

How to Shipwreck the World: The Controversy over Women and the Division of the Restoration Movement

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In 1888, a thirty-eight year old mother of six, named Clara Babcock was lecturing on the Women's Christian Temperance Union circuit, when a Christian congregation affiliated with the American Restoration Movement invited her to speak at their church. She accepted the invitation and when the congregation asked to ordain her as their preaching minister, she agreed. Babcock was the first woman within the Restoration Movement to be ordained as a minister. Her ministry was a successful one – the two congregations at which she preached soon outgrew their building and were forced to erect larger ones, and between her ordination in 1888 and her death in 1924, she is reported to have baptized 1502 individuals. In the next few years, the legitimacy of her ordination would come into question among the contributors to the *Christian Standard*, but as the Restoration Movement possessed no official ecclesiastical hierarchy, her ordination was never invalidated.¹

In the same year Babcock was ordained, the Restoration Movement congregations of the South confronted the question of women engaging in the ministry of the church when a series of articles was published in the *Gospel Advocate*, the leading periodical among Southern Restoration Movement congregations of the time. In a comparison of the two discussions the

¹Mary Ellen Lantzer, *An Examination of the 1892-93 Christian Standard Controversy Concerning Women's Preaching* (Master's Thesis, Emmanuel School of Religion, 1990), 17-21. Lantzer's deft and detailed analysis has been invaluable to the composition of this paper.

Bailey, Fred. "The Cult of True Womanhood and the Disciple Path to Female Preaching." *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*. 2 vols. Ed. Carrol D. Osburn, vol. 2. Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995. 485-518. Bailey also opens his essay with a description of Babcock's ministry.

irreconcilable differences of the two branches of the Restoration Movement become apparent. The Restoration Movement divided in the first decade of the twentieth century into two distinct denominations. The liberal branch of the movement, which continued to use the name the Disciples of Christ, would slowly accept women as ministers and today the general minister/president of the Disciples is a woman.² The conservative branch of the movement, known as the Churches of Christ, continues to restrict the role of women in the church. Discussion of the subject was renewed during the 1980s, but the Churches of Christ, as a group, have yet to come to a consensus that allows women to take a public leadership role in the work of the church.³

In this paper I will argue that the differing views on the proper role of women in the church contributed to the decision of the Churches of Christ to separate from the Disciples of Christ. A comparison of two discussions of the status of women in the church, one from a liberal “proto-Disciples of Christ” source and one from a conservative “proto-Churches of Christ” source demonstrate many of the theological fissures that were forming between the two groups. Further, as the mission boards which had been established in the Restoration Movement churches placed women in roles of public leadership, the proto-Church of Christ belief that women were restricted by the scriptures to the domestic sphere exacerbated the tensions that already existed over the existence of the mission boards.

The American Restoration Movement, sometimes called the Stone-Campbell Movement

²Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), “President’s Page,” <http://disciples.org/watkins/>

³C. Leonard Allen, *Thing Unseen: Churches of Christ In (and After) the Modern Age*. (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2004), 128-129

after its two main founders, began in the early years of the nineteenth century with a two fold goal: “restoration of the ancient order and Christian union.”⁴ The founders were disturbed by the proliferation of denominations within Christianity and hoped to find in a literalistic reading of the Bible that forsook the creeds of humankind a Christianity in which all believers could be united. They avoided the ecclesiastical hierarchies that were associated with the denominations. Restoration of the New Testament Church was a means to unity, but the tension between the two goals would cause the movement to fracture into a “liberal” camp that prioritized unity and a “conservative” branch that emphasized the restoration of the New Testament Church.

Throughout the history of the movement, the periodicals that circulated amongst congregations substituted for a denominational hierarchy. The editors of periodicals exerted influence on their readers and virtually controlled the direction of the movement. The history of the papers is “largely the history of the movement.”⁵ As the movement began to fracture, periodicals were associated with the “liberal” or the “conservative” camp. The primary sources for this paper are drawn from the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Standard* during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

At this time, the *Gospel Advocate* was the most powerful periodical among conservative Restoration Movement churches in the South, particularly in the Tennessee area. E.G. Sewell and David Lipscomb edited the magazine. These men, especially Lipscomb, were the main influences on the proto-Churches of Christ. The fact that the director of the U.S. Census turned

⁴David Edwin Harrell Jr., *The Social Sources of Division in the Disciples of Christ 1865-1900* (Athens and Atlanta, Georgia: Publishing Systems, Inc. 1973.), 8.

⁵Ibid., 17.

to Lipscomb for information when deciding whether to list the Churches of Christ as separate from the Disciple of Christ on the census is a testament to Lipscomb's standing within the conservative wing of the movement. Described by historian David Harrell as "stubborn, caustic, and plodding, the editors of the *Advocate* virtually defined conservative . . . orthodoxy. The *Gospel Advocate* was the nucleus which the Churches of Christ gathered around."⁶ The Churches of Christ remain regional in nature. While they are not limited to the area between Tennessee and Texas with part of North Alabama thrown in, that is where both the historic and modern-day heart of the denomination lies, in what one historian describes as "the broad belt" tying Nashville, Tennessee to Fort Worth, Texas.⁷

In 1866, the same year David Lipscomb revived the *Gospel Advocate* from its death during the Civil War,⁸ the *Christian Standard* began publication. The *Christian Standard* was founded by "a coalition of moderate and liberal churchmen" to be a moderate voice among the periodicals of the time and was associated with the proto-Disciples of Christ. Isaac Errett, whose influence among the Restoration Movement was "unequaled" during the 1880s, edited the *Christian Standard*.⁹ I will use the *Christian Standard* to represent thought among the proto-Disciples of Christ of the time.

⁶Harrell, *Social Sources of Division*, 20.

⁷Allen, 15.

⁸Robert Hooper, *Crying in the Wilderness*, (Nashville, TN: McQuiddy Printing Company, 1979), 51-52 and 88-89. The *Gospel Advocate* was first published by Tolbert Fanning and David Lipscomb's older brother William in July 1855. Publication was suspended during the war and in 1866 Fanning and David Lipscomb reissued the *Gospel Advocate*.

⁹Harrell, *Social Sources of Division*, 18-19.

In 1907, the conservative branch of the Restoration Movement announced their divorce from the liberal branch in the pages of the *Gospel Advocate*. David Lipscomb published an inquiry from the director of the Federal Bureau of the Census regarding the state of the Restoration Movement churches followed. In his reply, Lipscomb explained that the Churches of Christ had “separated from the ‘Christian Churches’ that grew out of the effort to restore pure primitive Christianity, by remaining true to the original purpose and the principles needful to develop it.”¹⁰ Despite his pivotal role in the schism, it would be vastly unfair to charge Lipscomb with the division of the Restoration Movement. The division had been fermenting for many years. Lipscomb’s formalization was simply a “belated recognition of an accomplished fact.”¹¹

Two popular histories have examined the reasons behind the division of the Restoration Movement. David Edwin Harrell, Jr.’s two-volume history discusses the sociology behind the division. Among a number of specific issues, he found that proto-Disciples of Christ and proto-Churches of Christ groups tended to be divided along class lines with the proto-Disciples of Christ mainly middle class and the vast majority of proto-Churches of Christ working class. The groups were further divided by their location as urban or rural congregations, and perhaps most importantly, the proto-Disciples of Christ congregations were mostly located in the North, or if

¹⁰David Lipscomb, “The ‘Churches of Christ’ and the ‘Disciples of Christ’” *Gospel Advocate*. XLIV (July 18, 1907), 457. From Earl Irvin West. *The Search for the Ancient Order*. Vol III. 1900-1918. (Indianapolis Religious Book Service, 1979) 22. The term “Christian Churches” was popular among both branches of the movement prior to their division.

¹¹Harrell, *Social Sources of Division*, 12.

in the South, in areas that had supported the Union during the Civil War.¹² David Lipscomb's concern that Southern members of the Restoration Movement have "something to read that would not hurt their feeling" prompted him to restart publication of the *Gospel Advocate*.¹³ This and other statements by Lipscomb support Harrell's description of the Churches of Christ as "the spirited offspring of the religious rednecks of the post bellum South."¹⁴ In his history of the Churches of Christ, Richard T. Hughes examines the theological differences that led to the division of the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. He focuses on the tension between the competing goals of restoration and unity as the greatest factor leading to the division.¹⁵ Differences of theological orientation created many of the controversies, and any goodwill the participants might have felt had been destroyed by the bitter aftermath of the Civil War. The deeper issues identified by both of these historians are illustrated by specific controversial issues that arose as symptoms of the underlying disease.

Two controversial practices generally receive credit for driving a wedge between the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ. The first is the use of instrumental music, specifically the use of the organ, in the worship service. The second controversy, over the existence of extra-congregational mission boards, reveals more of the differences between the

¹²Ibid. 324-326.

¹³Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, Revised Ed, (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 399.

¹⁴David E. Harrell, Jr., "The Sectional Origins of the Churches of Christ," *The Journal of Southern History* 30, (August 1964), 277.

¹⁵Richard T. Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996).

two groups. The controversy surrounding the missionary societies illustrated the continuing tension between the movement's goal of Christian unity and the method of restoring the literal New Testament Church. Many defenders of the societies believed "that there is no way for believers to be one without cooperating in carrying out the great commission."¹⁶ These members privileged unity among Christians above the literalistic restoration of the church of the New Testament, and for them the mission boards were a means more than justified by the ends.

The enthusiasm for the missionary societies was not shared by all within the movement. Conservatives thought of the societies as an unscriptural human innovation that was erroneously tacked onto the scriptural structure of the church. Support of the societies "became a symbol of apostasy to the conservative Disciples."¹⁷ Rather than promoting unity among believers, mission boards became the key to David Lipscomb's decision to list the Churches of Christ as separate from the Disciples of Christ.¹⁸ The mission boards highlighted the sectional division of the movement into the North and South, and further exacerbated the tensions between the middle class proto-Disciples of Christ and the working class proto-Churches of Christ. The sectional discord was entangled with the class strife. Lipscomb suggested that the American Christian Missionary Society held its 1892 convention in Nashville to mock the impoverished southern brethren who could not afford to support a mission board. Lipscomb defended the southern congregations as having done well in their mission efforts considering the conditions of

¹⁶Garrett, 370.

¹⁷Ibid. 362.

¹⁸Ibid. 397-401.

reconstruction.¹⁹ The theological conflicts over the understanding of the silence of scripture on an issue is also demonstrated by the disagreements over the mission boards. The proto-Disciples of Christ saw the lack of a direct prohibition in the Bible of extra-congregational institutions, such as mission boards, as permission to use them to further the work. Proto-Churches of Christ thinkers read the lack of an explicit affirmation to be a prohibition of such institutions, no matter how effective they appeared to be.

A factor in the debate over missionary societies which both Harrell and Hughes briefly discuss is that of the proper role of women in the church.²⁰ While the controversy over women has been discussed, the attention has focused mostly on the Disciples of Christ. There has not been a detailed analysis of how the controversy over women contributed to the frustration felt by proto-Church of Christ thinkers regarding the Mission Boards. This paper seeks to fill in that gap.

The *Gospel Advocate's* controversy over the role of women began rather calmly with an innocent letter asking Lipscomb to settle a dispute over whether or not it was right for a woman to speak in a Bible class. The writer, himself had never “before heard the right of the sisters engaging in worship, or reading in the Bible class, called in question,” but an elder of his congregation refused to meet because the women were allowed to speak in Bible class. The elder saw the equal participation of the women in the Bible class as a violation of the commandments for women to remain silent in church and not to teach.²¹

¹⁹David Lipscomb, “Card of Invitation,” *Gospel Advocate*. 34 (Oct. 6, 1892): 628-629.

²⁰Harrell, 256-266; Hughes, 381-382.

²¹ T.J. Hunsaker, “Woman’s Work in the Church,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (March 14,

Lipscomb first criticized the elder in question for having forsaken the assembly because things did not “suit” and questioned the fitness of the gentleman in question to serve as an elder. He then moved into the heart of the matter by stating that “it is a difficult question to determine exactly the limit of the law forbidding women to teach or to usurp authority.” Lipscomb found that women are indeed commanded by the scriptures to teach in some situations. So as “not to conflict with the clear examples and teachings of the apostles in other places,” Lipscomb modified the scope of the Apostle Paul’s comment to 1 Timothy 2:12 “I permit no woman to teach” by inferring a modifier for the verb to teach. Prohibitions became “to teach publicly,” instead of simply to teach, and commands for women to teach became “to teach privately,” defined by Lipscomb as “their children” and “their husbands who are more ignorant than they” and perhaps even a small group with a few men, providing any teaching on the part of the woman is carried out “in a quiet social way.”²² Lipscomb and others who opposed allowing women a public role in the church still avoided a strict literalist reading of the text as it would prohibit women from participating in the church or in worship in any way.

At the end of the article, Lipscomb admitted that the parameters he specified were only his interpretation and affirmed his dedication to unity amongst Christians with the statement, “for one man to say I draw the line here, and if you do not come exactly to my standard, I will withdraw from you – is to show himself a bigot and to declare his utter unfitness for ruling the

1888), 6.

²²David Lipscomb, “Woman’s Work in the Church,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (March 14, 1888): 6-7.

church of God.”²³ Lipscomb’s tone and concern for unity suggests that, at this time, he did not feel threatened by what, if any, discussion that was taking place on the role of women within the Restoration Movement.

Three days after that issue of the *Gospel Advocate* was published, Silena Holman of Fayetteville, Tennessee picked up her pen and wrote an entirely unexpected challenge of Lipscomb’s authority on the matter. She stated her intention to add “a woman’s standpoint” to Lipscomb’s interpretation of the limits placed on women by scripture. In her short opening letter, she argued that, taken as a whole, the scriptures indicate that men and women have “perfect equality before the Lord,” and women have the permission of Jesus to work publicly on his behalf. She further rejected the division Lipscomb created between public and private work as absurd and unscriptural. Her letter was published a month and a half later on May second. The editors tucked it in the back of the *Advocate* next to the advertisements and obituaries.²⁴

However, the subject was not dropped, either by Holman or the editorial staff of the *Advocate*. A number of people defended the view that women were confined by scripture to private work in the church. Articles either on the subject or in direct response to Holman appeared from David Lipscomb, E.G. Sewell, and A.A. Bunner (a frequent contributor from Ohio). The editors of the *Advocate* also reprinted articles from other papers that dealt with the subject of women’s work in the church. Holman, however, appears to have been the only participant to defend women engaging in public work in the church. One other woman, M.R. Lemert, wrote Lipscomb to question his limits on the work of women in church, but she appears

²³Ibid.

²⁴Silena Holman, “A Peculiar People,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (May 2, 1888), 12.

to have retreated after Lipscomb snubbed her letter.²⁵ Despite the often patronizing responses Holman received, Holman refused to back down. (It was suggested at one point that Lipscomb should throw her a bone, start “a women’s department in the *Gospel Advocate* and select sister Holman or some other good sister or two . . . to edit this department.”²⁶) She commented at one point that “while it does seem rather bad that two big brothers must fight one little sister, still, I am grateful for the implied compliment, and feel encouraged to continue,”²⁷ and her articles on the subject of women continued to appear in the *Gospel Advocate* through 1913.

Doggedness appears to have been an innate trait for Holman, or at least one she picked up early in life. She was born on July 9, 1850 in Moore County, TN.²⁸ Her father died in the Civil War leaving her mother “with a house full of girls, the oldest [Silena] . . . just fourteen, and a baby boy.” In an autobiographical sketch that appears in one of her letters, Holman noted that the neighbors pitied her mother for “having such a big crowd of girls on her hands” and no boys to fill the role of provider for the family. Silena began teaching to help her family’s financial situation. She was able, with the help of a grandmother who advanced her inheritance to her, to purchase the family home which had been sold to cover her father’s debts.²⁹

²⁵M.R. Lemert and David Lipscomb, “Keep Silence Wives,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (June 13, 1888), 5.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Holman, “Women’s Scriptural Status Again.” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (Nov. 21, 1888), 8.

²⁸Mattie Duncan Beard, *The W.C.T.U in the Volunteer State*, (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1962), 122.

²⁹Holman, “The New Woman, No. 2.” *Gospel Advocate*. 16 July, 1896. 452-453. online.

She married Dr. Thomas P. Holman, a Confederate veteran, on January 5, 1875.³⁰

During her marriage she had eight children – seven boys and a girl. The Holmans were fairly well to do. In addition to a house in Fayetteville, Dr. Holman owned a 300 acre farm outside of the town.³¹ Holman was active in the Tennessee Women’s Christian Temperance Union and was elected state president in 1899. She earned the nickname “General Holman” for her tenacity during her sixteen year tenure.³² Two years after her death, Holman became the second woman whose portrait was hung in the Tennessee State Capitol Library³³. While the temperance movement was the center of Holman’s work and her first letters to the *Gospel Advocate* dealt with the use of wine in the Lord’s Supper,³⁴ her letters to the *Gospel Advocate* took on another, although not unrelated, issue – the rights and place of women in both the church and society.

Both Holman and her opponents were committed to the Restoration Movement principle of Bible literalism and believed in the inspiration of the New Testament. They also agreed that the Bible should be interpreted holistically, so that all the teachings would harmonize with each other. The confusion arose in determining which passages were clear in meaning and should be used to infer the intention behind the other “obscure” passages. Due to the disjuncture between the gospels and the epistles, the conflict over the intention of scripture was often phrased in

³⁰Goodspeed’s *History of Tennessee*. “Biography of Thomas Holman, MD.” Columbia, TN: Woodward & Stinson Print: 1972, 895, online.

³¹Beard, 122; Goodspeed, 895.

³²Beard, 123-124.

³³Allen, 126.

³⁴Hooper, 200.

terms of whether the example of Jesus or the teachings of Paul would have priority when determining the role of women in the churches.

When Holman looked at the examples of Jesus' conduct to women in the Bible, she did not find a man who treated women as inferiors or as "weaker vessels" who needed the protective environment of the domestic sphere. Instead she found that Jesus more often than not treated women in the same way he treated men. As Jesus' life is the model for Christian behavior, "the attitudes and values practiced by Jesus have priority over other texts that may appear to be in conflict with the teachings of Jesus."³⁵ For this reason, Jesus' attitude toward women was a powerful resource for those who wanted to allow women to take a public leadership role in the church without abandoning their grounding in scripture. A few supporters of women in the ministry, much to the delight their opponents, went so far as to claim that they could not "reconcile Christ's treatment and mention of women with Paul's."³⁶ Any denial of the inspiration of the Pauline epistles left the claimant open to attacks that he or she was not holding fast to Restoration Movement's dedication to the scriptures. More commonly, proponents of a public role for women would use the example of Jesus to insist that the intention of Paul's instructions regarding women was misunderstood. The goal was not to dismiss Paul, but to

³⁵Kathy J. Pulley, "Women in the Church in Recent Discussion." *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*. 2 vols. Ed. Carrol D. Osburn, vol. 1. (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993): 6-7

³⁶John A. Broadus, "About Women Speaking to Mixed Audiences," *Gospel Advocate*, Vol. 30 No. 21 (May 23, 1888), 14. Carolyn DeArmond Blevins, "Women and the Baptist Experience," *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina University Press, 1996), 163. Broadus was a Baptist minister. The appearance of one of his articles in the *Gospel Advocate* indicates the similarity of the difficulties faced by the Restoration Movement churches and the Baptist churches regarding the role of women.

harmonize the teaching of the Bible as a whole. This was not heterodox in the least; David Lipscomb himself engaged in this form of exegesis when attempting to determine the limits placed on women by the scriptures.³⁷

Holman used examples of Jesus' interaction with women to argue that women were permitted by scripture to take a public role in the church and in society. In her articles, she was careful not to reject the inspiration of the epistles but claimed that "it is necessary in order to understand the teachings of the Word to take the Bible as a whole, and not in detached parts; always interpreting every passage of Scripture so as to harmonize it within every other passage."³⁸ In her letters, Holman brought up a number of examples from the gospels which she interpreted to show Jesus holding women equally responsible with men for the public proclamation of the gospel. She concluded that women were not only permitted but in fact commanded to work publicly in proclaiming the gospel. Paul was not uninspired, but in order for his words to harmonize with her understanding of Jesus' actions, she postulated that the exact meaning of the apparent prohibitions of women in a leadership role was unknown to humans.

Holman used the interaction of Jesus with an unnamed Samaritan woman as one example. In this passage Jesus remained alone at a well while his disciples go into the town to purchase food. A woman approached the well to draw water, and Jesus requested that she give him a drink. At the end of the ensuing conversation Jesus revealed to the woman that he is the messiah. The woman tells the people of the city what Jesus told her and has them return with her

³⁷See also above, page 9.

³⁸Holman, "A Peculiar People."

to the well to see him.³⁹ Due to the testimony of the woman, which receives no reprimand from Jesus, “many Samaritans from that city believed in him.”⁴⁰

Holman mined several points out of this short incident. First, the woman proclaimed Jesus as messiah, the basic gospel message, to a large number of people and received no reprimand from Jesus. Second, this example presents Jesus disregarding the cultural norms of the treatment of women. The text notes the astonishment of his disciples to find Jesus conversing with a woman.⁴¹ Finally, Holman emphasized that, in the Gospel of John, Jesus’ first revelation of himself as Christ is to this woman. If Jesus discriminated on the basis of gender, it was, in Holman’s opinion, to show favoritism to women.⁴²

The role played by women in the resurrection was one of Holman’s most powerful examples of Jesus’ treatment of women as equals. A group of women went to Jesus’ tomb the third day after the crucifixion. The women found the tomb empty and were told by Jesus or an angel to go and tell the other disciples what they had seen. The most important parts of the story appear in each of the four canonical gospels. Women, or a woman, were the first to learn of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and were commanded to carry that news to the other disciples.⁴³ Holman felt the meaning of these texts was self-evident. Jesus issued the command

³⁹John 4: 7-29, NRSV. The New Revised Standard Version will be used throughout.

⁴⁰John 4:39.

⁴¹John 4:28.

⁴²Holman, “A Peculiar People.”

⁴³John 20:11-18; Luke 24:1-27; Mark 16:1-9; Matthew 28:1-10. The number of women in the group varies. Matthew only lists two Mary Magdalene and the “other Mary” (Matt. 28:1). Mark gives the number as three – Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome

to proclaim the gospel to both women and men. Holman found that she “never could understand how a man could say that woman shall not tell the story of the cross, when she received her commission to do so from the Savior’s own lips.” As with the previous passage, Holman suggested that if Jesus privileged the women above his male disciples. “It was they [the women] who received the *first* commission from . . . to tell the glad news” before the male disciples.⁴⁴

The passages detailing Jesus’ treatment of women were not the only ones used to defend the position that the scriptures permitted women a public role in the church. Holman cited other passages to show that restricting the role of women caused the Bible to contradict itself. Among these was Gal 3:28 which states that in the church there is “neither male nor female.” Phoebe and Priscilla were, for Holman, examples of women engaged in public ministry with Paul’s approval. The former is mentioned in Romans 16: 1-3 and is often used as an example of a woman minister in the early church. Priscilla is mentioned in several of the Pauline epistles. Her key story is found in Acts 18:24-27, where she, along with her husband, taught a young man. In her first article, Holman suggested that Priscilla may have been considered of greater importance than her husband, Aquila, since the writer listed her name first.⁴⁵ Both Holman (and in her one short letter, Lemert) argued that women were among the disciples upon whom the Holy Spirit was bestowed in Acts 1:14, 2:1-4 and 17-18. Their reading was based on the inclusion of “certain women” and Mary among the disciples and were further strengthened by Peter’s quotation of the

(16:1). Luke gives the vague description of a group of Jesus’s female disciples (Luke 23:55). John further simplifies the account a lone visit from Mary Magdalene.

⁴⁴Holman, “The Scriptural Status of Woman,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (Oct. 10, 1888): 2-3.[emphasis mine].

⁴⁵Holman, “A Peculiar People.”

Joel's prophecy "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy."⁴⁶ If the women had received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and were among those speaking to the multitude in foreign languages, they reasoned that this was an example in the New Testament of women speaking publicly, and, therefore, the scriptures permitted women to engage in public ministry.⁴⁷ From the ninth chapter of Acts, Holman inferred that women must have been engaged in some sort of public work within the New Testament church. Saul, prior to his conversion, obtained permission to bring both male and female followers of the new religion to Jerusalem. Holman presented a rhetorical question, "if women were not allowed to speak of it except to their husbands at home, what harm could they have done?"⁴⁸ Holman further argued the daughters of Phillip, who possessed the gift of prophesy, were another example of women speaking publicly to the church.⁴⁹ She referred to 1 Cor. 14: 3 to define prophesy as public teaching on the scriptures before the church and finds "that Phillip's four daughters did publicly expound the scriptures, and in the presence of some men at least, including Luke, and Paul himself."⁵⁰ Finding examples of women publicly ministering in the New Testament church, a Biblical precedent for women engaging in a public leadership role, was vital for Holman's argument in the context of the proto-Churches of Christ.

The bitterest of the verbal sparring in the *Gospel Advocate* took place between Holman

⁴⁶Acts 1:11, 2:17-18.

⁴⁷M. R. Lemert. "Keep Silence Wives." *Gospel Advocate*. Vol 30, No. 24 (June 13, 1888): 5. Silena Holman. "A Peculiar People." *Gospel Advocate*. (May 2, 1888): 12.

⁴⁸Silena Holman, "The Scriptural Status of Woman."

⁴⁹Acts 21: 8-9

⁵⁰Holman, "A Peculiar People."

and A. A. Bunner over the actual role of Phillip's daughters. Nearly two months after "A Peculiar People" was published in the *Gospel Advocate*, Bunner ruthlessly responded to Holman's article. He compared her adjoining of the definition of prophecy as a public exhortation to the passage regarding Phillip's daughters to linking "the passage 'Judas went and hanged himself' with "Go thou and do likewise." He further attacked Holman's addition of a "woman's standpoint" to Lipscomb's interpretation of scripture. Bunner insisted that "a woman's standpoint' is a very far thing . . . from a scriptural standpoint."⁵¹

Bunner and Lipscomb believed any examples of women teaching in the Bible were examples of teaching that was done in private. The insistence of Holman that the scriptures do no say that such work was done privately was dismissed as speculation. In his reply to one of her articles, Lipscomb used Holman as an example of why women should not be allowed to teach. He cited "her strong emotional nature causing her to be easily deceived and to ready to run after anything or body that might strike her fancy against reason and facts." Holman's belief that the women who taught in the Bible taught in public is "only because the idol of her love demands she should see it."⁵²

When Holman used examples of Jesus' commands to women, she speculated that the work the women did was in fact "public." The Bible is silent on specifics, such as how many people were present when the women told the other disciples that Jesus had appeared to them, or if they pulled aside a few of the disciples at a time. Therefore the women could have proclaimed

⁵¹A.A. Bunner, "Woman's Work in the Church," *Gospel Advocate* 30 (June 20, 1888), 5.

⁵²Lipscomb, "Woman's Station and Work," *Gospel Advocate* 30. (Oct. 10, 1888), 6-7.

the news of the resurrection in a manner that would be congruent with the definition of private used by Lipscomb. The Biblical examples Holman alluded to were, in the minds of the *Gospel Advocate*'s editors, work accomplished within the private domestic realm of women and for women, and it would take an explicit precedent from the scriptures to change their minds.

Bunner challenged her to show "chapter and verse where she found that 'Phillip's daughters did publicly expound the scriptures.'" ⁵³ Holman responded that her interpretation was as legitimate as theirs and pointed out the inconsistency of demanding that the scriptures set precedence in order for a woman to speak publicly but not for women to participate in other acts of worship. She reasoned "that if the silence of Scripture as to woman's public work . . . is reason enough to oppose it, then no woman should be allowed to sing in church or partake of the Lord's supper as there is not the faintest allusion in the Bible as to her having done either." ⁵⁴

The stalemated nature of the debate continued. Holman wrote articles for the *Gospel Advocate* on the subject of women through 1913. Her final articles raised many of the same issues and appealed to many of the same passages as her prior articles, and, although the respondent was F. W. Smith instead of Lipscomb, the answer was the same. Work was done by women, but it was done in private. ⁵⁵ Smith insisted that the woman question was settled "in clear and unmistakable terms, quite two thousand years ago." The only reason in his mind that

⁵³Bunner, "Woman's Work in the Church," 5.

⁵⁴Holman, "Woman's Scriptural Status Again," 8.

⁵⁵Silena Holman. "The Woman Question." *Gospel Advocate* 55 (February 27, 1913): 198-199. Holman "The Woman Question, no. 2" *Gospel Advocate* 55 (March 6, 1913): 218-230. F.W. Smith. "Reply to Sister Holman." *Gospel Advocate*. 55 (March 13, 1913): 242-244.

the discussion continued was “many women will not *let it remain settled*.”⁵⁶

Different views on the nature of “womanhood,” which were more a part of culture than of scripture, created this impasse. The *Gospel Advocate* promoted the ideal of “true womanhood,” which prescribed that women be pious, pure, and submissive. The place of a woman was in the home where she would instill moral virtues in the children.⁵⁸ They had even adapted the concept for the rural context of its readership. According to one article from the *Advocate*, the “most contented little queen of the earth [was] the mistress of a true husband, a cosy [sic] cottage, a hen-coop, a cooking stove, a gentle cow, a good sewing machine, and a baby.”⁵⁷ Lipscomb, Sewell, and Bunner all subscribed to the “true womanhood” and read this ideal into scripture. Holman rejected the part of true womanhood that limited her to the domestic sphere, and consequently, her reading of scripture was different.

Her opponents agreed with Holman that Jesus treated women with a respect that was beyond that accorded to them by the culture of his time. However, they argued, the enhanced status that was offered to women by Christianity was that of the “queen of the home,” and they argued that this was the only role the Bible deemed appropriate for her gender. Women were, by nature, suited for the domestic sphere and unsuited to lead or teach. Their argument was then divided into two sub parts. First, Lipscomb insisted that women were physically unsuited to the

⁵⁶F.W. Smith, “Reply to Sister Holman,” 242.

⁵⁸Pulley, “Gender Roles,” 446.

⁵⁷Justus M. Barnes, “Woman Her Mission, and Her Education,” *Gospel Advocate* 28 (July 21, 1886): 451. From Pulley, “Gender Roles and Conservative Churches: 1870-1930,” *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*. 2 vols. Ed. Carrol D. Osburn, vol. 2. (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995) 467.

demands of leadership. Second, he attributed the unsuitability of woman to teach to “her strong emotional nature” which caused “her to be easily deceived” as Eve was deceived in the Fall. Lipscomb believed Holman had been seduced by the woman movement and suggested that readers look to Holman’s articles as an example of why “the Lord did not suffer a woman to teach and lead in his church.”⁵⁹

The proto-Church of Christ thinkers led by Lipscomb shared many traits with the larger fundamentalist movement of the time. The fundamentalists at large “wanted the churches, which had been somewhat regulated to the private sphere of society and to women’s supervision, to be returned to the men.”⁶⁰ Lipscomb bemoaned that the ratio of men to women in churches was small. He traced the lack of men to the involvement of women as leaders within the church. When, he claimed, “church affairs are surrendered to be run by women, men will withdraw from the church. . . . Men will never attend associations of any kind manned by women.”⁶¹ The perceived feminization of Christianity explain only part of his concern over the woman movement. He believed that when women “entered the public arena” immorality in society ensured as women neglected their role “of bearing and training immortals” for God, and because of this neglect, “the gambling rooms, the whiskey shops, the whore houses, theatres, the schools of crime and sin and shame, the penitentiaries and prisons are all manned and filled.”⁶³ His co-editor E. G. Sewell compared women leaving the domestic realm to Eve taking fruit from the

⁵⁹Lipscomb, “Woman’s Station and Work,” 6.

⁶⁰Pulley, “Gender Roles,” 463.

⁶¹Lipscomb, “Woman and Her Work,” *Gospel Advocate* 34 (Oct. 13, 1892), 644.

⁶³Lipscomb, “Woman’s Station and Work,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (Oct. 10, 1888), 7.

tree of knowledge. As sin had entered the world through Eve, it now gained strength through the “rebellion” of women against their role.⁶⁴ This response was especially critical of women who argued that it was necessary for them to engage in public work to protect their homes and children from the ills of society. Lipscomb laid the blame for what they were trying to fight at their own feet in what Holman described as “the unkindest cut of all.”⁶⁵

In the *Gospel Advocate*, the ideal of true womanhood found its most grandiloquent expression in an article by E. G. Sewell. His article, under the verbose title, “The Elevation and Proper Position of Women Under the Religion of Christ” appeared in the same issue as M. R. Lemert’s ill-fated response to Lipscomb. Sewell insisted that Christian societies, ruled by the Bible, had perfected themselves, and the “world has never seen such happiness, such pure morality, or such enjoyments as are to be found in our Christian homes.” He further explained that in such happy societies “wives and mothers are chaste, keepers at home . . . their presence is ever brightening, charming, and cheering the home circle and home life.” The position of queen of the domestic realm was far better than their place in “heathen” societies.⁶⁶ The *Gospel Advocate* insisted that all women should feel honored to fill the domestic position -- “a work surpassed in importance and second in sacredness to no other work in the world.”⁶⁷ Sewell accused women who desire other than the role of keeper at home of ingratitude to God for

⁶⁴E. G. Sewell, “The Elevation and Proper Position of Women Under the Religion of Christ,” *Gospel Advocate* 30 (June 13, 1888), 8.

⁶⁵Holman, “Women’s Scriptural Status Again.”

⁶⁶Sewell, 8.

⁶⁷David Lipscomb, “Woman’s Station and Work,” 618.

having granted them that role and allowing them to be born in a Christian rather than a “heathen” land. Such women, he stated, “have no proper conceptions of the blessings they enjoy at the hands of the Lord.” By desiring to work in public, the “men’s realm,” they were not only stepping out but “stepping clear down beneath the dignified and noble position the Lord gave her.” By forsaking her gender role, she “is living, moving, acting and working in rebellion against God.”⁶⁸

Holman never wrote a direct reply to Sewell’s editorial, but she clearly responded to his arguments in her third article on the subject of women’s role within the church, “The Scriptural Status of Women.” She contrasted the status of women in Christianity with their status in “heathendom” where “no possible misfortune is deemed equal to having been born of the female sex.” She thus established that, unlike the “straw women” Sewell created in his article, she understood the blessings she enjoyed and proclaimed Jesus Christ and Christianity to be “woman’s best friend.” Having defended herself against charges of ignorance and ingratitude, Holman proceeded to argue that “heathen prejudices” were still present in society and it was those prejudices, that had “debarred woman from legal rights, from intellectual culture, from religious instruction.” In her mind, Jesus began the work of liberating women, but it was a process that had not, as suggested by Sewell, reached its conclusion. Holman found no biblical justification for the distinction made between the private and public realms and implied that such a distinction is one of the remaining “heathen prejudices.”⁶⁹ Holman supported her rejection with the story of Jesus’ visit to the home of Mary and Martha of Bethany. This passage showed

⁶⁸Sewell, 8.

⁶⁹Silena Holman, “The Scriptural Status of Women,” 2.

that women could properly take a role in society other than the “keeper of the home.” Jesus stopped at the home of two sisters – Martha and Mary. Mary chose to listen to Jesus’ conversation instead of helping Martha with the domestic work. Holman said that Martha, “like a large number of people of the present day, she thought it was ‘a woman’s place,’ to attend only to domestic concerns and leave all other matters to men.”⁷⁰ When Martha approached Jesus with her concern that Mary has forsaken her correct role, Jesus reproached not Mary but Martha. He told Martha that she was “worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.”⁷¹ Holman used Jesus’ rejection of traditional gender roles to support her contention that the scriptures did not support the bifurcated world of public and private work.

At much the same time as Holman debated the editors the *Gospel Advocate*, the proto-Disciples of Christ held their own discussion on the proper role of women in the pages of the *Christian Standard*. In many ways the *Christian Standard* debate was the exact opposite of the *Gospel Advocate*. While the number of participants in the *Gospel Advocate* was relatively limited, the *Christian Standard* published sixty articles from twenty-nine participants. Further, while Holman was virtually the only defender of the view that women were permitted to engage in public ministry in the *Gospel Advocate*, she would have been in good company in the *Christian Standard*. Out of the twenty-nine writers twenty-one supported allowing women to minister publicly in the church.⁷³

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹ Luke 10:18-42.

⁷³Lantzer, 29, 70, as found in Pulley “Gender Roles,” 473.

The scriptural exegesis found in the *Christian Standard* and *Gospel Advocate* debates was similar in many ways. The opponents of women taking a public role in the church cited the same six verses as David Lipscomb. Writers in the *Christian Standard* who argued for allowing women to engage in public ministry made many of the same arguments as Holman did in the *Gospel Advocate*. Jesus' treatment of women and especially the part played by women in the resurrection was frequently discussed. One writer, James N. Clem quipped:

I can see why Jesus accorded to Mary Magdalene the honor of first breaking the good news of his resurrection. It is about the last chance woman will get. I suppose Jesus understands that after he ascends to heaven, women 'are to keep silence in the churches,' and not to be 'suffered to speak,' and the good Lord, and woman's friend, wants to give her a little liberty while he is on earth.⁷⁴

As Holman did in the *Gospel Advocate*, writers to the *Christian Standard* painted Jesus' work in terms of improving the conditions of humanity. They also pointed to Galatians 3:28 to argue that "there is neither male nor female, but we are all one in Christ Jesus" and the church should "let the laborer choose the special line for which she is particularly best fitted, and thus develop and bring to God's work her best gifts."⁷⁵ These are only two examples of the many arguments from scripture that were made in both the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Standard*.

Another common factor in the *Gospel Advocate* and *Christian Standard* debates is the

⁷⁴James N. Clem, "Paul, and Women, and Christ," *Christian Standard* 28 (August 28, 1892): 688, as found in Lantzer, 46.

⁷⁵Virginia G. Hedges, "Woman's Work in the Church," *Christian Standard* 29 (May 20, 1893): 390. From Lantzer 55.

influence of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Clara Babcock and Silena Holman were both active members of the WCTU. Holman idolized Frances Willard, the founder of the WCTU. In one letter to Lipscomb, she listed Willard with Queens Elizabeth I and Victoria of England as historical examples of women ably exerting and described Willard as leading "with the genius of Napoleon."⁷⁶ It seems reasonable that the inspiration of Frances Willard led both of these women to claim a public role in the work of the church as their right. Willard, a member of the United Methodist Church, was an outspoken defender of the equality of men and women in Christianity. She published *Woman in the Pulpit* to defend the right of women to preach, and attempted to be seated that the General Methodist Conference.⁷⁷ The evidence is entirely circumstantial, but it seems probable that the model of Willard, or in the very least, the experience they gained through their work in her organization, helped both Babcock and Holman to find their own voices and then demand a hearing.

While there were many similarities between the debate that took place in the *Gospel Advocate* and the controversy of the *Christian Standard*, there were also important differences. The differences on this specific issue illustrate the growing gulf between the theological orientation of the proto-Churches of Christ and the proto-Disciples of Christ. First, the members of the proto-Disciples of Christ were willing to entertain the notion that the New Testament church had not been the perfect incarnation of God's intention for his people. This was a

⁷⁶Holman, "Women's Scriptural Status Again," 8.

⁷⁷Rosemary Skinner Keller, "Conversions and Their Consequences: Women's Ministry and Leadership in the United Methodist Tradition," *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina University Press, 1996), 114.

departure from the restoration principle that the proto-Churches of Christ continued to hold dear. Second, the participants in the *Christian Standard* debate frequently used practical concerns as evidence in addition scriptures.

Several participants in the *Christian Standard* debate felt free to insist that Paul's admonition that women remain silent was no more than an accommodation of the culture of the time period. Holman was more restrained in the *Gospel Advocate*. The closest she came in her early letters on the subject was to argue that Jesus' work was a continuing process. This implied that the New Testament church was not the ideal pinnacle of Christian practice but refrained from stating that conclusion directly. Writers to the *Christian Standard* felt no such reticence about concluding that the church of the New Testament was an imperfect example of what God intended for the church. One anonymous writer called "for the church to press the culture toward equality rather than fall back into 'primitive' Christianity, which had not yet fully matured during the time of the New Testament."⁷⁸ Another writer, Thomas T. Holton, "insisted that while the apostles recognized the customs of the day, they also would have expected the church to grow beyond them."⁷⁹ Here tension between the two goals of the Restoration Movement is illustrated. In the context of the proto-Disciples of Christ *Christian Standard*, it was acceptable to make an explicit argument that the New Testament Church was influenced by culture and an imperfect human institution if that would allow for greater unity in the contemporary church. In the proto-Churches of Christ *Gospel Advocate*, where the focus was on literal restoration, such a claim would have been unthinkable.

⁷⁸Lantzer, p. 48.

⁷⁹Lantzer, p.52.

Writers in the *Christian Standard* appealed to practical concerns in their defense of women in public ministry. The first of these was a concern for expediency in spreading the gospel message. Supporters of women ministers argued that the work of evangelizing needed to be done, and if women were willing to do it, they should be allowed to. One writer, a preacher “chided readers for arguing over whether women could preach when all the while multitudes were being lost for want of laborers.”⁸⁰ Supporters of these arguments could use the example of Babcock’s ministry, or they could cite women ministers in other denominations such as the Unitarians and Universalists who had several female ministers in the Midwest area.⁸¹ The second practical argument made by writers in the *Christian Standard* was “that God would not have been wasteful by giving women abilities that were not intended for use.”⁸² The presence of both of these arguments illustrate the value proto-Disciples of Christ thinkers placed on efficiency in spreading the gospel and creating a world that was unified in Christianity. They further applied that efficiency to their model of God to infer that God would not gift women with a talent for ministry and intend for her to remain silent in the church. A woman’s talent became a justification of her ministry. Such an argument could not have taken root among thinkers in the proto-Churches of Christ. Their legalistic reading of the Bible combined with the correspondingly legalistic view of God did not allow concerns for efficiency to be a factor.

Even writers who argued that it was unscriptural for a woman to preach publicly or engage in a public ministry displayed a different theological orientation than their southern

⁸⁰Lantzer, 50.

⁸¹Cynthia G. Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1990.).

⁸²Lantzer, 52.

cousins. In the article which started the controversy in the *Christian Standard*, John B. Briney postulated that since there is no record of women speaking publicly in the apostolic church and Clara Babcock had begun an ordained ministry:

It is proper – aye, necessary – to make inquiry as to whether the sacred writings contain any expression of the Divine will on the subject. Is this a question upon which the Lord has legislated? If not, it is simply a question of expediency to be regulated by circumstances. If so, the question is settled for all those who respect a ‘thus saith the Lord.’⁸³

Briney concluded that the scriptures did not permit women to preach publicly – a position amicable to Lipscomb. But by his statement that if the scriptures did not expressly forbid it, then ministry by women would be acceptable even without a positive example of a woman minister in the Bible, he had revealed himself to be of a different cut than the proto-Churches of Christ thinkers who often interpreted the lack of an explicit example in the Bible to be a prohibition.

It quickly becomes clear just how far apart the proto-Disciples of Christ and the proto-Churches of Christ were – both on the specific controversy of the role of women within the church, but also on a number of deeper questions of theological orientation. While it is unlikely that differences of opinion on the role of women alone would have been enough to cause the fracture in the Restoration Movement, the issue did contribute to Lipscomb’s decision to formally divide the Churches of Christ from the Disciples of Christ.

In the early years of the 1890s, the tone of the *Gospel Advocate’s* debate over the role of

⁸³John B. Briney, “Paul and Women,” *Christian Standard*, Vol. 28 (Feb13, 1892), 136 reprinted in Lantzer, p. 107-109.

women in the church shifted once again and became entangled with the controversy over the scriptural status of missionary societies. The connection between the mission boards and women's role in the church is complicated. On one hand, the role and authority that the mission boards gave to women tainted the reputations of such institutions among the proto-Churches of Christ. On the other hand, women who desired a public role in their congregations were both guilty by association and denied the opportunity to organize themselves within their church that their sisters in the proto-Disciples of Christ churches enjoyed.⁸⁴

The Christian Women's Board of Missions (CWBM) had existed since 1874, and while it had suffered intermittent attacks from conservatives in the Restoration Movement, David Lipscomb mounted the first direct, sustained attack upon the organization in the *Gospel Advocate*.⁸⁵ The cause of Lipscomb's sudden assault on the CWBM was due to the decision to hold the convention of the CWBM and the General Christian Missionary Society to hold their national convention of 1892 in Lipscomb's home court of Nashville, Tennessee. Both of these societies were cooperative mission efforts supported by proto-Disciples of Christ congregations. In the last quarter of 1892, readers of the *Gospel Advocate* received a series of editorials and articles on the role of woman in the church and in society inspired by the abominations Lipscomb believed he had witnessed at the convention of the mission boards.

The "woman question" was not Lipscomb's only concern with the mission boards. He had long opposed them as a human innovation without a scriptural precedent to justify their

⁸⁴Hughes, 381 and Pulley, "Gender Roles and Conservative Churches," 470.

⁸⁵Fred A. Bailey, "The Cult of True Womanhood and the Disciple Path to Female Preaching," p. 487 and 509.

existence in the church. David Harrell identified the issues of social class and sectional division as reasons for Lipscomb's vehement opposition to the mission boards. Lipscomb saw the decision to hold the convention in Nashville as a second invasion by Northern forces. The sectional divide mingled with class differences between the proto-Disciples of Christ and the proto-Churches of Christ reared its head once again. Lipscomb accused the mission boards of "parading the gifts of the rich" and of giving authority to men based on the wealth and ability to give to the society rather than on the precepts of scripture. The Southern brethren, for the most part poor farmers, could not afford to provide the mission boards with the financial support proffered by their wealthier Northern brethren. In an article published on October 6, 1892, Lipscomb conjured the ghost of the Civil War in his defense of Tennessee's apparent lack of work in the mission field.

We have not done our duty heretofore in spreading the gospel when compared with the New Testament examples. Considering the destruction of all the material interests of our country twenty-five years ago – the fewness and poverty of our people, the necessity of rebuilding their farm and meeting houses, repairing their farms, supplying themselves anew with stock, agricultural and mechanical implements, their work and growth as compared with the religious activities of other people of modern times, have been creditable to them.⁸⁶

Lipscomb believed that few in Nashville or the state of Tennessee supported the mission boards or desired the presence of the convention in their state. He linked the Northern flavor of the convention to the public participation of women when he attributed the "speaking by women" to

⁸⁶Lipscomb, "Card of Invitation," 628.

the presence of “a greater number from the North in this meeting than are found in other church conventions in the South.”⁸⁷

He also felt that the supporters of the mission boards had unjustly silenced their opponent and replied to the suggestion of the *Christian-Evangelist* (another popular Restoration Movement periodical) for the brethren who oppose missionary societies to attend to the convention and judge for themselves as to the scriptural status of such institutions by railing that the supporters of mission boards “refuse to let us open out mouths to show wherein it is so [that the mission boards are unscriptural]. The spirit of it is, ‘as inferiors, listen to your superiors in silence.’”⁸⁸ Lipscomb felt that his right as a man to speak had been questioned, and he did not appreciate the demeaning command for him to remain silent.

While he touched upon many issues in his attack on the convention, the lion’s share of Lipscomb’s attack was reserved for the position women held in the mission societies. Several prominent women in the proto-Disciples of Christ mission societies gave lectures to mixed audiences at the convention, and out of all the flaws Lipscomb saw in the missionary societies, the most disturbing one was the leadership of women. Lipscomb’s biting commentary satirized the societies as fashionably feminine and opined that “the Bible was greatly last year’s almanac in the convention.”⁸⁹ The women spoke publicly and “several women were placed on the boards to manage the different missions,” and further “they are placed distinctly in the work of ruling

⁸⁷David Lipscomb, “Convention Items,” *Gospel Advocate* 34 (Oct. 27, 1892), 676.

⁸⁸Lipscomb, “Card of Invitation,” 628.

⁸⁹David Lipscomb “Convention Items” 676.

and exercising authority.”⁹⁰ Not only did mission boards usurp the authority of congregational elders, but they transferred that authority to women.

The participation of the women on the mission boards and as public speakers at the convention destroyed, in the eyes of Lipscomb, the order of society that had been created and approved by God. To evidence the divine sanction of a subordinate and private place for women, Lipscomb began a article titled “Woman and Her Work” by quoting the full text of six New Testament verses.⁹¹ Allowing women to speak violated God’s order and would “introduce confusion and strife for supremacy into every household. When woman did take the lead she shipwrecked the world.”⁹² This was a return to the theme that woman were incapable of leading because of Eve’s role in the fall.⁹³

Lipscomb’s sectional bias also played a role in his argument that women in a public role in society led to chaos. In this article, he argued that since the New England states had allowed women to take “the lead in church affairs,” the Northern states had fallen into a state of immorality. He claimed that “New England has almost become infidel” as the disastrous result of women having “entered the public arena” and insinuated that the same would occur in the South if it accepted women working in a public role. Instead women should stay out of “the sphere of publicity and of wild and corrupting ambition, and contaminating associations” and

⁹⁰Lipscomb, “Convention Items.” p 676.

⁹¹1 Corinthians 14: 34-35, Ephesians 5:22, Colossians 3:18, 1 Timothy 2:11, Titus 2:4, and 1 Peter 3:1-6.

⁹²Lipscomb, “Woman and Her Work,” 644.

⁹³see above, page 22.

accept that Christianity “gives her the realm and sacredness of home as her domain, and entrusts to her the most sacred office God has ever bestowed on mortal” that of mother and homemaker.⁹⁴ Lipscomb suggested at the end of the article that his readers compare the role of women in the convention to the scriptures he quoted “and see, if every woman who takes part in, and encourages that convention, does not set at defiance the word of God.” He found that his hypothetical woman in supporting the convention “not only violates the law of God, but she sins against womanly modesty and position . . . and in usurping the functions especially committed to men, sins against and drives him from the church and from God.”⁹⁵ This is hardly a new position for Lipscomb who had long argued that most, if not all, the ills of society could be attributed to women failing as the queen of the home.

Lipscomb refused to accept any attempts to justify the women who spoke publicly at the convention based on their talent. He latched on to the phrase “most delicious” that a writer had used to describe the merits of the women’s speeches and repeated it throughout the series of editorials concerning the convention.⁹⁶ He even complimented speaker Alice Williams on her well-crafted speech before denouncing her as rebelling against God’s created order with her “delicious” delivery.⁹⁷ This justification, acceptable to many in the proto-Disciples of Christ branch of the Restoration Movement, remained unacceptable among the proto-Churches of

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Bailey, 512.

⁹⁷Lipscomb, “Paul’s Word’s and Women’s Opportunity,” *Gospel Advocate* 35 (Oct. 20, 1892): 661.

Christ.

As with a number of issues, the offspring of the American Restoration Movement at the end of the nineteenth century found themselves divided over the proper role of women in a church governed solely by the rule of the Bible. A study of this specific issue finds that the controversy over the role of women was symbolic of many of the deeper theological and sociological issue that led to the division of the Restoration Movement into the Churches of Christ and the Disciples of Christ. The liberal, proto-Disciples of Christ branch was more concerned with the practical matters of creating unity among Christians by spreading the gospel. Within the debate of the role of women, this concern expressed itself in the justification of women engaging in public ministry based on the successes experienced by women ministers such as Clara Babcock. The conservative, proto-Churches of Christ branch was more concerned with restoring “primitive” Christianity through a legalistic reading of the New Testament. Thus, they not only rejected the pragmatic justifications of women ministers offered by the proto-Disciples of Christ, but viewed the participation of women as ministers, missionaries, and leaders of the mission societies as a betrayal of the cause of the Restoration Movement.

In addition to being symbolic of the theological differences developing between the two branches, the often public leadership of the women on the mission boards of the proto-Disciples of Christ functioned as further proof to the leaders of the proto-Churches of Christ that their brethren had dismissed the Biblical plan for the church and had substituted a human plan. This is demonstrated by the great amount of attention paid to the role of women in Lipscomb’s 1892 attack upon the mission boards. The participation of women as leaders and lecturers within the mission societies was to Lipscomb a symbol of the proto-Disciples of Christ ignoring the clear

commands of God.

Lipscomb's decision to separate the Churches of Christ from the Disciples of Christ was the result of a myriad of issues. No single issue alone would have had enough force to split the Restoration Movement, but they combined to create an overwhelming gulf between the theology and practice of the two branches. The controversy over the role of women in the church was one such issue, and in its symbolic power was one of the weightiest issues of them all.

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