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Wesleyan Holiness Studies Center

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Wesleyan Holiness Studies Center

BULLETIN

The Puzzle and Promise of American Methodist Scholarship

American Methodism remains a little studied and often misunderstood religious movement.

Knowledge of Methodism's impact on American culture is, at best, fragmentary, though the past two decades of historical research has witnessed real growth in the depth and understanding of American religion. Fine studies on Pentecostalism, Holiness, and Fundamentalism, on Mormonism and Shakers, on occultists and folk religion, and on Roman Catholics of every ethnic stripe have greatly enriched our understanding of America's religious mosaic. However, the lack of attention paid to American

Methodism denies a full account of what is arguably the most powerful and influential religious movement in American history.

The expansion of Methodism between 1776 and 1850 is a story of almost miraculous proportions. Rising from three percent of all church members in 1776 to more than 34 percent by 1850, Methodism was far and away the largest religious body in the nation boasting over a million members. In states like Indiana and Ohio, Methodists held *de facto* political power. More significantly for the future shape of American religious life, Methodists flourished in the free-religious economy of the young republic. They boasted an itinerant ministry that could

function anywhere and, unlike the older American Calvinist denominations, they proclaimed a message of individual freedom, autonomy, responsibility, and achievement that empowered common people and meshed with the fluid social and economic life of the frontier.

To help fill out the unfinished picture of American Methodism, the Wesleyan Holiness Studies Center, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, will host a conference at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky., October 7-8, 1994. The conference's specific purpose is to bring scholars of Methodism together to explore its impact on American culture during the great age of

Wesleyan expansion.

Conference papers will continue the process of relating Methodism to the broader range of historical questions now raised by scholars of the early Republic—issues such as the emerging market economy, the role of women, the Christianization of African-Americans, the influence of Methodists on labor activism, and Methodism's part in the political crisis that preceded the Civil War.

The conference is open to all scholars, students, pastors and interested lay people. Cost for the event is \$30; \$20 for students.

Questions regarding the conference may be directed to Dr. William Faupel at 606-858-2226.

Fundamentalism and Gender: A Wesleyan/Holiness Reflection

Margaret Bendroth, lecturer at Andover-Newton Theological Seminary, in a work that parallels the conclusions of Betty DeBerg (*Ungodly Women: Gender and The First Wave of American Fundamentalism*), argues that fundamentalism cannot be understood without reference

to questions of gender. As Bendroth writes, "fundamentalist attitudes about gender provide a key to understanding fundamentalism's internal development and its interaction with the dominant forces of American culture" (page 5).

The result is probably the best book to date on the topic (though in some ways I still prefer DeBerg's more sharply

analytical and historically contextualized work). Bendroth sees the fundamentalist movement taking shape as a masculine reaction to the "feminization" of American Protestantism in the nineteenth century. Especially interesting are her efforts to correlate theological developments with their social consequences. She argues that the

two most defining theological traditions of fundamentalism (a la Ernest Sandeen, the Princetonian doctrine of biblical inerrancy and Darbytite dispensational premillennialism) were inconsistent with the earlier efforts (often Wesleyan/Holiness) to develop a "biblical, feminism"—

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- Bratt, James D. *Gathered at the River: Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Its People of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993.
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- Dupree, Sherry Sherrod. *The African-American Holiness Pentecostal Movement: An Annotated Bibliography*. Hamden, CT: Garland Publishing, 1994.
- Felton, Gayle Carlton. *This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.
- Grider, J. Kenneth. *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*. Kansas City, Beacon Hill Press, 1994. \$47.95.
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- Sider, E. Morris, ed. *Preaching the Word: Sermons by Brethren in Christ Ministers*. Grantham, PA: Brethren in Christ Historical Society, 1994. Available from the Brethren in Christ Historical Society, Messiah College, Grantham, PA 17027. \$6.95.
- Stackhouse, John, Jr. *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993.
- Stone, Jon R. *A Guide to the End of the World: Popular Eschatology in America: The Mainstream Evangelical*

continued on page 6

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- David, Alberta Verne. "The Roles and Contributions of Women in Nazarene Higher Education, 1895-1980." University of Illinois, 1993. Order No. DA9329007
- Edwards, Ishmell Hendrex. "History of Rust College, 1866-1967." University of Mississippi, 1993. Order No. 9406641
- Glass, William Robert. "The Development of Northern Patterns of Fundamentalism in the South." Emory University, 1991. Order No. 9204810
- Hamilton, Barry Wade. "William Baxter Godbey: Pioneer of the American Holiness Movement." Drew University, 1993. Order no. DA9331585
- Haynes, Carolyn Alice. "Women in a Divine Republic: Feminism and Protestantism in Late-Nineteenth Century America." University of California, San Diego, 1993. Order No. DA9317505
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- Little, Lawrence S. "A Quest for Self-Determination: The African Methodist Episcopal

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- Jacobsen, Douglas and William Vance Trollinger, Jr. "Historiography of American Protestantism: The Two-Party Paradigm, and Beyond." *Fides et Historia* 25 (Fall 1993): 4-15.
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Book Review

continued from page 1

and thus the anti-feminism of fundamentalism is linked to fundamental theological themes. This conjunction of issues was reinforced politically as the fundamentalists fought certain women who either sided with emerging liberal parties in mainline denominations or otherwise failed to take the "right" side. While exploring such themes, Bendroth is also intrigued with a certain ambiguity present in fundamentalism—the extent to which the sociological reality (a movement dependent in many ways on the work of women) seems inconsistent with a public rhetoric that verges on misogyny.

All in all, there are useful data and some provocative hypotheses here that are worthy of careful analysis and reflection, but I have to say that finally I found the book very unsatisfactory primarily because Bendroth often seems to me to be forcing the data into an interpretative grid which it does not fit as easily as she assumes. So much depends upon the interpretative scheme that lurks in the background! Is fundamentalism, for example, a form of "conservative" or "orthodox" holding to the center of the tradition in protest to its erosion by the "acids of modernity" (as she regularly assumes), or is it a form of "radicalism" (as in dispensationalism) that has pulled away from the "classical tradition" in a variety of ways and in the last generation or two has been trying (via "neo-evangelicalism") to find its way back to the center?

The data looks quite different in these differing perspectives.

Bendroth seems to struggle constantly with findings that do not fit her generalizations. For example, she notes (on page 82) that 25 percent of those on the roster of the Interdenominational Association of Evangelists in 1942 were women. This seems to me to be a very extraordinary figure for the times—far in advance of most "mainstream" religious organizations of the time and in a period in which the holiness and other churches were backing away from an earlier affirmation of the ministry of women. Might this datum not be used to argue precisely for an extraordinary openness of "fundamentalism" to the ministry of women, as Michael S. Hamilton does in the summer 1993 issue of *Religion and American Culture*? And is it not fundamentally related to the deep division she constantly finds between a "proto-feminist" openness to women and the misogynist rhetoric?

Central in any discussion concerning women and fundamentalism is one's definition of fundamentalism. Here I found Bendroth to be fundamentally inconsistent. As a student of Timothy Smith, she is aware of the existence of the Holiness Movement and the fact that currents showing its influence do not easily fit her generalizations. Her answer to this is to indicate clearly in the introduction that she has set aside holiness, pentecostal and various immigrant groups to concentrate on the "coalition of conservative, predominately Calvinist, Protestants" that took shape largely in

response to "evolution." But by the end of the book she is treating the "neo-evangelicals" and others as if they could be understood as the continuation of this line, when some 75-80 percent of the current membership of the National Association of Evangelicals is holiness or pentecostal and a majority of the "Christian colleges" that carried the "neo-evangelical" culture in the 1960s and 1970s had their roots in the Holiness Movement. I don't think she can have it both ways—and this question brings the issue of the holi-

ness traditions into the core of her book.

In part she has been misled by her reliance on the work of George Marsden. This can be illustrated at a number of points, but is perhaps most obvious in her acceptance of his contention that the holiness themes of "fundamentalism" are the product of the importation of British Keswick tradition. This position ignores both the indigenous American holiness/Keswick tradition (A. J. Gordon and A. B. Simpson, to cite only two obvious early examples) and the American-

continued on page 5

reflections

In the summer of 1993 The Missionary Church Historical Society began publication of a new periodical, *Reflections*, dedicated to documenting the history of the Missionary Church. The Missionary Church is the product of a 1969 merger between the United Missionary Church, formerly the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, and the Missionary Church Association. The inaugural issue carries articles by Wayne Gerber on the founding of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ; Wayne Brenneman on the Mennonite Brethren in Christ founder Daniel Brenneman; Virgil Bixler on the founding of the Missionary Church Association; and Tillman Habegger on the history of the merger negotiations. The senior editor is J. Duane Beals. Membership in the society is \$12.00 per year. For information write the Historical Society, C/O Bethel College, 1001 W. McKinley, Mishawaka, IN 46545.

The Wesleyan Holiness Studies Center Bulletin
at Asbury Theological Seminary

Bill Faupel
Editor

William Kostlevy
Associate Editor

Book Review

continued from page 4

holiness sources of British Keswick (the campaigns of Finney and Phoebe Palmer in Britain as well as especially the influence of Robert Pearsall Smith and his wife Hannah Whitall Smith—and so on), leading to the strange conclusion (on page 22) that British Keswick appealed to a “masculine audience” (though she admits in a footnote that British Keswick occasionally supported a form of Christian feminism as in Jessie Penn-Lewis’ *Magna Carta Of Women!*). This is then incredibly illustrated by an American, D.L. Moody—a figure she seems to see as drawn toward the “masculine doctrine” of “power for service” with its supposed British sources when actually Moody’s Keswick-style religious experience came after the entreaties of two holiness (Free Methodist) women in Chicago just before his trips to Britain!

Such issues are not minor historiographical squabbles; they go to the heart of Bendroth’s book and the theses that she is arguing. If she were to integrate the holiness experi-

ence into her book more fully, many things would look quite different. Space does not permit elaboration, but let me suggest some ways in which a different profile would emerge.

One major thesis of the book is the incompatibility of dispensationalism with any form of Christian feminism and the ministry of women. At this point Bendroth’s conclusions seem to be vastly overstated. I think it is fair to say that dispensationalism with its pessimistic philosophy of history that undercut all doctrines of “progress,” whether more secularly “enlightenment” or more biblically “postmillennial,” contributed to the erosion of that form of biblical feminism most clearly rooted in the abolitionist struggles of the nineteenth century and dependent upon a more historically oriented interpretation of the scriptures and history itself. But there is another form of biblical feminism that argued from the account of Pentecost that in the “latter days” your sons and daughters shall prophesy! While this tradition was more ambivalent about wider social and cultural change, it often supported a radical feminism as well as the ministry of women in a variety of holiness, pentecostal and

proto-fundamentalist circles. Bendroth, of course, knows this tradition but argues that “dispensationalism” at its core must reject the logic of “latter days” gifts like the ministry of women. But this is to confuse two discrete uses of the term “dispensationalism.” It was after all the high Calvinist Princeton theologians who continued the classically Protestant argument that the pneumatic experiences of the New Testament are not normative today and pass with the “dispensation” of the New Testament. Whether certain New Testament phenomena (speaking in tongues or the ministry of women!) are valid today is a theological decision independent of the adoption of the scheme of “dispensationalism”—as would be obvious to Bendroth if she would read more in those holiness and pentecostal circles that fell under the influence of dispensationalism.

I keep wondering what would happen to Bendroth’s argument if she were to correlate the “internal” developments of “fundamentalism” with both the larger culture (and its ebb and flow of women in the professions, for example) and with the holiness and pentecostal subcultures, which

were playing out their own ebb and flow more in response to sectarian dynamics. That is, the holiness currents pulled away from the classical churches at a variety of points (their description of the “stages” in Christian experience, a certain depreciation of the sacraments and traditional orders of ministry, and significantly in their affirmation of the ministry of women) in a centrifugal trajectory of two or three generations and since have been moving back toward more traditional church life in a multi-generation “sect to church” centripetal movement. What would Bendroth’s story look like if it were told as a stage in the story of the holiness movement—that moment of self-correction to an earlier radicalism? This is not as outlandish as it sounds. On page 82, Bendroth cites Harold John Ockenga’s claim “that whenever a woman has headed an authoritative preaching movement, heresy has crept in.” Yet Bendroth fails to mention that Ockenga’s roots were precisely in the Holiness Movement (via Taylor University and his earlier holiness Methodism), and this quotation may well represent his own movement out of the Holiness Movement and his

continued on page 6

Important

Initially, funding for the *Wesleyan Holiness Studies Center Bulletin* has been provided by the Pew Charitable Trusts. Effective with the Winter 1994 issue of the *Bulletin*, it will be necessary to begin charging a fee to cover costs for printing and postage. The cost will be \$5.00 per year and will cover two issues. You may wish to subscribe for more than one year. If you wish to continue receiving the *Bulletin*, please return this portion of the *Bulletin* to the Wesleyan/Holiness Studies Center Bulletin, D. William Faupel, Director, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY 40390-1199.

Name _____

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Book Review

continued from page 5

struggle to suppress it within his own experience. This biographical element may help explain the internal development of fundamentalism and the ferocity of the convictions expressed. Many other key figures (Harry Ironside, for example) have similar biographies.

And do not such questions bring us close to and shed new light upon the profound ambivalence that Bendroth finds within fundamentalism? I am coming increasingly to appreciate the analysis of Robert Anderson in his study of pentecostalism as the vision of the disinherited where he describes the fundamentalist/evangelical subculture in terms of social class layers to be correlated with theological orientation. He sees the pentecostals on the bottom, the fundamentalist/evangelicals on the top, with the holiness movement

sandwiched in between. As one moves up the social ladder, the spiritual experience is more "moderate" and as one moves down the social ladder, the spiritual experience is more intense. In this construct, the fundamentalist/evangelical layer is the "moderate" holiness movement (i.e., Keswick) located in a lower middle class aspiring to be more "middle class"—and suppressing intensely any identification with the lower-class manifestations of the holiness movement. The repudiation of women's ministry becomes precisely an expression of the desire for "respectability" and a form of assimilation—and the stridency of the polemic is to be understood as a form of sibling (or perhaps generational) rivalry in which the strongest rhetoric is used to denounce precisely those that one is in danger of being confused with—the holiness and pentecostal churches whose most offensive deviation from traditional church life is precisely the ministry of women! Does not exploring

these internal dynamics in the life of the broader "higher life" culture provide some clues for the interpretation of the rhetoric, the biographies of fundamentalists and the internal ambivalence of fundamentalism on the question of the ministry of women?

Margaret Lamberts Bendroth. *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to The Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). \$22.50.

Reviewed by Donald W. Dayton
Professor of Theology and Ethics;
Northern Baptist Theological
Seminary. Dayton's "Evangelical
Roots of Feminism," in *Discovering
an Evangelical Heritage* (1976)
(and several similar essays), estab-
lished one of the most important
interpretive frameworks for under-
standing women's roles in evangeli-
cism. Dr. Dayton serves on the
advisory board for the Wesleyan/
Holiness Studies Center and will
direct next year's conference on "The
Fragmentation of American
Protestantism 1865-1920, Viewed
Through the Lens of Methodist
Experience."

More Articles

continued from page 3

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continued from page 2

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