

# THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN TO MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE\*

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## THE THESIS

The thesis of this paper is this: the early (Pentecostal) Church of the Nazarene took for granted the legitimacy of female ordained ministry, and herein lies a primary source of the ambivalence of its subsequent attitude toward the ordination and pastoral assignment of women. As it has sought to put that ambivalence aside, since the late 1970s, it has generally argued for the legitimacy of ordaining women and affording them places of service on grounds very different from those originally established by the Wesleyan Holiness Movement. And, in extension of the thesis, I would argue that the original grounds are theologically and spiritually superior to the grounds usually appealed to currently. As a practical matter, then, I would urge the re-proclamation of those original grounds.

## A PROLOGUE AND A THESIS

Dr. Stan Ingersoll has written a splendid, popular level sketch concerning the history of ordained women in the Church of the Nazarene and its predecessors. It appears in the latest (March, 2000) number of *Holiness Today*. The basic point he makes is really far more important than the historical data in the article. He underlines the fact that the early Nazarenes and their predecessors ordained women to ministry on the basis of their understanding of what the Bible has to say about apostolic ministry. That is a highly significant point, but one which, in the case of the Church of the Nazarene and its lineal institutional ancestry back to the mid-1890s, can generally only be inferred from the data, not directly supported by it. Data do support it quite directly for the two generations of the Wesleyan Holiness Movement that preceded the formation of the Church of the Nazarene. And therein lies the root of much of the problem which U.S. and Canadian Nazarenes have had since the late 1930s with accepting ordained women clergy.

## HOW HAVE WE COME TO OUR PRESENT POSITION?

### I. From before the beginning to about 1908

What happened? To begin at the beginning, it may be said that generally the battle for women’s ordination in the Wesleyan Holiness Movement had been won before 1895, insofar as that movement was predominantly Caucasian and insofar as it would distinguish itself from the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. More specifically, this is to say that the battle for women’s ordination within the Holiness Movement had largely been won before the various bodies which would become the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene had formed, and certainly before the actual formation of the national denomination in 1907-1908. Luther Lee’s sermon at the ordination of Antoinette Brown, had been published almost as soon

as it was preached, in 1853, and had wide circulation.<sup>1</sup> Phoebe Palmer's work, *Promise of the Father* had come out as early as 1859; Catherine Booth's *Female Ministry; or, Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel* had apparently begun its life as a lecture no later than the mid-1870s and had become a book before 1888. The later career of Ms Brown might have given comfort to Wesleyan Holiness opponents of women's ordination, but the timely appearance of Ms Palmer's work re-affirmed Lee's position and the book itself appears to have been read far more widely than Lee's sermon.

With only slight exaggeration, we could say that the publications of Palmer (1859) and Booth (before 1888), not quite a generation apart, serve as book-ends, as it were, to a modest shelf full of women's defenses of woman's ordained ministry. Ms Palmer, and Ms General Booth were indisputably among the handful of principal figures, male or female, in the nineteenth-century Wesleyan Holiness Movement. And they had addressed the issue of women's ministry and ordination directly and cogently in two highly effective ways: in speech and in writing and in the astounding success of their respective ministries among "all sorts and conditions" (though, ironically, neither of them was ordained by any human agency!). This two-fold witness left no doubt that God had indeed called them to ministry and had set them apart to do the work of ministry- humanly ordained or not.

Publications arguing the case for ordaining women to ministry in the Holiness Movement did continue to appear after 1888, but they added little new and usually were aimed at specific groups of the unconvinced. For instance, in 1891, Free Methodist Bishop, B. T. Roberts published *Ordaining Women*; in the same year, W. B. Godbey, one of the most widely-traveled and prolifically published of Holiness preachers, published *Woman Preacher*, and in 1894, Free Methodist Bishop Walter Sellew publishes, *Why Not? A Plea for Ordination of Those Women Whom God Has Called to Preach His Gospel*. But in the main, these works sound like additional amens to a familiar hymn. And it is important to note that at least these three "for instances" were written from within older ecclesial bodies, bodies with some sense of tradition - the Free Methodist Church and the Methodist Episcopal, South- and that tradition did not include woman's ordination in either case. Even later, Fannie [McDowell] Hunter's *Women Preachers* [1905] re-prints the heart of earlier apologiae and then presents a series of nine testimonies of women concerning their calls to preach. The testimonial approach is a novelty, but nothing is added to the argument.<sup>2</sup>

By 1890, then, for most Wesleyan Holiness people, the ministry of ordained women was as much of the theological and practical fabric of their mission as the doctrine of sin or the practice of congregational singing. Exceptions there were, apparently primarily among the Free Methodists and the Methodist Episcopal holiness people, north and south, but Wesleyan Holiness people generally had decided that concerning the matter of women's ordination, *Spiritus Sanctus locuta, caus finita*: the Spirit has spoken, the case is closed.

In the remarkable success of their corps of ordained women in spreading scriptural holiness in preaching, teaching, and social service, most Wesleyan Holiness folk understood the Spirit to have spoken quite clearly and directly to the question of women in (ordained) ministry. And they believed that they could show that all of this was quite in line with the Biblical Word. Here was the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* upon which good Wesleyans build their understanding of the sufficiency (and authority) of Scripture. Women's right to preach (really understood more as divine gift than "right"), and therefore women's "right" to ordination, no longer needed to be argued, nor was it even a special point to be made in most quarters among Wesleyan Holiness people after the early 1990s.

An interesting expression of this new attitude may be seen in a short biography of Hulda Rees, first wife of Seth C. Rees, published in 1898, just after her death. There, her son, Byron,

states very simply that she and the Friends fellowship to which she belonged believed that God had called her to preach, so she was “enrolled” as a minister in 1877, at the age of 21 or 22.<sup>3</sup> “Enrollment” as a minister, for the Friends, the Quakers, meant that the fellowship of enrolled ministers and the various meetings saw in her the biblical gifts and graces for ministry – it was recognition of God’s ordination. Apparently, no fuss was made over her gender. And in the sermons printed with the biography, she makes no point at all about being a woman in ministry. Byron Rees, barely into his twenties, wrote the biography and selected the included sermons, probably serving as amanuensis to his grieving father. He in no way underlines the relationship of gender and ministry, probably because he did not need to among the Holiness people in his parents’ circles. These circles included the National Holiness Association, which was a group of several dozen Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Episcopal, South, preachers, along with a handful of holiness preachers from outside the two principal Methodist Episcopal denomination. (The “National,” as it was called, had only recently opened its ranks to non-Methodist Episcopal preachers.)

Just a generation later, however, we see that a problem has developed, at least among the Nazarenes. In an editorial in the *Herald of Holiness* dated 15 October, 1930, James B. Chapman, now a Nazarene General Superintendent, and long-time editor of the *Herald*, apparently meeting resistance to ordaining women, comments on remarks made by P. E. Bresee to the *Manual Revision Committee* at the Pilot Point, Texas, meeting in October, 1908. Bresee had made clear there his support for women’s ordination. There no defensiveness in Bresee’s statement; only clarification of the issue and a declaration of his positive support. It is unlikely that Bresee faced any strong opposition at Pilot Point, for there were ordained women on the rolls of all of the uniting bodies. But he did understand the importance of that Pilot Point meeting (it was there that the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene, riding to the culmination of a series of mergers, became a nationwide holiness body). It was a moment for a clarifying statement. Here we need to dilate a bit.

Bresee had consistently supported women’s ordination, but, consistent with the temper of his time, he generally seems to have taken women’s “right” to ordination for granted. Two linked data would seem to indicate this: he did ordain women and he seems to have said very little about it as if it were something having great importance. That second datum would simply be an argument from silence were it not for the fact that like Luther, he seemed to enjoy a following which wrote down most of what he said that was of any moment. The question for Bresee seems to have been not at all one of gender but one of apostolicity, of gifts and graces. We see this in the working of the few exemplars we have of ordination certificates which he himself wrote out and in the process which he and the early assemblies worked out for examining candidates for ordained ministry. (Much of it taken from the Methodist Episcopal *Discipline*, of course.) However, a number of leaders in the Holiness Movement, including especially the leaders in the Holiness Church of Christ, knew that Bresee had run into serious conflict with Theodore and Mannie Ferguson some 14 years earlier as they worked together in the Peniel Mission. (You will recall that he left Episcopal Methodism to associate with the Ferguson’s Peniel Mission and then, after about a year, finding himself unwelcome in the work of the mission, he organized the First Church of the Nazarene, Los Angeles.) Theological differences may have entered into the picture, and it is quite clear that Bresee differed with the Fergusons concerning strategies for the alleviation of the social deprivations of the poor, but the evidence points to a more problematic culprit in the conflict. It is quite clear that Mannie Ferguson, whose writings show her to be something of a female chauvinist, had given instruction that if anything were to happen to her, the Peniel Mission would be placed under an all-female board; and she was already in 1894, in the process of creating such a board? All of the evidence we have on Bresee shows that he bore

two characteristics which would make working in such a situation intolerable. He had a very strong personality - as strong as Ms Ferguson's. And he steadfastly refused to make gender an issue in ministry.<sup>5</sup> For Bresee, apostolicity was the sole qualification for ministry.

So, Bresee's remarks to the 1908 *Manual* Revision Committee, it seems to me, are aimed at two things: first, allaying the fears raised by any gossip that he was not thoroughly committed to the idea that women's ordained ministry was legitimate; and second, insisting again that gender is not and should not be an issue in ministry.

In 1930, Chapman appeals to Bresee's 1908 remarks as a *defense* of women's ordination- not really a primary point as far as Bresee himself had been concerned. Bresee had not so much defended it as he had simply stated his support for it. But what had come to be taken for granted even by the time Bresee left Peniel Mission, now, in 1930, had fallen under scrutiny and become a matter for debate in some quarters. What was forgotten in the renewed debate was the original argument for ordaining women, the argument taken for granted by Bresee - that *all* clerical ordination, male or female, is tied to apostolicity.

## II. From about 1908 to about 1930, with an excursus on the earlier history of American feminism

What had happened between 1908 and 1930? It seems to me that four cultural factors came into play in English-speaking North America in that period, each of them with a theological and spiritual dimension which deeply affected the Nazarenes' understanding of ministry: the deflation of feminism, the leavening of Fundamentalism, the development of a new paradigm or model for "leadership," and (related to the new model for leadership) the development of *institutionalism*. These factors helped Nazarenes to forget what they had never really carefully articulated for themselves in the first place- rather, they had taken it for granted, namely, their rationale for accepting the legitimacy of women's ordination and ministry.

First was the deflation of the women's cause which took place in the period between the Spanish-American War (1898) and the coming of the Great Depression in October, 1929. The Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene was born in the wake of the "Womanist Movement," which really was the second wave of feminism to sweep across Canada and the U. S. in the nineteenth century. The first had begun to have public affect in the late 1830s, just as Phoebe Palmer began her work with the Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness. It had crested with the Seneca Falls Convention in July, 1848, held in the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York, under the leadership of Lucretia Mort and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, both of whom had strong Methodist Episcopal connections. The long and bitter prelude to the Civil War and the War itself focused national attention away from the women's rights resolutions agreed upon at the Convention and the movement faded for a generation, except for a few lively individuals, such as Ms Stanton and Susan Brownell Anthony, and a few lively spots, such as Oberlin College in Ohio (the first co-educational college-level institution in the U.S.); and Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts (the first permanent woman's college in the country). Oberlin had agitated for women's rights and racial equality from its founding in 1833. In 1836, Mary Lyon founded Mt. Holyoke and the school's commitment to women's rights did not fade in the heat and light of the prelude to the Civil War and the War itself. But most of the feminist had retreated to the shadows by the 1850s.

Still, that first feminist movement smoldered on, however fitfully. And one of the principal elements keeping it at least smoldering was the American novels of the 1850s written by women. One thinks here of Susan Warner (who used the name Elizabeth Wetherell as a pseudonym), *Wide, Wide World*; Maria Cummins' *The Lamplighter*, and Mary Jane Holmes' *Meadow Brook-*

all very popular novels in the 1850s<sup>6</sup>, all filled with Christian piety (“ostentatious piety,” one critic calls it, though it seems to me that some of that piety is barely distinguishable from good manners), and all populated by women and girls who can both cry, laugh, keep accounts, and think. Then, too, one George Eliot, whose real name was Mary Ann Evans, was writing in Britain, and her books were selling well here, too. Her contribution to 1850s feminism in Britain and the fanning of its dying embers in 1860s North America is seen in *Adam Bede* (1859) - a wonderfully titled account<sup>7</sup> of a Methodist woman preacher in Britain who must give up preaching (not altogether unwillingly) because the Methodist Conference there has (in 1803) forbidden women preachers (not just fictionally).

The second wave of English-speaking North American feminism had begun in the mid-to late 1870s and had rather quickly developed two segments - a religious and a secular. A familiar name in the religious segment is Frances Willard (though we must not neglect to mention her astounding influence in secular circles as well); in the secular, Florence Kelley. You can see one of the more interesting examples of the ideology and the power of this second wave in Theodore Roosevelt’s senior dissertation at Harvard, written in 1880. Its title: “The Practicability of Equalizing Men and Women Before the Law.” Obstacles littered the way, he said, but the ideal state would have equal justice for both genders. “I would have the word ‘obey’ used not more by the wife than by the husband,” said the future Bull Moose leader and builder of the Panama Canal. By the time he became Vice President under William McKinley, he had done what the rest of American culture had done- he’d shipped his feminism into a backwater. Even his Progressives divided over the issue of women’s suffrage in the 1912 election.

But in the years from the late 1870s to 1899, feminism, or “The Womanist Movement,” as it was often called, rolled along in full strength. Women won the right to vote in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho in the 1890s. It suffered some loss of interest to the national pre-occupation with the War with Spain and then to Teddy Roosevelt’s phenomenal ability to grab media attention. But in the brief interval between Roosevelt’s political eclipse (only partial) in 1912, and the American entry into World War I, in 1917, it again took center stage with the crest of the suffrage and prohibitionist movements. In the 1912 election, California, Arizona, Washington, Oregon and Kansas extended the vote to women. But the news stage was crowded, mostly by the flurry of events related to the Great War in Europe, where hostilities had begun in 1914 - events such as the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the Zimmerman Telegram, and the United States’ worsening relations with Latin America, including the Mexican Border War. Then, with the ratification of the 18th Amendment (prohibition) in 1919, and the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, in 1920, giving all women citizens 21 years of age or older the right to vote, the women themselves began to speak and write and act as if their cause was won, and they went on to other matters. With the men, they threw themselves behind the “return to normalcy” called for by Republican presidential candidate Warren G. Harding. In the first presidential election in which all registered American women 21 and older could vote, they voted 2:1 for “normalcy,” and the Republicans were back in power. They had been out of the White House only sixteen years in the previous sixty.

The Nazarenes in many places were coming to enjoy their own version of the “return to normalcy.” In his University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation, “Christian Perfectionism in America,” approved in 1929 and revised and published in 1939, Merrill Gaddis had described the Church of the Nazarene as “the right wing of the Holiness Movement.” Many a Nazarene, upon learning of this description, took this to be one more affirmation that their denomination had “arrived,” socially- an affirmation all the more important because it came from a quarter recognized as significant by people and institutions who “counted.” The processes that had gotten underway in 1919 with the dropping of “Pentecostal” from their name and with the

centralizing and rationalizing of the administrative structure of the Church gained social cachet with the holding of the General Assembly in Columbus, Ohio, in 1928. There were a few embarrassments to report, but generally the secular press noted that these Nazarenes were solid citizens with an excusable zeal and an understandable excitement about themselves and their faith. In short, they were “normal” folks with commendable religion. Not quite mainline, but surely not far away. And the Nazarenes themselves breathed a sigh of relief and agreed. But it was a costly agreement, and one of the costs was the place of women in ordained ministry.

Theologically, in the matter of women’s ordination and women’s ministry, the “return to normalcy” and the deflation of the women’s movement by about 1925, cost the Wesleyan Holiness Movement dearly, especially the Church of the Nazarene. The Nazarenes still had not articulated a rationale for ordaining and making places of service for women and now their acculturation exacerbated their theological amnesia.

### III. From about 1930 to the mid-1940s

In its earliest decades, the Church of the Nazarene in most quarters seems to have taken for granted the rationale provided even before its own existence - that of the 1850s to 1890. Now, in the late 1920s and on to the 1940s, it still enjoyed the ministry of women, pastors and evangelists, who had come in during the early days - when their “right” to ministry was taken for granted. And, women, some of them ordained, continued all along to make strong contributions within the Movement’s schools and in extra-U.S. missionary work. But with “normalcy” and the deflation of the second wave of the women’s movement, not only was that which had been taken for granted lost; what had been taken for granted also lost its sustaining context.

Popular culture portrayed women in ways which would have been totally unacceptable to even the secularists among the earlier women’s movements, let alone the religiously and theologically rooted. The phenomenal rise of popular radio programming and of the moving picture industry in the 1920s and 1930s, both appealing to cultural least common denominators, increasingly idealized material and physical satisfaction and vigorously promoted an emotionally attractive, technologically produced caricature of the ancient medieval notion that “city air makes free.” And the preoccupation of the educated with popular Freudianism did not help either. Female sexuality was caricatured in all of the mass media and became a cultural obsession. The Nazarenes avoided the cinema and generally took care with what they listened to on the radio - practices which had far more merit than we knew at the time. But, they let their avoidances become the substitutes for teaching discernment and principle. And this left them with nothing, or next to nothing to say about being male and female; and left them nearly mute where they sorely needed to discuss and to teach and to proclaim thoroughly Christian understandings of gifts and graces and callings. They simply turned to the models declared appropriate by those elements in the surrounding culture which they considered decent. Theological reflection seldom turned in the direction of “ministry” or even “church,” except in an institutional sense. Individual piety, often put in terms of “practicality,” became the primary concern of holiness folk. And they saw - were encouraged to see - church and ministry as both a source of support for that piety and as places to exercise that piety, practically.

Earlier Wesleyan Holiness thought had rested its case for ordination to ministry precisely in theological reflection. The earlier holiness people made it clear that the basis for ordination to ministry was apostolicity- that is to say, one was fit for ordination if one clearly possessed the gifts and graces of ministry presented in Scripture, especially as they were understood to be defined and exercised in the New Testament churches. In fact, Luther Lee, Phoebe Palmer and Catherine Booth and others had looked upon ecclesial ordination simply as a faithful Christian

community's response to God's own "ordination." And that is the way Hills, Bresee, McClurkan, the Rev. Ms Cagle and a host of others had seen it, too. That theological idea is absolutely necessary to any appropriate exegesis of the system which those earliest Nazarenes put in place for determining eligibility for ordination. Gender was incidental. In fact, while the language of "rights" was used, it is clear that the referent in the "right" to preach was not anything "natural" to either men or women. The "right" to preach arose out of one's being *divinely engrafted and gifted and divinely called* to preach. Ordination was a recognition and confirmation of God's work, not a "right" totally within the control of the church.

But with the deflation of the women's movement by the late 1920s, and the rise of the twin menaces of the new culturally-produced female ideal (woman as the source and object of all physical desire) and social respectability, the Nazarenes went two ways at once. On the one hand, some in their sometimes over-eager desire to be socially acceptable, adopted the new ideal. Of course, they did not overtly accept the implicit and explicit connection of the ideal with sexual desire. What they did was to sentimentalize woman. By the late 1930s, Nazarenes generally would not have given a moment's thought to observing Maundy Thursday or Ascension Day, but they reverently celebrated Mother's Day. On the other hand, some, in their sometimes over-eager desire to negate the allurements of modern society and modern society's pre-occupation with sexuality, rejected the new ideal as if it really were the truth about women - an awful truth, but the truth. So we had serious mini-wars about skirt lengths and "bobbed hair," face powder and sheer hose, open-toed shoes and jewelry, and we got all sentimental about "tell[ing] Mother [we'd] be there" and "Mother's Old Bible." There were exceptions, of course, but generally, we simply could not think of women in ways that allowed us to focus on the fact that God calls women to *ministry* and grants the gifts and graces which qualify them for ordination.

The fact is, we had a great deal of difficulty focusing on the fact that it is divinely given gifts and graces which qualify *men* for ordination as well. Cultural considerations (or counter-cultural considerations) all too often entered the decision to ordain men as strongly as they entered the decisions concerning women. "Bearing," "sense of the fitness of things," "well-spokenness," and, sometimes above all in so far as character entered the picture, "carefulness in dealing with the opposite sex," often played heavy roles in the processes of decision. Many of the Nazarene district superintendents simply would not recommend unmarried men to congregations as pastors.

The second cultural factor which "helped" Nazarenes forget what they had once taken for granted (but seldom articulated) about ordaining women for ministry was Fundamentalism. [I shall make this section short and hope that you will subject yourself to reading my article, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement...," in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring, 1978). I think I would now write a very different article, but I think that the main line of thought there still holds.] Fundamentalism had come into play in the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene in the 1910s but did not really make itself felt until almost 1930. The Nazarenes agreed with the Fundamentalists that Scripture is divine revelation and not simply a record of human reflection upon something which the reader has chosen to call "religion" or "religious experience." But with that agreement - and I think with some of the basic argumentation against the "tongues movement" in the late 1910s and 1920s - came a tendency to narrow our vision of the work of the Holy Spirit to that of agent of entire sanctification. Much of the rest of our pneumatological language then became *pro forma*. So, where our Wesleyan and Wesleyan Holiness Movement forebears had understood the Bible as the Spirit's principal vehicle for testifying to us, internally and corporately, concerning Christ and our salvation, now in the late 1920s, we began to look at the Bible as a set of propositions and an arsenal of proof texts about

almost anything. And the Spirit simply said, “Yes, that is true.”

All of this tended to throw us on the letter, to put us at the mercy of the words in the Written Word. We still stated the major outlines of our faith as if we were medieval realists; but we explained and scrapped over the details as if we were nominalists - or even rationalists. We lost the capacity for seeing Scripture whole, as guided by the Spirit; and we focused on pericopes, as guided by whatever need was at hand. In other words, we “prooftexted” (not really a verb, but we do use it that way.) Where we found passages difficult for us to handle, such as those of Paul concerning women speaking up in church services, we finessed them one way or another and said, “Well, we don’t want to prooftext, do we. But we did not move back out from “prooftexting” to seeing Scripture as a whole, and as the Holy Spirit’s vehicle for revealing Christ and his saving way to us. We appealed to rationalism or to the social sciences or to polity, or even to a “good illustration.”

To put the matter in terms of ordained women’s ministry, we could not see that the gifts and graces for ministry of which the Spirit’s vehicle-book talks are not at all tied to gender, and that Paul’s concerns about women speaking in church must be read through the lens of those passages speaking of those gifts and graces - not vice versa. And those gifts and graces are given to the Church, the Body of Christ, in which there is neither “male nor female,” etc. So there is a “lens” which is even more basic than the gifts themselves- it is the nature of the Church itself. This would seem to imply that the Church is to remain open to recognizing these gifts in “whomever” they occur in the Church.

The third cultural factor which “helped” Nazarenes forget what they had earlier taken for granted concerning ordaining women to ministry and making places for them to serve began to gather strength in the late 19th century. But it came to its full power only in the late 1920s, and dominant in the 1930s. This was the rise of new models or paradigms of “leadership.”

Involvement in the Spanish-American War and in WWI, with the concomitant rise in the magnitude and intensity of manufacturing/ industry produced a very different definition of “leader” from that which had prevailed previously. Perhaps the quickest way to say it-and also a very easily misinterpreted way to say it is that up until the turn of the 19th c., the dominant view of the leader was of one who understood and articulated the people’s common purpose and gave primary attention to getting the best possible production from each individual in working toward meeting the common purpose. The good leader expected that good individuals, working together as best they could, would make good government or a good company, or even a good military unit. The best leader, then, was one who could turn the energies of the greatest variety of persons to a common purpose. Teddy Roosevelt is a critical figure in a basic change in which a contradiction of the earlier view becomes strong, and finally, by 1932, dominant. TR looked to the old model when he thought about Big Bill Taft and Taft’s associates. But in his war with the trusts, he turns to the new. More and more, the leader defines the common purpose (good government, good company, good military unit), often without consultation with those to whom he attributes it. He makes his definition ultimate and seeks to conform individuals to that purpose. This change moved rapidly into the military in WWI, under the leadership of generals such as Pershing and admirals such as Sims. It came into government “big time” in Wilson and in cabinet officers such as Andrew Mellon. (It came to stay with Franklin Roosevelt.) It sat on the Supreme Court in the person of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. And it came into business in such persons as William Randolph Hearst, John D. Rockefeller, and Henry Ford.

This paradigm or model of leadership simply had no place for women as women had come to be defined in that period. Women were not of the *esse* of life. They were of life’s *bene esse*. As best I can determine, the term “little woman” as a popular synonym for “wife” comes from this period. E Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, among others, picture quite precisely the idea



of woman held by such leaders.

Nazarenes were of two minds concerning this new paradigm or model of leadership. Their general leadership in the late 1920s and into the 1940s had all grown to adulthood as the new paradigms were developing. So, it is no surprise that in the late 1920s, the newer paradigm began to take hold in areas with relatively strong Nazarene populations- in the Olivet and Pasadena Zones especially. A new style of district superintendent came into being, and that new style of district superintendent tended to seek to secure and develop pastors who fit their plans. While Nazarenes had serious questions about superintendents and pastors who seemed more interested than earlier leaders had been in quantity, they became less and less likely to cut the tenure of the superintendent or pastor short. And they expected more in the way of organizational skills and administrative know-how; less in the way of preaching ability and theological depth. (This is not to say that all of the preaching was poor and that theology ran into the shallows. There were strong, strong exceptions. But the generalization still holds.)

This, in turn, led to an increase in the importance of pragmatic savvy and a diminution of theological sensitivity. And from thence came a growing indifference to the fact that God could be calling women to ordained ministry. The pragmatic argument was that in then-current society people simply had no desire for women pastors and that leadership had no compelling reason even to encourage women to be open to God's calling to and gifting for ministry. The original reason, the one which had been taken for granted early on, and seldom articulated among Nazarenes, had been completely forgotten. It was not even applied now to *men*.

#### IV. From the mid-1930s or so until the early 1980s

As we have said, early Nazarenes seldom stated for themselves the theological grounds of the legitimacy of female ordained ministry. They simply accepted, tacitly and implicitly, the theological formulations of others within the Wesleyan/Holiness Movement. Again, they took for granted the legitimacy of female ordained ministry. But a serious problem would develop from this taking-for-granted. The problem is this: few would think to explain or present any rationale for what was taken for granted. So, in time, as the Church of the Nazarene in the United States and Canada, responding to various cultural factors and aping various cultural mores, developed an almost all-male clergy, the diminishing presence of female clergy was hardly noticed. With a few exceptions, the women themselves fell silent. From the late 1910s onward to the late 1950s, pastors, evangelists, missionaries, teachers and administrators frequently and fervently, and publicly, urged young persons, men and women, to heed the call of God to ministry. Abundant sermons and talks and books and articles sought to sensitize youth to give themselves to such service. But two elements in those materials are quite clear to us now that probably were not clear to their original audiences and readers. First, males produced almost all of those materials. Second, except for the call to missionary service, the appeals were almost always pitched toward young males. They re-enforced values and understandings of adventure and romance which the culture habitually identified as male, and their clinching illustrations almost invariably involved males.

Then, too, when Nazarenes looked at their phenomenal growth in the United States during the decades from the 1930s to the 1960s, and on around the world since the end of World War II, an almost all-male clergy led in that looking- an almost all-male clergy that saw all of history in that period focused on men. The print evidence, at least, shows that Nazarene clergy almost always took the term "unemployment," as it applied to the Great Depression, to mean *male* unemployment. In the 1940s and 1950s, the culture at large simply understood the terms *military personnel* and *industrial workers* in as having male referents, and the print evidence, at least,

shows that our almost all-male clergy understood them as the culture at large understood them. Oh, of course, our clergy knew that the Great Depression cost many women jobs in the clothing industry and retail sales, especially- many even thought it wrong for a woman to work outside the home if her job could be held by a man with a family to support; and during World War II, of course our nearly all-male clergy knew of the WACs, WAVES, WAAFs. and SPARS, and of Rosie the Riveter. Still, it is easy to show that in those three to five decades our almost all-male clergy heard the terms “industry” and “the military” as male-referent terms, just as society at large heard them.

What then becomes important to us is the fact that the clergy’s general concurrence with the cultural mores in these matters led them [I want to believe unwittingly] to two conclusions which marginalized women who believed that they were called to ordained ministry in the Church of the Nazarene.

First, that almost all-male clergy, from the mid-1930s onward, read itself back into the period from 1894 to the 1930s - that is to say, most of the denomination’s clergy, including even its women clergy, somewhere in the 1930s, forgot how deeply influential were its women clergy in tending the growth of the denomination in its first thirty-five years. And that amnesia has stuck with us until quite recently. For the fifty years from about 1930 to about 1980, almost everyone thought that the *men* had done it all, all along. Many knew the names of the women but had little idea of the depth and breadth of their work. It seemed to be a bit of a surprise when the stories of some of the women were rehearsed that they had been disproportionately significant. But try telling the story of the Nazarenes in Texas without mentioning any ordained women. Nor can the story of Los Angeles First be told without telling about some ordained women. It would be impossible to recount the history of the denomination in Argentina or in the Caribbean without telling of the work of ordained women. Pastors, too, the great majority of them. But, until just a decade or two ago, most everyone thought that men had done it all, all along.

Second, Nazarenes also marginalized women who believed that they were called to ordained ministry by way of the consensus criteria for measuring success. Especially after the middle 1940s and the end of World War II, enculturation came more and more to be the implicit measure of that success. [And here, parenthetically, I would ask you to keep this matter of enculturation in mind.] From the late 1940s into the 1970s, the *Herald of Holiness* is filled with news of this congregation or that moving out of its former location in an inner city or mid-town area to a “commodious building” on a site often described as being “in a desirable part of town.” This was news because it was thought to represent success. Sociologically speaking, from the perspective of the role of women, our ideals were Donna Reed of “Father Knows Best” and June Cleaver, mother of Wally and Theodore. We meant to get away from Laverne and Shirley, to say nothing of Beulah, Miz Blue, and Sapphire (stereo-typical African-American women of whom you know nothing, but of whom your parents knew a great deal). Here at NTS, from its earliest days until about 1980, faculty and headquarters wives gave concerted attention to helping students’ wives (they were organized as the Parsonettes) learn how to set a proper table for dinner or for a reception, how to decorate the parsonage so that it would always be presentable should anyone of social significance drop by, how to maintain that spare bedroom for evangelists, etc. In short, the Parsonettes spent lots of time learning how to be upper middle class hostesses on poverty-line budgets. Ironically, the strongest voices among the NTS and Headquarters wives who led this campaign in enculturation were either ordained women or women who considered themselves full-time partners in the public aspects of their husbands’ ministries. Homebodies or Martha Stewarts they were not.

Even our women full-time preachers obliged us by working to type. Except for a few caricatures of femininity, we prided ourselves on our women preachers: well-mannered, well-

spoken, well (and modestly)-dressed. They fit quite acceptably into the man's world of Nazarene clergy from the 1930s onward. Just enough face powder, lace hankies and perfume to keep the good old boys from slapping them on the back and inviting them to a bout of swapping stories or a game of horseshoes, and just enough obvious toughness and disinterest in male preening to chase away any protective jealousy on the part of pastors' or laity's wives. "Sensible" was the word most often used to describe them, if someone wanted to pass them a compliment. Males coveted such encomia as "dynamic" and "go-getter." They felt them to be high praise indeed. But these were risky terms to apply to a woman, especially a woman preacher, for such terms came with connotations of "pushy." And not a few women clergy became masters at playing out that stereotype of "sensible" - not because they wanted to be actors but because those were the dimensions of the role laid upon them by the nearly all-male Nazarene clergy.

Only in the 1970s, thanks in large part to the rise of *secular* feminism, did one begin to hear Mary Scott and Estelle Crutcher, Mary Latham and Mildred Wynkoop, and others preaching and teaching in their own (feminine) voices, though those particular women were by then in their senior years.

But on what grounds are we now again opening the door to ordaining women for ministry? Is it theological and spiritual? And if it is theological and spiritual, is it consistent with the Gospel grounds?

#### CONCLUSION - WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Permit me to be so bold as to suggest three problems which I believe we are already creating. I believe each could take us where we should not want to go. One hears all three of these quite frequently, even in our current denominational literature concerning women in ordained ministry. Those creating these problems are persons for whom I hold deep respect, but I must respectfully suggest that their approaches, if they be taken as foundational or fundamental, raise even larger questions (and ultimately raise larger barriers) than we now have to work with. The first of these ultimately unwanted tracks has to do with a particular way of interpreting Scripture; the second and third have to do with the role of some terms which we are using in attempting to resolve our issues.

Let us look at that particular way of interpreting Scripture. Actually, it involves two ways of interpreting Scripture. On the one hand are the literalists, who look at some passages in I Corinthians and I Timothy, especially, and, on those bases are against ordaining women to ministry. On the other are the contextualists, who suggest that Paul wrote those passages to specific persons in specific circumstances. The latter usually go on then to point to passages, even in Paul, which seem to suggest that Paul's general point of view actually drew no distinction between men and women in the matter of ordained ministry. So the discussion concerning women's ordination becomes a "battle from the Bible."

In fact, not a single word in the Bible was originally addressed to some abstract audience. But the Wesleyan tradition (among others) recognizes that it is not the letter, but the Spirit which gives life to the Bible. And that means that we must keep on the alert, for the Spirit may apply those Pauline prohibitions again. It also means that the Spirit may require men to fall silent as well. Paul explicitly commands it in I Cor. 14.28, if there is no one to interpret the prophecy. "Let the man keep his revelation between himself and God alone," says Paul.

But the real point is that as Wesleyans, we do not seek proof texts and we continually seek the testimonium Spiritus Sancti in our use of the Bible.

We probably would be helped if we were to go back and see just how it was that Phoebe Palmer, Catherine Booth, and others, male and female, used Scripture, and appealed to the work of the Spirit, to make the argument for ordained women's ministry. In fact, while they made a

special plea for woman's ordination, they did not make a plea for the uniqueness of women's ordination. Their case for the ordination of women serves also as a theological delineation of ordination, period.

The second path which we seem to be taking, in which I believe there is considerable peril, is putting the question of women's ministry and ordination in terms of "rights."

Ordination to ministry is no one's "right." And the church must remove from its language and its ritual, formal and informal, the language of "rights" as it speaks of ordination. Ordination is a matter of discernment- discernment of a call to preach and discernment of gifts and graces. The church must take every precaution to see to it that this discernment is rooted and grounded in the work of the Trinity alone, so here it must hew closely to Scripture. Because the Gospel always comes in incarnate form, in specific times and places, cultural factors inevitably enter the picture. That is both the wonder and the scandal of particularity. But we need not so focus on the predicate that we despair of really hearing the subject. It is the Gospel and it does come- to us, and to all. So, while we know that cultural factors will enter into our discernment of a call to preach and a discernment of gifts and graces, we may work in confidence that the Holy Trinity is also at work in the process.

And, after all, the credential for ordination is the same for all, male and female, bond and free, Jew and Gentile. It is a positive response to a divine call and the presence of divinely granted gifts and graces.

The word "empowerment" could be used with a biblical referent, of course. But its usual use in the current concern for women's ordained ministry does not have a biblical referent. It has either a personal referent, such as a mentor or a mentoring or sponsoring group; or it has an ecclesiastical meaning. But neither of these is biblical, or at least they have no essential relationship to a biblical understanding of being set apart for ministry. As used, the term comes from the social sciences and has to do with one person or more enabling or credentialing another person to perform certain tasks.

Far better, it seems to me, would be conversation among us – to the point that we reach some sort of biblically-theologically sound consensus - about discernment. "Discernment of spirits" is a sound biblical concept. Such discernment itself is wholly dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit; and, biblically, that work may be carried on in an individual or in a group of individuals. What this means is that we get back to the biblical idea of ordination as a recognition by the Church, the Body of Christ to whom the Spirit gives life, that someone has been specially called to proclaim the Gospel and has been granted the gifts and graces necessary to fulfill that calling. Ecclesiastical ordination is not on the order of the Church's power to bind and to loose. That power has to do with sin and forgiveness. It may be an aspect of a divine calling to ministry, but it is not a necessary or essential element in ecclesiastical ordination. Ecclesiastical ordination should involve a process of discernment and a declaration of recognition of God's gifts, including the authority to preach the Word and to administer the sacraments.

In suggesting that we avoid the language of "empowerment," I am not at all objecting to mentoring processes and sponsoring activities. The ministry is, after all, according to Scripture, accountable one to another and to the body of Christ at large. I am simply suggesting that in developing a strong conscience regarding ordination of both men and women we do what we can to keep priorities clear and straight.

Our task, then, is to work diligently, grace-fully, to reconscientize and commit ourselves and our peers to what is basic in ministry and in ordination, and that is the biblical-theological point of apostolicity - that God specially calls and has called some; called them to the proclamation of the Good News of full salvation; and, according to Scripture and its fulfillment in the life of the church by the Spirit, has clearly testified that this call has come to male and female, Jew and

Gentile, bond and free.

## Notes

1 Question has rightly arisen as to whether Ms Brown was actually ordained or simply installed as a pastor. She certainly remembered it as an ordination. But the issue is confused by the fact that on the United States' frontier, opposition to the ordinary judicatories and pyramidal structures of most denominations was quite common, and people often simply took matters into their own hands. Cf. Luther Lee, *Woman's Right to Preach the Gospel. A Sermon At the Ordination of Rev. Miss Antoinette L. Brown, at South Butler, Wayne County, N. Y., Sep. 15, 1853* (Syracuse: The author, 1853). It should be noted that the title of the book, published by Lee himself in the very year in which he preached the sermon, indicates that Lee himself believed that he had preached at an ordination.

2Perhaps as important to Nazarenes as Hunter's book itself is the fact that it carried an introduction by A. M. Hills, who, by 1905, held what were widely believed to be the best of credentials as both a preacher and a scholar in the Holiness Movement on both sides of the Atlantic.

3Byron Johnson Rees, *Hulda A. Rees, the Pentecostal Prophetess. A Sketch of Her Life and Triumph, together with Seventeen of Her Sermons* (Philadelphia, 1898), pp. 15-16.

4 For source-based discussion of this episode, cf. Charles Edwin Jones, *Perfectionist Persuasion. The Holiness Movement and American Methodism, 1867-1936* (Metuchen, N. J., 1974), pp. 107-108; Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness. The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative years* (Kansas City, 1962), pp. 49-51, 109; and Manie Payne Ferguson, "Peniel Missionary Work," in L. L. Pickett, *Faith Tonic, 1 and 2 Combined...* (Louisville, n.d.), pp. 3-35.

5 Bresee did oppose Ms Ferguson's plan to place all of the "rescue" work in the hands of young women. But Bresee's opposition, as best it can be understood, rested solely on his fears for the safety of the young women, not on their capacity for carrying out the work. Apparently, Ms Ferguson took (mistook) Bresee's concern for male chauvinism, or, at least patronization.

6 Warner's book sold more than 100,000 copies in its first year; Cummins' sold 40,000 in its first month in the bookshops; eventually, Holmes' various books sold more than 1 million copies.

7 "Adam" for the first man; "Bede" for the quintessential English saint. Adam becomes the husband of Dinah Morris in the novel. Eliot, of course, turned away from the evangelical piety of her youth, and in some significant ways, *Adam Bede* is an exploration of her own spirituality.