Current Status of Baptist Women in Ministry
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Current Status of Baptist Women in Ministry

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For Spine of Book:

Review & Expositor

Current Status of Baptist Women in Ministry
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Baptist Women in Ministry
Pamela Durso, Issue Editor

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A Word From . . . The Managing Editor

By Mark E. Biddle*

Readers of the Review & Expositor will note two changes in this issue. First, in discussions at our annual meeting of the editorial board of the journal, held this year in Chicago, it came to the board’s attention that many of us, who began our association with R&E as associate or assistant professors (that is, as youngsters), have now ‘matured.’ This observation raises the question of whether we, and the journal, view the challenges facing the world and the church in the same ways as our younger colleagues and students. Many students at the respective seminaries constituting the consortium that publishes the journal already contribute to public discourse through blogs, for example. In one effort to ensure the vitality of the journal, we decided to add a new section, inaugurated in this issue and entitled “A Word from a Seminarian.”

Second, this issue of the Review & Expositor is the first since 1996 that does not include the name of Nancy deClaissé-Walford, the Carolyn Ward Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages, McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University, among the officers of the journal. For over a decade of that period with only a brief break to take full advantage of a sabbatical opportunity, Nancy served as Managing Editor. Even during that sabbatical she agreed to fulfill the responsibilities of Associate Editor to provide continuity. Terms of office on the editorial board of Review & Expositor are for three years. Editorial boards of the journal repeatedly extended Nancy’s tenure because of her skills—shepherding issue editors and authors, handling many of the business affairs of the journal, leading the editorial board to important decisions about the future and direction of the journal, contributing book reviews and articles, and, of course, the sometimes onerous

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* Mark E. Biddle is the Russell T. Cherry Professor of Old Testament at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, and Managing Editor of Review & Expositor.
task of copy-editing; Nancy repeatedly agreed to continue as Managing Editor because of her devotion to the journal. Finally, presented with new opportunities and ready to take a deserved break from the demands of editing a journal such as ours, Nancy has stepped down. Because I “spelled” her for the few months of her sabbatical, I have an idea of the effort and energy Nancy has expended in these years of her service and I am grateful. Moreover, I thank her on behalf of the editorial boards of R&E, present and past, and on behalf of its readers.
Current Status of Baptist Women in Ministry

By Pamela R. Durso

For the four hundred years in which the Baptist tradition has been in existence, women have been contributors to, inspirers of, and ministers within that tradition. These women influenced our denominational tradition and shaped our faith experience. Their lives and faith are interwoven into the fabric of who we are as Baptists. Yet these women are not known to us. Many of their stories are buried in dusty history books, or even sadder, their names were not included in church records or lists.

Fortunately, there is good news. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries progress was made in the field of Baptist women’s studies. Numerous books, dissertations, and articles were written that explore the roles of women in Baptist churches, and much of the research that has been done has centered attention on Baptist women ministers. This issue of Review and Expositor extends that recent research and offers insight into the current status of Baptist women ministers.

The issue begins with an article by Pamela Durso, in which she traces the history of the licensing and ordination of Baptist women ministers and provides names, dates, and places for “first” ordinations in six Baptist denominational bodies in the United States and in Baptist denominations in Australia, Brazil, Cuba, England, Germany, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Tasmania.

Eileen Campbell-Reed, co-director of the Learning Pastoral Imagination Project, offers updated information about the status of Baptist women ministers, including statistics related to ordination, pastoral leadership, denominational and academic roles, salaries, benefits, and job opportunities.

1 Pamela R. Durso is executive director, Baptist Women in Ministry, Atlanta, Georgia.
In a narrative article, Tracy Hartman, professor at Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, introduces Baptist women pastors. After interviewing nineteen women pastors and co-pastors and members of five pastoral search committees, Hartman chronicles their journeys during the call process and then documents both the resistance and support women pastors have experienced within Baptist life.

The next two articles highlight the reality that the great majority of the recent research has centered on Anglo women. Little attention has been given to the work and contributions of African American, Asian American, Native American, and Hispanic Baptist women ministers, and the fact is that finding sources and information on non-Anglo Baptist women is admittedly extremely difficult. Fortunately, Courtney Lyons, a Ph.D. candidate and teaching fellow at Baylor University, and Isabel Docampo, professor of supervised ministry at Perkins School of Theology-Southern Methodist University, took on the challenge. Lyons provides a historical overview with explanations of impediments to African American Baptist women’s full inclusion in church leadership, and Docampo traces the place of United States Latina Baptist women ministers within the overall story of Baptist women in ministry.

Elizabeth Flowers, assistant professor of American religious history at Texas Christian University, focuses our attention on a national organization, Baptist Women in Ministry, by telling the story on its twenty-fifth anniversary.

The final two articles are expository in nature—one from the Old Testament and one from the New. Meredith Stone, women in ministry specialist with Texas Baptists, explores the leadership of Vashti and Esther, and Kyndall Renfro, pastor of Covenant Baptist Church in San Antonio, Texas, calls us to revisit the story of Mary Magdalene.

This issue of Review and Expositor offers much helpful and insightful information on the current status of Baptist women ministers and hopefully will inspire you to do further reading!
A Word From . . .
By J. Alfred Smith, Sr.

Break The Silence: "Justice is Waiting for You to Speak"
2 Samuel 13:19 – 20

She is a beautiful young woman. She is a member of a privileged family. Her young life has a beautiful future. As the daughter of King David, many a prince desires to marry her. Life is waiting to make her dreams come true. The worst that can happen is waiting to harm her. Tragedy strikes.

Her spoiled, oldest half-brother has eyes to spoil her. Unlike Dinah, the daughter of Leah, who of her own initiative left home to meet the girls of the land, and ended up meeting danger, Tamar stays home and innocently meets danger. If a princess is not safe at home, who is safe at home?

Amnon feigns illness. He deludes his father. Listen as he says, “Let Tamar come and make two heart cakes . . . the birya, a medical concoction, so that I may eat and be healed.” An unsuspecting father speaks. Assuming as many do today that a child is safe in the home of a close relative, David gives the order for an authorized visit. ‘Go, Tamar, to the house of your brother Amnon. Bring the medicinal cakes shaped like the heart in a valentine to his house.’ An evil son manipulates the most powerful father in Israel. See Tamar leaving on a mission of doom that will ruin her innocent life.

Life is a mystery. It has a series of unexpected twists and turns. Tamar comes to the place called a dangerous intersection. See her offer the food to Amnon. See Amnon behave badly. He is brusque, blunt, and brutal. He is
coarse, calloused, and cruel. He is devious, demonic, and destructive. He is not speaking tenderly. He is not wooing Tamar with seductive speech. As the son of a king, he is used to giving orders and taking only yes for an answer. Listen as he speaks, “Come lie with me, my sister.” Tamar is not silent. Tamar speaks and her daughters speak each day, “Do not degrade me . . . my brother do not degrade me; upgrade your mind, your morals, and your motives. Do not, do not degrade me.”

‘This outrageous act should not be done . . . such should not be done in this home, in this nation, in this world.’ One in three women worldwide will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her life. Tamar is not silent. Amnon refuses to listen. Tamar speaks logically, “No my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile. As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels of Israel. Now, therefore I beg you; speak to the King for he will not withhold me from you” (2 Sam 13:12-14 NRSV).

Tamar is a beautiful woman with a beautiful attitude that offers beautiful redemption from ugly ruin. “Now therefore” means, I the offended person, offer a peaceful resolution. ‘If you go to the king, you and I can save our future. This disgrace can become grace. Marriage is possible.’

Amnon does not want marriage. Amnon does not want love. Amnon wants sex, not passionate, sweet, romantic, tender, refreshing love. Amnon seeks action that overpowers. Talk ends.

Amnon rapes her. A brother is expected to protect his sister. A sister is supposed to be safe in any home where family lives. But no male in the family warns the undisciplined male that dire consequences are in store for anyone who shames a female family member. Tamar tears her robe and she puts ashes on her head. She is devastated, demoralized, and disgraced. Brother Absalom responds to her screams. He asks, “Has Amnon been with you?” Who else could it have been? How did he know? Why was he suspicious of Amnon? ‘Be quiet. Do not tell anyone what happened. Remember Amnon is your brother. What happened cannot be told. You are a princess. Your brother is a prince. Your father is King. You cannot tarnish the political status of the King.’ How sad is the ugly reality in which the innocent and powerless Tamar is blamed for being victimized. Who cares about Tamar? Who is in tune with her feelings? Who is ready to go to the mat for her? Who will pray with Tamar and stand by her side as she screams for justice? Do you remember that Tamar is your daughter, your granddaughter, your sister, your niece, blood of your blood and bone of your bone? Do you have a
personal complicity in ecclesiastical rape that
painfully crushes Tamar’s hopes of preaching in the
pulpits and serving as pastors of those churches for
which she is often the best-qualified candidate?

For every Tamar who has been wounded by
patriarchy, there is a word from Isa 66:12, “For thus
says the Lord, as a mother comforts her child, so will
I comfort you.” In Isa 49:15, God reasons with us:
“Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child
of her womb? Even these she may forget, yet I will not forget you.” The
Psalmist depicts God as a mid-wife, “Yet it was you who took me from the
womb, you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.” Perhaps the large number
of women graduating from our Association of Theological Schools in the
United States and Canada accredited seminaries will be free of thinking about
God in non-anthropomorphic categories of biblical literalism and will preach
texts that use feminine images for God. Kristina Lacelle-Peterson has written,
“Scripture’s feminine metaphors for God yield a more dynamic
understanding of divine nature and remind us that women as well as men
are capable of bearing God’s image in the world. Embracing these images in
worship helps us to engage with God’s gracious, multi-faceted invitation to
us.”¹

The images that we read unconsciously shape our value system and they
condition our attitudes and responses to those with whom we interact. My
esteemed teacher Howard Thurman stated that one of the central problems
in human relations is applying the ethic of respect for personality in a way
that is not governed by special categories. He raises a question, “Does the
category by which life is defined decree how the ethic shall be applied?”²
Careful interpretations of scriptural images are imperative for readers who
may utilize a deficient ethic in creating distorted definitions of persons by
gender, class, and race. For example, the use of naked, battered women’s
bodies in the prophecies of Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are present for
discussing divine punishment and for denouncing public policies and
practices of political and religious establishments. Readers may miss this
point and end up with misogynous behavior. Hebrew Bible scholar Renita J.
Weems reminds us of the marriage and sexual customs of Old Testament
times. A woman’s sexuality was the exclusive property of her husband or
whoever was the head of the household. Fathers were compensated for their
daughters’ and brothers avenged their sisters’ humiliation and male cousins
could broker the marriages of their female cousins. Professor Weems says,
Perhaps more than any other material in the Bible, the portraits of women’s sexuality drawn by Israel’s prophets have contributed to the overall impression one gets from the Bible that women’s sexuality is deviant, evil, and dangerous. Women, sex, and marriage were used by the prophets to make politicized commentaries on Israelite society, the political fortunes of Israel, and the religious life of Israel.3

Across the years, well-intentioned biblical expositors and their students have fed faith communities the milk of patriarchal biblical literalism. Women who are in the shoes of Tamar feel the results of such teaching.

Modern day Tamar is breaking her silence as she emerges into the theological academy as one who has much to contribute. Tamar shares with the academy her experiences that provide a reality check for theoretical reasoning. In fact, womanesque exegesis makes room for theory born from struggle. In my opinion, the mistake that President Lawrence Summers of Harvard University made was to attempt to contain Cornell West within the cubicles of research and classroom teaching. This attempted restriction if it had succeeded may have prevented West from being a public policy theologian and an ethical commentator on the issues of the day. Cornell West is an organic intellectual who speaks for the voiceless communities of the nation. Christian ethicist Traci C. West says it far better than I can. She says, “Our tendency to designate certain individuals as great thinkers and then detach them from societal influences allows us to maintain false boundaries between great thinkers and the everyday people, especially those who are a part of the areas commonly identified as problem communities.” In my opinion, input from Tamar is needed at the table where the academic elite and the public policy makers sit at the table of rational objectivity. The input from Tamar who is emerging from oppression as a womanist enables her to counter the self-interest of power brokers who have no existential basis for including the felt needs of disaffected communities. Jewish feminist theologian, Judith Plaskow, has also lucidly expressed what I am saying about the inclusion of Tamar. Whereas Reinhold Niebuhr speaks about sin in the collective ego of groups, Judith Plaskow describes sin as primarily the failure to be self-assertive, vocal, and responsible for self-actualization, even if brother Absalom attempts to silence Tamar.4 Roman Catholic Joan D. Chittister has a word for both Absalom and Amnon. She says,
It is not what sexism says about a woman that is sinful. It is what sexism says about God that is wrong. Sexism really implies that God is all powerful except when it comes to women at which point the God who could draw water from a rock and raise the dead to life is totally powerless to work as fully through a woman as through a man. Indeed, I have no doubt about it. It is God who is being held hostage to sexism, and as a result, the world. The images of women must change.5

If the images of women would change in the church, perhaps a long overdue change would take place on American soil. But an end to sexism calls for the sisters of Tamar to speak in the historical tradition of courageous women. At an 1851 women’s meeting in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner Truth stood up and saved the meeting that angry men tried to destroy. The angry white leader made a mockery of the women’s effort to obtain the right to vote. He said that it was not reasonable for women to desire the vote because they could not walk over a puddle or get into a carriage without the help of a man. The only black woman in attendance at this meeting on women’s suffrage was Sojourner Truth. She was a slave preacher who could not be silenced. At this meeting, she delivered a powerful impromptu speech, “Ain’t I a woman?” She refuted the weaker sex argument and she destroyed the thesis that the Bible supported male dominance. She said that she had never been helped over mud puddles and she had never been helped into carriages, “Look at me. Look at my arm,” rolling up her sleeve to display raw muscular power.6 She continued, “That little man in black there, he says women can’t have as much rights as men because Christ wasn’t a woman. Where did Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with him.”7

Jarena Lee followed in the tradition of Sojourner Truth. Jarena Lee was born on February 11, 1783, in Cape May, New Jersey. Her hard-pressed parents who struggled to survive hired Jarena out as a servant girl when she was only seven years old. In 1804 at the age of twenty-one, she was converted. Around 1811, Jarena Lee first began to feel the call to preach. As a member of Bethel African American Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she asked Pastor Richard Allen of the Bethel A.M.E. Church for a license to preach. Later he gave her the permission to hold prayer meetings and to exhort after the licensed male preachers had spoken. Within six years, Pastor Joseph Lee, whom she married in 1811, died. Four other family members also died. Jarena Lee was left with two young children to rear. She returned to Philadelphia in 1818. By then the Reverend Allen had become bishop of
the first black denomination in America. In 1819, a minister was poorly preaching a text. Jarena Lee interrupted the preacher and powerfully exegeted and expounded upon the text. It was then that Bishop Richard Allen endorsed her call. In 1835, Jarena Lee travelled over seven hundred miles preaching as many sermons. In 1836, Jarena Lee became a preacher for the American Anti-slavery Society. Jarena Lee opened the door for women preachers in the African American Episcopal Church. This denomination elected and consecrated Bishop Vashti McKenzie as their 117th Bishop of the church at the 2000 General Conference. In 2005, Bishop McKenzie became the first female president of the Council of Bishops and the titular head of the church. Bishop McKenzie is the author of *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (1996). All of this and much more for the inclusion of women in Christian ministry has taken place in the A.M.E. church because Jarena Lee dared to break the silence. Said Jarena Lee, “If a man may preach because the Saviour [sic] died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour instead of a half one? As those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach would seem to make it appear.”

From Sojourner Truth to Jarena Lee and from Jarena Lee to the present, a roll call of African American women courageously broke the silence. Daisy Bates helped organize the movement to desegregate the schools of Little Rock, Arkansas. Diane Nash led the student movement through which students risked their lives on buses in Freedom Rides to integrate inter-state travel in southern states. Fannie Lou Hamer was an ex-Mississippi sharecropper who co-headed a poor peoples’ delegation to the 1964 National Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey. On national television, she courageously challenged President Lyndon Baines Johnson and the Democrats to reject white racism and black elitism by seating her poor black peoples’ delegation from Mississippi. President Johnson called her an illiterate woman because she was a humble hymn-singing woman who refused to compromise her Christian convictions. The situation was tense because southern delegations were leaning toward Republican presidential challenge Barry Goldwater from Arizona. The president appointed a committee to seek a compromise with Mrs. Hamer and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The committee members were Vice Presidential candidate, Senator Hubert Humphrey, Senator Walter Mondale, Union leader Walter Reuther, and F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover. The committee recommended that only two African Americans have non-voting seats with the all-white Mississippi
voting delegation. Vice President Humphrey told Mrs. Hamer that if she and the Democratic Freedom Party refused the compromise, his position on the Democratic ticket was at stake. She gave a Christian response and stated,

Do you mean to tell me that your position is more important than four hundred thousand black peoples’ lives? Senator Humphrey, I know lots of people in Mississippi who have lost their jobs trying to register and to vote. I had to leave the plantation where I worked in Sunflower County, Mississippi. Now if you lose this job of Vice-President because you do what is right, because you help the MFDP everything will be all right. God will take care of you. But if you take the nomination this way, why you will never be able to do anything for civil rights, for poor people, for peace, or any of those things you talk about. Senator Humphrey, I am going to pray to Jesus for you.10

The power of Mrs. Hamer’s speech gave voting and speaking rights to two delegates from the MFDP and seated the others as honored guests. The Democrats agreed not to seat any delegation in the future from a state that illegally denied anyone the vote. A year later President Lyndon Baines Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act.

Mrs. Hamer believed that educated people were better prepared to do what she was doing but they did not have the faith and the fortitude that she had. She was hospitalized in 1964 for polio and while there, was sterilized without her knowledge. She was hospitalized in 1974 for a nervous breakdown and in 1976 had surgery due to breast cancer. Mrs. Hamer died of heart failure brought on by cancer, diabetes, and hypertension. The Reverend Andrew Young, then the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, gave her eulogy in Ruleville, Mississippi. A postage stamp honoring Fannie Lou Hamer was released in 2009.

The sacrifice and suffering of Tamar persists. The struggle continues. Politicians and celebrities acts as moral guides on sexual ethics. Misguided and misinformed male persons attempt to speak for God on the issue of rape. Second Samuel 13:19-20 does not inform us whether Tamar became the mother of a male or female child or what happened to the child. Nevertheless, the biblical record clearly defines rape as the use of physical force in the abusive act of having sexual intercourse forced upon a person without that person’s consent. Rape is a devastating crime. However, on October 23, 2012, a senate candidate from Indiana is charged with saying, “When life begins
with that horrible situation of rape that is something that God intended to happen.”¹¹ This is called Gift from God rape. A congressional representative and senate candidate from Missouri said on August 19, 2012, “If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.”¹² This is called Legitimate Rape. On December 21, 2011, a candidate for a state representative seat in Wisconsin is reported to have said, “If you go down that road, some girls’ rape so easy.”¹³ This is called Easy Rape. The purpose of including this data in this manuscript is to make the point that while the political arena seemingly strives to be a moral arbiter in society, the church must not allow herself to be morally neutral on issues of public morality. Unfortunately, the so-called evangelical right, which has influenced conservative politics, limits the scope of its ethical concern to abortion, marriage, and homosexuality. Martin Luther King, Jr. believed that the church has a role in shaping public policy. “He mounted a sustained political critique against the cultural values of hedonistic materialism, conspicuous consumerism, political individualism and jingoistic militarism.”¹⁴

Although Marín Luther King, Jr. was a harsh cultural critic of America, his deep love for this nation gave an eschatological vision of an America that would triumph over the nihilism, decadence, violence, emptiness, poverty, and moral apathy that plagues the nation. Perhaps, the emerging leaders who are being trained in the seminaries and universities will be vocal in addressing the great issues of today not only in the academy and the churches but also in the public square. Hopefully, these emerging leaders will create in their generation a hunger for eco-justice as well as a need to make war obsolete. May their voices break the silence on the issues that threaten the loss of the Soul of America. May their training provide the expertise needed to build a communitarian ethic based on justice. May their dedication be empowered by the spiritual energy and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Then Amnon will live up to his name of being a father who brings well-being and peace. Absalom will come to be a father of peace and Tamar will be the well-nourished palm tree.


3 Renita J. Weems, Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 4-5.


7 Ibid., 61.


14 Luther D. Ivory, Toward a Theology of Radical and Involvement: The Theological Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 165.
A Word From a Seminarian . . .

By Stephanie Nash*

A View from the Frontier

Accepting the call to become an ordained Baptist pastor after teaching high school English for twenty-five years rates as the worst right decision I have ever made. Why would I leave the best position a teacher could imagine, working with the brightest kids around, to become a female pastor in the second most conservative county in the United States?

Now, after nearly fourteen years serving as the Pastor for Education, Outreach, and Administration of Second Baptist Church in Lubbock, TX, my understanding of the practicality of that call, which woke me with a start from a vivid dream, is as foggy as it was on that cold December morning. Why would God want me now, just as I was contemplating retirement, ready to put down my red pen and pick up some leisure reading? I cannot answer that question today any better than I could address it then. But I do know that my decision that morning was a pivotal moment that I will forever reference as the best day of my life.

My experience probably made no more sense than Peter’s, dropping his nets in the midst of a busy, productive day to follow that enigma called Jesus into an unknown wilderness. It was no more practical than Paul’s, blindly changing course in the midst of professional success to become the object of curiosity, suspicion, and mistrust by the Jewish community’s leaders. What sort of God would plant the notion of going to seminary in the heart of a sixty-year-old, just as dreams of travel and grandchildren begin to embed themselves in the normal retiree’s brain? But this change in my life’s course

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has been the most exciting adventure I could have imagined, and I would not trade a moment of it.

As a pastor in West Texas, I have been graced with the most amazing sacred moments. Bracing against the hot dry wind on the barren flatland that surrounds Lubbock, I have stood beside dear friends as we committed the remains of a beloved spouse to the hardscrabble earth. On warm spring Sunday mornings I have shared a morsel of communion bread with homeless men and women who scanned my eyes, looking for a trace of hope by which to steer their lives. Standing in cool baptismal waters I have lifted the radiant faces of children and aging adults into freshly resurrected lives. And deep into the night, I have held the sagging shoulders of grief as it stood outside a hospital door. Who could withstand the irresistible call to follow Christ into the rich wilderness of this holy ground?

Friends question my sanity as I climb into my Caravan each Thursday to spend my day off traveling to Abilene nearly three hours away to attend seminary classes at Logsdon and then return late into the evening. They do not understand that sitting in these classes led by bright, inspiring professors who offer challenge and encouragement fuels me for the tasks that await me back home. True, it will probably take me ten years to get that elusive MDiv that takes most normal students only three or four, but I look forward to each weekly trek. My master’s degree in English did not take me nearly this long, but the precious hours spent with fellow students struggling to decipher God’s work in the world are my sacred reward. Whenever I meet a young minister in those classrooms who studies me cautiously, unsure what to make of his first woman preacher, I see it as a rare opportunity to share in one of God’s little surprises.

I may never fully understand what God is up to in my life after that crazy right turn fourteen years ago, but I can testify that prudence may not be as helpful a compass in finding God’s heart as reckless trust and imagination opens more doors to grace than practicality. I have grown used to quizzical stares and hesitant inquiries about my vocation, but no amount of criticism or doubt can dispel the joy I find in the wilderness that has become my new home. I thank God for a church that has dared to embrace women as ministers for thirty years now, and I trust God will figure out what to do with me around the next bend in the path.
A Word About . . . Words
By David M. May

I do not know the day and can only approximate the month, somewhere between May and August. I do, however, know with certainty the year and the place: 70 CE—Jerusalem.

In a row of stone buildings in the lower city of Jerusalem, a group of hungry, confused, and scared Judeans huddled in a stone-vaulted storage cellar. They had made desperate and last-ditch preparations. The main entry of their building of refuge was blocked off from the nearby street. They had breached the walls between buildings, creating escape routes so they could scurry mouse-like between them. Like mice, if they thought about it (and I am sure they did), they knew a powerful and predatory cat had them trapped. The Romans had them pinned in, that is, the soldiers of the 5th, 10th, 12th, and 15th legions. Over 24,000 Roman soldiers were squeezing the life out of Jerusalem and its inhabitants. Each day the noise, confusion, and rumors grew. Because the siege had begun during Passover, thousands of additional hungry people were crammed into the city. Those who risked foraging for food often ended up captured and nailed in hideous poses on crosses. What was one to do? Sticks and stones against brass, iron, and spears? Unlike the 1965 lyrics by Barry McGuire, this group of Judeans knew with certainty they were on “the eve of destruction.”

As they hid in their underground bunker hoping and praying, someone within that group attempted one more desperate act to keep the forces of evil at bay. In the archaeological excavations on the lower city of Jerusalem, a small broken piece of pottery was discovered. Roughly scratched upon it are a few Greek letters. In the first row are double ΑΑ and ΒΒ, and in the

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second row are the first six letters of the Greek alphabet ABΓΔΕΖ. This type of inscription, called an abecedary inscription, served as an amulet. It reflected the sacred and mystical power of the alphabet and the belief that letters could protect those who needed to escape from principalities and powers.

The archaeological remains from the recent excavations illustrate graphically that the abecedary inscription did not help. Whatever may have happened to the occupants, the buildings were intentionally destroyed by the Roman legions as they poured their anger and fury into this particular section of Jerusalem.

This shard of hope, however, is a reminder of the power of the alphabet, words, and books. The ancients, especially the illiterate who witnessed these strange markings on paper, stone, or pottery, believed that letters had power. Even without knowing what words might mean, they knew they were sacred. Letters filled them with awe. These strange markings could change everything.

Paul the Apostle was well aware of the power of words; for this reason, he wrote letters. Even his opponents, who suggested he had a face only a mother could love and that he could not talk his way out of a paper bag, grudgingly acknowledged his written words: his letters were “weighty and strong” (2 Cor. 10:10). Paul’s rival in Corinth, Apollos, might have had great rhetorical skills and the chiseled face of a Hollywood star, but whatever inspiration and insight he created has vanished with him into the irretrievable midst of history because we have none of his words to read. The word written, preserved, and transmitted is the word empowered.

At some point in my Greek class we always translate 1 John with its simple Greek and basic vocabulary. Translating 1:4, I was reminded by the writer of 1 John about the powerful emotions simple words evoke: “We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” The one who writes and the one who reads mix together to produce the elixir of joy.

As a teacher, I am struck by how sacred are the words we give to students. We select books to read; we compose assignments to write; we ask for papers; and we ask students to articulate their reflections and thoughts in essays. For teachers words are our tools. To remind me of this fact, I clipped a small epigram a long time ago and have either taped it to my door or tacked it to a bulletin board since I started teaching in 1987: “A drop of ink may make a million think.” This optimistic thought reminds of the importance of our words and our writing.

In the Hebrew Scriptures is the brief summary description about young Samuel, a servant of the Lord who assisted the old priest Eli in Shiloh. As
Samuel grew up it was said: “the LORD was with
him and let none of his words fall to the ground” (1
Sam 3:19 NRSV). It would be wonderful if, like
Samuel, none of our words, written or spoken, fell
to the ground. As I am reminded, however, when I
see volumes of books on sale for a dollar or my
articles in unopened and unread journals (I am
certain this is not true for Review & Expositor), words
spoken and written often fly up like sparks out of a fire only to fizzle out in
an instant. Words fall to the ground, crumbs to compost, or are left to mold.
Sigh.

Yet, we still believe in words. We are people of words, oral and written,
and they have an indescribable and mystical power. Phillis Wheatley, the
first African-American woman poet, the second woman poet published in
American, wrote these words in her first poem:

While an intrinsic ardor bids me write
the muse doth promise to assist my pen.
(“To the University of Cambridge”)

In the midst of slavery and isolated from all that she had known of her home
in Africa, Wheatley had inspiration to write. In that inspiration, moreover, she
found liberation, if not of the body, at least of the mind and spirit.

On the eve of destruction, an unknown author feverously scratched
awkward Greek letters onto a pottery shard and believed. He or she believed
that the letters of the alphabet, the simple combination of strange mystical
markings, could change and transform life—save his/her life and the lives of
others. Maybe on our best days, so do we.

1 Doron Ben-Ami and Yana Tchekhanovets, “The Lower City of Jerusalem on the Eve
of Its Destruction, 70 C.E.: A View from Hanyon Givati,” Bulletin of the American Schools of
Thematic Words
She-Preachers, Bossy Women, and Children of the Devil: Women Ministers in the Baptist Tradition, 1609-2012

By Pamela R. Durso*

ABSTRACT

For four hundred years, Baptist women have been central to the growth of their churches, the upkeep of their buildings, the funding of their programs, and the theological education of their children. Yet, during most of those four hundred years, women did not hold formal leadership positions in Baptist churches. They were not given official titles or paid salaries. Only in the last fifty years or so have significant numbers of Baptist women been ordained either as deacons or as ministers. Despite the lack of recognition and despite opposition, Baptist women have served, led, and ministered from the earliest days of the history of the Baptist faith.

This article provides a chronological timeline of the history of Baptist women’s service and ministries from the early seventeenth century until the early twenty-first century. Included is a tracing of known “first” ordinations of women both here in the United States within six Baptist denominational bodies and by Baptist denominations in nine countries around the world. Other earlier ordinations may have taken place, and as more research is done in this field, other ordinations surely will be discovered and documented. The article also includes available information about the number of Baptist women who have been ordained or who are currently serving as pastors.

In 1941, John R. Rice, a well-known American evangelist, published a short book with a very catchy title: Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers. While his title may seem humorous now, women preachers were

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no joking matter for Rice (and he was not joking about bobbed hair or bossy wives, either). He was against them all: short-haired women, opinionated and spirited wives, and women preachers, but he was especially adamant that women not preach—after all, according to Rice, Eve had led Adam astray in the Garden of Eden, and women ever since had been the source of false teaching and the temptresses of men. Clearly, women could not be trusted with the gospel message, as Paul also must have believed since he commanded them to be silent in church. Rice further noted that this command was addressed to everyone and was to be binding for all time.\footnote{1} Since the 1941 publication of the book, Rice has been joined by others who have been critical of women in the pulpit, and over the last seventy years, preaching women have been called a lot worse than "bossy."

Among those preaching women whom Rice would have opposed would have been some Baptists. Most people readily acknowledge that for the four hundred years that Baptists have been around, women have been central to the growth of their churches, the upkeep of their buildings, the funding of their programs, and the theological education of their children. Yet, during most of those four hundred years, women did not hold formal leadership positions in Baptist churches. They were not been given official titles or paid salaries. And only in the last fifty years or so have significant numbers of Baptist women been ordained either as deacons or as ministers. Despite the lack of recognition and despite opposition, Baptist women have served and led and ministered from the earliest days of the history of the Baptist faith.

Following is a chronological timeline of the history of Baptist women’s service and ministries from the early seventeenth century until the early twenty-first century. Included is a tracing of known “first” ordinations of women both here in the United States and in nine countries around the world.
The Earliest Baptist Women Ministers

As early as 1641, Baptist women were preaching. A document written that year revealed that six Baptist women, Anne Hempstall, Mary Bilbrow, Joane Bauford, Susan May, Elizabeth Bancroft, and Arabella Thomas, had been preaching throughout England during the 1630s, and apparently these English women took up preaching because “there was a deficiency of good men, wherefore it was but fit that virtuous women should supply their places.”

Another early English Baptist women preacher, Mrs. Attaway, was a lace-maker and member of a General Baptist church in London. In the mid-1640s, Thomas Edwards, a Presbyterian minister and a vehement opponent of Baptists, labeled Mrs. Attaway as the “mistress of all the she-preachers on Coleman Street.”

This Baptist “she-preacher” began preaching first to female audiences but later opened her meetings to anyone who wanted to come, and apparently many wanted to come. Edwards reported that “there came a world of people, to the number of a thousand.”

One hundred years later, “she-preachers” could also be found proclaiming the gospel in Colonial America. Many of these women belonged to Separate Baptist churches. The most prominent was Martha Stearns Marshall, who, beginning around 1754, often prayed and preached during worship services conducted by her brother Shubal Stearns and her husband Daniel Marshall.

Semple described her as a woman “of good sense, singular piety, and surprising elocution,” who on “countless instances melted a whole congregation into tears by her prayers and exhortations!”

About forty years later Freewill Baptist women preachers began to make their way into the history records. In his History of the Freewill Baptists, I. D. Stewart noted that Mary Savage in 1791 became “the first name on the record as a female laborer in the gospel.” That year, Savage traveled to New Durham, New Hampshire, and spent nearly twelve months in the town “doing what she could. The melting power of her exhortations was often irresistible, and
so great was the effect with which she sometimes spoke at the Quarterly or Yearly Meeting, that a note of the fact was entered upon the book of records.”

These Baptist “she-preachers,” while apparently quite effective, served only informally. None held official church positions or titles, and none were ordained. Formal recognition—that is, licensing or ordination—was slow in coming, but perhaps it came earlier than most Baptists think.

“First” Baptist Women Licensed to Preach

Freewill Baptists were most likely the first Baptists to recognize women ministers formally. While some Freewill Baptist writings indicate that Mary Savage may have been licensed to preach in the late eighteenth century, no documentation of that license has yet been found.

What has been discovered, however, is that Freewill Baptists did license a woman to preach in 1846. In June of that year, the Freewill Baptist Home Mission Board commissioned Ruby Bixby and sent her and her husband to minister in Iowa. The couple traveled from their home in Vermont to New York, to Wisconsin, and finally arrived in Iowa. While in Wisconsin, the Honey Creek Quarterly Meeting of the Freewill Baptists licensed Bixby to preach and that license was renewed later in Iowa.

After arriving in the state, the Bixbys organized a church in Clayton County, and that church’s reports listed Ruby Bixby as its minister from 1849 until her death in 1877. Her obituary noted that she was “an independent, self-reliant preacher. Her discourses were characteristically persuasive, and she was more than ordinarily successful. She preached much with churches as pastor, and much as an evangelist.”

“First” Ordinations of Baptist Women in the Nineteenth Century

Nearly thirty years after Bixby received her license to preach, the earliest documented ordination of a Baptist woman took place. Since that time numerous Baptist denominations throughout the world have ordained women to the ministry.
What I have collected in the past few years are the known “first” ordinations of women by six Baptist denominational bodies in the United States and by Baptist denominations in Australia, Brazil, Cuba, England, Germany, Mexico, Nicaragua, the Philippines, and Tasmania. The ordinations cited are the earliest documented ones. Other earlier ordinations may have taken place, and as more research is done in this field, other ordinations surely will be discovered and documented.

The earliest known ordination of a Baptist woman was that of M. A. Brennan, who in 1876 was recognized as a minister by the Bellevernon Freewill Baptist Church in Pennsylvania. While specific information about her ordination has not been found, the fact that Brennan was listed on the Quarterly Meeting’s annual ministerial list of newly ordained ministers indicates that she indeed had been ordained.

In the late 1870’s the annual reports of two churches in Michigan list Lura Maines as minister. Even though she was not the pastor of these churches, she represents the second woman ordained in the Freewill Baptist tradition.

The first ordination of a woman associated with the Northern Baptist Convention, which is now known as the American Baptist Churches, USA (ABC-USA), occurred six years after the first Freewill Baptist ordination. On July 9, 1882, May Jones was ordained at a meeting of the Baptist Association of Puget Sound in Washington. Apparently, her ordination caused quite a controversy. Opponents charged that Jones’s church, First Baptist Church of Seattle, had not properly presented a request for ordination to the association or scheduled an ordination council. Instead, church delegates, while their pastor was on a European tour, had proposed to the association on July 9, 1882 that Jones be ordained that very day after the close of the official meeting.

Participants at the meeting who were offended by the proposal walked out, leaving only those supporting Jones’s ordination to vote on the recommendation. Not surprisingly, the recommendation was accepted, and following her ordination, Jones served briefly as interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Seattle, and beginning in 1883, she pastored six Baptist churches, sometimes serving two or three churches simultaneously.

A second Northern Baptist woman, Frances Townsley, was ordained in 1885. In 1875, Townsley had begun preaching in churches throughout New England and holding evangelistic services. A few years later, a church in her hometown of Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts, licensed her to preach. In 1883, she moved to Fairfield, Nebraska, and settled “among a few unchurched Baptists.” Together they built a building, and although she continued to travel
and preach, Townsley soon began serving as the pastor of the Fairfield Baptist Church.

In January 1885, the church’s deacons, tired of sending for ordained ministers to preside over the Lord’s Supper, asked to ordain Townsley. After initially protesting, Townsley relented, and on April 2, 1885, following a three-hour examination of her faith experience, call to ministry, and doctrinal views, the ordination council voted to ordain her.10

The first Seventh Day Baptist woman to be ordained was Experience Fitz Randolph Burdick, who grew up in West Virginia. As a child Burdick felt God’s call to preach, but not until 1882, when she was thirty-two-years old, did she publicly acknowledge her calling and begin preaching. Three years later, in 1885, Burdick was ordained by the Seventh Day Baptist Church in Hornellsville, New York. She served several churches in New York, and at the time of her death in 1906, was pastor of a Seventh Day Baptist Church in New Auburn, Wisconsin. During her ministry, Burdick conducted fifty weddings, ninety funerals, and preached 890 sermons. Since her ordination in 1885, fourteen other Seventh Day Baptist women have been ordained.11

While the nineteenth century had some firsts with regard to women in ministry, the twentieth century saw more and more “firsts.” Edith Gates was the first English woman to serve as a Baptist pastor, serving the British Union’s Little Tew and Cleveley Church from 1918 to 1950. Gates did not enter ministry through the traditional English Baptist method, which was to graduate from a Baptist college and then be ordained and added to the list of accredited ministers. Instead, Gates qualified for the pastorate by passing the Baptist Union Examination. Most likely she was ordained in 1922, after having already served in ministry for several years.12

For a period of forty years, from the early 1920s to the late 1950s, no other “first” ordinations of Baptist women have been discovered. In 1959 and the years that followed, however, numerous “first” ordinations began to occur.

Imogene Stewart was ordained in 1959 by Greater Pearly Gate Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., a church affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., one of the oldest African American Baptist conventions. Stewart may have been the first National Baptist woman to be ordained.13

Within Southern Baptists circles, the first woman to be ordained was Addie Davis. On August 9, 1964, Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham,
North Carolina, ordained Davis. When news of her ordination became public, Davis and Watts Street Baptist Church’s pastor, Warren Carr, received letters of opposition from Southern Baptists all over the country. One man wrote to Davis, calling her a “child of the devil,” and instructed her to renounce her ordination. After an unproductive search among Southern Baptist churches, Davis contacted the American Baptist Convention and soon was called by the First Baptist Church of Readsboro, Vermont. Davis pastored American Baptist churches for eighteen years, and then returned to her hometown of Covington, Virginia, and co-pastored an ecumenical church until her death in 2005.14

Five years after Addie Davis’s ordination, Uvee Mdodana Arbouin became the first woman ordained by the Progressive National Baptist Convention. Her ordination service took place on October 5, 1969. Arbouin served as co-pastor of the Zion Temple Baptist church in Richmond Hill, New York.15

Beginning in 1975, ordinations of Baptist women began to occur more frequently in other countries. The first woman ordained in the Baptist Convention of the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) was Ursula Jöhrmann, whose 1975 ordination was followed by that of Carmen Rossol. In 1979, Rossol became the first woman ordained in the Baptist Convention of West Germany. Her congregation, Gummersbach-Windhagen, was located in a small town near Cologne. Neither of these women was allowed to use the title “pastor,” but were instead called “theological co-workers.” Only in 1992 did the German Baptist convention, the Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden, decide that congregations could use the title pastor for ordained women.16

Marita Munro became the first woman to be ordained by a Baptist church in Australia. While a student at Whitley College, she pastored several churches. One of these churches, Collins Street Baptist Church, ordained her on October 1, 1978.17

Two years later, the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches ordained Angelina Buensuceso, making her the first ordained Filipino Baptist woman. From 1938 to 1965, Buensuceso served five Baptist churches, holding the positions of associate pastor, choir director, and pastor. She then began a
teaching ministry, serving on the faculty of Central Philippine University from 1967 to 1974. From 1974 until her retirement in 1983, Buensuceso was the director of the Convention Baptist Bible College. In 1980, after forty-two years of ministry, she was ordained at the age of sixty-three. 18

In 1992, The Fraternity of Baptist Churches in Cuba ordained Ena González García, Clara Rodés, and Xiomara Gutiérrez Díaz. 19 The next year, the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua made history on January 30, 1993, by ordaining Carmen Pena Garay, who was then serving as pastor of Hebron Baptist Church. 20 In 1996, Pastor June Robertson was ordained by Launceston’s Memorial Baptist Church in Georgetown, making her the first female Baptist minister in Tasmania. 21

On March 25, 2000, Rebeca Montemayor López became the first Mexican Baptist woman to be ordained. She was ordained at Shalom Baptist Church in Mexico City. 22 A few months later, on July 10, 2000, Sílvia da Silva Nogueira became the first Baptist woman to be ordained in Brazil. Following her ordination, her church was “put out of the state convention.” 23

Statistics Relating to Baptist Women Serving as Pastors

Estimating the number of Baptist women worldwide who have been ordained or who are currently serving as pastor is a difficult task. Even offering an accurate estimate of the number of Baptist women ordained within the United States is challenging. Yet, some statistics relating to Baptist women pastors are available.

The ABC-USA collects information from their affiliated congregations with regard to ministry positions and gender. As of August 7, 2012, that denominational body had 378 women serving as pastors, 46 as interim pastors, 37 as co-pastors, and 24 as bi-vocational pastors for a total of 485. 24 Among moderate Baptists bodies that grew out of or have previous connections with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the numbers are harder to determine. Denominational organizations and fellowships tend not to keep good lists and statistics, and many churches are dually aligned with several state and national bodies. But in 2012, an unofficial list kept by Baptist Women in Ministry has 150 Baptist women pastors and co-pastors that affiliate with the Alliance of Baptists, the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV), the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). Of the 150 women, 106 serve as pastor and 44 serve as co-pastor. A breakdown of the 150 by denominational
affiliation is difficult given the dual alignment of some churches and also the lack of formal affiliation statements by other churches, but in 2012 the best estimate is that the Alliance of Baptists has 43 women serving as pastors or co-pastors; the BGAV has 25; the BGCT has 25; and the CBF has 90.25

In addition to these moderate Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists currently have three women serving as ministers. Statistical information is not available from any of the African American Baptist conventions, but in Memphis, Tennessee, alone, three women serve as pastors of National Baptist Convention churches. Gina Stewart is pastor of Christ Missionary Baptist Church in South Memphis; Lynn Dandridge is pastor of Central Baptist Church; and Mary E. Moore has been pastor of New Salem Baptist Church since 1998.26

Despite the difficulty of gathering statistics and incompleteness of the data, there has clearly been a significant increase of women serving in pastoral roles in the past few years. In 2009, at least 526 Baptist women in the United States were serving as pastors and co-pastors. In 2012, that number has jumped to 638.27 While the number of women serving has increased rather dramatically, the overall percentage of Baptist churches that have called a woman as pastor remains small. The Baptist bodies from which statistics have been collected (ABC-USA, the Alliance, BGAV, BGCT, and CBF), when taken all together, have less than five percent of their churches that are currently pastored by women. Only three of those denominational organizations, the Alliance of Baptists (31%), ABAC-USA (9.8%), and CBF (5%), have more than five percent of their churches pastored by women.28

While the overall percentage of Baptist churches that are willing to call a woman as pastor remains small, the ordination of Baptist women has increased dramatically since the early 1960s. By 1997, Sarah Frances Anders, who was then professor of sociology at Louisiana College and the keeper of statistics about Baptist women, had documented 1,225 ordinations of Southern Baptist women.29

In 2005, Baptist Women in Ministry began tracking ordinations and keeping records. In 2007, Eileen Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, in
This changing attitude toward ministers and ministry among Baptists resulted in thousands of women being given the title of minister and being ordained. Since that report, Baptist Women in Ministry has continued to collect ordination information. Documented ordinations in recent years include 45 in 2011, 42 in 2010, and 55 in 2009. Given that not all ordination information is submitted or documented, these numbers are low. But given known information as well as an educated estimate, in 2012 the total number of women ordained since 1964 in churches affiliated with Baptist bodies located mostly in the South is upwards of 2,200. Including women ordained by churches affiliating with American Baptists, Free Will Baptists, National Baptists, Progressive National Baptists, and Seventh Day Baptists would probably double that number. Estimating ordination numbers among Baptist women worldwide is impossible but would certainly be an interesting project to undertake for a young scholar interested in researching Baptist women ministers.

The great majority of recently ordained Baptist women serve as chaplains or on church staffs, work with children or youth, or serve as associate pastor and are part of a larger trend within Baptist life. During the latter part of the twentieth century, Baptists began to ordain ministers, women and men, who were serving in positions other than the pastorate, and this trend reflected a change in the Baptist understanding of ministry. For most of their history, when Baptists used the word “minister,” they meant pastor or preacher. Around the middle of the twentieth century, however, the understanding of the role of church staff members other than the pastor began to be redefined within the larger Christian community and within Baptist congregations as more churches began to hire new staff members to lead and plan their music programs, to work with preschoolers, children, teenagers, college students, and senior adults, and to oversee administration, education, and recreational activities. Eventually, some Baptist churches recognized and publicly identified these staff members as ministers.

With these new position titles sometimes came ordination. This changing attitude toward ministers and ministry among Baptists resulted in thousands of women being given the title of minister and being ordained.

**Baptist Opposition to the Ordination of Women**

In the past thirty years, many Baptists denominations in the United States and around the world have begun to recognize women as ministers of the
gospel and to ordain them. Yet, many Baptist groups continue to oppose women ministers.

The Original Free Will Baptist denomination, which traces its roots back to the early New England Free Will Baptists who early on endorsed women in ministry, began to exclude women from leadership positions in the 1950s. Since then, while the denomination has not taken an official position against female pastors and women’s ordination, women have rarely been offered leadership opportunities in the churches, nor have they been approved for ordination.

National Free Will Baptists also have been reluctant to allow women to serve in ordained ministry positions. In the past few decades, some National Free Will Baptist associations have ordained women to the gospel ministry, but most disagree with this practice.32 The official policy of the National Baptist Convention of America, the second largest African American Baptist denomination, is that women should not be ordained as ministers.33

Southern Baptists in 1984 stated their opposition to the ordination of women in a resolution titled “On Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry.”34 In 2000, the SBC revised its confessional statement of faith, the Baptist Faith and Message, to contain a clear denouncement of women’s ordination and service as pastors: “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.”35

Conclusion

Official and recognized ministry leadership by Baptist women is on the rise. Baptist women are slowly but steadily making progress in finding churches that affirm and celebrate their God-given gifts. Numerous cultural, theological, and denominational factors have contributed to the increasing numbers of women serving. Baptists and Baptist churches were influenced by the women’s movement of the 1970s and by the increasing visibility of women in all facets of public life, from politics to medicine to business. Reinterpretations of and new insight into biblical and theological teachings on gender roles have also contributed to more openness in Baptist life. Sadly, the other reality that must be acknowledged is that Baptists have lost hundreds, perhaps thousands of women, who have fled their childhood denomination and moved into Methodist, Presbyterian, Disciples of Christ, and United Church of Christ circles.
What does the future hold for Baptist women in ministry? The bad news first. In the next ten years, Baptist women, like those Baptist women ministers who walked before them, will most likely continue to face the prospect of being labeled by some as she-preachers, bossy women, and children of the devil! The opposition to women preachers and women ministers will not end any time soon. The good news, however, is that, given trends of the past fifty years, especially the last twenty, Baptists in the next ten years will move closer to mainline Protestant groups and at least ten percent of all Baptist pastors will be women.

The number of ordained Baptist women serving in all capacities of ministry—on church staff, as chaplains, with non-profit agencies, as missionaries, as professors—has surely increased dramatically since 1964 when Addie Davis was ordained, but gathering information and statistics about the full spectrum of women in ministry certainly needs more attention and research. Preserving, telling, and interpreting the stories of individual Baptist women also must be done in order to educate churches about the giftedness and readiness of women ministers and to encourage girls and young women who are discerning a call to ministry.


2 A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers in Middlesex, Kent, Cambridgeshire and Salisbury (n.p., 1641). Although the six women are not specifically identified as Baptists, Baptist scholars such as Edward Caryl Starr and William Thomas Whitley included this document in their bibliographies of Baptist writings, indicating that the women were Baptists. See Edward Caryl Starr, *A Baptist Bibliography: Being a Register of Printed Material By and About Baptists, Including Works Written Against the Baptists,* 25 vols. (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1947-1976), and William Thomas Whitley, *A Baptist Bibliography: Being a Register of the Chief...*

3 *A Discoverie of Six Women Preachers*, 1.


9 Ibid., 309-10.


15 Pamela A. Smoot, “‘Hear the Call’: The Women’s Auxiliary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 46/1 (Spring 2011): 56.

16 Andrea Strübind, email to author, August 15, 2012.


21 Ibid., 14/4 (Fall 1997): 9.


23 Carolyn Goodman Plampin, e-mail to author, 20 June 2006.

24 ABC-USA Professional Female Summary, August 7, 2012.


33 Stephen John Thurston, president of the National Baptist Convention of America, telephone interview with author, 29 June 2006.
34 Annual, Southern Baptist Convention, 1984, 65.

Together stories and statistics describe the status of women’s leadership among Baptists. In turn the status of women’s ministry and leadership narrates a larger and more encompassing story about the variety of ways Baptists are working out questions of meaning, purpose, and everyday faith. In 2012 a growing number of women in the moderate-to-progressive constellation of Baptists—those who distanced themselves from the Southern Baptist Convention—find ordination, calls to service, and places of leadership. In Cooperative Baptist Fellowship-related theological schools, more than forty percent of students enrolled in masters-level programs are women. Female faculty in these schools dropped to twenty percent since 2005. Women currently serving in ministry, including 150 pastors and co-pastors, reached an all-time high in 2012. However, controversy about women’s entry into pastoral leadership continues. Both the actual numbers and percentages of women’s ordination and pastoral leadership remain far below that of mainline denominations. Women’s volunteer leadership on Baptist governing boards typically reflects official commitments of each group regarding women’s equality and inclusion, yet men continue to fill most high-level staff roles at all Baptist schools and agencies. Women’s pay, benefits, and job opportunities in ministry remain lower than those for men in similar jobs, reflecting ongoing gender inequities among Baptists. For Baptists affiliated with CBF, the Alliance of Baptists, Baptist General Convention of Texas, and the Baptist General Association of Virginia, women’s visible leadership shows significant numeric growth over the last four decades, reflecting changes in Baptist belief and practice regarding the ministry of women. Yet, change in Baptist life is slow, and the status of women’s leadership reflects how different Baptist groups work out long-standing tensions and conflict over questions of identity, meaning, and faithfulness.
Four centuries ago Baptists emerged in England, separating from the state church and spreading quickly through the British Empire and into the Americas. Baptists continue to carry with them the practical and philosophical tensions of the times in which they were born. To each new generation and institution, Baptists practice and believe what must seem to the modern mind impossible polarities. At the heart of these tensions lies a persistent Western dilemma: Is detached rational deliberation or engaged expressive imagination the better way to embrace life’s meaning and to make ordinary decisions? Crosswise to this tension is another concerning sources of authority: Is God’s purpose for life and guidance for everyday choices located exclusively within the scriptures or is it foremost in the individual’s direct experience of God? Baptists have worked out these tensions and questions in a multitude of creative and contentious ways.1

Four decades ago women entered more fully and publically into the fray of Baptist tensions when churches began regularly ordaining and calling them to pastoral leadership in congregations and other ministry settings. Clergywomen have become something of a test case for unfolding philosophical and practical tensions of Baptist life. For example, ordained female pastors have been portrayed as anathema by Southern Baptists. Yet among American Baptists clergywomen are understood as normative. For churches affiliated with the Alliance of Baptists (AB) and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), female pastors continue to be anomalies, yet are growing in numbers and remain central to discussions of what it means to live and to lead as Baptists. In each group a sizable portion of energy and time goes into making arguments, stating positions, and covering news about the role, place, and practice of women in Baptist life. Baptist clergywomen make up a smaller portion of ordained Baptist ministers than women in most mainline denominations. Yet Baptist clergywomen are part of a significant trend in United States Christianity since the mid-twentieth century, constituting the single largest change to the face of ministry in the history of the church.2

Stories and numbers together describe the status of women’s leadership in Baptist life. In turn, the status of women’s ministry and leadership narrates a larger and more encompassing story about the variety of ways that Baptists are working out their questions of meaning, purpose, and everyday faith. Four markers of women’s leadership guide this analysis. Women’s participation and leadership in theological education reflects both a
longstanding Baptist commitment to education and a sustained ambivalence about women’s participation in theological enterprises. Women currently serving in ministry, including the pastorate, are growing in numbers, yet controversy about their entry into pastoral leadership remains, and the numbers are far below those in mainline denominations. Women’s leadership in denominational staffs and governing boards attempts to embody with numbers the official commitments of each group, although paid leadership is still primarily in the hands of men—even among groups that officially support shared leadership between men and women. Women’s pay, benefits, and job opportunities in ministry offer a finer grain description of inequities in pay and benefits that remain and carry forward the historical sexism and ongoing tensions of belief and practice among Baptists. Together these accounts of women’s leadership and ministry demonstrate the various and ongoing ways that Baptists have negotiated the tensions and questions of meaning, purpose, and everyday faithful living.3

**Women in Theological Education**

When the CBF’s annual General Assembly concluded in June 2012, events at the closing service captured a paradigm shift twenty years in the making. The night marked the final address and celebration of Daniel Vestal’s sixteen years of leadership as executive coordinator. As part of the celebration, the CBF Foundation announced a new “Daniel and Earline Vestal Leadership Scholars” program. The first fellowships were presented to two young women attending CBF-partner seminaries. Emily Holladay is a student at Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology (Atlanta, Georgia) and grew up in the home of a Baptist pastor. Mary Beth Gilbert Foust is a student at Baptist Theological Seminary of Richmond (Virginia), and her mother and sister are also ministers. In the twenty-one years since CBF began, young women are increasingly leading CBF churches and the organization itself. This trend finds nourishment in the support of women in the newer Baptist theological schools and in the more open official stance of the CBF itself.4
Since 1990 more than a dozen Baptist studies programs and theological schools have been launched in the wake of changes to the six seminaries affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Consistently since 2005, CBF-related schools enroll more women in their master's level programs than do other United States seminaries, increasing from 38% in 2005 to 40.5% in 2011-12. The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) reports that, over the past five years, enrollment in Master of Divinity (M.Div.) programs in U.S. schools declined slowly but steadily, and the percentage of women in M.Div. programs also dropped by one full percentage point from 30.6% to 29.6%. CBF schools have dropped overall enrollment in the same years, but the percentage of women has increased by two and a half percentage points. In the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) programs, CBF schools enroll women at lower rates (15%) than other U.S. theological schools (20%). These two sets of figures (M.Div. and D.Min. statistics) suggest that theological education among moderate and progressive Baptists works like a larger-than-average front door into ministry. Yet a number of women are leaving by the back door without graduating or without entering ministry. They are not moving as rapidly through predictable pathways into advanced professional training through D.Min. programs, now offered by half the CBF-related schools. In recent years American Baptist Churches-USA schools enroll women at an even higher than average rates. For example, in 2005 women made up 57% of the students enrolled in seminaries related to the American Baptist Churches-USA. In contrast, Southern Baptist seminaries enroll women at rates lower than averages across ATS. In 2005 women made up 22% of the student enrollment in SBC seminaries.5

In 2010, ATS proposed the following revision to their accrediting standards: “While member schools have a variety of stated purposes and theological commitments, each school shall seek to increase the participation and leadership of women in theological education.”6 The proposal became a serious point of contention at the biennial meeting, creating more debate and dissent than Daniel Aleshire, executive director of ATS, recalls ever witnessing in his two decades at the helm of ATS. Aleshire, a former professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, observed that nearly all those who spoke for the change represented schools associated with mainline churches and saw the change as a matter of identity. The men (and only men) who spoke against the proposal were from Evangelical and Roman Catholic schools. The standard finally adopted allows “the framework of each school’s stated purposes and theological commitments” to take precedence over any
insistence by ATS that schools advance women’s status in their institutions. This debate mirrors a protracted and ever-widening division among Baptists and a major point of contention and schism in the last three decades. For moderate and progressive Baptists, women’s participation and leadership is a matter of gender justice, and is authorized by experience and practice. For conservative Baptists, women’s participation and leadership in church is a matter of role, authorized by scriptural authority and theological identity.

These different commitments to women’s status are reflected not only in student enrollments, but also in the number and responsibilities of faculty in Baptist schools. Among ATS schools in the U.S. in 2011, women made up 24% of the total faculty. In 2012, a tally of faculty reveals that in SBC schools women make up 9% of the faculty and teach exclusively in the areas of education, music, counseling, social work, and women’s ministries. Women in CBF schools make up 20% of the faculty. This figure has decreased since 2005, when the same number of women (26) constituted 22% of the teaching posts. In ABC-USA schools, women make up 37% of the faculty. The faculty numbers follow the patterns of enrollment when comparing Baptist schools to national averages: SBC is low, and ABC is high. However, while CBF schools enroll more female students in their M.Div. programs than average, they are slightly lower than average in employing female professors, having declined in the past six years. Several women have been appointed academic deans in Baptist seminaries and divinity schools including Gail O’Day, named dean at Wake Forest Divinity School in 2010.

Women Currently Serving in Ministry

When Bailey Edwards Nelson began her work as pastor of Flat Rock Baptist Church in Mount Airy, North Carolina, on July 10, 2011, the local Baptist association took swift and decisive action, voting the church out of membership. The “sole issue” for withdrawing fellowship, according to the Surry Baptist Association’s director, Billy Blakley, was “the majority of the association interprets the Bible as denying females the role of senior pastor.” Members of the church were unaware that a vote regarding their membership was on the agenda and did not attend, although the association did contact
them weeks earlier. Soon after she was called by Flat Rock, Nelson said the church’s attendance was up, new visitors were coming for worship, and the “church [was] filled with energy and confidence in who they are and the direction they’re going.” She said members were “clinging to Baptist principles more than ever before.”

Over the last forty years, variations of the same arguments have risen again and again in debates about ordaining and calling women as Baptist pastors. One side argues for God’s guidance in the experience of calling a pastor and appeals to support from scripture and to “autonomy, soul competency, and priesthood of the believer.” The other side argues for God’s eternal guidance found in scripture with particular roles for men and women and appeals to New Testament passages about female silence and male pastoral authority as well as “God’s delegated authority” in all relationships. The arguments capture enduring Baptist tensions between the individual liberty of conscience and the authority of scripture. The debates can be creative or contentious, and in the case of ordained Baptist women, the debates have been both.

A great deal has changed between the 1964 ordination of Addie Davis, the first Southern Baptist woman ordained to the gospel ministry, and the 2010 call of Bailey Nelson as pastor of Flat Rock Baptist Church. Davis had to leave the South to find a church to pastor and spent her ministry among American Baptists. Women would, however, eventually fill every role of ministry in congregations, chaplaincy, and other specialized ministries in Southern Baptist life. Subsequently, the number of women serving as pastors in the SBC, and then among the churches that split from the denomination, has grown slowly from fourteen identified in 1983-84 to more than ten times that number in 2012 (150). The AB consistently has the greatest percentage of churches pastored by women. In 2012 female senior, solo, or co-pastors led 43 of 139 churches affiliated with the Alliance (31%). Virginia, Texas, North Carolina, and Georgia have consistently been home to the greater numbers of women pastors. Most of the churches pastored by women are affiliated either with AB or CBF or both. The percentage of CBF churches led by women in 2012 is 5%.

Women serving as pastors:

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A brief comparison with American Baptists, United Methodists, and Presbyterians shows that the moderate and progressive constellation of Baptists continue to lag behind other groups in ordaining and calling women as pastors in both real numbers and percentages. In 2012, American Baptists reported that among its 5,134 pastors (senior, solo, bi-vocational, interim, and co-pastors), 485 of them are women (9.4%). When associate and assistant pastors are included, the totals increase to 682 women of 5,768 total pastors and associate/assistant pastors (11.8%). United Methodists reported a substantial increase in the number of women pastors in the first decade of the twenty-first century. A salary study reported in November 2011 that in 1998, 20% of United Methodist pastors in the U.S. were female. By 2008, clergywomen made up 29% of the total. Presbyterians report that in 1973, only 1% of Presbyterian pastors were women. The numbers increased to 8% in 1984, 13% in 1990, and 22% in 1999. In 2008, more than 4,200 women constituted 27% of the total number of pastors in Presbyterian churches. Presbyterian women also comprised a greater percentage of “specialized clergy” roles increasing from 4% in 1979 to 17% in 1990, and 45% in 2008.

Baptist women have long filled a variety of staff ministry positions in Baptist churches with and without ordination and with and without pay. Surveys of Baptist women between 2005 and 2012 suggest that four areas of ministry provide the most common pathways into ministry for women: 1) minister with children, youth and/or families; 2) minister of music; 3) associate pastor; and 4) minister of education/formation. Women also serve churches working with other specific age groups (i.e. college students, senior adults, etc.) as pastoral counselors, health specialists, and community or missions ministers. A newer pathway into ministry for Baptist women is through a growing number of pastoral residencies and internships.

Beyond local Baptist churches women find pathways into ministry through chaplaincy and pastoral counseling, campus ministry, higher education, and missionary service. In recent years, women endorsed for chaplaincy or counseling make up 10% of the SBC’s total endorsees, 19% of those endorsed by the Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT), 33% of ABC-USA endorsees, 35% of CBF endorsees, and 59% of those endorsed by
the Alliance. A notable aspect of the story of women’s endorsement is that in every Baptist agency across the board both the numbers and the percentages are on the rise over the last seven years, increasing as much as seven percentage points (AB) and nearly doubling the number of women in several cases (SBC, AB). One of the most enduring and recognized pathways into ministry and service for Baptist women has been through missionary service. In 2012 women constitute more than half of the missions personnel of the SBC’s International Missions Board (53%), ABC-USA’s International Ministries (56%), and CBF Global Missions (56%).

Women in Denominational Leadership

When Soozi Whitten Ford was named executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Indiana and Kentucky in January 2012, she joined a very small handful of women hired as denominational executives in Baptist life. Although women have traditionally led women’s organizations like the Southern Baptist Woman’s Missionary Union and American Baptist Women and Girls, they have not been hired to lead any major Baptist denominational body, and have held a small number of state and regional posts. Central Baptist Theological Seminary (Shawnee, Kansas) in 2004 appointed Molly Marshall as the first and only woman president of a Baptist seminary in the United States. Central is affiliated with both ABC-USA and CBF. Other notable exceptions in 2012 include the Alliance, which is currently staffed by a team of three women and one man, and the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America (BPFNA), which is staffed entirely by women. Staff leadership is almost evenly split in state and regional CBF offices, yet only one woman is currently serving as co-coordinator.

The AB, BPFNA, and CBF elect governing boards, which intentionally aim for equal numbers of men and women, reflecting more closely the general U.S. population and the membership of Baptist congregations. Each board also tries to balance the number of laity and clergy and to expand beyond their mostly white memberships to include non-white leaders. In 2012, women made up 49% of CBF’s coordinating council, 43% of the Alliance
board of directors, 31% of the board of general ministries (ABC-USA), 20% of the BGCT board, and 7% of the SBC executive committee.

**Women’s Pay, Benefits, and Opportunities for Ministry**

In 2007, Baptist Women in Ministry (BWIM) sponsored the first Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching, named for an eighteenth-century Separatist Baptist female preacher. That year fifty-four churches welcomed women to their pulpits to preach. In February of 2012, the month-long emphasis on inviting women to preach in Baptist pulpits, raising awareness in congregations, and expanding preaching experience for women, grew to include 217 churches. The fiftieth anniversary of women’s ordination among Southern Baptists is fast approaching, and the first American Baptist woman was ordained 130 years ago. Thus questions of opportunity, equity, and change for women in ministry remain significant.

Findings from a salary survey offer insight into ministers’ financial well-being, their concerns for equity and change, and a more detailed picture of what opportunities are ahead for ordained and professional women in ministry.19

**Salary and Benefits Survey**

The “Baptist Ministers—Salary Survey” conducted in 2012 reached 349 ministers, and 325 completed the questions. Respondent breakdown by gender was 33% men and 67% women. Seventy-five percent of the ministers work full time. Fully a third of those who took the survey are pastors and co-pastors: seventy-nine men and thirty-four women. Ninety-five percent of all respondents are white. Eight in ten ministers work in churches, and less than 13% work in hospitals or non-profit agencies. One third of the women are unmarried, while 96% of the men are married. Nearly half the respondents have children living at home. The largest groups for men and women are in their thirties (30%) and fifties (25%), followed by those in their forties (17%). Almost equal numbers are in their twenties (13%) or over sixty (14%). Survey participants are highly educated, with one third of the men holding doctoral degrees and the rest holding a graduate or professional degree. Eighty percent of the women have a graduate or professional degree, and 9% hold doctoral degrees. Nine of ten women are affiliated with CBF, as are 97% of the men. Other affiliations include Alliance of Baptists (23%), SBC (14.5%), ABC-USA (13.6%), BGCT (11.4%), and Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV, 10.5%). Three open-ended questions allowed participants to frame their
The current financial situation in the U.S. and its toll on churches and ministers appeared in comments about staff lay-offs, cuts to salaries and/or benefits, and mortgages being “underwater.” One woman says her church “has lost members and staff in recent years.” And she worries over being asked “three months severance or six months on the job?” As the “bread winner” in her family, she feels “scared to death.” Further she says, “My church has no idea the pressure I am under with the ‘discussions’ taking place in circles that I am not allowed to be part

financial concerns and related feelings as well as hopes for change regarding salary and benefits.20

**Greatest Financial Worries**

When asked “What is your greatest current financial worry?” the top answers were: 1) retirement; 2) current financial situation, including lack of health care coverage and unmanageable mortgages; 3) paying off student loans and other debt; 4) paying for college for children; and 5) job security or current salary. More than a third of the respondents worry about having enough money saved, lack of employer contribution to retirement plans, or complete absence of retirement plans. The second cluster of concerns for one-third of the respondents is their current financial situation. A few lament living “pay-check to pay-check” or worry over having “no cushion in case of emergency.” One woman serving on a church staff for several years says, “My salary does not cover my expenses. I cannot get health insurance through my church. I have no opportunity to be part of a pension or retirement plan.” Some young ministers are saddled with student loans and other debts. One 20-something minister still in seminary says, “I worry about how to finance the last year of my Master of Divinity. I cannot live on my ministry salary, so student loans are currently sustaining me. Soon, however, I will need to repay my loans, and I am concerned that a future full-time salary will not support responsible and timely repayment.” The minister worries about a need “to be bi-vocational to make ends meet.”

One woman serving on a church staff for several years says, “My salary does not cover my expenses. I cannot get health insurance through my church. I have no opportunity to be part of a pension or retirement plan.”
of. Yet they say how much they value me. Isn’t there a more godly way for a church to treat its ministers?”

The fourth cluster of responses related specifically to job security and salary. One young woman working two ministry jobs writes, “If I keep working jobs that I love and feel called to—it will always be this way. . . . I can’t imagine moving forward with plans for a family living like this.” Only nine ministers taking the survey (<3%) indicated they had no financial worries.

Changes to Salary and Benefits

When asked, “What changes would you like to make to your current salary and benefits?” top responses included: 1) increase pay (42%); 2) increase benefits (42%); 3) add or raise retirement (21%); 4) add or increase insurance benefits (17%). Ministers working full time reported 2011 salaries that were concentrated in the range of $40,000 to $59,999 (54% for women, and 40% for men). Ministers reporting salaries above $60,000 included more men (47%) than women (22%). And ministers reporting salaries under $40,000 included more women (23%) than men (13%). For every benefit listed, men reported receiving them at higher rates than women.

Unsurprisingly more women than men wished for additional pay and benefits. Sixty-three percent of women and 73% of men indicate that they currently receive health insurance. Six percent of the men surveyed and 27% of the women are currently working part-time. Of the total respondents, 7% indicated they would like full-time ministry jobs. A fair number (12%) indicated satisfaction or desired no changes to their current pay and benefits. Despite a number of comments indicating frustration or dissatisfaction, and the large number of participants hoping for increases, 79% of men and 77% of women who took the survey indicate they are moderately or extremely satisfied with their current employment. Slightly fewer men (72%) and significantly fewer women (56%) are moderately or extremely satisfied with their current salary and benefits.21

When asked: “How would you describe your feelings about your current salary and benefits?” more than half the responses were straight-forwardly happy/satisfied (35%) or unhappy/disappointed (25%). However a significant number of responses could be categorized as either “good, but . . .” (27%) or ambivalent (7%). The qualifications to the good feelings covered the same territory as the list of desired changes in salary and/or benefits. This question
also drew out feelings about fairness and (in)equality of pay and benefits between men and women, for education and experience, and for ministers in general. For instance, one woman in her forties writes that she had to “fight” to be paid in a way “equitable with male staff,” although she is currently very satisfied with her job, pay, and benefits. Others noted that they are anxious, frustrated, and feel “discriminated against.” Another woman wonders if her pay “is comparative to what others in this position would make (especially if they are men and have my same level of education).” Two key findings in the survey stand worthy of more attention. Inequities in compensation continue with women receiving less pay and benefits than men. The high levels of satisfaction with work despite less satisfaction with compensation indicate the intangible benefits that ministry delivers; as one woman put it, “I love my job and feel like I am called to it. If it weren’t so, there is no way I would do all I do for the money I make.”

Conclusions

The stories and statistics gathered in this snapshot of women’s leadership and ministry in Baptist life in 2012 give texture and detail to a larger set of perennial tensions of being Baptist in the twenty-first century. The status of women in different groups shows how those tensions are worked out, sometimes with conflict and sometimes with creativity. Neither side of the tension is abandoned entirely by any group, lest they give up being Baptist altogether. Baptists who tend toward the side of rational deliberation, and who see God’s eternal purpose mediated mainly through biblical texts, however, generally make decisions about women’s leadership that embody those commitments. Women lead less visibly in those groups, and the statistics are lower for all leadership roles except with other women and children. Women are expected to do work that is on the whole supportive rather than authoritative. On the other hand, Baptists who work out the perennial tensions leaning toward a relational and expressive kind of discernment and who see God’s presence and purpose in immediate moments and situations support women’s leadership in ways consistent with their values. In those groups, women’s ministry is grounded in the experience and practice of women themselves and the communities where they thrive. Women’s visible
leadership is growing in every capacity for those groups, and the statistics reflect the changes. Yet, making change in Baptist life is slow given the long-standing character of these tensions. Both life-purpose and every-day decisions of faithful living hang in the balance for women and Baptists everywhere.

1 Charles Taylor, Sources of the Self: the Making of Modern Identity (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Taylor maps the shattering of a theistic vision of sources for identity and ethics since the Enlightenment. He argues that although westerners agree on goods of society (freedom, dignity, rights, self-fulfillment and expression, justice, etc.), sustained tension and disagreement over the sources remains embedded in schools of thought and institutions. See esp. chapter 25. Bill J. Leonard observes the following tensions enduring through four hundred years of Baptist history: 1) individual liberty of conscience versus the authority of scripture; 2) the autonomy of the local church versus associational cooperation; 3) clergy versus laity; 4) religious liberty versus loyalty to the state; and 5) dramatic conversion versus nurturing process (“Introduction,” Dictionary of Baptists in America, ed. Bill J. Leonard [Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994], 4-6). See also Baptist Ways: A History (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), in which Leonard identifies three additional tensions: doctrinal statements (invariably confessional, selectively creedal); ordinances (sacraments and symbols); and diversity (theological and ecclesial).

2 Although May C. Jones was ordained on July 9, 1882 by the Baptist Association of Puget Sound in Washington, Northern Baptists (now American Baptist Churches, USA) were slow to embrace the practice. The pace of ordaining and calling women as pastors grew more substantially after a 1965 resolution urging ABC-USA churches to support women in ministry. See Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Pamela R. Durso, “State of Women in Baptist Life,” (Atlanta, GA: Baptist Women in Ministry, 2005), 2; (hereafter, SWBL, 2005) and Jackson Carroll, God’s Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 7.

3 Other articles in this issue of The Review and Expositor take up questions and descriptions of the practice of ordinations and women’s leadership in African American and Hispanic Baptist groups. See articles in this issue: Courtney Lyons, “Breaking Through the Extra-Thick Stained-Glass Ceiling: African American Baptist Women in Ministry,” and Isabel N. Docampo, “Tracing Sister Connections: The Place of United States Latina Baptist Women in Ministry within the Overall Story of Baptist Women in Ministry.” Unless
otherwise indicated the current figures and percentages detailing women’s leadership in Baptist life were collected in surveys of Baptist schools, agencies, and governing boards conducted by phone, email, and web search by Eileen Campbell-Reed with assistance from Klem-Mari Cajigas Chimelis between July 1 and August 10, 2012 (hereafter, Campbell-Reed, Leadership Survey, 2012).

4 CBF Communications, “Assembly concludes with Vestal’s final sermon, approval of 2012 Task Force report,” http://www.thefellowship.info/About-Us/News/Archive/8340 (accessed July 31, 2012). Emails to Eileen Campbell-Reed from Mary Beth Gilbert Foust and Emily Holladay, August 7-9, 2012. Foust’s sister is a Methodist minister, which points to an often hidden story that is challenging to tell, about the women who grow up Baptist but pursue a call to ministry in another tradition.

5 The M.Div. is the basic ministry degree recognized across most Christian denominations as preparatory for professional ministry. For statistics on SBC and ABC-USA schools, see SWBL, 2005, 6-7. Not all the students in M.Div. or D.Min. programs in CBF-related schools are Baptist. Neither do all CBF-affiliated students attend CBF-related schools. The numbers, however, suggest trends worth considering.


7 Ibid.

8 Women have been hired in the last seven years in CBF-related schools, but the net effect of change is an increase of 15 male faculty between 2005 and 2011. See SWBL, 2005, 6-7. Campbell-Reed, Leadership Survey, 2012. See also The Association for Theological Schools Data Tables for 2011, “Table 2.12-B Head Count Enrollment by Race or Ethnic Group, Degree, and Gender, 2011 United States” at www.ats.edu (accessed July 20, 2012).


12 SWBL, 2005, 6-7. Email from Paula Clayton Dempsey (Alliance of Baptists) to Eileen Campbell-Reed, July 19, 2012. As of July 2012, CBF estimates 1,800 affiliating congregations. Ninety of 150 female pastors are serving in CBF-related congregations (5%).

13 While there has been no formal listing or registry for Baptist women as pastors, Sarah Frances Anders in the 1980s and 1990s and Pamela R. Durso from 2005 to present have kept informal lists and published them regularly. See Campbell-Reed and Durso, SWBL, 2005; SWBL, 2006; SWBL, 2007; Pamela R. Durso and Amy Shorner-Johnson, SWBL,
CURRENT STATUS OF BAPTIST WOMEN IN MINISTRY

WINTER 2013


14 ABC-USA Professional Female Summary, August 7, 2012.


BWIM sponsored the “Baptist Ministers—Salary Survey,” which was designed and conducted by Eileen Campbell-Reed. Participants took the survey between June 12 and 28, 2012. The qualitative sample was drawn first from the BWIM constituency and allowed to “snowball” to other Baptist ministers through social media outlets. The results describe the self-selected group who participated and should not be generalized. Nonetheless, the insights offered by participants suggest concerns that can be taken seriously by churches, ministers, and those who support them.

Benefits listed on the “Baptist Ministers—Salary Survey” included: health insurance, life insurance, disability insurance, reimbursement for work expenses, reimbursement for study or conference expenses, book allowance, paid vacation, sabbatical, other leave (sick, family care, personal days), employer tax matching (for self employed ministers), discretionary benefit fund, other (most frequent reply: retirement). The National Association of Church Business Administrators maintains a thorough salary survey instrument and data. They have not yet collected enough data on CBF churches, however, to make an adequate comparison with the information gathered through “Baptist Ministers—Salary Survey.” See http://www.ministrypay.com/.
Already but Not Yet: The Status of Women Baptist Pastors

By Tracy Hartman*

ABSTRACT

Even though the percentage of Baptist churches with women pastors is low, it is an increase over the numbers in years past. In 2012, more churches called women as pastors than ever before. The status of Baptist women pastors and co-pastors, however, is about far more than statistics. Behind the numbers are stories of women who have been called by God to serve and stories of the churches who have called them. This article chronicles the different ways churches and their pastors experienced the call process, where they experienced resistance in their journeys, and where the women find support for their ministries. Nineteen women pastors and co-pastors were interviewed as well as members of five pastoral search committees. The pastors represented a wide spectrum of age and experience from just out of seminary and serving a first call to seasoned ministers with over thirty years of experience.

Women who are called to serve as pastors or co-pastors in Baptist life will be pleased with emerging trends. Between 2005 and 2010, the number of women serving as pastors and co-pastors in moderate and progressive Baptist churches rose from 102 to 150, nearly a 45% increase.¹ Alliance of Baptist churches are leading the way; in 2012, over 31% of their churches were pastored by women. In 2012, 5% of all Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) churches had women serving as pastors or co-pastors.²

¹ Tracy Hartman is the Daniel O. Aleshire Professor of Homiletics and Practical Theology at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond, in Richmond, Virginia.
While progress is being made, many moderate churches who are willing to ordain women still declare they are not ready for a woman to serve as their pastor. The four major moderate/progressive groups that support women in ministry claim a total of 8,931 affiliating churches. In 2010, only 135 or 1.5% of those churches had a woman serving as pastor or co-pastor.³

As important as these numbers are, the status of women pastors and co-pastors is about far more than statistics. Behind the numbers are stories of women who have been called by God to serve and stories of the churches who have called them. This article chronicles the different ways churches and their pastors experienced the call process, where they experienced resistance in their journeys, and where the women find support for their ministries. The author interviewed nineteen women pastors and co-pastors and members of five pastoral search committees for this project. The pastors represented a wide spectrum of age and experience from just out of seminary and serving a first call to seasoned ministers with over thirty years of experience.

The Call Process

Sixteen of the nineteen churches in this study have women pastors for the first time in their history. None of these churches set out to make a statement or to blaze new ground by intentionally hiring a woman to be their pastor. Rather, search committee members unanimously reported that they were committed to finding the right person to serve their church, regardless of gender. Van Ward, chair of the search committee at Millbrook Baptist in Raleigh, North Carolina, said it this way, “It is important that it (hiring a woman pastor) not be called a brave move; it wasn't. We were just being faithful, and she was the one.”⁴

Several committee members spoke of using very intentional spiritual direction and discernment processes both within the committee and in the larger congregation throughout the search process. Some committees anticipated resistance and were proactive about helping the congregation work through issues, providing literature and conversation opportunities that helped to address biblical and cultural concerns related to women in
pastoral roles. One search committee made a list of every question they thought would arise about hiring a woman pastor, and worked together to reach consensus on their answers well in advance.

One search committee made a list of every question they thought would arise about hiring a woman pastor, and worked together to reach consensus on their answers well in advance.

When Broadneck Baptist, a thirty-year-old Alliance church in Annapolis, Maryland, entered their last search process, three women had already served as pastor. For this congregation, gender was never an issue.

Covenant Baptist, a CBF church in San Antonio, Texas, describes itself as a “Contemplative Christian Community.” The church is small, averaging thirty-five to forty in worship each week, and the committee was surprised when over seventy-five candidates applied for their pastoral position. When the search committee narrowed the pool to three, all were women. Covenant called Kyndall Renfro, a young seminary graduate, to be their pastor. At her ninety-day review, even those who had some initial reservations about hiring a young woman were affirming of her ministry. Kyndall reports that she has experienced more resistance due to age than gender.

Other churches struggled through a long process before hiring a woman. First Chinese Southern Baptist Church in San Francisco, California, was Joy Yee’s home church. The church supported her as she explored a call to ministry and completed her theological education. Not imagining she would ever pastor, Joy returned to serve the church in various capacities. Eventually, the English speakers in the congregation wanted to call Joy as their pastor. But some, particularly the Chinese-speaking members who had a different minister, were opposed to women pastors; some objected on biblical or cultural grounds, while others had difficulty imagining a woman pastor. It took the church four years of exposure to women in ministry (through Joy providing pulpit supply and then serving as the interim) and hours of Bible study and discussion before the English-speaking members of the church voted to call her. Eventually the English speakers broke away from the church (for a variety of reasons unrelated to women in ministry) to form New Covenant Baptist, which five years later merged with Nineteenth Avenue Baptist Church. Joy reports that one upside from all the struggle was that the congregation learned what bound them together and what they could release. She said, “It builds something into the community when you’re dealing with conflict and come through it. You learn who you are and how to live in grace.”
Glendale Baptist in Nashville, Tennessee was also strengthened through adversity. Their story began in 2001 with a search for a full-time associate pastor. The committee determined that April Baker was the best candidate. April and her life partner, Deborah Lynn, discerned that Glendale was a congregation where their family could worship and serve. Although the church had been welcoming and affirming for some time, they knew calling April would require a more public acknowledgment of inclusivity. This official “coming out” resulted in the departure of about thirty members (a quarter of the active congregation). Some left because they disagreed with calling a lesbian minister. Others were not opposed, but they worked for conservative Southern Baptist agencies or Tennessee Baptist schools and were not in a position to lose their jobs in order to stay at Glendale. Other congregants supported the decision and chose to stay, sacrificing or losing jobs in the process.

Within a year, the pastor decided to retire. The church formed a discernment and search committee, chaired by Eileen Campbell-Reed. The committee covenanted to listen carefully to the movement of the Spirit and to the members of the congregation. Over time, they saw the need for someone to work alongside April, not to supervise or be supervised by her. The church voted to move to a non-hierarchical, co-pastor model, built on principles of shared responsibility and mutual accountability. The committee sought a candidate who would meet the needs of the church and balance April’s gifts and passions. Many assumed this person would be a man, but the right candidate was Amy Mears. Eileen reports, “Moving to co-pastors was as challenging as calling a woman. Navigating all these changes was huge. The question of two women pastors raised the bar way higher. We had weathered the LGBT issue well, yet we were tired. However, the church trusted the process, and it has been a very positive journey.” Since calling April and Amy in 2004, the church continues to live into the new direction. Eileen says, “The decision helped the church live more conscientiously into its mission to be a ‘caring community of equality and grace.’” Glendale has become a beacon for female seminarians and attracts a constant stream of people searching for true community.
While more churches are hiring women pastors, these congregations tend to be smaller with solo pastorates. Of the twenty churches surveyed in this study, only six have an average weekly attendance over 100 and only two of those exceed 200 in worship. Connie Stinson, pastor of Luther Rice Memorial Baptist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland since 2004, reported that churches that were open to talking to her when she was looking for a pastorate were in more depressed areas, in decline, and in denial about who they were and the world around them. Consequently, she believes that few strong, capable, well-equipped young white men were clamoring to serve those congregations. But, she noted, well-seasoned women were willing to embrace the challenges and answer the call.

Although this scenario is still true in some cases, healthy and vibrant churches are also calling women with much less resistance than in prior years. When Julie Pennington-Russell answered a call to serve Calvary Baptist Church in Waco, Texas in the 1990’s, she was the first woman to pastor a Baptist church in Texas. On her first Sunday, protestors lined up on the street. In contrast, when she accepted the call to serve First Baptist in Decatur, Georgia in 2007, the reaction and the press were positive. Julie noted that since First Baptist had chosen to affiliate with CBF, there was barely a blip on the radar screen when the Georgia Baptist Convention disfellowshipped the church over her hiring.

Women’s Journeys to Pastoral Roles

Recently, more women are starting churches (three from this interview group), co-pastoring with their spouses or another ministry colleague (five from this interview group), or securing a solo pastorate in their first call out of seminary (three from this interview group).

In 2005, Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond produced a four-week curriculum, Your Sons and Daughters Shall Prophecy: Discerning God’s Desire for our Church, designed to help churches prepare to call a woman as their senior pastor. Research for that project indicated that most women move into pastoral roles from associate positions (often in the same congregation). Recently, more women are starting churches (three from this interview group), co-pastoring with their spouses or another ministry colleague (five from this interview group), or securing a solo pastorate in their first call out of seminary (three from this interview group).

Four of the women pastors in this study transitioned from associate roles to pastor in a congregation they were already serving. Congregants reported
that although they considered a number of other candidates, their associate pastor was the best fit for the job. Several commented that they had reservations about woman pastors in the past; experiencing a competent associate pastor, who happened to be a woman, however, removed any resistance they originally harbored. These congregations knew and trusted these women and were quick to name the gifts they brought to ministry.

In 2000, when Baptist Church of the Covenant (BCOC) in Birmingham, Alabama, was without a pastor, the church asked Sarah Jackson Shelton to serve as their interim pastor. Sarah had felt a call to preach when she entered seminary, but by the time she graduated, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was moving away from women in pastoral ministry, so she served in youth ministry for over twenty years. After initially contacting Sarah about serving as interim, BCOC called her back, asking her to wait and apply to be the next pastor. Sarah chose instead to serve as a one-year intentional interim, not wanting to risk losing both opportunities if in the end the church did not call her as pastor. Once that one-year interim was completed in December 2001, Sarah left BCOC. Nine months later, after the Birmingham search committee had done a nationwide search and traveled to hear sermons by three different prospective pastors, they approached Sarah and said, “You’re our candidate.” She was taken off guard, and the committee asked her to take a week to pray and think. Sarah went to spend the week with her father, but the two of them never talked about the offer. Finally, on the last night of her visit, her dad said, “Baby girl, all I know is that when two or more Baptists agree on something you need to pay attention to that.” During the first few weeks of Sarah’s tenure as pastor, protestors hurled rocks through church windows, and members of the local Baptist association voiced objections, but ten years later, Sarah is still serving BCOC. Search committee member David Goodwin notes, “In our church, we’ve only had male voices and male perspectives (in the pulpit). Sarah has opened up a new faith walk for me. She phrases things differently and focuses on different lines of scripture. I think it’s made us a more faithful congregation.”

A number of women interviewed for this project felt a call to pastor while they were serving happily in associate roles. Although they gained valuable

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**During the first few weeks of Sarah’s tenure as pastor, protestors hurled rocks through church windows, and members of the local Baptist association voiced objections, but ten years later, Sarah is still serving BCOC.**
experience in their associate roles (several assumed almost full pastoral responsibilities when the churches were without pastors), pastoral roles did not come easily. Two of the women searched for almost two years before securing a position. Abby Thornton, whose search took just over six months, entered the search process never dreaming that it would work out; many people told her that it would be impossible to find a church to pastor. Broadneck Baptist had been led by women pastors before, and Abby remains grateful that others paved the way for her to serve.

In her search process and at her husband’s urging, Andrea Dellinger Jones sent out thirty-three packets that included a carefully prepared resume, sermon manuscripts, and DVD’s of her preaching and leading worship in a variety of contexts. Only two churches responded. One was Millbrook Baptist in Raleigh, North Carolina, where search committee chair Van Ward remembers having received 182 resumes for the open position. She remembers that although Andrea did not have the five to ten years of pastoral experience they sought, her resume popped with professionalism and showed in detail how her experience qualified her for the job. Andrea also impressed the committee by following her resume with a phone call. Four years later, the church is thriving under Andrea’s leadership.

In a new trend, some women are entering the pastorate via church planting. Erin Spengeman and Carrie Dean co-pastor church starts in Richmond, Virginia, and Atlanta, Georgia. Carrie and her husband, Nathan, are committed to urban ministry. Sensing that churches were losing ground in inner cities, they started a church that is investing in the community and being the presence of Christ in numerous ways. Although Nathan and Carrie share pastoral duties equally, Carrie reports that some of the members still view her more as the “first lady” of the church rather than as their pastor.

Erin became co-pastor of Synago, an emergent house-church, at the invitation of colleague and church founder Nelson Taylor. Erin often met with Nelson to help him vision, dream, and process ideas. Finally they realized that she needed to be an integral part of the new ministry. Synago welcomes the unchurched and members of other faith traditions, and Erin has experienced no resistance in this context.

Gwen Brown and her husband, Charles, began a Sunday morning Bible study in their home in 2005 that evolved into a worshipping community. They realized that to lead the new church well one of them needed theological
education. Gwen, a former corporate project manager, felt a call to pastor while walking down a deserted hospital corridor during a pastoral visit. She left the corporate world to attend McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta. At McAfee, Gwen was introduced to Baptist Women in Ministry and to CBF. She is grateful for the support that both groups have offered their fledgling ministry.

Tonya Vickery and Jessica Williams were hired, along with their husbands, to co-pastor long-standing churches. Originally, Tonya felt a call to missions, that being the only model she had for women in ministry. Attending Southern Seminary in the mid 1990s, she called the International Mission Board (IBM) three times to see what classes would equip her for mission work. Each time, different people informed her that since her husband was taking classes, she didn’t need to. Tonya knew she needed theological education, and her husband encouraged her to take preaching and complete a Master of Divinity degree. Realizing that the IMB would never appoint them, the Vickerys re-evaluated their call. After serving for a time in associate roles, they decided to pursue co-pastoring together. In order to be viewed as a couple, Tonya and Jeffrey put their resumes in two columns on the same page, but early on, churches interviewed Jeffrey and viewed Tonya as the pastor’s wife. When Cullowhee Baptist Church in Cullowhee, North Carolina called them to co-pastor over ten years ago, it was the first time the church had been served by co-pastors or by a woman.

Darren and Jessica Williams searched for two years for a church to co-pastor. Along the way, more than one church wanted to hire Darren as pastor and Jessica as associate, a scenario they briefly considered but rejected. As Darren put it, “We’re called together; we’ll go as co-pastors together.” In one interview, the committee asked Jessica if she was willing to “just read Scripture in worship” for the first few months to give the church time to adjust to a woman in the pulpit. Again, the Williams said, “No thank you.” In another interview, a woman asked, “What should I call you, ‘pastorette’?” Finally, they were contacted by Nomini Baptist in the Northern Neck of Virginia. Now in their second year of co-pastoring, Darren and Jessica are pleased to be viewed as equal partners in ministry, even as they continue to live into what that means on a day-to-day basis.
Resistance Remains

Women pastors continue to report resistance to their ministry from a variety of sources. Several discussed being brought up in unsupportive churches where members prayed that God would change their hearts. Others encountered resistance in college where well meaning friends tried to “straighten them out” or steer them back to a “biblical understanding of female submission.” In college, Erin Spengeman heard that God does not call women, and she could not discuss her emerging call with her closest friends. Most of these women reported that their gifts were not affirmed and cultivated until they entered seminary. But some found resistance even there. Julie Pennington-Russell recalls that on the first day of preaching class, her professor remarked, “Ah! I see we have two ladies in the class! Well, that’s marvelous! And you know what I always say: that a woman preaching is rather like a dog walking on its hind legs; neither of them does it well, but you’re surprised it can be done at all!”

Other women reported push back from parents, in-laws, and close friends when they chose to be ordained. For some, this resistance softened over time as opponents watched these women grow into beloved pastors. One pastor said, “It is much harder for people to be against a theoretical idea than against a real person. When I stopped being anxious about my call, others did too.”

Women pastors also reported occasional resistance in their churches, communities, and local Baptist associations. Connie Stinson remembers that a woman walked out the first time she preached. Tonya Vickery recounts offering to pray before a church softball game and the umpire asking, “Isn’t there anyone else who can pray?” Members of her church immediately countered that she was more than capable of praying, and the pitcher from the opposing team later apologized for the incident.

Two women reported that being a woman Baptist minister sometimes lowers resistance, because people are intrigued. Carrie and her husband were hesitant to join a group of church planters who were not supportive of women in ministry. Instead of experiencing resistance, Carrie found the group
supportive and respectful, challenging her in good ways. “It has been a positive experience,” she reports.

**Sources of Support**

Recent research by the Lilly Endowment points to the importance of support systems for all ministers, but particularly for those in first calls or isolated situations. The women interviewed for this article reported receiving support from a wide variety of sources. Several immediately named their spouses who were both supportive of their work and willing to relocate in order for them to answer a call. Others spoke of the importance of local clergy support groups (some gender specific, some ecumenical and gender diverse); some referenced mentors and coaches as key to their success.

**Words of Wisdom and Advice**

The women pastors willingly shared advice for other women called to ministry. Most frequently, they encouraged women to be themselves. Carrie Dean echoed the advice mentor Dock Hollingsworth gave her, “Don’t worry what others think about women pastors. You are one; just be one. Just be who God called you to be and make your own way and place.” Kyndall Renfro noted, “Be yourself; it is very hard to figure out how to be a pastor because there are so few role models that look like you. You may feel pressure to model your ministry after someone else, but you’ll find the most energy in ministry when you’re just yourself, even if it looks completely different than what you’ve seen before.”

Others shared advice about pursuing a call to pastoral ministry. Gwen Brown shared, “Really know that your call is a divine one. There has to be a settling in your own spirit to do ministry, otherwise you will grow weary, because it can be extremely difficult.” Erin Spengeman said, “Go for it! Trial and error helped me to see if I liked a certain type of position. Be confident that God has called you and just try it.” Sarah Jackson Shelton added these words, “Be faithful to that calling; you can’t ignore it, so don’t try. There are lots of ways to be faithful. Don’t try to prove a point or raise a banner; just do it.” Jessica Williams noted, “The church that calls you may not be the church
you have imagined; it may not come in the shape or form you really want. You may have to move beyond your comfort zone, but there are churches willing and ready to call and love you as their pastor. Don’t give up.” Joy Yee shared, “Let your gifts shine; don’t worry about being a blazing advocate, just preach the word. It is not about women in ministry.”

Elizabeth Hagan, pastor of Washington Plaza in Reston, Virginia, simply said, “Do not let anyone tell you no.”

Some women stressed the importance of good preparation for ministry. Julie Merritt Lee shared that a residency program and C.P.E. were most helpful for her. C.P.E. enabled her to name anxiety in the church system and her own, and she still contacts members of her residency program for advice and support. Tonya Vickery wished that everyone, male or female, could serve as a true associate pastor under someone who is affirming in order to get their feet wet and get prepared. Other women spoke of the value of their theological educations and the networks that all of these programs opened up for them.

Members of search committees shared good advice for churches that think they are not ready for a woman pastor. Eileen Campbell-Reed said, “Churches are ready; it just takes someone to lead the process.” Another committee member had stronger words. He said, “What are they waiting on? If our congregations are seeking God’s will, then either they are open to wherever that road leads, or they aren’t. It’s not that hard.”

Analysis

Increasing numbers of churches are already calling women as their pastors, and women are finding entry into these roles from associate pastorates, church starts, and first calls out of seminary. In recent years, larger churches are calling women to serve as their senior pastor. These trends are encouraging. Other churches are moving towards openness to a woman pastor. Leaders in these congregations can facilitate this move by helping congregants experience competent women ministers through pulpit supply, interim pastors, and associate roles that include preaching and worship leadership.
and worship leadership. But until all churches that say they affirm women in ministry actually become open to hiring women pastors, until they close the gap between their formal and functional theologies, we must continue to say not yet.

1Pamela R. Durso, email to author, August 3, 2012. The moderate Baptist constellation of churches includes the Alliance of Baptists, the Baptist General Association of Virginia, the Baptist General Convention of Texas, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. See also Pamela R. Durso and Amy Shorner-Johnson, “The State of Women in Baptist Life,” commissioned by Baptist Women in Ministry, presented June 2011.


4 Unless otherwise noted, source material for this article was gleaned from in-person and telephone interviews that the author conducted with participants in May and June 2012; transcripts on record.

5 This curriculum is available from Smyth and Helwys publishing.
ABSTRACT

This article examines the state of African American Baptist women in ministry, historically and currently. Comparing views of women among the nine historically African American denominations, Baptists appear to be the most discriminatory. The author offers a historical overview with explanations of impediments to African American Baptist women’s full inclusion in church leadership, Baptist or otherwise, and describes ways African American women have maneuvered around these obstacles to obey their callings. Drawing from available data from Baptist denominations, seminaries, and secondary literature, the article summarizes and assesses the current state of African American Baptist women in ministry with observations to interpret the data. Three “herstories”—histories of women—offer case studies of African American Baptist women in ministry to introduce some of the obstacles that African American Baptist women in ministry in general face in pursuing pastoral ministry. The article ends with suggestions for how affirmers of women in ministry and local churches can better support African American Baptist women in ministry. While there are more opportunities for African American Baptist women than ever before, there is still much farther to go. As Ella Baker used to say, “We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.”
invited all the brother preachers to stand. Sitting in the pew, I was immediately confronted with a crisis of identity. Which do I own, my call or my gender? Do I sit and deny this call, this claim of God on my life decreed by God before I was formed in the womb? Do I sit and now again, another time add to my own history of shame, for the years I tried to do everything else but answer this call? Or do I stand and deny my gender? A preacher I am, a brother I am not. I finally resolved the violent conflict by standing. Because, when I stood I stood as I am. I stood in the total authenticity of my being—black, preacher, Baptist, woman. For the same God who made me a preacher is the same God who made me a woman. And I am convinced that God was not confused on either count.

—Rev. Dr. Prathia Hall

Even in the twenty-first century, African American women encounter racial, gender, and economic discrimination. Once respected as spiritual leaders of African tribes, American slavery made them into “work-oxen” and “brood-sows.” The suffering of African American women was compounded beyond segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement because they were expected to protect African American families and values from the effects of those injustices, without resources and within the constraints of proprietary womanhood. African American women became mothers of the church and “builder[s] and nurturer[s] of a race, a nation.”

There are nine historically African American denominations in the United States: African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), National Baptist Convention, USA, Incorporated (NBC USA, Inc.), National Baptist Convention of America, Incorporated (NBCA), Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC), Church of God in Christ (COGIC), National Missionary Baptist Convention (NMBC), and Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship (FGBCF). All of these denominations decry racism as sin, yet most affirm patriarchy as biblical. The AMEZ was the first to ordain a woman—Julia Foote in 1894. The AME and CME did not ordain women until the 1940s. Frustrated by gender
In American society, African American women typically rank lower and earn less than African American men and white women, have fewer opportunities for educational or professional advancement, and expend significant personal resources serving their families and churches. Ministry is no different. African American Baptist women in ministry face tremendous obstacles to formal ministry placement and recognition; African American church membership is at least 75% female, yet women constitute less than 10% of church leadership and about 1% of African American Baptist pastors.

This article examines the state of African American Baptist women in ministry, historically and currently. Three “herstories”—histories of women—introduce a discussion of obstacles African American Baptist women in ministry face. The article ends with suggestions for better-supporting African American Baptist women in ministry. While there are more opportunities for African American Baptist women than ever before, there is still much farther to go.

Making a Way Out of No Way

African American Baptist women have creatively ministered in spite of tremendous prejudice against them. They organized Women’s Auxiliaries, raised funds for church and mission work, taught Sunday School, and educated their communities toward racial uplift. Many African American heroines have been called “abolitionist,” “educator,” or “speaker,” instead of “pastor” or “preacher.” For example, Harriet Tubman freed over 300 slaves through the Underground Railroad, providing pastoral care and spiritual guidance. Sojourner Truth addressed large audiences with scripture-based appeals for racial and gender equality. Nannie Helen Burroughs co-organized and co-led the Women’s Auxiliary to the NBCUSA, Inc., founded a school for African American women and girls, mobilized Baptists for missions.
support, began a quarterly newsletter, and founded Women's Day as an annual worship service led by women—thus offering the first (and often only) preaching opportunities for African American women.

As African American women have pressed for formal recognition for their ministry, a liberation theology of African American women has emerged. Womanism is a theological response to racial, gender, and economic oppression and includes a commitment to the survival, quality of life, and wholeness of all people, of all races, male and female. Womanists emphasize positive hermeneutics concerning women of color rather than the stereotypical: “‘sin-bringing Eve,’ ‘wilderness-whimpering Hagar,’ ‘henpecking Jezebel,’ ‘whoring Gomer,’ ‘prostituting Mary-Magdalene,’ and ‘conspiring Sapphira.’”

State of African American Baptist Women in Ministry

Mapping the current state of African American Baptist clergywomen has been difficult. Most African American denominations do not keep personnel statistics, and Baptist denominations in general fall short in tracking church leadership by race and gender. The data in tables below is drawn from a poll of Baptist seminaries, secondary literature, and data tables from the Association of Theological Schools (for students identifying as Baptist) and the ABC-USA.

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<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Percent of African American Baptist Women Pastors</th>
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<tr>
<td>ABC-USA</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>CBF</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
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<td>AB</td>
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Most African American denominations do not keep personnel statistics, and Baptist denominations in general fall short in tracking church leadership by race and gender.
A few observations about this data merit consideration. First, the number of African American women receiving seminary education is increasing. Since the 1970s, African American women have jumped from 5% to nearly 8% of all seminarians and from 5% to 49% of all African American seminarians. Since the 1970s, African American women have increased their seminary enrollment by 1000%.

### African American Baptist Female Seminarians (2012)\

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Baptist Affiliation</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>% of Students who are African American</th>
<th>% of African American Students who are Females (% of African American students / % of total students)</th>
<th>% of African American Students who are Baptist</th>
<th>% of Students who are African American Baptist Females (% of African American Females / % of African American Baptists / % of Students)</th>
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<td>Gardner Webb</td>
<td>214</td>
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<td>48% / 21%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>McAfee</td>
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<td>60% / 29%</td>
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<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Truett Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>42% / 5%</td>
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<td>Northern</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>36% / 29%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>60% / 14% / 3%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Second, there is a strong disparity, however, between the percentage of African American Baptist women seminarians and those actually serving in Baptist churches. Averaging the enrollment of African American Baptist seminarians from the author’s poll, 6.4% of Baptist seminary students are African American women, yet African American women comprise barely 1% of Baptist ministers. Thus, even though African American women represent one-tenth of all seminarians and more than one-third of all African-American Baptist seminarians, African American women pastor only 1% of Baptist churches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% of All Seminarians</th>
<th>% of African American Seminarians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1970s</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1980s</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A third observation to consider is that while SBC seminaries average 4.5% in African American female enrollment, non-SBC seminaries average 14%, nearly three times as many. A fourth observation is that many African American women enrolled at Baptist seminaries belong to other denominations.

Overall, the lack of data on Baptist leadership by gender and race is astounding. The ABC-USA is the only Baptist denomination that tracks information by race, gender, and region. The SBC tracks over thirty ministry positions, but none by gender or race. The Alliance of Baptists (AB) tracks gender, but not paralleled with race. Other denominations tracked only the number of member churches, and some do not even keep records at all.

The playing field is certainly not level! Even among Baptist groups that openly affirm women in ministry, the majority of Baptist pastors are male. Women make a strong majority of Baptist membership, both in white and African American churches, yet they comprise only a single digit percentage of pastors. The AB leads the way with 31% female pastors in 2012, but they do not track information by race. The CBF has 5% female pastors in 2012, but
also does not keep statistics by race. ABC-USA has 9.8% female pastors as of 2011; 1.7% of ABC-USA pastors are African American females.9

The nearly universal failure of Baptist denominations to maintain accurate records about their pastors allows false assumptions of a level playing field to prevail and marginalizes minorities like African American women. Baptist Women in Ministry (BWIM) and American Baptist Women in Ministry (ABWIM) have done considerable work to report the state of Baptist women ministers. Perhaps the work of BWIM, ABWIM, and similar groups can influence denominations to document better and celebrate their rich legacies of women’s pastoral leadership.

The statistics that are available paint a grim picture, but African American women make a way out of no way, as they always have. The following “herstories” present the spiritual journeys of three African American Baptist women in ministry who have overcome significant obstacles to obey God’s call to formal pastoral leadership.

Herstories

Prathia Hall

Prathia Hall learned social justice ministry from her father, her primary spiritual and intellectual mentor. After graduating from Temple University, she worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Southwest Georgia and Selma, Alabama. Hall was often asked to speak at mass meetings because of her oratorical prowess. Martin Luther King, Jr. described Hall as “the one platform speaker I would prefer not to follow.”10

Hall tried to escape her call to ministry for many years. She was ordained in 1977 and earned seminary and doctoral degrees from Princeton. She was a top-ranked professor at United Theological Seminary, where she directed a center for women in ministry and African American studies. She became the Martin Luther King, Jr. Chair of Ethics at Boston University’s School of
Sholes-Ross has been rejected as pastor by eighteen churches, she believes, due to African American ecclesial patriarchy and the assumption of white churches that African American pastors cannot lead liturgical worship. She plans to “continue seeking, along with mentoring other clergy women who are struggling . . . supporting women in ministry across cultures and denominations.” She co-founded Equity for Women in the Church through the AB in 2011 as a multi-cultural, ecumenical advocacy organization for clergywomen, equipping women in ministry, connecting African American clergywomen with mentees, and empowering laywomen to advocate for women in senior pastoral leadership.

Sheila Sholes-Ross

Raised in New Orleans, Sheila Sholes-Ross had always assumed God’s call was for her husband. After years of his encouragement to consider God’s call for her, Sholes-Ross discerned her call to preach in her forties. She was ordained by the ABC-USA four months after graduation from Hood Theological Seminary. Many male seminary professors encouraged Sholes-Ross through her ordination process, and her husband has been her biggest supporter. Yet, she yearned for a female ministry mentor. As a teenager, she knew of only one woman seminarian and did not hear a woman preach until her thirties. She identified African American Baptist women’s biggest obstacle as the lack of female ministry role models and wished that seminaries provided better opportunities for networking between seminarians and female ministry mentors.

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She also encourages female preachers to find their own preaching voices instead of imitating male preachers.12

**Billie Boyd-Cox**

Billie Boyd-Cox, from rural Alabama, grew up hearing that God did not call women “in or near pulpits.” Boyd-Cox’s parents forbade her to visit a church where women preached. As an adult, she moved to North Carolina and witnessed women in various ministry capacities. Through her non-denominational church’s education program, she recognized God’s call for both women and men and was ordained as a deacon. She sensed God’s call in 1995, when she was in her thirties, but ignored this calling until 1998. When she shared her calling with her father, who was a preacher, he offered her books from his library and advised against church-planting. He never invited her into his pulpit, but he did often hear her preach.

In her twelfth year of ministry, currently as pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Conyers, Georgia, Boyd-Cox is completing her theological education at McAfee School of Theology in Atlanta. She self-identifies as a passionate preacher, often drawing from the Old Testament concerning the healing and restoration of women: “I believe sermons should be transformational and should be applied to life like lotion to dry skin.”13 She deeply grieves never having a mentor’s guidance and support, male or female. She also grieves the tragedy of chauvinism in the African American church and its oppression of women. Boyd-Cox encourages established ministers to share their pulpits with aspiring preachers and has mentored numerous clergy herself: “We do not have to preach every conference or revival when we know others are capable and could use the experience. We are our sister’s keeper, even in the pulpit.”14

**Obstacles for African American Baptist Women in Ministry**

While there are many obstacles women in ministry face, three have been identified as the most significant and particular to African American Baptist female ministers. First, Baptists historically affirm local church autonomy. This freedom is a wonderful aspect of Baptist life, but also prevents Baptist denominations from promoting the ordination of women because local churches decide for themselves whom they will ordain. When the AMEZ,
AME, and CME churches began ordaining women in the 1890s and 1940s, these denominations issued top-down statements enforcing women’s ordination. Local churches may have resisted, but the denomination had the final authority. Baptist life is not ordered this way. Even if a Baptist denomination broke protocol to issue such a statement, support for women in ministry must come from local churches.

Second, without accurate information about gender and race, false assumptions of a level playing field silence the prophetic margins. Baptists do not keep sufficient personnel data. With the wealth of technology designed for personnel management, this kind of information could be easily acquired and maintained. BWIM has established a website where clergywomen can “report” their ministry placements. Baptist groups would do well to emulate, for example, the ABC-USA in its impressive database of ministry personnel and BWIM in its prioritization of gathering information.

Third, African American women live with triple consciousness: race, gender, and class. Bettye Collier-Thomas notes that this oppression-in-triplicate gives African American women a powerful base for theology and proclamation.15 At the same time, this triple oppression often keeps them silent. Because of slavery and racial prejudice, the African American church has been the center of African American autonomy in American history, and consequently, the main venue for African American male authority. Historically, African American women have tolerated sexism for the sake of defeating racism. Racism “was the first line of battle” and “neither they nor their families would be free until every vestige of racism was removed.”16

Though few have braved the social stigma of speaking against sexism in the African American church, many African American clergywomen have subverted ecclesiastic patriarchy creatively, preaching “by any means necessary,” doing ministry by other titles, and imitating “masculine” preaching instead of celebrating their own unique voices.17 By the mid-twentieth century, many pressed for formal ministerial recognition. As African American Methodist denominations (AMEZ, AME, and CME) publicly supported women’s ordination, African American Baptists remained exclusively male-led. Even the PNBC, established in 1961 for social justice, failed to advance women in ministry.
Socio-economic factors make preparation for ministry very difficult for African American women. For most, ministry is a second or third career. Many African American clergywomen pastor low-paid or unpaid churches bivocationally. Additionally, African American clergywomen often pay steep personal costs. The divorce rate for African American clergywomen is 23%, three times the male rate. The singleness rate for African American clergywomen is 55%, more than double the male rate. Teresa Fry Brown explains: “Yes, when women answer the call they typically experience some disruption . . . our pruning process. God mercifully removes that person or those persons from our lives who would otherwise eventually impede our ministry.” Delores Carpenter echoes: “Most male-female relationships have cemented around the female’s reinforcing the male in his career achievements. The fact that the woman’s career development needs the same support is often missed. Females can become emotionally depleted from the demands of both family and those who depend upon her for ministry. Rarely are members of the congregation sensitive to her role as a dual and triple caregiver.”

As African American Baptist women press for formal ministry recognition, they face heavy resistance from many fronts. For this reason, many have changed denominations. According to Carpenter, half of African American Baptist clergywomen switch denominations, most commonly to Methodist and independent Pentecostal churches. As minorities-in-triplicate, they must excel just to be considered for ministry placement. Those placed have an experience akin to front-line combat soldiers, weathering a spectrum of opposition, often with little or no hope for career mobility.

**How You Can Support African American Baptist Women in Ministry**

Many of the expressed needs of African American Baptist women in ministry could be easily met by their supporters being intentional to demonstrate support in word and deed.

*Share your pulpit!* Show support publicly by inviting African American women as guest preachers or planning special events which may help the congregation be more receptive to women preaching. Each February, BWIM
celebrates Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Women Preaching, similar to the annual African American Baptist tradition of Women's Day. Since most laity have no experience with women ministers, exposure to female preachers builds bridges, overcomes barriers, and emphasizes shared commitments to the gospel. This also provides an invaluable opportunity to aspiring ministers to develop their preaching.

***Correct misguided patriarchal hermeneutics.*** Marvin McMickle’s *Deacons in Today’s Black Church* (2010) unashamedly defends women in ministry as biblical. He powerfully critiques patriarchy in the African American church: “The primary reason for excluding women is gender discrimination—something that can no more be supported or defended through the use of scripture than the racial discrimination so long directed against black people in the United States.”24 He relays his church’s transition to affirming women’s ordination via “the Jackie Robinson Model,” finding a woman “whose public life and Christian service in the church was so exemplary that the only grounds upon which anyone could oppose her selection and ordination was that she was a woman.”25

The very need for this tactic exposed the church’s sexism and the double standards placed upon women. He opened the door for the full inclusion of women in his church’s leadership. McMickle’s eschewing of deceitful power plays is the kind of courageous, prophetic rhetoric needed to overcome oppression, double standards, and closed doors. Those who believe African American women should be included in church leadership must speak out against discrimination.

***Equip seminarians for real-world challenges.*** Seminaries today need to have course offerings that equip African American Baptist women in ministry for real-world challenges and that raise awareness of racial and gender discrimination in the church. Courses addressing African American church history and theology contextualize the historical background of gender prejudice and oppressive hermeneutics and provide models of how other denominations have moved toward inclusivity. Homiletics coursework could encourage cultivation of students’ unique voices. The Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta exemplifies such a curriculum, offering extensive coursework in African American religious history, womanism, and liberation theologies.
Provide mentors! Female and male ministers can provide game-changing support for aspiring clergywomen. Ministry mentorships provide a noncompetitive relationship for encouragement, constructive feedback, and practical wisdom. BWIM’s Dear Addie program, named for Addie Davis (ordained SBC, 1964), allows women in ministry to correspond with seasoned clergywomen about ministry concerns. Other ecumenical organizations like The Young Clergy Women’s Project (TYCWP), exclusively for ordained women under forty, host annual conferences, publication opportunities, online resources, and peer-mentoring. Teresa Fry Brown’s Can a Sistah Get a Little Help? (2008) offers a written source for ministry mentorship, with humorous and moving insights and practical advice—“Mother Wit and Sistah Sense”—for being an African American woman minister.

Work together. Multiple organizations promote women in ministry such as Christians for Biblical Equality, BWIM, ABWIM, Equity for Women in the Church, and TYCWP. By working together toward making education more accessible and relevant, developing support networks, and speaking prophetically against discrimination, slowly but surely, barriers to the pulpit will be overcome. As they bridge gaps between denominations, races, genders, regions, methods, theologies, and constituents, they can better collaborate to accomplish their shared goals: affirming and supporting women in ministry.

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Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn’t for the Women: Black Women’s Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001), 33-38; Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, 50.


Gilkes, *If It Wasn’t for the Women*, 111-14.

This table contains the results of my poll. I contacted thirty schools, either Baptist seminaries or seminaries with programs in Baptist studies for student demographics, but only thirteen released enrollment information.


Sheila Sholes-Ross, email to author, April 23, 2012.

Billie Cox, email to author, April 27, 2012.

Ibid.


19 *A Time for Honor*, 144.


22 Ibid., 139-40, 101-2.


24 Marvin McMickle, *Deacons in Today’s Black Church* (Valley Forge: Judson, 2010), 89.

25 Ibid., 93-4.
Tracing Sister Connections: The Place of United States Latina Baptist Women in Ministry within the Overall Story of Baptist Women in Ministry

By Isabel N. Docampo*

ABSTRACT

The history of U.S. Baptist women in ministry with roots in or connections with the Southern Baptist Convention is incomplete without its sisters from the various races and ethnic groups that comprise Baptists. This article attempts to offer a beginning place to bring some completion by sharing some of the history and work by Latina Baptist women. My hopes for this article are: first, that it encourages Latina Baptist women to share their stories and complete what this article is beginning; second, that it encourages the stories from Asian, Native American, African American and other ethnic women with roots in the Southern Baptist denomination; and third, that the work of collecting these stores be done collaboratively with our Caucasian sisters so that we do not lost sight of how we influence each other’s self-understanding and place in ministry. Working together, Baptist women in ministry have the opportunity to nurture the vision of the Baptist women’s movement of the 1970s-80s—the vision for transformation of the patriarchal religious and economic institutions.

The history of Baptist women in ministry with roots in or connections with the Southern Baptist Convention is incomplete without telling the stories of its sisters from the various races and ethnic groups. This article offers a beginning place in sharing some of the history of Latina Baptist women. The

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* Isabel N. Docampo is Professor of Supervised Ministry at Perkins School of Theology of Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.
The article hopefully will encourage Latina Baptist women to share their stories and complete what this article is beginning and will also encourage the telling of stories by Asian, Native American, African American, and other ethnic women with roots in the Southern Baptist denomination. This work of collecting stories needs to be done collaboratively with our Caucasian sisters so that we do not lose sight of how we influence each other’s self-understanding and place in ministry. Working together, Baptist women in ministry have the opportunity together to nurture a new vision for the transformation of patriarchal religious and economic institutions.

This article is limited in its scope and will focus on a brief history of the Latina grandmothers and mothers in the United States who fought for a rightful place in ministry. Their legacy, I believe, is why it was possible for me, and Latinas like me, to seek theological education and to be ordained as Baptist clergy. This article offers my own perspective as an invitation for more conversation. I share my story as one of the first United States Latina Baptist women to be ordained in the 1980s in the hopes that Latina Baptists also ordained in this time frame may self-identify and provide needed correction to our shared story.

My attempt to write the story of Latina Baptists has revealed the importance of digging deeper to recover the rich history of Latina Baptist women and their perseverance for a legitimate role in Christian ministry, and my research has also revealed the need for collecting up-to-date data on ordained Latina women in ministry and seminary graduates. This small project also highlights the diversity among Latina Baptist women in ministry, some who identify as feminists and some who do not. We are diverse theologically as we are in racial and ethnic identities. We are from Cuba, Mexico, and Central and South America. We are Mexican American. We are also diverse in how and with whom we share our ministerial gifts. Some of us remain in the Latino community; others minister within the broader United States community. Still others minister in both the Latino and broader
Texas (1881) and Florida (1884) were the first states in which Southern Baptists established ministries with and for Latinos and in which our first women leaders emerged. Not until 1920 did the Baptists reach out to Latinos/as in New Mexico. In 1940, Baptists developed Latino/a ministries in Arizona and in 1948 in California.

In Texas, the Mexican Baptist Convention was formed in 1910, and in 1917, the Woman’s Missionary Union called La Union Femenil Misionera (UFM) de Tejas was organized. Since its inception, the Texas mujeres (women) hoped for a missions magazine in Spanish that would be similar to the WMU’s English language Royal Service, but the lack of funds made such a magazine impossible. The Union Femenil Misionera de Cuba (UFM), which was organized in the late 1880s as an auxiliary to the Western Cuban Baptist Convention, assisted the mujeres in their dream, however. The Cuban women called their magazine Nosotras (“We” in the feminine form). It is not clear how many years the Cuban UFM sent their magazine to the Texan women, but apparently this relationship was ongoing. This early exchange began the influence of Latinas abroad on the Latinas in the United States and...
initiated the solidarity of these two groups in their struggle to find a place for women to engage in ministry.

In late 1954, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board allocated funds for a Spanish language version of the WMU’s magazine, *Royal Service.* The funds, however, were insufficient. The Texas women responded by ingeniously developing an affordable, grassroots format and product that met the needs of their Latina audiences and their Texan congregations. Adelina V. de García, longtime Texas church leader, led in the production of a new magazine, *Nuestra Tarea (Our Work)*, that, instead of merely offering a translation of the English language magazine, was written for and about Latina Baptists. The cover story of the first issue in February 1955 highlighted the Baptist work in Cuba and was produced in appreciation of their sisters in Cuba. The creativity and contributions of *Nuestra Tarea* carved out a place for Latina Baptists’ leadership within the WMU. The early visionary women responsible for the magazine and the women who followed them led the way in a collaboration between Caucasian and Latina Baptists to empower women to respond to a calling to Christian vocation, particularly in congregational mission work. Among those influential women were Adelina V. de García, Noemi Cuevas, Betty D. Mojica, Esther B. Moye, Esperanza V. de Ramirez, Gladys Caballero, Olga Nybert, Helen Stuart, Dolores Jones, and Martha Thomas Ellis (the first editor of *Nuestra Tarea*).

By 1980, as the magazine celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, the *Unión Feminil Misionera* was a vibrant department of the larger WMU and had a strong leadership development program for Latina women from all over the United States and Puerto Rico. At the helm of the department was Doris Diaz, a Guatemalan native, who organized annual UFM national workshops in Spanish at the Ridgecrest and Glorieta Baptist Conference Centers. These workshops brought women from all over the United States and Puerto Rico together to learn about missions, but more importantly, the experience contributed to their self-esteem as women leaders, enabled them to support each other, and provided training in leadership skills to be used in their congregations. The women were empowered as they became more effective
in their local congregations, raising funds and awareness for mission work. Diaz’s events offered women an opportunity to gain strength from each other and to believe that God had called them to be collaborators in spreading the good news of the gospel in their cities and abroad. In April 1980, Diaz convened eighty-five women of diverse ethnic groups—Romanian, Japanese, Chinese, Native American, Korean, Filipino, Polish, and Italian—for leadership training. Her vision was to bring all racial and ethnic groups together to share the good news of Christ. Many women, especially Latina women, grieved Diaz’s premature death due to cancer for she had been the model of an empowered woman called by God to use all of her gifts to spread the gospel.

By the 1970s, the UFM was proudly a women’s organization that developed female leadership through missions education in congregations. It also raised significant funding for the Southern Baptist Home and Foreign Mission Boards through the annual Annie Armstrong and Lottie Moon offerings.

**One Latina Baptist’s Journey**

*Primera Iglesia Bautista Hispano Americana* of New Orleans, Louisiana, was my childhood congregation. There I discerned a call to Christian vocation in 1978. The church was organized in the 1950s and was pastored by a Cuban-born minister, Donald Levy, during its formative early years through the mid-1960s. He and his wife, Lucretia, worked as a team. Donald Levy was educated at the Western Baptist Convention of Cuba’s seminary, which was a product of the Southern Baptist Convention’s mission efforts. When the couple arrived in New Orleans to serve *Primera*, Lucretia immediately formed a *Union Femenil Misionera* and thus brought her Cuban Baptist UFM culture to our small congregation. This women’s group developed long-time leaders who led and taught Sunday School and Training Union, who served on committees, and who were the heart of the church. Since most of the church’s male members were either merchant marines or day laborers in construction, the women members held together the various ministries on Sunday morning and during the week. Lucretia Levy’s legacy
to the church was her contributions to leadership development and Christian discipleship through the weekly UFM meetings, which were mostly populated by the young mothers in the congregation, many of whom were adjusting to life in a new country.

My mother, Alida Docampo, a Cuban native, came to faith through the work of this Latino/a congregation in the mid-1950s soon after she arrived in the United States. She was one of several women in our congregation who was influenced by Levy’s discipleship and introduction to the work of the Union Femenil Misionera. My mother served as the UFM director for many years. She and her peers kept the UFM’s work strong long after Levy’s death, and in the 1970s these women were loyal leadership trainees of the national Union Femenil Misionera under the direction of Doris Diaz. They faithfully saved their meager earnings to attend the annual summer conferences, at which they honed their leadership skills and embraced a passion for missions that they shared with the laywomen of our congregation.

Two other influential women in our congregation did not directly emerge from the UFM: Lydia Sanchez and Barbara Garcia. Sanchez, a Mexican American, was a lay music leader who worked with children, youth, and adults in our music ministry. Barbara Garcia was a United States Caucasian native who had served as a Southern Baptist missionary to Mexico and had married Samuel Garcia, the son of the Mexican American UFM leader, Adelina V. de Garcia. Barbara’s quiet leadership, her encouragement, and her willingness to stand alongside the women and men in our church made a profound impact.

These two women alongside the UFM trained laywomen taught Sunday School and Vacation Bible School, led home Bible studies, and served on evangelism committees. They described themselves as mujeres Cristianas empoderadas (empowered Christian women) who were called to spread the good news of Jesus. This good news of Jesus began to bring changes within the homes of our members as well as in our church as we moved from male-centered to shared leadership. I understand today how...
the witness of these women subverted the status quo and how their witness helped me to think critically about my own status.

These women leaders guided the congregation's youth program of which I was a part. The church's Latino/a culture expected young adults in their late teens and early twenty to join the adults in church ministries, and we did. Our bilingual and bicultural abilities were of great help to the church, and we became liaisons between the congregation and the local English-speaking denominational leaders. Our women church leaders taught us how to organize and plan. They instilled in us a passion for outreach beyond our doors and into the world. They told us missionaries' stories and taught us that social ministries are intrinsic to the sharing of the gospel. The women's leadership in our small congregation made a powerful impression on us and helped us understand that God may be calling us, both girls as well as boys, into Christian vocation. That knowledge empowered me to believe that there were no gender limits with regard to the Christian vocation I could pursue under the eyes of God.

In the late 1970s, three young adults in our congregation articulated a call to Christian vocation—two young women and one young man. I was one of those young adults. We all attended seminary and were subsequently ordained. The church ordained the other young woman, Ileana Gutierrez, and called her as the minister of education. The young man, my brother Eduardo Docampo, ordained in Fort Worth, Texas, served as the pastor of Spanish language congregations and eventually as a strategy coordinator of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board in Atlanta, Georgia. He received his Doctor of Ministry degree from Golden Gate Theological Seminary. I attended The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1979-1982) and was the only Latina enrolled in the Master of Divinity program. There I met the first Native American woman student at Southern, the late Konawv Holloway. She was enrolled in the Master of Religious Education program. I was ordained in Baton Rouge, Louisiana in 1985 at Broadmoor Baptist Church.

In the early 1980s, Primera called a Puerto Rican-born pastor, Eliud Camacho, who was supportive of women in ordained ministry. Under his leadership, the church ordained its first woman deacon. My mother, Alida Docampo, was that woman deacon. Her deacon ordination took place in
1981, and Camacho invited me, a seminarian, to preach the ordination sermon. The influence of the Latina women in Texas and Cuba was clearly evident in my congregation during my childhood and early adulthood. The interrelationship between United States Caucasian Baptist women and Latina Baptists in the United States and from the Caribbean and Central and South America is also evident in this story.

The Influence of the Socio-Economic-Political-Religious Context

Telling the story of Latina Baptists without contextualizing it within the larger story of the social, economic, and political forces that were sweeping the United States is impossible. The 1960s and 1970s were decades in which the nation was wrestling with justice issues regarding African Americans, Native Americans, Chicanos, and women. As the socio-political landscape transformed to make room for the disenfranchised, these same minorities within mainline denominations gained momentum in their struggle for equal status. Caribbean and Central and South Americans were also examining their socio-political-religious relationship with the disenfranchised and resisting the legacy of United States colonization. African Americans, Native Americans, Chicanos, and women began to articulate and publish their liberation theories. Black liberation theology and Christian feminist scholarship and practice were emerging.

The larger society’s public conversation about the rights and contributions of minorities led denominations, including the Southern Baptist Convention, to examine their relationships with minority congregations and their approach to mission work in Latin America. The women and men in our small congregation in New Orleans who were shifting into mutual relationships of power were no doubt influenced by these shifts. Nevertheless, my Latino/a congregation did not completely alter its theology or God-talk. Instead, the congregation maintained an androcentric approach even as it began to question the merits of patriarchy in its practices. It did not have leadership to help the community integrate its practices through the emerging lens of Christian feminism or liberation theology.

It did, however, faithfully seek to discern God’s revelation in scripture to the best of their collective abilities in light of what God was revealing and doing among them at the time.
was revealing and doing among them at the time. From my perspective, this deficit in leadership resulted in the church being unable to change its androcentric God-talk. Consequently, when subsequent leaders used God-talk to reinforce pastoral authority, that language was exclusively male and hierarchical.

As a young woman in her teens and early twenties, the socio-political-religious events and conversations did have an important effect on me. Those events validated how I analyzed patriarchal values working against the liberating good news message of Jesus and how I critically analyzed the androcentric, hierarchical pastoral authority of church leaders. In 1979 I brought these questions and critiques with me as I enrolled at Southern Seminary, where I met women such as Lynda Weaver-Williams and Molly Marshall-Green, both Ph.D. candidates who modeled and taught an understanding of the good news of liberation and freedom that validated the nascent critiques of my patriarchal religious roots. I was introduced to feminist theology through the seminary’s guest lecturer, Letty Russell, and in my systematic theology course. Following seminary, I was encouraged in my ministry calling by Nancy Hasting Sehested’s witness and ministry and by the Caucasian women with whom I served on the Southern Baptist Women in Ministry (SBWIM) Steering Committee during the mid-1980s. One of my important mentors in those years of difficult transition was Anne Thomas Neil, a Baptist trailblazer for women in the mission field. I met Neil while serving on the SBWIM steering committee. These and subsequent connections with the women and men in organizations such as The Southern Baptist Alliance (now the Alliance of Baptists), the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, and the Judson Baptist Association allowed me to understand better the quiet, subversive power of the women leaders from my childhood. I distilled from these encounters and experiences a ministry praxis and God-talk that made sense for me, a bi-cultural Latina Baptist feminist.

Parallel Stories

At the same time that I was in transition, Cuban and Nicaraguan Baptist women were having a parallel experience with Latinas and non-Latina
Baptists in the United States. In the early 1990s, Baptists in both countries ordained women to the gospel ministry and called them as pastors of their congregations. The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America supported and stood in solidarity with the Nicaraguan Baptist Convention and La Fraternidad de Bautistas de Cuba when they took this step. In Cuba, the ordination of three women occurred after a group of progressive congregations split away from the dominant Baptist denomination and formed la Fraternidad de Bautistas. A few years later Second Baptist Church of Santiago de Cuba, affiliated with the Eastern Baptist Convention of Cuba, ordained Gisela Muñoz. La Fraternidad, a member of the Alliance of Baptists, today has many women who are seminary trained and ordained pastors leading congregations.  

**Baptist Latinas Today: a Diverse Group**

Ordained Baptist Latinas in the United States today remain a powerful leadership force in Latina and non-Latina congregations and organizations. Research is needed to track and record their presence in our society and the impact they have had on the greater Baptist women in ministry efforts. Through my Baptist networks, I have met Latina women of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. Now retired, Sarah Frances Anders, a sociology professor at Louisiana College, demonstrated the importance of collecting and maintaining data of all ordained Baptist women in ministry, lest that information is lost to history and we lose our legacy. Without thorough research, the task of naming ordained Latina Baptists and seminary-trained women is extremely difficult.

Within my own networks, I am aware of the following ordained Latina Baptists. Ruth Cuellar, a Cuban native, is a pastor of a Latino/a congregation in Newnan, Georgia; Bicri Hernandez de Singh, a Mexican native, is a CPE supervisor in Texas; Cristina Garcia-Alfonso, a Cuban native, earned her Ph.D. in Old Testament and serves as a hospice chaplain and hopes for a future teaching position; Ana Karim, Cuban-American, serves as coordinator for the summer intern program of the Alliance of Baptists; Ileana Gutierrez, Cuban native and minister of education; and me, a Cuban-American, who is a theological field educator at a Perkins School of Theology with a Doctor of Ministry degree.

Many Latina Baptists are not ordained but are also engaged in significant ministry. One is Nancy Bedford, a U.S. citizen by birth, but Argentinian in culture since she was raised in Argentina as a daughter of Southern Baptist
missionaries. She holds a Ph.D. in Theological Studies and is the Georgia Harkness Professor of Applied Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Chicago. Nora Lozano, a Mexico-native, teaches at the Baptist University of the Américas in San Antonio, Texas, where she co-directs the Latina Leadership Institute. She has a Ph.D. in Religious and Theological Studies. Maziel Barreto Dani of Puerto Rico heritage is a Ph.D. candidate and was ordained in 2011 by First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City.

Latina Baptists who are seminary trained sometimes choose non-church vocations, while others redirect their vocation into non-profit agencies because they are stymied by the machista/patriarchy practices that grip many Latino/a congregations in the United States. Some Latina Baptist have experienced the exclusionary practices of racism found in some moderate Baptist institutions that have not explored the difference between the number of minorities hired and transformation of practices that comes from mutual sharing of perspectives and gifts.

Research is needed to know more about Latina Baptists in ministry: How many are ordained? How many are seminary trained? What are their racial/ethnic backgrounds? Where do they serve? How do they self-identify? How do they move in and out of the larger society? What contributions do they make? How are they influenced by the socio-political-religious climate of the United States and their native countries? How are their stories interrelated to their non-Latina Baptist sisters in ministry?

**Baptist Women in Ministry Identities and our Sister Connections**

Recovering and maintaining our stories separately as Latina, Caucasian, Native American, and Asian Baptist women endangers any transformation of the institutions that have kept women marginalized. We must recover our connections to each other in order to understand how our identity as a whole emerges from our separate identities and to learn how these two are always evolving in relationship to each other. Critical analysis of the history of sisterly collaboration is needed, and this history cannot be separated from Southern
Baptist missionary movements that were part of the United States global colonization, which often limited indigenous expressions of the Christian faith. For those of us with heritage from colonized countries, we must ask ourselves how we have integrated a colonized self-portrait and faith expression. This critical analysis will form the basis by which we might pursue together the important questions to help us remove our blind spots of how hierarchical power structures, racism, and classism still lay claim to our relationships. Without this important work, I believe we will be unable to critique the continued power of patriarchal and androcentric God-talk (theology) that exists within even our theologically moderate Baptist institutions and that holds us captive. As Baptist women we have the opportunity to bring forth new God-talk. Our God-talk must strive to be life giving, rooted in Divine love as power, and found within non-exclusionary mutual relationships.

Some resources that will help us in this conversation are the theological works of Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, Maria Pilar Aquino, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Mayra Rivera. Also important is the work of Daisy Machado and Jeannette Rodriguez. These and other theologians have articulated what my ministry praxis has taught me: the importance of God-talk and understanding our identities cannot be suppressed by a quest for an elusive unity, which has too often meant the suppression of the other in favor of the dominant group even with the best of intentions. This suppression keeps intact the very power structures we hope to dismantle. Conversations about our sister connections at this deeper level will help us engage in God-talk that focuses on mutual relationships of loving justice that is the plumb line by which we may self-critique our own collusion with religion and social and political institutions to maintain a status quo that imprisons so many instead of bringing Jesus’ good news of liberation.

Research and Conversations

My hope is that research concerning ordained Baptist Latinas attains the following goals. First, the research should be performed collaboratively with non-Latina Baptists women in ministry. As I stated above, God-talk and identity is essential to how we understand God and enter into mutual relationships. Working collaboratively will allow us to tell each other our stories and also foster conversation of how stories are interrelated. It will help us understand how we share the same socio-political-economic space and also how our respective God-talk and practices make a profound impact on each other’s daily life and identities. The Alliance of Baptists has formed
a community called Equity for Women in the Church, spearheaded by Sheila Sholes-Ross and Jann Aldredge-Clanton, that holds promise for bringing Baptist women in ministry across ethnic/racial groups and may foster the start of this type of conversation.\footnote{1}

Second, we invite all ordained and seminary trained Baptist women in ministry to integrate their God-talk in light of their experiences and praxis, which will allow us to see our blind spots and understand where we have colluded with oppressive practices and beliefs. We will then be able to open ourselves up truly to understand God’s vision of transformation for humanity. As an ordained Latina Baptist feminist, I have identified my Christian vocation in the liberating work of Jesus (Luke 4:18-19) and the love of neighbor (Matthew 22:37-40). Integrating how our God-talk either liberates or maintains androcentric religion in place is the first step toward understanding how the grace of God might call us to a new vision. Without such self-critical conversation, the mere celebration of the presence of more women in ministry at the table alongside men will risk the reinforcement of social, economic, and religious institutions that hold men and women captive—mostly women—and keep the marginalized and poor without hope for the future.


\footnote{2} Ibid.

\footnote{3} Ibid., 18.

\footnote{4} Ibid., 20.

\footnote{5} Alida Tersy Docampo, interviews with author, June and July, 2012.

\footnote{6} Ken Sehested, executive director of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America during the time of the ordinations, verified this information. Also, I have met pastors of La
Fraternidad de Cuba at Alliance of Baptist and Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America meetings where they have spoken of their denomination’s history and vision.


11 I attended the Equity for Women in the Church community meeting at the April 2012 Alliance of Baptists Convocation in Austin, Texas.
“In My Mother’s House”: A Glimpse of Baptist Women in Ministry on its Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

By Elizabeth Flowers*

ABSTRACT

During the early years of the Southern Baptist controversy, a national organization for women ministers was founded that would come to be called Baptist Women in Ministry (BWIM). In 2008, the organization observed its twenty-fifth anniversary by hosting a dinner and celebration. The focus of this article is on the BWIM and its role within the Southern Baptist controversy and its struggles during the early years after the formation of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The article traces BWIM’s journey through the lean years of the 1990s when the budget allowed for little more than a newsletter and an annual worship service to the floundering years of the early twenty-first century, when BWIM had meager monetary resources and a skeletal structure. By 2003, a vote was taken to see if anyone was even interested in keeping the organization running. The result was a surprising and resounding yes.

The article concludes with a recounting of the anniversary celebration. By its twenty-fifth year, BWIM had a new generation of leaders—young female seminarians and pastors who had picked up the dream, revived BWIM, and breathed new life into the organization. At the 2008 Cooperative Baptist Fellowship assembly, the energy of BWIM and its women was palpable—and quite different from previous assemblies. The organization’s “This Is What a Preacher Looks Like” T-shirts were everywhere and sold quickly. Women participated equally in the assembly worship—preaching, serving communion, commissioning missionaries, and reading from scripture. BWIM’s sessions were standing room only.

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Founded in the early years of the Southern Baptist controversy, Baptist Women in Ministry (BWIM) observed its twenty-fifth anniversary in 2008. On June 18, the night prior to the beginning of the General Assembly of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF), 160 women and a scattering of men gathered at the Memphis Southern History and Heritage Center to celebrate. Sitting around large circular tables, they feasted on a home-style fried chicken dinner. It was Wednesday evening, the traditional time for Southern Baptist prayer meeting and supper, but on this occasion women were front and center. Recognizing key BWIM founders was its coordinator LeAnn Gunter Johns, a young graduate from Mercer University’s McAfee School of Theology and associate pastor at Peachtree Baptist Church in Atlanta. “We remember and celebrate these women who were, and who are, Baptist pioneers in the cause of women in ministry,” she said in a clear ringing voice. “They paved the way for our own ministries.” Johns also unveiled BWIM’s special anniversary T-shirt. Women cheered when she held one up to reveal the slogan, “This Is What a Preacher Looks Like.”

Guitarist and folksinger Kate Campbell supplied the entertainment. Between ballads, she shared her own story of being reared in a conservative Southern Baptist family in Sledge, Mississippi, and Nashville, Tennessee, where her father had served pastorates. A middle-aged blond dressed casually in jeans, Campbell was clearly one with the BWIM women. They roared with laughter when she sang her tribute to that longtime Southern Baptist custom of “Funeral Food.” They clapped and hummed along as she celebrated the church women of her childhood and youth. They nodded in understanding when she recounted the confusion, disjuncture, and sorrow she felt upon realizing she had moved outside the theological and cultural worldview of her parents. And they wept when she sang “In My Mother’s House.” When she finished singing the final stanza—“In my wandering/I have found/There is/ A wideness in mercy/ And there’ll always be/ A place for me/ In my mother’s house”—there was a silence at my table, interrupted only by the sound of gentle crying.

Interestingly, in my field notes for the anniversary celebration, I wrote “In My Father’s World” rather than “In My Mother’s House.” I made the notes during the event. Yet even as I reread them that same evening, I doubted
my memory and put a question mark to the side. When I contacted others who had attended the event to see if Campbell might have included “This is My Father’s World,” they suggested that I had confused it for “In My Mother’s House.” Quickly scanning the lyrics online, I realized my mistake.

Mine was a rather telling slip. Having grown up Southern Baptist and spent the past few years researching the debate over women’s roles during the controversy, I well knew that these women had experienced the old SBC as a world ruled by men. No matter how active their mothers had been in their congregations, in running their households, and in nurturing and giving both realms vibrancy and color, it still had been a very patriarchal world.

The women at BWIM’s anniversary that night had rejected and violated its patriarchal dictates. Indeed, many BWIM women carried the scars of the previous decades along with the pain of leaving Southern Baptist life. At the same time, they could never fully leave, even if the returning only existed in their hearts and minds. Each was, in her own way, and as Campbell sang, a “prodigal daughter.” The story of the prodigal son has been told and retold, while that of the daughter has not. Unlike the son in the biblical story, these daughters attained their prodigal status by following a call from God.

I had attended the anniversary dinner and assembly as field-based research for the epilogue of my book, a history of Southern Baptist women and power since World War II. While the final chapters ended with the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, the history struck me as incomplete, and I remained curious about women in more recent Baptist life. As for moderates, had the older generation really escaped the proscriptions of the SBC? What about those of the younger generation? Did they, too, feel like prodigal daughters? To what extent was it still their “father’s world” and “mother’s house”?

This article presents some of my findings regarding moderate Baptist women pursuing ordained ministry, particularly a call to the pulpit. I attempt to capture the messiness of their journeys as they described them: ones characterized by faltering progress and consistent, sometimes insurmountable, challenges. Yet in the end, it is these women, I argue, who pose the most significant challenge to the future of moderate life. I also suggest
that if moderate Baptists see gendered understandings of women as key to and integral to the Southern Baptist controversy—rather than a sideline issue or consequence of the debate over inerrancy—then they might avoid a repetition of the past. Highlighting the stories of these prodigal daughters might also shift moderates’ sense of their past and certainly their grasp of the present. Obviously, the wealth of material here is staggering. To economize this material, I will use BWIM’s twenty-fifth anniversary together with the 2008 CBF General Assembly as a focus.4

Is This Really What a Baptist Preacher Looks Like? Faltering Progress

During the 2008 assembly, BWIM sponsored two sessions on the topic of women in ministry. One involved the recently-published State of Women in Baptist Life report, which served as a twenty-five year retrospective, and the other included a panel of women ministers intended to encourage congregations in considering a woman pastor. At both sessions, the same elderly male pastor from South Carolina recounted the story of a college-age woman who had visited his office to discuss her call to seminary and ordained ministry. His advice was for her to examine her sense of call and, if fully convicted, to join another denomination. “Did I give her the wrong response?” he honestly asked. Many of those present recoiled. Some expressed anger over his advice. “Why not affirmation,” one cried. In self-defense, he pointed to the State of Women report and wondered if, thinking of her vocational well-being, he really could have told her anything else.5

Some women agreed that he was correct on at least one count. Her current odds of finding a Baptist pastorate, even among moderates, were slim. According to the status report presented, women served as senior pastor or co-pastor in only 5.9% of CBF-related churches, 113 of its 1,900 affiliated congregations. As expected, the Alliance of Baptists, the much smaller organization of more progressive or liberal Baptists, scored higher, with 24%, or 30 of its 123 affiliates. Interestingly, those state conventions that had not been taken over by Southern Baptist conservatives, and thus perceived as moderate-controlled, performed lowest, with the Baptist General Convention
of Texas reporting only .196%, and the Baptist General Association of Virginia standing at 1.3%. In the words of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s Al Mohler, moderate support of women in ministry was “hypothetical” and “symbolic,” a “theological trajectory rather than genuine openness.” After reviewing the statistics from the previous 2005 *State of Women* report, he concluded that “moderates, while registering strong opposition to the 2000 revision of the *Baptist Faith and Message*, and while offering strong words of encouragement to women seeking to serve in the pastorate, appear to be extremely reluctant to call women to serve in these positions.”

The percentage of women serving as senior minister or co-pastor remained well out of proportion with the demographics of the fourteen CBF-partner seminaries, divinity schools, and Baptist studies programs, whose female students ranged from 23% to 53% of the student population, with eight schools reporting close to or more than 40% for a numerical total of 825. Moreover, since 2000, an average of sixty-four women in CBF and Alliance-related churches have been ordained per year. At the time of the anniversary celebration, that would mean approximately 480 women ordained in less than a decade, not accounting for those ordained from the 1960s onward. Considering the few churches actually calling women to pastor or co-pastor, where would they serve? The 2005 *State of Women* report did indicate that far more moderate churches were inviting ordained women to serve in other traditionally male staff positions, such as associate pastor or Christian education minister, although they did not have any exact numbers. Furthermore, women serving in paid church roles traditionally filled by females, such as children’s director, were more likely to be ordained, represented on church staffs, and recognized by the title “minister.”

Still, many moderate women questioned whether the latter really counted as progress and wondered if it were more a superficial gesture of support for women in ministry rather than any substantive conviction for change. Moreover, when recounting their seminary experience, many female seminarians sounded frustrated. Women’s studies scholar Susan Shaw, also
an ordained Baptist pastor and graduate of Southern Seminary, interviewed a group of female students at Truett School of Theology at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Truett was founded in 1994 as an alternative to the conservative-controlled Southwestern and by 2005, the year of Shaw’s interview, it had 385 students. Of these, 32%, or 125, were women. Women found Truett’s vocal commitment to women in ministry troubling when measured against the reality of their experience. The school, said LeAnne Gardner, “may pat women on the back and offer affirmation” but nevertheless “doesn’t actively encourage churches to call these women as pastors.” It was, she said, “like there’s one step missing; there is a lot of lip service, and it’s not taken one step further.” When Melissa Browning complained that she was never called from Truett’s pulpit supply list, the staff told her that “a lot of churches don’t want a woman.” Browning immediately asked, “Well, do you try to persuade them?” Additionally, despite the rising numbers of women in moderate seminaries as well as doctoral programs in theology and church history, only 22% of faculty at the ten CBF seminaries and divinity schools, which would exclude Baptist studies programs at other denominational seminaries, were female. Almost half of ninety-six women faculty members teaching Baptists students at the fourteen CBF partner institutions were at the adjunct, visiting, or instructor level. Gender equity was clearly lacking.

As I discovered during my own research, frustration abounded when newly minted women seminarians failed to find positions in moderate Baptist churches, and this frustration often increased over time, particularly for those who felt called to preach. As several women indicated, even those churches advertising for senior pastors with gender neutral language or alternated feminine and masculine pronouns often asked for extensive preaching experience. These women quickly pointed out that real-life preaching experience was one qualification they lacked. They expressed the difficulty of honing their preaching skills when so few pulpits welcomed them week-in and week-out. While there existed occasions to
preach, said one, homiletics was an art that needed consistent application and practice. It might be weeks, even months, between preaching opportunities. Furthermore, churches that might express openness to a woman as senior pastor often required that applicants have previously served in the role. Few women, even among the most gifted preachers, could make that claim.

These frustrations paralleled those of the founders, leaders, and participants in BWIM during its early years. Many, as I knew from my contacts and interviews, had already taken the elderly South Carolina’s pastor’s advice and joined other denominations. Indicative of this flight, few pioneers from the early to mid-1980s attended BWIM’s twenty-fifth anniversary dinner. There were the natural attritions of age and death. Anne Neil, for instance, who had served as BWIM’s first president, was past travel at age eighty-eight. But years of struggle had also taken their toll. These women had, at first, felt that the controversy might be the impetus needed for moderates to push wide-open the door to women. Instead, they found the door only slightly ajar. Several indicated that the disappointments they experienced in moderate life far exceeded those in the SBC, as they had hoped for more than the moderates were either willing or able to give. Lynda Weaver-Williams, one of the earliest ordained Southern Baptist women and member of the first BWIM steering committee, referred to the moderate leadership of the 1980s as “the Lukewarm.” Additionaly, the relationship between BWIM and CBF during the 1990s remained quite rocky, with BWIM existing on a budget that allowed little more than a newsletter and annual worship service. As Karrie Oertli, an ordained Oklahoma woman and BWIM board member during this period, put it: “I felt as though it was the responsibility of us women to make a place for ourselves [in the CBF]. At times that seemed a lot like having to conform to the decisions already made . . . or be thought of as those ‘pushy broads’ who would never be satisfied.”

In informal conversations, the women of BWIM laughingly referred to themselves collectively during this period as the CBF’s red-headed stepsister, but the pain behind the nickname was clearly evident. Where, they asked, was this “new thing” that the CBF had promised?

Marilyn Mayse, one of BWIM’s founders and early participants, later celebrated having left moderate Baptist life for Episcopal ordination. “I have been privileged to minister rather than to fight for the privilege of
ministering.” Quite a few of her BWIM colleagues, she said, had likewise moved to minister in other denominations. Looking at the moderate landscape in 2006, she mourned that “so few” of those women who stayed “have been able to claim full visibility at the front of the church.”

Indeed, the BWIM T-shirts were so effective because Baptist preachers still looked like men.

This IS What a Preacher Looks Like: Progress, Nevertheless

On the one hand, then, for many women, progress was torpid. But there were still women who emphasized that signs of progress, faltering as they were, kept them committed to the “Baptist” in Baptist Women in Ministry. Over the course of my research, these signs became more readily apparent. In 2000, when I began outlining a book on the topic of women in Southern Baptist life, BWIM was floundering, with meager monetary resources and a skeletal structure, administratively or institutionally-speaking. This same year, the SBC charged the CBF with endorsing homosexuality by highlighting its financial contribution to BWIM and the openly tolerant rhetoric of certain BWIM leaders. CBF’s immediate condemnation of the practice felt like a blow to BWIM leaders, who had refused comment on the matter and felt pushed even further to the margins. In 2001, when reviewing the CBF’s first decade, Cecil Sherman, the CBF’s first coordinator, was blunt on the matter of BWIM if not irritated by its women’s demands: “A minority has tried and continues to try to co-opt CBF. They want CBF to carry the flag for their cause. An illustration: To some extent CBF has become the voice for Women in Ministry. This has been done willingly, but leaving congregations free and serving the Women in Ministry agenda has created problems.” He concluded with the telling observation: “Some of the strongest, longest support for the CBF comes from West Texas. They are not too keen on women in church leadership.”

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In 2003, those involved with BWIM voted on whether to keep the organization running. The result was a surprising, at least to me, yet resounding yes. By 2008, when I attended the anniversary dinner, a new generation of young female seminarians and pastors had picked up the dream, revived BWIM, and breathed new life into the organization. Many of
these younger women had not lived through the battles, but they had grown up hearing the tales. The mythic accounts of forbearers like Anne Neil, Molly Marshall, and Nancy Sehested, coupled with the reality of State of Women reports, had given these women enough righteous indignation to press on. Always mingled with the war stories were those tales of intense joy in ministry and in finding one another’s support. At the 2008 CBF assembly, the energy of BWIM and its women was palpable—and quite different from previous assemblies I had attended, where BWIM worked from the sidelines. “This Is What a Preacher Looks Like” T-shirts were everywhere and sold quickly. Moreover, the women participated equally in the assembly worship—preaching, serving communion, commissioning missionaries, and reading from scripture. BWIM’s sessions were standing room only. Coordinator LeAnn Gunter Johns awarded a freshly minted M.Div. graduate, Bailey Edwards Nelson, with BWIM’s Addie Davis Award in preaching and announced the results of the first Martha Stearns Marshall Day of Preaching, a newly established tradition in which BWIM designated a day for moderate churches to invite a woman to preach from the pulpit.

Bolstered by such enthusiasm, the CBF had even added to its identity, mission, vision, and core values a set of strategic priorities that included “honoring race, gender, and generations.” Under this initiative, it pledged to “heighten understanding of women in leadership.” It elected an ordained woman pastor as moderator, promoted a woman as missions coordinator, and continued its financial support of BWIM.

If some women called the CBF’s moves “knee-jerk reactions,” others acknowledged that the CBF could move only so fast as it attempted to grow its numbers and meet its budget. In light of these concerns, maintaining the center had to be a priority. Nevertheless, that center “had come a long way.” Historians have noted that new practices must gain a certain degree of cultural acceptance as ideas before they become concrete realities. The question hanging in the air for moderates, or perhaps even the elephant in the room that the South Carolina preacher dared express, was: How long would women wait until their everyday reality changed? It was one thing to have women in positions of leadership in worship at the CBF’s annual assembly and even in its organizational structure, but it was quite another to have moderate churches call women regularly...
and in equal numbers to their pulpits. How long would this new generation wait?

Conclusion: A New Challenge to Moderate Baptists

One advantage of this new generation has been the legacy of BWIM. In 2009, the newly reorganized women’s group appointed a full-time executive director, Pamela R. Durso. Durso was described by her friends and peers as a quiet personality, good listener, able administrator, and one who had an eagerness and passion to shine the spotlight on women ministers. She had attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and received her doctorate in church history from Baylor University. Although not ordained, she had taught, researched, and written extensively on Baptist women, highlighting their ministries. As executive director, she worked to reinvigorate the twenty-five-year-old organization. She also recognized, as co-author of the *State of Women* reports, that while doors were opening, the statistics for women in ministry had not progressed significantly over the life of BWIM. Speaking at a gathering of moderate leaders, she addressed the challenge of that South Carolina pastor: “What do we say to our Baptist daughters who feel called and who are gifted to serve as pastor?” Durso gave two options. The first, she said, “is that we tell young women to stop waiting for existing churches to change. We encourage them to move outside the traditional framework for their future in ministry. In essence, we advise them to give up on looking for open pulpits and existing churches that will embrace their gifts. And instead, we call out young women to plant new churches, churches which from their very foundation will be inclusive of women, affirming of their gifts.” The second option, she continued, “is to challenge our young women to stay in their churches, to be proactive and make change happen, to be reformers, revolutionaries. We advise our daughters to work from within our existing churches but to be vocal and strong in their call for change.”

This second option seems much like the age-old tactic of waiting, a tactic that had not taken Baptist women very far. In my own work, I tie the tactic of waiting to the tendency to think of gender as a side issue to inerrancy, or even as a consequence of supposedly larger biblical and theological issues. This interpretation necessitates addressing those latter issues first, with the assumption that the debate over women would then solve itself. It also affirms moderates’ tendency to compromise and accommodate the center. Durso’s first option, however, forced the challenge back to moderates themselves,
and Durso asked the CBF leadership to put finances and training behind it. To what extent they will prove willing to go this route remains to be seen.

If they do follow this path, the greatest challenge to moderates in including women's voices as equals in every aspect of ecclesial life, particularly the pulpit, will not be a balancing of numbers and statistics. Inviting women into the pulpit, as well as other positions of leadership and power, means being open to different experiences, theologies, and expressions of faith. Some women in BWIM, for instance, have questioned that prized moderate tenet of local autonomy as a convenient form of avoiding the tensions over women's ordination. Even more have tended to prioritize difference and dissent at the cost of compromise and unity. During the debate over homosexuality in the CBF, women, according to insider accounts, were more likely to protest any policy of condemnation, and certainly more women spoke from the floor against the CBF's policy statement excluding homosexuals from paid staff positions and missionary appointments. Finally, in actively constructing a Baptist theology of women in ministry, many of those speaking and writing for BWIM have elevated the golden age of Baptists, and particularly Baptists in the South, not as the SBC's staggering post-World War II success, when it became the largest Protestant denomination in the US and achieved a vast missions empire abroad. Instead, they reached back much earlier to frontier Baptists as that small struggling band who existed for the marginalized and oppressed. 21

Likewise, Baptist women called to the pulpit have themselves ministered at the margins of Baptist life, their voices unheard by the majority of Baptists. Listening to the stories of these faith-filled and feisty prodigal daughters might change moderates' sense of Baptist history, force them to address long ignored underlying tensions, open conversations regarding Baptist identity, and signal to wider American culture a "new thing."

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Field notes, Baptist Women in Ministry dinner, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, auxiliary event, Memphis, Tenn., June, 18, 2008.


Prior to the 1960s, many evangelical groups and denominations regularly opened their pulpits to women and willingly ordained them on the basis of God’s call. After the 1960s and early 1970s, however, women’s ordination was interpreted through the lens of feminism and seen to represent a bid toward gender equality. Critics often associated women’s ordination with more confrontational, even radical, versions of feminism, which was certainly how Southern Baptist conservatives essentialized the movement. See Flowers, 42-49.

In considering moderate life, I look to the CBF rather than the Alliance of Baptists, as the CBF is not only much larger in size, with 1,800 affiliated churches in 2010, but more geographically representative. In contrast, the Alliance, with 131 churches, exists primarily in the Eastern and Mid-Atlantic states. The Alliance has also tended to be more comfortable with the characterization of itself and its congregations as progressive or liberal rather than moderate. Finally, the women associated with BWIM have depended more heavily on the CBF and CBF-affiliated churches as their primary means of support among moderates.

Field notes, Baptist Women in Ministry sessions, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, Memphis, Tenn., June 19-20, 2008.


Durso and Shorner-Johnson, 7.

Campbell-Reed and Durso, *State of Women*, 2005, 3-4. Numbers are difficult to obtain because the SBC, the CBF, and the Alliance do not keep exact statistics on church staff.
members. Of the 307 women who responded to Campbell-Reed’s and Durso’s informal survey on ministerial positions other than church pastor, 31% served as children’s minister, 16% as music minister, another 16% as youth minister, 11% as associate pastor, 9% as education minister, 4% as missions minister, 3% as senior adult minister, and the remaining 10% were such things as minister of congregational care, congregational health, counseling, family life, and spiritual formation. The three other State of Women reports do have comparable statistics here.

11 In writing Into the Pulpit, I drew on both field-based and textual research. My fieldwork concentrated on conservative and moderate Southern Baptist women’s groups and organizations, including BWIM. More specifically, from 2004 to 2008, I attended nine women’s conferences and retreats, half a dozen national meetings, dinners, and gatherings, and participated in the local manifestations of these organizations. I visited and participated in various church Bible studies, luncheons, presentations, and programs. I also went to one Southern Baptist convention meeting and three Cooperate Baptist Fellowship assembly meetings as representative of conservative and moderate life. During this period, I engaged in hundreds of conversations, primarily with women, conducted twenty-three interviews as well as numerous informal and unstructured interviews, took copious field notes, and collected surveys. Besides my interviews with thirteen BWIM leaders and pioneers, I attended the BWIM board meeting, Baptist Church of the Covenant, Birmingham, Ala., June 23, 2004, the annual BWIM worship service and meeting, “Rooted in the Past: Grounded for the Future,” Baptist Church of the Covenant, Birmingham, Ala., June 24, 2004, the annual BWIM worship service and business meeting, “Vocare: Leading Lives Worthy of Calling,” Gaylord Texas Resort, Grapevine, Tex., June 29, 2005; and finally, as mentioned, I went to BWIM’s twenty-fifth anniversary celebration and related panel sessions. Oklahoma Women in Baptist Life, while organized independently of BWIM, was recognized as one of BWIM’s state affiliates and through my connections with BWIM, I participated in the Oklahoma Women in Baptist Life fifth annual conference, “Ordinary Women Doing Extraordinary Things,” First Baptist Church, Oklahoma City, 4-5 March 2005. During all of these events, BWIM leaders graciously included me in their informal meals, dinners, and conversations.

In terms of primary sources associated with BWIM, I carefully studied FOLIO, BWIM’s quarterly newsletter and major publication from 1981 to 2003, as well as its more recent newsletter, VOCARE.

12 Campbell-Reed and Durso, State of Women, 2005, 7.


14 Campbell-Reed and Durso, State of Women, 2005, 6-7. The other three reports do not have comparable statistics on women faculty.

15 Lynda Weaver-Williams, interview by author, written correspondence, July 4, 2006.

16 For a history of the relationship between BWIM and moderates, including both the Alliance of (Southern) Baptists and the CBF during the years of the controversy, see Flowers, 92-101, 149-76.
17 Karrie Oertli, interview by author, written correspondence, July 6, 2006.

18 Marilyn A. Mayse, interview by author, written correspondence, April 2, 2006.


21 For an analysis of BWIM’s uniquely Baptist theology of women in ministry, see Flowers, 95-99, 152-54. For the controversy over homosexuality regarding BWIM and the CBF, see Flowers, 170-73.
Expository Words
At a recent trip to the park, my voice could be heard calling out to my four year-old daughter, Kinsey, “There’s more than one way, sweetie!”

Kinsey is a daredevil. She likes to climb and jump and take risks. She is a younger sibling, who sees her older sister doing big and amazing things, and so Kinsey thinks that she can be just as amazing as that big sister. During our recent trip to the park, when Kinsey saw her sister climb up the five-foot tall cargo net made of chains in order to get to the top of the slide, she thought she could do it too. But two rungs up the ladder, Kinsey looked down . . . and then she looked up . . . and then I saw the face that means, “I’m not too sure about this.” So I rushed over and assured her that while this was one way that big kids got up to the slide, there were indeed other ways that she could choose. She could go up the slowly inclining ramp and then climb up a couple of platforms. She could go over to the stairs on the other side of the bridge that she liked so much. All were acceptable ways to get to the slide.

But as I returned to the “mom bench,” I noticed Kinsey hovering near the cargo net several times while her sister climbed it. I would see the look of concern and indecision in her eyes, and I would call out to her, “There’s more than one way, sweetie!”

Like Kinsey and her quest to reach the top of the slide, our lives involve many tasks that have multiple methods of accomplishing them. There is more than one way to cook vegetables, to hit a golf ball, and to preach a sermon, and there is even an unfortunate old proverb about there being more than one way to do violence to feline animals. In all those situations, when various means are available to us, we are inevitably faced with a decision—which way will we choose?

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In the book of Esther, both Queen Vashti and Esther faced a similar task—to subvert somehow the de-humanizing authority wielded by King Xerxes. But with various means available to them, they each were faced with a decision. How would they choose to respond to the king’s abuse of power?

**Vashti and Direct Confrontation**

In Esther 1, we meet King Xerxes and Queen Vashti and learn of their saga. We immediately discover that the king seems to be fond of flaunting his wealth and splendor as he holds a banquet for the elite of his kingdom that lasts 180 days. This lavish banquet is followed by a seven-day feast for all the people who lived in the citadel of Susa, and concurrently, Queen Vashti holds a seven-day festival of her own for the women (Esth 1:1-9). At the end of the king’s banquet, a highly inebriated King Xerxes calls for the grand finale to a spectacular event—his queen should appear before the people in her royal diadem to display her beauty to all the people. But when the king’s messengers tell Vashti of this command, she refuses and ignites the king’s fury (Esth 1:10-12).

Many have wondered why Vashti would decline this request of her husband, the king, to display her beauty. Interpreters have therefore postulated several reasons why Vashti may have refused. (1) She was too busy with her own party and guests. (2) According to the midrash, the king requested that Vashti appear only in her royal diadem (i.e. naked). (3) Greek beliefs about Persian customs would suggest that only concubines attended men’s parties. (4) Vashti’s dignity would not allow her to be paraded in front of hundreds of drunken men.

But whatever her reasons for refusing, Vashti directly defied the power structures that influenced her life in repressive ways. Surely this was not the first time that the king had wanted to de-humanize his wife by putting her on display without regard for her feelings. Filling in the narrative gap in the story, we might imagine that after countless episodes in which Vashti was objectified for her beauty she finally decided that enough was enough. When she did finally refuse the king, apparently his advisors were concerned that her defiance would influence subversive behavior among other women, and they might be tempted to act out of the same sense of self-worth. Therefore, the advisors convinced the king to issue an edict for the subordination of all women to the rule of their husbands (Esth 1:16-22).
Vashti chose direct confrontation in response to the king's exploitation of power. But this decision had consequences. Vashti was banished from the royal court and removed from her position of power and influence (Esth 1:19). She gave up her life in the royal court for her defiance. Further, her insubordination resulted in a decree against all women in the kingdom.

Yet, despite the negative repercussions, it is also possible that Vashti's actions had a positive influence. According to the fears of the king's advisors and their subsequent decree, Vashti's resistance to the king may have emboldened other women to resist their husbands, or the powers, who were objectifying them. The king's advisors recognized that Vashti's bravery was fuel for other women to find their voices; they knew the positive influence of her courage.

**Esther and the Resistance of Deference**

Esther enters the scene when King Xerxes decides he needs a replacement for Vashti. Among all of the gorgeous young virgins brought to the palace to be beautified for the king, Xerxes favors Esther over them all. Although chosen as the king's favorite, Esther continues to hide her nationality because Mordecai, her cousin and guardian, forbids her to reveal her true ethnic identity (Esth 2:1-18). The plot thickens when a conflict between Mordecai and the king's most elevated royal official, Haman, results in Haman orchestrating a decree for the extermination of the Jews (Esth 2:19-3:15).

Like Vashti, Esther now has come face to face with the repressive power of the king. The difference is that in Esther's situation the king's dehumanization of people has a much broader scope. Haman and the king think of the Jews as merely troublemakers who cannot be tolerated so they do not hesitate to order complete annihilation—young, old, women, and children (Esth 3:13). Yet, there Esther, the Jew, stands in the middle of it all. She begins conferring with Mordecai as to if, and how, she should act on her people's behalf. (Esth 4:4-17).

Esther faces a choice. Should she choose direct confrontation with the king like Vashti? Should she merely be silent? Or is there another way?

Esther takes a chance and approaches the king even though she knows that coming before him without being requested is worthy of death. Oddly, when the king grants Esther clemency by extending the golden scepter and asks what she desires, Esther does not immediately confront the king with the matter of Jewish extermination even though the king offers her half of
the world. Rather than overtly challenging the king about the decree for her people’s deaths, Esther politely, and with proper deference to authority, invites the king and Haman to a meal (Esth 5:1-8). Then, when the banquet is set and the king again asks Esther what she desires (Esth 7:1-2), Esther finally makes her request for the salvation of the Jewish people known, but again, only with deference. She calls him “your majesty,” and says, “if I have found favor with you,” and, “if it pleases you” (Esth 7:3). Only then does she humbly ask for her life and the lives of her people. Although the king deposes Haman now, Esther later learns that the decree against the Jews is still in effect. Thus, she again approaches the king in humility saying, “If it pleases the king . . . and if he regards me with favor and thinks it is the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling . . .” (Esth 8:5).

When Esther initially took the risk to go before the king and he granted her an audience, she could have immediately resisted the king’s decrees with a direct confrontation demanding that the edict be overturned. She chose a different method for her resistance, however. Esther chose deference and respect for authority. Knowing that the king had the power to save her people, she deferred to that power and authority. She respected the king and worked within the system, and by doing so, she was able to affect change.

**Feminist Evaluations of Vashti and Esther**

Many feminist interpretations of these two women favor Vashti’s actions over Esther’s. Such interpretations extol the couragelessness of Vashti in standing up and saying no to objectification. They celebrate Vashti’s ultimate defiance of patriarchy and her bravery in facing the consequences. Scholars who take this view of Vashti’s heroine-ism often disparage Esther as no more than a pretty face. They argue that Esther accommodates herself to power and uses her womanly wiles to get her way, and that, in doing so, she merely upholds the paradigm of patriarchy in place. For example, Nicole Wilkinson Duran writes, “The king’s earlier thoughtless decree on the subordination of women (1:19) stands, in some sense reinforced by Esther’s pleasing manipulation of her husband, the king.”

Other feminist interpreters, however, have sought to recover Esther’s role as the heroine of the book. Adele Berlin interprets Vashti’s role in the story not as a heroine, but as Esther’s foil. Vashti has no voice in the text; she never speaks. Thus, Berlin finds that Vashti merely establishes the standard for
different types of behavior in the court and then is removed so that Esther, the star of the show, can enter the scene.4

I must ask—can we have it both ways? Can Vashti and Esther both be heroines? Vashti’s bravery in direct defiance speaks for itself as an act of valor even if it also functions as a foil to Esther’s actions. Vashti chooses direct confrontation with the objectifying commands of the king even in the face of the sacrifices she will have to make to do so. Still, Esther’s more subtle methods of deference and respect for authority also provide her a means to resist the de-humanizing genocide ordered by the king.

Sidnie Ann White also commends Esther’s behavior as a model for life in the Diaspora. She writes, “By accepting the reality of a subordinate position and learning to gain power by working within the structure rather than against it, the Jew can build a successful and fulfilling life in the Diaspora, as Esther does in the court of Ahasuerus [Xerxes].”5 While I also view Esther’s chosen means of resistance as successful, I would, however, adjust White’s perspective on Esther’s exemplary actions cited above. While White finds accepting her subordinate position a necessary part of Esther’s successful life in the Diaspora, I do not think such resignation was necessarily a part of Esther’s resistance. She can choose to defer to authority without resigning herself to subordinate status. One need not think less of him/herself in order to pay respect to another person or entity.

Therefore, both Vashti and Esther are self-respecting women who faced the daunting task of subverting the king’s exploitation of power. They both had to take risks and exemplify bravery in their attempts to overturn oppression. They both had to make difficult decisions in consideration of the best method of resistance for their individual situations. Although they chose different means, both were successful in accomplishing their goals.

Vashti, Esther, and Women in Ministry

How we take up the task of advocating for women in ministry in Baptist life is a question that has perplexed us since the discussion began. Should we directly confront the issue, be silent, or should we find more subtle ways to advocate?

For some people and some moments, Vashti’s method of direct confrontation may be the best choice. Elizabeth Flowers writes of such a Vashti moment as she describes the events that followed when Nancy Sehested was called as pastor of Prescott Memorial Baptist Church of Memphis, Tennessee,
in August 1987. At the news of Sehested’s appointment, the local association called for an investigation of the church’s doctrinal soundness and motioned to refuse to seat Prescott Memorial’s delegates. When the issue was raised at the association meeting, Sehested went to the floor microphone to speak. Before she could give voice to her church’s decision, however, the vote was called to question. Sehested was outraged that the one thing she knew about being a Baptist—having a voice—was being overrun. Ironically, Adrian Rogers petitioned the moderator of the meeting so that Sehested would be allowed to speak. When the moderator agreed, she moved valiantly toward the stage. “From the pulpit, and not the floor, she proclaimed her authority to preach as given by Jesus Christ alone.”

Sehested had a Vashti moment. She decided that her situation called for a direct challenge. Although brave and indeed powerful, there are consequences to overt confrontation—some bad and some good. Directly challenging power structures about sensitive issues involves risks and sacrifices. Thus, like Vashti, we must be willing to accept those risks if we choose to respond as she did.

In a July 2011 interview, Sehested discussed the pain that being a Vashti caused. Being an outspoken pioneer for women in ministry created great pressure on Sehested’s ministry that ultimately led her into what she describes as a “Saturday of the soul” time. After leaving her pastorate in Memphis due to the stress, she tells of the letters she received from other women complaining that she had let them down.

On the other side, however, a positive influence may also come with those negative repercussions as open resistance may encourage others to make their own voices heard. Nancy Sehested may have never dreamed that her inspiring and courageous story would still be told twenty-five years later. Pam Durso, the current executive director of Baptist Women in Ministry, calls Sehested a “founding mother,” the one who “put the dream into motion,” and “one of the great heroes in our journey of Baptist Women in Ministry.”

But we must not forget that there is more than one way to get to the top of the slide. While Vashti moments may occur, many situations call for Esther’s response instead. There are times that call for deference and respect for authorities. As Baptists, the distinctives of priesthood of all believers and autonomy of the local church guide us so we value a respect for the opinions and positions of others.

Nevertheless, like Esther, this does not mean that we must resign ourselves to a subordinate position; we can be deferential to others while
also being respectful of ourselves and our own viewpoints. We can choose to wait for the right moment to invite people to the banquet and respectfully address the issue that is on our hearts.

Far away from the public stage upon which Sehested stood, a God-fearing woman, whom I will call Jan, became a deacon at a First Baptist Church. Jan was proud of the steps her church had taken for the women of her congregation but knew there was still room to grow. As time passed in her church she saw that women on her church staff were still only “directors” rather than “ministers” and that women were not preaching from the pulpit. Outside of the limelight, Jan worked within the structure of her church by meeting with the deacon officers, voicing her concern for larger leadership roles for women in the church. After that meeting, Jan decided to write a respectful, yet direct, email to the church staff and other leaders in the church expressing her desire to hear women’s voices from the pulpit. Because she was respected by the church and was respectful of its leadership, Jan’s voice was heard and only a few months later a woman’s voice was also heard from the pulpit of that First Baptist Church.

Jan could have stood up in a business meeting and publicly issued a challenge to the church leadership. She could have eschewed proper channels of structure in the church and began undermining the leadership in private circles, but she did not. Jan also did not resign herself to a subordinate position, but chose deferential respect in order to invite others to the banquet and present her response to the situation of women’s leadership in her church. For Jan and her particular situation, the choice she made for Esther-like actions allowed her to affect change in her congregation.

Nancy Sehested and Jan chose different methods in how they addressed the situations they faced concerning women in ministry. Like Vashti and Esther they are both self-respecting women who faced daunting tasks. They both took risks and made difficult decisions . . . and they both were successful in making a difference!

**Conclusion**

Here we stand at the bottom of the slide. We know that some of our older sisters and brothers have gone up the cargo-net made of chains. They have made bold stands in the name of women in ministry. Yet, we also know that many people have also taken the slowly inclining ramp or the stairs. Day after day, they have also taken risks and sought perhaps more subtle ways to affect change. As we stand here and face our decision of how to make the
climb, hopefully we can hear our divine parent calling in the background, “There's more than one way, sweetie!”


7 Ibid., 112.


9 Ibid.
Peter’s denial, Judas’ betrayal, and Thomas’ doubt claim universal notoriety as elements of the passion/resurrection narrative. By contrast, Mary Magdalene’s dogged and unwavering devotion attracts little attention. Mary's steady faithfulness contrasts strikingly with the erratic behavior of the Twelve. The male disciples fall asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:45-46), abandon Jesus during the arrest (Matt 26:56; Mark 14:50), and lock themselves in a room for fear of the Jews (John 20:19), whereas Mary courageously follows Jesus to the cross and to the tomb (Matt 27:55-56; 27:61; 28:1; Mark 15:40-41; 15:47; 16:1; Luke 23:49; 23:55-56; 24:1,10; John 19:25; 20:1).

Along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, Mary accompanies Jesus’ body to the grave long after the prominent disciples have fled the scene. She goes further than Joseph and Nicodemus, however, and returns to the graveside, even after the burial. She cannot seem to stay away from her Lord and is compelled to move toward him, even after his departure, even after hope seems lost. In the heat of most strenuous trial, Mary continues to follow. Throughout the narrative, she remains fearlessly faithful, whereas Joseph and Nicodemus are too timid to follow Jesus openly when he is alive (John 3:2; 19:38) and the twelve disciples are scared to follow Jesus openly during his death. Other than the Beloved Disciple (John 19:26), no record exists of one of the Twelve being present at the cross, and not one of the Twelve is present for the burial of the body. Indeed, there are stories of outright denials and abandonment as mentioned above, such as John 18:17, 25-27, 20:19 and Mark 14:50.

Arguably, Mary Magdalene is the only known disciple whose faithfulness to Jesus does not waver. She follows him in his life (Matt 27:55-56), his death, and his burial.

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Modern scholarship correctly debunks the centuries-old myth that Mary of Magdala was a sinful woman and a prostitute. The only known fact about Mary’s history is that Jesus healed her of seven demons as told in Luke 8:2. While a defense of Mary’s character is important, it is old news. Mary Magdalene must be properly celebrated, not merely defended. A more robust admiration for Mary Magdalene will develop from careful attention to her appearance in John 20:1-8.

**Faithful Disciple**

Tragically, commentators still fail to calculate the significance of Mary’s role in the Fourth Gospel’s resurrection account. For example, one commentator rather blindly claims, “Everything about this tale of the two hastening disciples indicates a primacy of [the Beloved Disciple] . . . .”¹ Too much scholarly attention remains focused on Peter and the Beloved Disciple, despite their minimal activity in the story compared to Mary’s, despite Mary’s exclusive conversation with the risen Lord (John 20:14-17), despite Mary’s role as the twice-first to see (John 20:1, 16) and the twice-first to tell the good news (John 20:2, 18).

Commentators often attribute first belief to the Beloved Disciple, based on John 20:8, but verse 9 states clearly that neither male disciple understood the implications of the empty tomb (“they still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead”).

The role of first-believer quite obviously belongs to Mary, but this honor is tainted by negative interpretations, such as those of the commentator who writes, “a special self-disclosure is necessary before the Magdalene recognizes him,” as if the story was about Mary’s lack of faith rather than about the amazing arrival of the risen Lord and his intimate disclosure with a beloved follower.² The male disciples, not Mary, serve as literary precursors to the story of doubting Thomas when they do not believe Mary’s testimony. Peter and the Beloved Disciple run to the tomb in verse 3 but do not believe Mary’s word until verse 8; despite her confession that she has seen the Lord in verse 18, the disciples are still afraid in verse 19, similar to Thomas’s lack of confidence in verse 25. Mary displays no doubt or lack of faith at the tomb when she first mistakes the Lord for a gardener, for she has been given no testimony that he is alive in which to believe. She is simply in the throes of grief, confusion, and strange hope at the sight of an empty tomb; it would have been absurd if she had perceived history’s great miracle immediately.
That she quickly understands the reality before her at the mere sound of her name is a tribute to her great faith.

The narrator explains without ambiguity that both Peter and the Beloved Disciple enter the tomb and look, and yet neither of them encounters an angel, or Jesus for that matter. The angelic message is deliberately and unequivocally reserved for Mary. Interestingly, all four divergent resurrection accounts agree that the angelic messengers do not show themselves to the men, only to a woman or to women. The question then is, since Jesus was present in the Garden, why did he not appear to Peter, or to the Beloved Disciple? It would seem that he wanted to entrust the Holy Miracle, the Good News—fresh and fragile as it was—to the most faithful recipient possible, and the most faithful disciple in this case was Mary Magdalene, a woman.

The details indicate that Mary’s encounters with the angels and with Jesus were divinely orchestrated, not accidental. Mary Magdalene was chosen for this meeting—for the role of first-believer and for the task of telling the Good News—and she was chosen ahead of the Beloved Disciple, ahead of Peter.

Far too often, Mary’s prominent role—if acknowledged at all—is treated like an unfortunate accident of history or as “proof” that God can use the most unlikely people to spread the gospel. The more logical conclusion, based on the evidence of the four gospels, is that Mary Magdalene was, in fact, most worthy for the task. As the faithful disciple who followed Jesus all the way to the grave, Mary was deserving of the great honor to encounter the resurrected Lord. To express patronizing surprise at this Divine selection is weak exegesis. The only appropriate response to Mary Magdalene’s story is genuine and honest homage to a great woman.

**Feminine Witness**

Mary Magdalene was not chosen because she was a woman, but because she was the most faithful disciple, the most trustworthy recipient of the blessed Good News. Does it matter, however, that she was a woman? Would the story be different if the first-witness, first-believer, first-preacher had been a man?

The divine selection of Mary Magdalene, a woman, as the first one entrusted with the Good News is particularly compelling in light of cultural patriarchal norms, evoking among women of future generations the assurance that the female experience and the female voice are valid expressions of faith. Might there be deeper implications to this story beyond the sheer possibility that a woman can encounter God equally to a man? What impact did Mary
Magdalene’s gender have in the context of her own story? Does the story suggest anything about the makeup of the feminine soul?

In order to probe deeper than a surface treatment of gender, this article suggests a rereading of the text through a mystical lens. Rather than reducing Mary Magdalene (or any human being) to a superficial stereotype of gender, the church can re-imagine the story with the aid of ancient wisdom. No shallow gender definitions of the type so boisterously prominent in modern Christian jargon would do justice to the power of this tale.

For centuries, mystical wisdom has taught that the masculine and the feminine reside in every human being, and that the most fully human person is one who has integrated these two into one well-balanced whole. Mystics understood that God created both male and female to reveal the divine image, and Jesus as God-fully-revealed-in-human-flesh displayed both masculine and feminine natures of God.

Jesus is the ideal example of a balanced and fully-human human, his masculine and feminine spirits working in perfect harmony. Under the dominance of patriarchy, however, the feminine half of the divine image has been largely lost, often creating an imbalance in both men and women. Jesus’ own integration of the divine feminine is largely downplayed or unnoticed. On the backdrop of such tragedy, vibrant stories of feminine faith have the potential to reawaken the feminine spark of divinity that so often lies dormant under patriarchy.

As a faithful disciple of Jesus, Mary Magdalene is a strong female example of a well-integrated human being, and as such, her story is pregnant with meaning. Her encounter with the risen Christ gives voice to the dynamic feminine soul, which has so often been silenced by an unbalanced patriarchal emphasis on the masculine. Mary Magdalene’s story, when told in its full power, is imperative to the health of the church and to the health of a fully-integrated humanity. Margaret Starbird writes, “[W]ith the exile of Mary Magdalene from our consciousness, we were tragically cut off from the irrigating waters of intuition and mysticism, from feminine ways of knowing, from the deep wisdom of the body and its senses, and from our intimate kinship with all that lives.” This article recommends narrative elements of Mary’s story, which, when reconsidered, have the potential to reveal the feminine Imago Dei.

First, Mary Magdalene’s passionate tears, contrary to popular interpretation, are not a sign of her weakness or her lack of faith. Her sorrow is instead a sure sign of her devotion. In their pure intensity, her tears protect
her, for she would not have attached herself to any other Savior. Although feminine emotions are often mislabeled as devilish tricksters, Mary Magdalene’s emotions are a source and sustenance for her faithfulness. Even in death, her feelings bind her to the one man, Jesus Christ. That she would dismiss the first sound of Jesus’ voice as the mere voice of a gardener speaks to the depth of her focus; she can think of nothing else but her lost Lord. The depth of her emotions is a source of her strength.

Second, something draws her to the tomb that early Sunday morning, and even after she reports her findings to the disciples, something draws her back, and even after Peter and the Beloved Disciple depart, something keeps her there longer. There is no way she could have known what was coming; her surprise at every step along the way makes that clear enough. Despite having no clear insider knowledge, something she could not explain kept her close to the grave. Her feminine intuition was spot-on. Often instinct and gut reactions are downplayed as lesser gifts than logical analysis, but there was nothing logical about Mary’s lingering at the tomb. It was her intuition that gifted her with a holy encounter with the risen Lord.

Finally, Mary’s faith is awakened by an intimate and personal interaction: Jesus speaks her name. Doctrine or argument or physical proof do not convince her of the resurrection; a conversation, the sound of her name, a personal interaction does. Mary even reaches out and touches Jesus. Contrary to inadequate translations of John 20:17 in which Jesus tells Mary, “Don’t touch,” what he actually says is “Do not hold on to me,” implying that she has embraced him, but he needs her to go forth and preach instead. A tenderness to Mary’s interaction with Jesus calls into question the coercive methods of persuasion employed in male-exaggerated culture.

This is not to suggest that tenderness or any of the other attributes listed above appears only in women. Quite to the contrary, there are clear signs of tenderness in Jesus himself and in the Beloved Disciple (example, John 13:23-25). Arguably, tenderness makes an appearance in people like Jesus and the Beloved Disciple because these men were integrated human beings, who embodied both halves of the Divine Image. Jesus was no stranger to tears, either, and his example, along with Mary Magdalene’s example, points to the feminine way of being which has often been belittled or lost in both men and women in favor of an unbalanced exaggeration of the masculine soul.
Conclusion

While Mary Magdalene was not chosen for her honored role because she was a woman, it is infinitely important that she was a woman, because her sure and steady spirit of faithfulness bears witness to the feminine Imago Dei. Had the Beloved Disciple—another arguably well-integrated human being—been chosen, his sheer physical gender could easily have aided the powers of patriarchy in blotting out the inner character of his balanced soul. Mary Magdalene's physical gender makes the contribution of her feminine soul undeniable for those willing to recover her lost story.


2 Ibid., 220.

3 See Cynthia Bourgeault's The Meaning of Mary Magdalene: Discovering the Women at the Heart of Christianity (Boston: Shambala, 2010) for a full argument on Mary Magdalene as a female version of a completed human being.

4 Margaret Starbird, Mary Magdalene, Bride in Exile (Rochester: Bear and Company, 2005), 5.
Words about Recent Books
I. Women in Baptist Life: Selected Bibliography

Editor’s Note: An added feature to the Book Review section for this issue is a selected bibliography related to the women in Baptist life. Pamela R. Durso, the issue editor, offers the bibliography along with an introduction.

For much of history, the lives and contributions of Baptist women have been minimized or overlooked altogether. That reality began to shift in 1979 with the publication of a groundbreaking book, *Women in Baptist Life*, written by Leon McBeth, professor of Baptist history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. For the next decade, McBeth led the way in researching and writing about Baptist women in the church. Other scholars in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries followed his lead, and soon much progress had been made in the field of Baptist women’s studies. Numerous books, dissertations, and articles have been written in the past thirty years that have explored the roles of women in Baptist churches. Following is a selected bibliography of books related to the topic of Baptist women.


II. Biblical Studies


Eldon Jay Epp, New Testament scholar and textual critic, has written a well-researched account of the textual issue associated with Rom 16:7. The main issue revolves around whether the name of Andronicus’s companion in verse 7, Ἰουνία, is Junia (a woman) or Junias (a man). Since the name is spelled the same in Greek, only an accent mark determines the gender.

The book is brief; pages 3-81 constitute its heart, with the rest being abbreviations, endnotes, bibliography, and indices. Epp’s thesis is simple: the best evidence supports Rom 16:7 as a reference to a woman who was an early Jesus follower, a coworker of Paul, who was also an apostle. While the thesis is simple, the evidence to arrive at the result is complex and interconnected. Epp skillfully examines textual, linguistic, grammatical, and historical data to support his contention. For those interested in textual criticism and an example of careful research, Epp’s approach is a model of scholarly methodology. The evidence he marshals in his research is impressive and probably definitive for supporting Junia as the correct reading in Romans. No one should approach this passage without consulting his conclusions.

His work is also a reminder that often the ancients had it right, but we moderns muck it up. For example, when accents began to be added to Greek manuscripts (after the seventh century), they added the accent for the feminine, Junia. Also early Church leaders, such as Chrysostom, who were much closer to the Greek language of that day than moderns, supported the reading of Junia (p. 32). Epp also creates a helpful chart (pp. 62-63) on the use of Ἰουνία in various editions of the Greek New Testament. He illustrates that Junia was the preferred reading from Erasmus (1516) until the 1913 edition by Eberhard Nestle. Only one lone exception exists within these various editions.
With the post-1913 editions of the Greek New Testament, Epp charts the sudden and surprising historical shift from understanding Ἰουνίαν as being the woman Junia to the man Junias. As he clearly illustrates, nearly one hundred years of interpretation has perpetuated “a pervasive sociocultural bias” (p. 20) that silenced the role of Junia. The male-dominated academy of this era could not posit a woman being prominent among the apostles. Thus, even in the face of historical and textual evidence, they transformed her into a him. In doing so, they created a myth that Ἰουνίαν was a contracted male name. Epp deconstructs this linguistic fallacy.

As Epp notes, today more individuals (and Greek New Testaments—Nestle-Aland 28th and United Bible Society 4th [2001]) acknowledge Junia as the correct reading of Romans 16:7, and for this correction he is thankful. Now, however, some scholars suggest that Junia was only “well known to the apostles” and not an apostle herself. Junia recovers her womanhood but loses her apostleship. By way of his own previous work and the work of others (Richard Bauckham and Linda Belleville), Epp demonstrates that Andronicus and Junia were “outstanding apostles” (p. 78).

Epp’s careful and methodical approach on this subject is more than an arcane study on an obscure verse. He reminds all interpreters not to rest so securely on the “assured” results of previous scholarship. Interpreters need to explore and see for themselves the truth of given propositions and assumptions. By careful and methodical work, they may reinforce assured results, destroy and reconstruct something new, or rediscover what had been buried either by time or bias.

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Acknowledging that, since—at least in popular perception—feminism pursues a serious agenda and comedy represents almost the antithesis, Jackson argues that these perceptions constitute superficial stereotypes. Indeed, as the title of her
Oxford D. Phil. dissertation written under the supervision of John Jarick indicates, Jackson advocates for the potential inherent in collaboration between creative, dynamic feminism and comedy that offers a serious critique of a flawed world.

Jackson unfolds this argument in a logical, incremental fashion. First, she explores the concepts of comedy, the comic, humor, etc., in order to gain terminological precision. She focuses on comedy and the comic perspective on reality and favors the school of thought that sees the essence of comedy/the comic in an awareness of incongruity. She then outlines the techniques and devices that express this awareness, discusses the social and psychological functions of the comic awareness, and counters the inevitable objections to the notion that the Bible contains comedy.

Jackson devotes the body of her study to explorations of these comic elements in the narratives of significant female figures in the Hebrew Bible, the point of contact with feminism. She provides chapter-length treatments of the stories of the “Trickster Matriarchs,” the “Five Women of Moses’ Infancy,” Rahab, Deborah, and Jael, Delilah, three of “David’s Wives,” Jezebel, Ruth, and Esther. Jackson first identifies the comic elements evident in each story, typically calling attention to characterization, plot-shape, linguistic devices such as paronomasia or word-play, irony, etc. Incidentally, she emphasizes the fact that readers of the Bible in translation confront a fundamental obstacle to recognizing humor in the text, since language plays such a key role in the construction of comedy.

Concluding sections of each chapter of the body and the two final chapters of the book explore the theological significance of humor in the stories of these women, in particular from the standpoint of feminist theology. Here Jackson highlights both the difficulty and the power of the Bible’s feminine (if not yet feminist) humor: “… the stories that proclaim the tricksters’ cleverness, proactivity, and courage are the same ones that reduces them merely to wombs, objects acting in the interest of the male agenda. On the other hand, the inherent nature of a trickster is to question the power structures of its culture, sharing comedy’s subversive and revelatory qualities—undermining what is and offering a glimpse into what ought to be . . .” (p. 61). To illustrate, Jackson succinctly phrases the circumstance in relation to Delilah’s employment of sexuality and deceit: “Her society can be faulted for limiting her to only this type of power, but faulting Delilah for using it is unjustified” (p. 141).

Jackson’s study of comedy in the Hebrew Bible accomplishes its two
chief objectives admirably. It opens the curtain on humor in the Bible, revealing the subversive, counter-cultural, dare one say, liberating power of the humorous tales of Israelite women. Seen through the lens of the comic *a la* Jackson, biblical narratives come alive with depth, humanity, and rich complexity.

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Tremper Longman’s *Job* is the last installment of seven volumes in the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms series. He has masterfully written a commentary with fresh insights on this theologically deep biblical book. The scholar, pastor, student, or layperson will find Longman’s book very readable and informative. The commentary begins with an introductory chapter covering all the basics such as authorship, date, genre, background information, setting, and structure. He includes a discussion on the text and talks about why Job is such a hard book to translate (pp. 27-29). Also, Longman adds relevant sections to his introduction that are not found in some other commentaries. These include a subsection discussing whether or not Job was an actual person, a major section on the history of interpretation of the book, and a section on Job in light of Jesus Christ (a Christian reading of the book). He also gives a theological overview of the book (pp. 51-68), looking at the theology within major sections (i.e., the preface, chs. 1-2; Job’s complaint, ch. 3; debates, chs. 4-27). This section will prove especially helpful to the reader who has only a basic understanding of Job. Longman says the central theological focus of the book of Job is on the source of wisdom (p. 52), not theodicy or suffering (p. 462). This is the perspective from which he approaches his commentary.

Similar to other volumes in this Baker Wisdom series, Longman divides the book into workable passages. In each section, Longman then offers a fresh translation of the text, gives an interpretation, and follows with theological implications.
The text is reprinted at the beginning of each subsection for the convenience of the reader. He addresses original language issues mainly in his footnotes but also highlights key grammatical issues in the interpretation sections. Longman also points out differences in English Bible translations of the text in the footnotes. The interpretation sections focus on the setting of a specific text and the key ideas within it. His theological implication section usually focuses on one or two theological ideas that are significant in the passage.

Longman often makes references to other scripture in his discussion. I think readers will find this very helpful, particularly those places in which he identifies similarities between words/phrases in Job and in other passages (e.g., comparisons of Job 10:11 and Ps 139:13 [p. 178]). Furthermore, Longman includes a convenient index of scripture references and other ancient writings, which makes it easy to locate his discussions of similarities.

This is an outstanding commentary in an excellent commentary series. Pastors and laypersons will find Job insightful; students and scholars will find Longman's commentary helpful for exegesis. I highly recommend it.

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With this book, Critchley develops, and makes somewhat more accessible, the argument he proposed in *Infinitely Demanding* (2008). The overaching goal of the text is to develop a coherent, grounded secular ethics. He claims, “This faith of the faithless cannot have for its object anything external to the self or subject, any external divine command, any transcendent reality” (p. 4). Critchley explores this question over the course of four chapters, plus an introduction and short conclusion. Each chapter is developed through an extended engagement with a specific thinker or cluster of thinkers. While part of a whole, each chapter also functions as an independent essay.

The second chapter (after the introduction) “The Catechism of the Citizen” engages Rousseau and the Social Contract. According to Rousseau, binding a people together as a people requires the development of a “fiction.” This fiction must be taught; thus the need for the citizen to be catechized. However, from where does the authority required to catechize come? According to Rousseau, it must come from the fiction of a quasi-divine legislator and be indoctrinated through civil performance. Of course, this answer is insufficient for an anarchist such as Critchley. Rather, he argues for a supreme fiction, which “is a fiction that we know to be a fiction—there being nothing else—but in which we nevertheless believe” (p. 91).

The content of this fiction is developed in his third chapter, “Mystical Anarchism.” Here he contrasts Carl Schmitt with Barack Obama, and himself with both. Schmitt demands dictatorship over human beings who cannot be trusted to govern themselves. Liberalism, represented by Obama, seeks endless
discussion. Instead, Critchley opts for a utopia of mystical anarchism. It is a utopia of love resulting in a life, “no longer exhausted by work, cowed by law and the police” (p. 150). This politics of love is that into which the citizen must be catechized.

Paul and Heidegger’s reading thereof are the focus of “On the Nature of Faith.” Through Heidegger’s approach to Paul, Critchley comments on the weakness of the human person. He goes on to argue that Marcion and Harnack err in their rejection of the Hebrew Bible specifically because it is a rejection of this weakness. This weakness is a prerequisite for receiving love. He writes, “If law and sin were not within me, then freedom would mean nothing. The self is broken, impotent and wretched, but its wretchedness is its greatness: we know that we are broken. . . . It is only a being which is constitutively impotent that is capable of receiving that over which it has no power: love” (p. 206).

The final chapter, “Nonviolent Violence” continues an ongoing polemic between Critchley and Slavoj Žižek. According to Žižek, one must wait for an act of “divine violence” to bring about social change. By “divine violence” Žižek means an “absolute, cataclysmic revolutionary act of violence” (p. 213). Critchley, conversely, believes that while violence is never justified, it is at times necessary. Even more so, it is Žižek’s passivity which Critchley rejects, writing, “what defines Gandhi’s nonviolent resistance is not inactivity or passivity, as Žižek suggests, but a stubbornly persistent and hugely imaginative activism” (p. 241). What this all results in is the claim that “Conscience is the inward ear that listens for the repletion of the infinite demand. Its call is not heard in passive resignation from the world, but in the urgency of active engagement” (p. 251).

Faith of the Faithless has several flaws. First, Critchley is not a theologian and thus not aware of current discussions within the theological community. Some may take exception, for example, to his call for a mysticism that “eviscerates the old self” (p. 152). Further, his contrast of Paul versus the legalism of Judaism may come off as supersessionist. Second, it seems likely that one would have to share Critchley’s anarchist political commitments to fully agree with his argument. Finally, the chapters, while related, do not directly flow into one another. This is especially true of the last chapter. To fully understand Critchley, one would have to read Infinitely Demanding as well. However, this weakness is also the book’s greatest strength. Because the chapters stand
alone, they can be assigned in isolation. While the chapters are likely beyond all but the most advanced and well guided undergraduates, they would function well in a graduate seminar, especially as supplementary reading. This is especially true of the fifth chapter with its reading of Paul's political theology.

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A central claim of *American Grace* is that American religion has changed drastically since the 1950s. Putnam and Campbell contend that the transition has not been completely smooth. Indeed, they claim that the American religious landscape has endured what they call a shock and two aftershocks—three marked shifts, each of which came about in reaction to the one before it. The initial “seismic societal shock” occurred in the 1960s, a time during which the “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll’ youth counterculture” emerged (p. 93). Putnam and Campbell claim that the evangelical movement gained traction in the 1970s in response to this sexually liberal counterculture, and that this conservative backlash then led to the rise of the religious “nones” (p. 3). The authors found that 17% of Americans claim no religious affiliation, which means that religious “nones” outnumber mainline Protestants, who constitute 14% of the population. Religious “nones” comprises agnostics and atheists, but most religiously unaffiliated Americans are simply that—not affiliated with a particular religious tradition or spiritual practice (p. 16).

The rise of the religious “nones” notwithstanding, as compared with other countries with advanced economies, the United States is an unusually religious country, and
religions here have been able to “adapt to changing circumstances” (pp. 9, 71). The authors note that “religious identity in America has become less inherited and fixed and more chosen and changeable,” and that several factors account for religious switching (pp. 135, 143). Although marrying someone of another faith often results in one spouse’s conversion to the other’s religion, now “about 60 percent of switching from one’s religious tradition of origin seems to have been unrelated to marriage” (p. 143).

While their research and presentation are chiefly based on the findings of the Faith Matters surveys, Putnam and Campbell employ vignettes to give a more detailed picture of life in select congregations in the United States. Based on interviews and participant observation, these vignettes provide context for—and confirmation of—the broader survey data.

A brief review cannot do justice to the elegance of American Grace. The authors carefully establish their argument regarding the three seismic shocks. They explain how, despite the increasing political and theological polarization in religious America, people’s interactions with those who differ from them are less hostile than in decades past or in other countries today, and they also offer rich visual representations of their data with graphs and maps. Books based on survey research customarily offer very broad, suggestive findings, but Putnam and Campbell’s extensive background, as well as their use of other qualitative methods, makes this a compelling, accessible study for scholars, ministers, and laypersons alike.

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