

Jody Fleming

*The Faith and Praxis of Women in Missions in the Early
Pentecostal and Holiness Movement*

Abstract:

Women in the early years of the Pentecostal and Holiness movement played a very important part in the advancement of local and world mission. This paper examines not only the contributions women made during this time period, but also the balance they had between their faith and the practice of that faith. This study includes a select group of women chosen for their comprehension of Christian faith and how it impacted their understanding for reaching out to the world around them. Some are better known than others, but each of their stories represents the impact of women on Christian missionary work of their day.

Keywords: mission, women, faith, praxis, Holiness, Pentecostal

Jody Fleming is a Ph.D. Candidate (A.B.D.) in Christian Theology at Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA with a concentration in Global Christianity and Intercultural Studies. Her dissertation will focus on spiritual transformation of Evangelical mission practice through Pentecostal Intercultural dialog.

Introduction

The idea of women in leadership positions in the Christian tradition has been a source of controversy for many years. The Christian community has had to wrestle with the problem of understanding what the Bible truly says about women in leadership in the church, and what to do with women who exhibit strong leadership capabilities. Many women throughout the history of God's people have exhibited giftedness as leaders through the power of the Holy Spirit, but sadly were not afforded the opportunity to exercise those gifts. Yet they found ways in which to powerfully serve God and contribute to his kingdom.

During the final part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries the Pentecostal Holiness revival was sweeping the United States. In addition to the changing societal roles, women were embracing scriptures such as Joel 2:28-29 that says, "[God's] Spirit will be poured out on all flesh" as a call to service. After experiencing an infilling of the Holy Spirit, many women felt called to serve God in foreign missions. Many of these new missionaries were single, some were married and others widowed. Armed with a fresh wind of the Spirit and a desire to impact the world for Christ, women in the Pentecostal Holiness movement embraced missionary work.

This paper will argue that the contributions of a small cross-section of women from that era are a result of their experience with the Holy Spirit. Those experiences led them to live out their understanding of the balance between faith and praxis in domestic and foreign missionary service. The empowerment they received was a catalyst for the impact they had on their world. The method used here will be to first discuss the tension between biblical faith and praxis in regards to mission work and evangelism. This will be followed with a brief discussion on the historical background of women in the Pentecostal Holiness movement and their role in society, and the mission of the church during that time period. Several case studies on women of that era will follow highlighting their understanding of the tension between faith and praxis. They will include: Phoebe Palmer, Pandita Ramabai, Minnie Abrams, Susan Norris Firkin, and Lucy Leatherman. These women are a small representation of the vast number who dedicated

themselves to mission work. Final considerations will be given to how the contributions of these women have and will continue to impact the church and her mission.

The Missiological Tension of Faith and Praxis

As with many subjects in the Christian faith tradition, there seems to be a tension between faith and works. The New Testament writers speak on the subject quite frequently and at times there seems to be a contradiction in their teaching. However on closer examination we can see that there is an interconnectedness that exists between faith and praxis - works/deeds, which has a direct correlation to those who have dedicated their lives to missions. The women of the early years of the Pentecostal Holiness movement had various forms of this understanding. So to appreciate how they may have developed their sense of mission work from the Christian faith, the tension between the two subjects must be briefly explored.

There are many examples in the New Testament epistles that explain the importance of salvation through faith. Romans 10:9-10 says: "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." Ephesians 2:8-9 also expresses the importance of faith for salvation: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

These passages along with many others clearly identify the importance of faith for the assurance of salvation. For Emmanuel M. Jacob,¹ the example of the tension between faith and praxis of Jesus' teachings in Matthew supports the idea that saving faith is a product of genuine discipleship. As a life of discipleship to Christ develops, the love for others and the desire to build a better world translates into a desire to partner with God in his plan to redeem the world. According to the author, transformation through faith leads us to engage in the divine mission, the *missio Dei* (Jacob 2002: 108). With that concept in mind, the idea of works of the faithful begins to take shape. In the second chapter of James it is says:

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.... As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” (James 2:14-17, 26) Jacob’s article focuses mainly on the idea of a disciplined life modeled after the life of Jesus as shown in Matthew, however, this statement in James seems to sum up his point of the tension between faith that is lived out in mission.

The hermeneutical approach to faith and praxis in relation to mission is well understood in the Pentecostal movement of Christianity. Gordon Fee notes that global mission is “deeply woven into the biblical understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection for all people.”² The universality of faith in Christ is directly linked to serving others both locally and globally. To carry out the missional call of God, the faithful are empowered in life and ministry by the Holy Spirit. So the idea of faith and praxis in mission are held together by the evangelical model of living a life of discipleship that pours into a desire to preach the good news to the lost.

But what does that have to do with the social concerns that are mentioned in the passage from James? The text suggests that mission is more than just preaching the good news – there must be another component. Murray Dempster argues that church mission must consist of both evangelism and social concern. This understanding of praxis is essential in order for the church to bear authentic witness³ – faith without works is dead. As the church is to be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God, Dempster identifies several key elements that are manifest in the Pentecostal approach to mission. The church’s role includes proclaiming the Kingdom of God through the spoken word, picturing the kingdom in social witness, and manifesting the kingdom in moral deeds (Dempster, et al. 1991: 24-38).

The understanding of faith and praxis as a biblical model for mission is supported through the Evangelical and Pentecostal efforts to participate in God’s plan. Faith in community that manifests in spreading the good news of God’s kingdom through proclamation of the word and social interaction and service is essential to the call to *missio Dei*. The early

Pentecostal Holiness movement understood this tension. The women whose lives will be discussed here will show a deep understanding of this tension of faith and practice. But before their stories are heard, it is important to understand the theological and cultural dimensions of the time period in which they lived.

Women and Pentecostal Holiness Beginnings

It could be said that positive tension of faith and praxis were, in part, one of the mainstays of the early Pentecostal Holiness movement. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, revival began to take place in Christian churches across the United States. A renewed understanding of a holy life was developing and the influence of John Wesley from a century before was being felt. The awakening of the Holiness movement within the Methodist church began as an attempt to revitalize discipline and commitment to the Christian faith.⁴

The women whose stories will be examined lived and worked in ministry during this time period were active in the Holiness movement that would develop into the Pentecostal revival, which began shortly after the turn of the twentieth century in the United States. Women had an increasingly active role in the Holiness movement that continued into the beginnings of the Pentecostal movement for several reasons. Positive roles for women in ministry began in various places leading up to the Pentecostal Holiness movement. Earlier in the nineteenth century, Quaker women had had some freedom to serve in leadership in the church. Quakers were known to emphasize the scriptures and the interior life of faith over the outward forms of ritual and institution. Men and women were equal in their responsibility to walk in relationship with the Lord. That intimacy led to a respect for others and the willingness to see the giftedness of the Holy Spirit in both men and women (Synan 2001: 234).

The equality that Quaker women experienced continued to develop as the Holiness movement began to take shape. Again the importance of spiritual giftedness and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit served to balance the scales for women in ministry. Evangelical movements, many from the Methodist Church, began to stress the importance of the Holy Spirit as the driving force behind faith and praxis. Women as well

as men were experiencing the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, which empowered them to overcome intentional sin and live a life of harmony with God. As women studied the scriptures they became more confident of their ability to serve God in areas that had previously been closed to them. They believed that God's sanctifying grace saved them from sin and empowered them for service. According to Barbara MacHaffie, this led to women making up a high percentage of Holiness ministers well into the twentieth century (MacHaffie 2006: 198-199).

Janette Hassey cites several factors for the increase in the positive view of women in ministry through the growth of Evangelicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. During that time period the church was struggling with theological liberalism, which actually helped the cause of women in ministry. Biblical literalism was the answer to liberal theology. This led to a fundamentalist understanding about prophecy that saw women as equally gifted as men (Pierce and Groothuis 2004: 39).

Pentecostals would emphasize the same equality with an emphasis on the call of God (Ma 2010: 194). The empowerment that women received through their faith and experience with the Holy Spirit motivated them to be actively involved in ministry. By the latter part of the 1880's many bible training schools opened their doors to women. Leaders such as A.B. Simpson, A.J. Gordon, and William Bell Riley believed that a sanctified spirit-filled life, and not gender, was what qualified people for ministry in the church (Pierce and Groothuis 2004: 41). Charles Parham also included women in his Bethel Bible School, which saw the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in early 1901 (Synan 1997: 90). Parham's School was influential in the events that developed the Azusa Street Mission that also included women in leadership.

Susan Hyatt provides three basic biblical themes from the Pentecostal Holiness beginnings that strengthened women's right to public ministry. These themes identify equality for women as they stepped into roles that had previously been dominated by men. The three themes include: a theme of biblical equality stated in Galatians 3:28 as "all being one in Christ," the equality of redemption for women through the work of Jesus Christ, and the Pentecostal theme of equality as quoted from Joel

by the Apostle Paul in Acts 2:17-18 that the Spirit fell on both men and women alike (Synan 2001: 238). As these themes gained traction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women engaged in ministry that had previously not been available to them. As a result, women engaged in activities focused on social reform and Evangelism. Not only were they involved in the work, they also supported it financially and produced written works about their experiences. Fueled by their faith in Christ through their sanctification experiences, women moved into the practical application of their call.

Women, Society and Mission

Due to the advances in technology during this time period, domestic work that had previously occupied much of women's time was greatly reduced. Women had more time to pursue other interests outside of their domestic duties. As women of this time period began to identify God's call on their lives, they took on new roles in the church and society. Faith was central to their life and now they had time to live out the call of James to put that faith into practice. Not only did they desire to train their children in the faith, but they also had deep concerns about societal issues both in their own cities and across the globe.

Along with the spiritual developments of the time period, sociological and cultural components helped to shape the role of women. MacHaffie notes that what historians have called the "cult of true womanhood" elevated women to a more prominent place, even if it was still within the realm of home and family (MacHaffie 2006: 159-60). This concept developed in the mid nineteenth century and highlighted virtue and piety as marks of a true woman and one who was held in high honor. MacHaffie notes several results of this higher standard for women including their pastoral role in bringing their husbands and sons to salvation. As they were thought to be morally and spiritually superior to men, they began to question why they should not take on a more substantial role in elevating society outside of their traditional roles of wife and mother (MacHaffie 2006: 163).

As a result of this new understanding of worth, women began to organize and identify areas in which they believed they could make a difference. Social concerns such as prostitution, alcoholism, slavery, and

illiteracy were at the fore of women's thought. Throughout the nineteenth century, maternal societies, Sunday schools, and benevolent associations were the focus of women putting their faith into practice (MacHaffie 2006: 164-7). By the time of the Pentecostal Holiness movement, several well-known societies had been or were beginning to be developed.

One of the major forces of social reform during this time period was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The WCTU was driven by the idea that it was a woman's responsibility to save husbands, sons, and Christian civilization from the devastation of over-indulgence in alcohol (MacHaffie 2006: 167). Patricia Hill notes that the WCTU gradually incorporated feminist goals, and like many other benevolent organizations of the day, served as a bridge for women from their domestic sphere to the male-dominated public realm (Hill 1985: 25). The WCTU was influenced by its forerunner, the Woman's Crusade of 1873-74, which focused on a campaign of prayer and exhortations in saloons that called for owners to covert (MacHaffie 2006: 167). The driving force behind the work of this group of women was faith, faith that stirred them to action. While the WCTU was not necessarily a foreign mission agency, it does highlight the new found freedom of women who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to push for social change.

Closely related to the temperance movement was the development of Women's missionary organizations. Women developed and ran complex organizations that allowed them to adopt entrepreneurial and money management skills. The missionary boards developed by these women provided much-needed ministry in other cultures where male missionaries were not able to speak to or care for women. Missionary wives at that time were too busy with their homes and children and supporting their husbands that they did not have time to minister "in the field" to the specific needs of women. As a result professional women were needed to serve on the mission field. While women were still not ordained in ministry, they went to the field as teachers, doctors, nurses, and social worker rather than preachers. Foreign aid societies such as the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) allowed women at home to become experts in the new "science of missions" (Hill 1985: 4).

By the year 1900, there were forty-one American women's agencies supporting twelve hundred single missionaries across the world.⁵ Social

reform organizations such as the WCTU overlapped with mission agencies in some places, but the growing concern and urgency of conversion for “heathen” lands had the mission agencies moving ahead by the early twentieth century. Hill notes that the Victorian view of women as nurturers and mothers made them uniquely qualified for the mission task at hand and the role was no longer limited to the women of non-Christian cultures. Ideal womanhood had a new perspective as “educated motherhood” which opened doors even farther for women in mission (Hill 1985: 5). From this background emerged women who would have significant impact in their world, both at home and in distant lands.

Faith and Praxis in Missionary Women

Having outlined the social and cultural climate of the time period in the years around the turn of the twentieth century, attention will now turn to some individual biographical sketches. These women are a very small representation of the many who were involved in the mission movements of the Holiness and Pentecostal traditions. Each one had a unique call and contribution to foreign and domestic mission. These women had varied backgrounds, ethnicities, and faith traditions. Some were married, some widowed and others single. What they all have in common is a desire to see the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit that they experienced, empower others not only for conversion, but to improve their own lives and societies. The biographies start with the forerunners of the Holiness revival and extend through the beginnings of Holiness and Pentecostal traditions.

Phoebe Worrall Palmer (1807-1884)

Phoebe Worrall Palmer was born in New York City to parents who had been converted under the influence of John Wesley in Great Britain (Hammack 1984: 115). In 1827 she married Walter C. Palmer, a physician, who joined her in kneeling to pledge their lives to promoting Holiness at a revival held at the Allen Street Methodist Church in 1832. In a few short years she and her sister combined their two women’s prayer meetings. Phoebe testified to the sanctifying grace she received and soon became the leader of the prayer meeting known as the “Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness.” By 1839 the meeting was open to men and Mrs. Palmer’s circle of influence would include Methodist bishops, ministers and

laymen and women (Ingersol 2011). Many of the Holiness and Pentecostal denominations credit Palmer with the beginnings of an American renewal movement that would spread around the world.

Not only did she lead the prayer meetings, but she was also a prolific writer on the subject of holiness. Palmer believed that it was holiness that could make the soul beautiful which empowered a believer to live a well-balanced or “symmetrical” life (White 2003: 22). Her influence expanded nationally and internationally through articles in the *Christian Advocate Journal* and books such as *The Way of Holiness* (1843), *Faith and Its Effects* (1848), and *The Promise of the Father* (1859). She also served as the editor to the *Guide to Holiness*, which the Palmers purchased in 1863 (Ingersol 2011). It is hard to believe she had time to do much else than lead prayer meetings and write for publication, but she and her husband found time to serve others through missions both in America and abroad.

While Phoebe Palmer is more known for her writing and teaching on sanctification that sparked the Holiness revival of the late nineteenth century, that does not mean she did not have a heart for missionary works and service. For her, living the holiness life entirely surrendered to God would not only stand as his witness to others, but would also empower believers to answer his call. A sense of the urgency she had for others to receive holiness is noted as she writes: “Let me assure you dear friend, that as surely as you heed holiness *now*, so surely it is for you *now*. The provisions of the Gospel are all suited to the exigencies of the present time.” She goes on to attempt to answer three important questions, the third being, “What will be the advantages to ourselves and others of living in possession of [holiness]?” (Oden 1994: 285). Even though a specific missionary call is not indicated, the theme here shows a desire to effect the lives of others with the Gospel.

In her notes accompanying *The Way of Holiness*, Mrs. Palmer recounts the struggle to heed God’s call for complete devotion. While this is a personal account of surrender, there is a hint of the missional call here as well. She writes: “She then took this passage, ‘As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.’ Previous to this she had taken as the motto of life, ‘Entire devotion of heart and life to God.’ She then asked what has induced this resolution and led to corresponding action? ‘The Spirit of God’ was the reply” (Palmer 1843: 122). The importance of resolving to

devote heart and life to God and a life of holiness is coupled with action that is Spirit led. Mrs. Palmer's experience and teaching on holiness were at the center of her theology. Even though she is not considered a systematic theologian, her explanation of holiness influenced many generations to come.

Her desire for holiness in heart and life spilled over into her concern for the world around her. She and her husband did serve others diligently throughout their lives. Charles Edward White describes Mrs. Palmer as a revivalist who had an impact on the feminist movement through her public speaking and publications. He observes that shortly after her sanctification experience, Palmer took to the streets to distribute tracts as a means of reaching those who might never hear the gospel in a church. She was known to go to the "cellars, garrets and alleys" to reach people and bring them along to church, sometimes provided them with proper clothing. While the spiritual need for salvation was at the center of her work, she was aware of the other needs around her as well. Working in tandem with his wife, Dr. Walter Palmer often offered free medical care to poor patients, often providing money for food or medicine (White 1987: 30).

Phoebe Palmer also organized others to serve the needs of the poor. As part of her work in the Methodist Ladies' Home Missionary Society in 1850, she established the Five Points Mission in one of New York's worst slums. The project stands among many of her contributions to the history of mission. White notes that while Charles Dickens visited the mission under police protection, Palmer was undaunted in her work to serve the poor of that area. The mission included a home, school, workroom, and chapel, and could be considered as one of the Protestant movement's first outreach projects intended to reach the rapidly expanding American slums. The Palmers would also minister in Canada, and in 1859 their preaching and missionary journeys took them to the British Isles. They would minister there for the next four years.

If there could be such a thing as a "Holiness Hall of Fame," Phoebe Palmer would have to be one of the main inductees. Ingersol, and no doubt many others, consider her to be the mother of the Holiness revival (Ingersol 2011). For Mrs. Palmer, salvation through Christ and sanctification in the Holy Spirit were at the center of a disciplined life. By

faith, she attained holiness as a blessing from the Lord. However, she did not rest in the wonder of that blessing, but instead put her faith into action through writings and missions that would serve to inspire many generations to come.

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922)

One of the most prominent women of the early Pentecostal movement came from the most unlikely place. Pandita Sarasvati Ramabai, a native born Indian woman, is honored as a Christian, reformer, Bible translator and social activist,⁶ and one who had a major impact in Christianity in the closing decades of the twentieth century. Pandita was born to Brahmin parents, the highest caste in the Indian social political system. Her father, a scholar and social reformer, went against his culture and taught his daughter how to read and write Sanskrit. In 1877, a severe famine swept India leaving Pandita and her brother as the only ones from their family to survive. She and her brother set out for Calcutta and when they arrived, impressed the Bengali Brahmins with their level of intelligence and ability to speak publically (Hosier 2000: 258).

Going against cultural norms, Pandita married outside of her caste. After three years of marriage, she was widowed in 1882 and left to raise her infant daughter on her own (Burgess 2003: 1017). She traveled to England where the Sisters of Wantang took her in (Oden 1994: 321). While there she became a Christian and studied education at the Cheltenham Ladies' College. Her travels took her to America (1886-8) where she studied educational systems in Philadelphia. During her time in the USA she publicized her planned mission in India raising support as she traveled (Anderson 2007: 77). Her travels through India and Britain gave her a deep sense of the need for women's rights. Through trips to the underprivileged in London, she was moved by the Christian compassion and love shown to unfortunate women and children (Burgess 2003: 1017). She was determined to raise the standard of women in India, especially those who had become child widows, and in 1887 published a book on the subject. *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* was written as her vision of creating educational institutions for Indian women (Anderson 2007: 77).

Her own story of faith that led to practice is recorded in a testimony that Ramabai wrote in 1907. She describes the Hindu religion and how she found it to be a false means of faith in that a woman's whole-hearted devotion was to be given in worship to her husband. Gradually she began to experience the love of Christ, and describes seeing light in the darkness and eventually meeting Jesus Christ (Oden 1994: 324). Through this experience, she realized that there was no caste system in the kingdom of God. All believers were equal in sin and salvation. In describing her experience of understanding salvation through Christ as a present reality, she wrote: "At the end of 1896 when great famine came on this country, I was led by the Lord to step forward and start a new work, trusting Him for both temporal and spiritual blessing..." (Oden 1994:326). Pandita Ramabai is describing her faithful steps into action in expanding her fledgling mission to 300 girls rescued from famine in Madhya Pradesh (Anderson 2007: 79).

The Mukti Mission and subsequent Pentecostal revival began with the establishment of a widow's home in Bombay. Ramabai offered refuge to widows, both young and old, from the harsh treatment of men that she witnessed in her own country. In 1895 her work moved to a farm near Poone (Pune) where she planted fruit trees and crops, and dug wells (Hosier 2000: 260). The farm helped to sustain the women and children who were housed and educated there. The mission expanded so quickly, that by the turn of the century overseas missionaries came to serve at Mukti.

The mission also included the teaching of Christian doctrine. Anderson notes that the mission was a "purely undenominational, evangelical, Christian mission," that focused on training women and orphans from all levels of Indian society to be teachers or Bible women working in different Missions (Anderson 2007: 78). Pandita experienced an infilling of the Holy Spirit around 1894, and began to believe others should seek the same blessing. Daily prayer meetings led to the establishment of "Prayer Bands," groups of young women who were trained in witnessing about their faith. As the charismatic tone of the mission grew, revival began to sweep across India (Anderson 2007: 79).

Pandita Ramabai's contribution to missions in India and the Pentecostal movement as a whole is a clear example of the balance between faith and praxis. She notes the following:

Many hundreds of the girls and young women who have come to my Home ever since the doors were opened for them have found Christ as I have. They are capable of thinking for themselves. They have had their eyes opened by reading the Word of God, and many of them have been truly converted and saved... I thank God for letting me see several hundred of my sisters, the children of my love and prayer, gloriously saved. All this was done by God in answer to the prayers of faith of thousands of His faithful servants in all lands, who are constantly praying for us all..." (Oden 1994: 326).

Her missionary endeavors allowed women to play a prominent role in the Indian revival, demonstrating to her countrymen that women had the ability and competence to accomplish great things (Anderson 2007: 88). Because of her unique blend of social concern, compassion, scholarship, and administrative skill, she is credited with being one of the most amazing women of modern times (Burgess 2003:1018).

Minnie Abrams (1859-1912)

Minnie F. Abrams was born in 1859 to a farming family in Mapleton, Minnesota. She attended school to become a teacher and spent two years at the University of Minnesota before heeding her missionary call. She never married, but her influence in mission bears reflection. Gary B. McGee (1999) calls Minnie Abrams, "the most prominent of the veteran missionaries who moved through the ranks of the holiness movement to Pentecostalism." However much of her work has gone unnoticed, which McGee notes was the case of the contributions made by many Holiness and Pentecostal women to the field of missions.⁷

After her teacher's training and studies at the University of Minnesota, she enrolled as one of the first students of the Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions, established by a leader in the Methodist deaconess movement. This was in keeping with many other young women of her day who gave up marriage and family for a more "useful" life as a missionary (McGee 1999: 516). When she graduated, the Minnesota branch of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society commissioned her as a "Methodist deaconess-missionary" (Burgess 2003: 305).

Minnie was highly influenced by the urgency to evangelize the nations before the return of Christ. This urgency was connected to the Wesleyan Holiness and “Higher Life” (Keswickian) teachings on the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and subsequent gifts that was being embraced by many missionaries in India at the end of the nineteenth century (McGee 1999: 517). Her passion for faith and mission can be heard as she stated: “God had a way of subduing me and He did it... and when I was subdued I found myself a faith missionary, working under an East Indian woman, Pandita Ramabai, who was also living by faith” (McGee 1999: 517). The balance of faith and praxis is shown in her passion to be a “faith missionary,” trusting God alone for her needs (Burgess 2003: 305). McGee notes that as she stepped out in faith, she flourished, which in turn spurred her on to have greater faith in God’s provision. Ms. Abrams came to work at the Mukti Mission through her desire to serve God and enter the mission field.

Before her time at Mukti mission, Abrams had begun her work in India at a boarding school in Bombay. Like many other women missionaries of her day, Minnie’s main concern was the educational training which reflected the missiology of “Woman’s Work for Woman,” a movement focused on improving the lives of foreign women (McGee 1999:516). However she began to feel confined by the compound as she felt a deep compassion for the people she had seen suffering. She longed to be involved in hands-on evangelism and after waiting ten years was given permission to become a full-time evangelist (Burgess 2003:301).

Her passion for evangelism led her to resign her Methodist appointment in 1889 and join Pandita Ramabai as an administrative assistant. As a faith missionary at the Mukti Mission, Abrams would serve hundreds of child widows and famine victims. Shortly after the turn of the century, stories of revival were reaching India. Ramabai sent her daughter and Ms. Abrams to Australia in 1903 to investigate the crusades of R.A. Torrey and Charles Alexander, which sparked revival there. Within a few years, revival was breaking out among the tribal people of Northeast India. Before long, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit came to the mission (McGee 1999: 517).

In 1905, the Indian revival would sweep into the Mukti mission. The experience of a Mukti resident seemingly being doused by flames as she was being “Spirit baptized,” resulted in the mission being a center for

repentance and revival. Soon after, Abrams organized a massive evangelism initiative. She had trained the women at the mission as evangelists and organized them into “prayer bands.” The groups of fifteen women were dispatched twice a week to the surrounding countryside to preach the gospel in the nearby towns (McGee 1999:517). From her experience at the mission, Abrams wrote *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire* in 1906 describing the revival and its theological underpinnings (Burgess 2003: 301).

Her desire for evangelism, fueled by her own faith in Christ, compelled her to put her faith into action. Her ministry as an administrator, educator, and evangelical trainer played an important role in the wave of revival that swept India just before the Azusa Street mission experience. Abrams returned to Minnesota in 1910 and was disappointed to hear evangelism being promoted as a “man’s job” at a Layman’s Missionary Convention. From her own experience, she knew that global evangelism would not be able to be accomplished without women. On returning to India, she organized a group of women evangelist as the Bezaleel Evangelistic Mission to travel to the unreached mission fields of northern India. Before long, many American women were joining the work. Bezaleel may have been the only women’s missionary society from the Pentecostal tradition (McGee 1999: 219).

Minnie F. Abrams was able to train and mobilize women to evangelize the unsaved through her faith and dedication. McGee (1999) notes that she is one of the most prominent of the veteran women missionaries, yet unfortunately her story is not all that well known. She was able to find a balance between institutional ministry and gospel proclamation. Her desire to see people come to salvation and be baptized with the Holy Spirit through “signs and wonders,” in tandem with serving their physical needs, is a wonderful example of the contributions of women in the field of missiology at the turn of the twentieth century.

Susan Norris Fitken (1870-1951)

Another example of a missionary career of women at the turn of the century is found in a Canadian born Quaker. Susan Norris was born near Ely, Quebec in 1870 to Quaker parents. Her parents were active in the temperance reform movement and her mother served in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union as a delegate to the convention in Ottawa.

Her pietist roots were the result of her connection to the Quaker church; however she did attend an Anglican and an interdenominational church that had a strong evangelical emphasis (Ingersol 2012).

As a teenager, Susan experienced some major illnesses that threatened to take her life. At age 17 she was diagnosed with cancer, and a year later almost died of typhoid fever (Laird 1993: 72). These experiences drew her closer to her religious convictions, and at times she would experience dreams and visions (Ingersol 2012). One of those experiences was a vision of the Lord that assured her that she would get well. When she did recover enough to travel to visit family, she had another vision that she believed was a missionary call (Laird 1993: 72). After her recovery in 1870, she offered herself as a missionary to the China Inland Mission, but due to her health concerns, was turned down. She was not able to find an opening that would accept her, so she turned her efforts to local ministry. Hearing again from the Lord that she was not to minister overseas brought her disappointment, but did not derail her from her passion for evangelism (Laird 1993: 72).

Despite her disappointment, Ms. Fitken was sent to a Christian Endeavor convention in New York City, where she heard about the Friends' Bible Institute and Training School in Cleveland. She was determined to attend the school and enrolled in the fall of 1892. While there, she blossomed as a gifted preacher alongside her fellow male students and was assigned to a church in Vermont. During her work at another church in the Green Mountains of Vermont, Susan was invited to use her gifts in evangelistic work by the Chairman of the Evangelistic Committee of the Friends Society. Reluctantly she agreed to lead a revival in New York. While there she attended a Holiness convention and received the "second blessing" of sanctification in the Holy Spirit (Laird 1993: 74-5).

The revival was a success that led to Susan being sent out for other revival meetings in the area. She was teamed up with another "gifted evangelist," Abram F. Fitken. In the summer of 1896, they married and traveled together as co-evangelists. However the quiet Quaker style did not seem to fit their desire for preaching holiness and sanctification in the Spirit. The couple decided to join the church they had started with the Association of Pentecostal Churches in America, one of the branches that would eventually combine as the Church of the Nazarene. Susan was ordained by

the church, but credited her authority to her divine appointment from God (Laird 1993: 78).

As the couple started a family, Abram moved into a career on Wall Street. Susan continued to preach on Sundays and worked with the fledgling women's missionary society. In 1915, the Church of the Nazarene recognized the society's work and approved a national organization, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS). Fitken was approved as the president, a position that she held until 1948 (Laird 1993: 79). She continued to contend for the power of the Holy Spirit as she wrote: "We cannot be all the Lord wants us to be, or do our best for Him, without the baptism with the Holy Spirit in His sanctifying power, not only making our hearts pure, but filling us with His holy Presence" (Fitken 1940: 711-12). Her understanding of faith and praxis were clearly stated:

Holiness and Missions like Siamese Twins are inseparable. God is a Holy God, manifested as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Bible is a Holy Book, revealing God's plans for a lost and ruined race. God is a missionary God...The Bible is a missionary Book. The theme of the Bible is redemption. The Central Figure is Christ, the First Foreign Missionary who came to make provision that all men might be saved from all sin; that God might have a holy people who would worship and serve Him here, and dwell with Him in a holy heaven through all eternity (Fitken 1940: 44-8).

While these statements were recorded later in her life, they indicate a missiology that held faith and action together.

Her desire to serve on the mission field overseas would eventually come to fruition. She would travel to the British Isles to witness and support the work of the WFMS there. By the time of the Great Depression in the U.S., the WFMS had seen significant growth in both members and finances. This allowed her to take on a special project of building a hospital in Swaziland, Africa. It would be dedicated and named after the Fitken's oldest son, Raleigh, who had died at the age of 10. Other missionary trips would include Mexico, Trinidad and Barbados, Panama, Central America, Hawaii, and South East Asia. Susan Fitken's understanding of the interconnectedness of faith and praxis in mission is unmistakable in the

area of mobilizing women to support missions and missionaries through the WFMS. Laird notes that in the three decades of her leadership, the women of the WFMS had raised over \$6,000,000 and enrolled 80,000 women in membership (Laird 1993: 82). Even though she could not physically serve on the mission field for extended periods of time, Susan N. Fitken's contribution to missions in the early decades of the twentieth century is remarkable.

Lucy Leatherman (1880-1921/3)

Little is known about the final person for consideration for the impact of women missionaries in the early Pentecostal-Holiness movement. While her name may not be all that familiar in mission histories, her contribution to the field is notable. What is known about her is that she was born near Greencastle, Indiana, and was the widow of a physician (Alexander 2005: 71). She is noted to have received the Pentecostal experience through the initial wave of the Spirit at Azusa Street.⁸ As it was for many who attended the Azusa Street revival, Leatherman experienced the gift of tongues. She was believed to have the gift of xenolalia, the ability to speak in a known language. What she spoke appeared to be a Turkish language, which was believed to be in preparation for the mission field in the Middle East (Alexander 2005: 72-3).

Even though there is not much known or written about her, she was a prolific writer for the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century. She regularly posted reports to publications both in America and Europe. Leatherman would travel across the United States and eventually become an itinerant evangelist to Jerusalem, not affiliated with any one church or denomination. Kowalski notes that Leatherman traveled farther and more frequently than the majority of Pentecostal missionaries (Kowalski 2010: 271).

What drove Lucy in her missionary endeavors was her desire to spread the message of Pentecostal Spirit Baptism. The sense that we get of her life and missionary journeys is that she was more focused on evangelism than theology or missiology. Most of her work was done to plant churches and promote the Pentecostal experience of Spirit Baptism.

What is unique about her is that she was not afraid to travel alone and did so in countries where women were considered second-class citizens, and had limited ability to move around freely or participate in public activities. She was likely one of the most well educated women in the Azusa Street revival. Most importantly, she was known to fully engage in the culture to which she was ministering. She would often dress in native clothing and endure the harsh traveling conditions that existed in the places where she ministered (Alexander 2005: 71-2).

Her overseas missionary work began in 1907 in Egypt and would take her to more than eight other countries. Her travels took her to Jerusalem and Beirut, as well as conducting revival services in Nazareth and Galilee. Several of her reports noted revivals that had outgrown their meeting places forcing the gathering outside. In a short article titled “Apostolic Revival in Egypt” she wrote:

Magnify the Lord with me for the great revival in Egypt. Multitudes have been saved, sanctified and baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire. We have out-grown our mission rooms and must live out-doors. God willing, as soon as the missionaries arrive from America, I will go to new fields of labor as He opens the way. I believe Arabia will be where my Father will send me next. Pray for me. (Alexander 2005: 76).

Her writing indicates a faith and dependence on God to carry out the missional task that has been given to her. Although she is not known for her social mission, she did visit Ramabai and Abrams at the Mukti mission where there had been an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Kowalski 2010: 271).

Lucy Leatherman traveled to Southeast Asia, Chile, Argentina, and Peru ever mindful of the social and political climates around her. Allan Anderson credits her as the first Pentecostal missionary to arrive in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria (1906) and in the Philippines (1909) during the first decade of Pentecostal missionaries (Anderson 2007: 288). Unfortunately, the trail of her recorded mission work goes cold in 1923 and it is unclear if she died at that time or earlier in 1921. The impact of her faith in God and her Spirit Baptism at Azusa Street fueled her desire to spread the Pentecostal message wherever God led.

Conclusion

Each one of these women is a wonderful example of the greater work in missions that was taking place during this time period. Women were becoming a formidable force in understanding their faith and how that translates into social concerns and mission to the poor and lost. The role of women in society had shifted at least a little more in favor of women in ministry, even if it was not in preaching or pastoring established churches. Of course there are many other women whose contributions have done much to advance the gospel, but these in particular had a uniqueness that made their contributions important for this study.

What they all had in common was an experience with the Holy Spirit. Whether it was a sense of warmth, a response to an altar call, or receiving the spiritual gift of tongues, each one understood the importance of having the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Their faith allowed them to be sensitive to the leading of God. That openness and faith moved them to works that served others. Their stories are also a testimony of how God uses people from all walks of life to accomplish great things.

Phoebe Palmer chose to teach others, including men and serve the poor in the slums of her city. Pandita Ramabai was from a high Hindu caste, but led a mission and revival in home country to serve women and children who were oppressed. Minnie Abrams used her administrative gifts as a veteran missionary to help organize and train women for evangelism. Susan Norris Fitken trusted God for direction and built one of the largest foreign mission aid societies in the U.S. Lucy Leatherman was the first Pentecostal missionary to reach Palestine as a “faith missionary” and adapted to the cultures in which she ministered. Each one had a part to play in the development of missions and mission agencies. While they still may have not received the same recognition as their male counterparts, there is no doubt these women were leaders in their circles of influence.

Their stories give us a better understanding of the balance and sometimes tension between faith and praxis. It is clear that each one had an understanding that they were “saved by faith...not by works” (Eph. 2:8-9). However, after experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit, they were compelled to live out that faith because “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). I would agree with Rosemarie Kowalski that missionary theology is

sometimes messy in process and that today we decidedly need “a theology ... capable of integrating programs of evangelism and social concern into a unified effort in fulfilling the Church’s global mission”(Kowalski 2010: 291). The legacy of these women serves as a reminder that God wants to use us in mission, faith, and praxis, no matter if it is across the globe or across the street.

End Notes

¹ In his article “Discipleship and Mission: A Perspective on the Gospel of Matthew,” *International Review of Mission* 91, no. 360 (Jan. 2002), Emmanuel M. Jacob points to the parable of the sheep and the goats as a missionary mandate for social responsibility within the Christian community. His cultural background as a South African living during apartheid gave him a unique perspective on the balance of faith and praxis. His article is limited to a study on Matthew, however his understanding of the presence of Christ as necessary for putting faith into action supports the faith vs. works discussion (page 108).

² Gordon D. Fee argues for a understanding of global mission through what he determines as Jesus’ continuous teaching on the Kingdom of God in his chapter “The Kingdom of God and the Church’s Global Mission” in *Called & Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991). God’s kingdom is both now and not yet, which Fee contends provides the power to accomplish the ongoing work of the Spirit (page 16).

³ Murray W. Dempster also contends for interpreting Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of God as a way of integrating a holistic approach to the theology of church mission and ministry in “Evangelism, Social Concern, and the Kingdom of God” in *Called & Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective* by Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1991, page 24).

⁴ In Barbara J. MacHaffie’s chapter on “Women in the Evangelical Tradition” in *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), she notes that the Holiness movement opened new areas of service in public life for women that had not be available for them previously. Sanctification through the Holy Spirit was a mainstay of the Holiness renewal movement, which in turn led to living out the Christian faith in service to others (page 198).

⁵ David J. Bosch identifies a shift in thinking about women in ministry and volunteerism as part of the post enlightenment understanding of mission in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, page 328).

⁶ Allan Anderson provides an excellent summary of the Mukti Mission and the Indian revival in *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007, page 77).

⁷ Gary B. McGee's article, " 'Baptism of the Holy Ghost & Fire!' The Mission Legacy of Minnie F Abrams," *Missiology: An International Review* 37, no. 4. (October, 1999) outlines the life and ministry of one that he considers to be a veteran Pentecostal missionary. According to McGee, her missiology impacted countless women in India and is credited with spreading the Pentecostal revival to Chile through the publication of her book (page 515).

⁸ In "The Missions Theology of Early Pentecost: Call Challenge and Opportunity," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19, (2010), Rosemarie Daher Kowalski explores the historical components of Pentecostal theology that influenced missions through four case studies. She notes that the Holy Spirit was central to the women's call and passion for God's missionary service (page 271).

Works Cited

- Alexander, Estrelida
2005 *The Women of Azusa Street*. Cleavland: Pilgrim Press.
- Anderson, Allan
2007 *Spreading Fires: Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Beaver, R. Pierce
1980 *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Bosch, David J.
2007 *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Burgess, Stanley M. and Eduard M. Van Der Mass
2003 *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Dempster, Murray A., Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, eds.
1991 *Called & Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
- Fitken, Susan N.
1940 *Holiness and Mission*. Unknown:Kindle edition.
- Hammack, Mary L.
1984 *A Dictionary of Women in Church History*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press.
- Hill, Patricia R.
1985 *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

- Hosier, Helen Kooiman
2000 *100 Christian Women Who Changed the 20th Century*.
Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H Revell.
- Ingersol, Stan
2011 “Phoebe Palmer: Mother of the Holiness Revival.” *Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy*. <http://whwomenclergy.org/article26.htm>.

“Susan Norris Fitken: Mother of Missions.” *Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy*. <http://whwomenclergy.org/article21.htm>.
- Jacob, Emmanuel M.
2002 “Discipleship and Mission: A Perspective on the Gospel of Matthew.” *International Review of Missions* 91(360): 102-110.
- Kowalski, Rosemarie Daher
2010 “The Mission Theology of Early Pentecost: Call Challenge, and Opportunity.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, 19: 265-291.
- Laird, Rebecca
1993 *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene: The First Generation*. Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House.
Ma, Julie C. and Wonsuk Ma.

2010 *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.
- MacHaffie, Barbara J.
2006 *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- McGee, Gary B.
1999 ““Baptism of the Holy Ghost & Fire!” The mission Legacy of Minnie F. Abrams.” *Missiology: An International Review*, 27 (4-Oct.): 515-255.
- Oden, Amy, Ed.
1994 *In Her Words: Women’s Writings in the History of Christian Thought*. Nashville, TN: Abington Press.
- Palmer, Phoebe
1843 *The Way of Holiness with Notes by the Way*. New York, NY: Piercy and Reed Printers.
- Pierce, Ronald W. and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis.
2004 *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

- Robert, Dana L.
1996 *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press.
- Synan, H. Vinson
2001 *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- 1997 *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- White, Charles Edward.
1987 "The Beauty of Holiness: The Career of Phoebe Palmer." *Fides et Historia*, 19(1): 22-34.