computerized

¹⁵⁰ Rachel Held Evans, introduction to *A Year of Biblical Womanhood: How A Liberated Woman Found Herself Sitting on Her Roof, Covering Her Head, and Calling Her Husband “Master”* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), xx-xxi.

¹⁵¹ Evans, *A Year of Biblical Womanhood*, xx.

¹⁵² Evans, xi.

baby, making her own clothes, sitting on her roof for an hour and a half paying penance for her transgressions, and hula hooping with the Amish.¹⁵³

At the end of her project, she came to the conclusions that “when we turn the bible into an adjective and stick it in front of another loaded word, (like *manhood*, *womanhood*, *politics*, *economics*, *marriage*, and even *equality*), we tend to ignore or downplay the parts of the Bible that don’t fit our tastes.”¹⁵⁴ Instead of grasping the text for its cultural, historical, literary, and personal contexts, by using the Bible as an adjective to describe other things, we oversimplify the Bible into a list of bullet points of how to live our lives instead of realizing that it is a holy and a complicated text.¹⁵⁵ Evans recognizes, as all evangelicals should, that the Bible does not present a “one size fits all” model for being a woman of Christian faith.¹⁵⁶ Roles change depending on the cultural context, but following Jesus’ commandment to “love the Lord your God, with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength,” will not change and does not depend on socially constructed gender roles.¹⁵⁷

Because third-wave feminism tries to include many differing perspectives and people under its wings, the results are diverse. The third wave allowed for evangelical churches to wrestle with the concept of women in the church and has taken more of a top-down approach with conferences such as the Evangelical Women’s Caucus and the publication *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. With the advent of the internet, people such as Sarah Bessey and Rachel Held Evans have been able to make their publications and their blogs more widespread, thus creating more of a bottom-up approach and inviting a larger audience into the conversation. Feminism and Christianity might always be

¹⁵³ Evans, 17-18, 79-82, 90-94, 164-169, 188-196, 282-287.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Evans, 295; Luke 10: 27

debated since both topics are ideologies that can be placed on a spectrum, allowing the radicals, conservatives, and moderates to participate in similar discussions. Although the third-wave is the most inclusive of all of the waves, what needs to continue is the discussion about how women are not only a part of the historical narrative, but also the biblical narrative and the narrative of the Christian church. This is where the true Jesus feminists fit: those who know where they came from, where they are going, and how to invite others to wrestle with concepts and definitions that stereotype women into a homogeneous lump.

Conclusion

When discussing the complexities of American feminism and Christianity, it changes the way that we write history. Catherine A. Brekus, women's religious historian, calls this "reimagining the past."¹⁵⁸ Most of the time, historians write about the heroes and the people that get the most attention, but that only creates a narrative that excludes those who have often been in the shadows, and are not traditionally included in the trajectory of American history. This trajectory and the people involved in combining the narratives of American Christianity and feminism is more important than the way it has been organized in the past.

Although this narrative cannot include all evangelical women and their contributions to the feminist movement, key moments that fit inside and outside of the traditional "wave analogy" of feminism prove that the "waves" of feminism can only provide a certain framework for understanding this complicated and often very personal ideology. The waves metaphor is a part of our public discourse, but historians have the power to go beyond it and challenge its nature to privilege only white-middle class women in the feminist movement.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Catherine A. Brekus, *Religious History of American Women*, ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 2.

¹⁵⁹ Laughlin *et al.*, 84.

Patriarchal systems are not God’s dream for humanity. And for Christians, Sarah Bessey invites us into identifying ourselves as “Jesus feminists” because

in Christ, and because of Christ we are invited to participate in the Kingdom of God through redemptive movement—for both men and women—toward equality and freedom. We can choose to move with God, further into justice and wholeness, or we can choose to prop up the world’s dead systems, baptizing injustice and power in sacred language. Feminism is just one way to participate in this redemptive movement.¹⁶⁰

“Reimagining the past” through the study of history is another. So, by studying history and combining it with other narratives that may have not been told, historians become the storytellers of their generation. And like any good story, sometimes a new draft needs to be written, or a new experience added in. Although many historians and evangelical church members have seen Christianity and feminism as antithetical, this is a blanket and incorrect statement. With Christianity and feminism, the two stories needed to be told side by side, recognizing the women of faith who have fought for equality in America since its beginning. Now, that is something worth reclaiming and recognizing, in churches, in schools, and in the community at large. Women have always been a part of history. Now is the time that we choose to embrace their significance.

¹⁶⁰ Bessey, 14.

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