Evangelical Feminism

A History

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1 Introduction

> Feminist theology cannot be done from the existing base of the Christian Bible.
>
> —Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Womanguides*, p. ix

On a rainy afternoon in the spring of 1982, a young pregnant woman visited the headquarters of Campus Crusade for Christ, a conservative Christian ministry to college students. Anne Eggebroten was dressed in one of her cutest pregnancy dresses (despite her disdain for typically feminine attire). She hoped that her outfit would help convey that she was "a good Christian woman" at the same time that she was trying to communicate a feminist message. Armed with bookmarks advertising a conference later that summer, her goal was to "reach the female employees [of Campus Crusade] with the good news of Jesus' freeing women."[1] Eggebroten was told that she would need the president's personal approval to hand out her advertisements, which "was unlikely for your organization," the Evangelical Women's Caucus. Eggebroten reported that less than twenty-four hours later, she received the bookmarks back in the mail. She concluded that "you'd probably have better luck smuggling Bibles across the Iron Curtain" than to interest a traditional, evangelical organization like Campus Crusade in an event sponsored by a feminist organization, even an evangelical one.

At the time of this incident, Eggebroten was teaching English full time at California State University at San Bernardino and was a member of NOW, a local church, and the Evangelical Women's Caucus, an evangelical feminist organization. For most people today, much less in the early 1980s, the terms *evangelical* and *feminism* are contradictory. *Evangelicalism* refers to a nondenominational coalition of conservative Christians

known for its strict, or "literal," interpretation of the Bible. *Evangelical* also conjures up images of right-wing politics and social conservatism, including support for "traditional" gender roles. So how could an evangelical also support feminism, a movement that seeks, at its most basic level, to redress the inequalities, injustice, and discrimination that women face because of their sex? Surely a person cannot hold true to a feminist ideology and social agenda and a conservative theology at the same time?

Nonetheless in 1973, at a gathering of young evangelicals concerned about the dearth of conservative Christians working toward social justice, the seeds of "evangelical feminism" were sown. In that year, the Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA) convened a conference in Chicago to discuss social concerns, to which only a few women were invited. As a result of the discussions at that meeting, a second conference held in the following year involved a larger number of women and included a special seminar on the topic of women's equality. This seminar led to the emergence of an "evangelical women's caucus" and a concomitant "biblical" or "evangelical feminist" movement characterized by the belief that when interpreted correctly, the Bible teaches the equality of women and men.[2] The Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) maintained a unified front for more than a decade until a resolution recognizing a lesbian minority in the organization revealed fundamental differences among the members over the role of biblical authority that led to emotional tensions and, ultimately, schism. What was the social and religious context that enabled the development of an "evangelical feminism"? And what were the theological issues it had to confront?

What follows is the story of the emergence and theological development of biblical feminism, why the members of the movement split, the results, and what all this reveals about conservative Protestantism and religion generally in contemporary America. At the heart of this engagement among evangelical feminists was a negotiation over the nature, meaning, and scope of biblical authority, the end result of which was a weakening of scriptural authority, a change that had been taking place not just among evangelical feminists but throughout American religion. My account reveals a shift from inerrancy (the belief that the Bible is inspired by God and is entirely without error) to hermeneutics (methods of textual interpretation) as the means of establishing evangelical identity and the general weakening of authority located beyond the self. As such, the his-

tory of evangelical feminism is more than just a narrative of events. It also is a kind of "color commentary" on the struggles over authority in American evangelicalism and religion more broadly and thus has important lessons to teach us about American evangelicalism, American religion generally, and the nexus between religion and public life.

Central to the question of authority in American Protestantism is the biblical text itself. It is the Bible, unmediated through the institutional church or authoritative leaders, that directs the beliefs and actions of the believer. At the heart of the issue of scriptural authority is the trustworthiness of the source. Does the biblical text reliably reveal divine will? Is it historically accurate? Even if one finds it reliable and accurate, how does one apply it to one's own life in contemporary America, given that it was written in very different social and historical contexts?

Such issues are crucial to biblical feminists because as evangelicals, they believe that the Bible—not progressive revelation or traditions as they developed through communities or were constructed through philosophy—is God's revealed truth. As such, to these women, the Bible, and the faith it reveals, is central to solving the problem of women's oppression in the home, church, and society. In coming to this conclusion, biblical feminists have employed modern, and contested, methods of biblical interpretation. Central to the altercation in the EWC was a disagreement over which methods were acceptable and, therefore, what conclusions could be drawn. To some, condoning lesbianism in their organization clearly indicated a shift in the basis of religious authority away from the Bible toward a greater emphasis on the outside culture, both secular and religious (i.e., liberal). Yet even the women who opposed recognizing lesbianism in their movement altered their conception of biblical authority. These changes in their hermeneutics and concept of biblical authority caused biblical feminists to play an important role in shifting the boundaries of American evangelicalism. Accordingly, the story of evangelical feminism clarifies and addresses trends visible in American religion and culture since the 1960s.

Within conservative Protestantism, evangelical feminists helped reshape how evangelicals defined themselves through their use of modern hermeneutical methods and acceptance of a limited definition of inerrancy. Prior to the 1970s, American evangelicals defined themselves by their adherence to the belief that the Bible contains no errors and teaches God's truth on every topic on which it touches, from faith to science to

psychology. Beginning in the 1970s, however, based on modern methods of biblical interpretation, some evangelicals began to limit the infallibility of scripture to the topic of faith and its practice, thereby contesting the foundation of the movement. By using a more limited definition of inerrancy and modern hermeneutical methods in their interpretations of scripture relating to women's roles, evangelical feminists helped shift evangelical boundaries away from inerrancy to the rules of engagement, that is, the methods of interpretation. In this, the history of evangelical feminism reveals a surprising theological rigor among conservative Protestant women that has not previously been recognized.[3]

The debate among biblical feminists further reveals the impact on evangelicalism and American religion of an increasing rise in individualism in American culture. It is not news to say that individualism is on the rise in liberal Protestantism, in which personal experience and social justice long have been interpretive keys. In addition, since the 1960s, spirituality—personal faith that is not tied to a particular institutional religious form—has become more popular.[4] Many of the same scholars who have chronicled the rise of personal faith have also documented the numerical growth of conservative American Protestantism. In large part, this increase can be attributed to a relationship to the text of scripture as authoritative that has kept the symbolic boundaries of evangelicalism largely intact. That is, American evangelicalism has remained largely exclusive in its faith claims. It has not become inclusive or tolerant of a broad range of theological or social views in the way that many mainline churches have. Many scholars of American religion thus have been content to argue that evangelicalism is thriving in a modern—some might say postmodern—environment.

What is interesting in the account of evangelical feminism is that it indicates that although American evangelicalism may continue to survive and grow, it may not be thriving after all. A deeper analysis shows the increasing encroachment of a more individualized, therapeutic, and consumerist society on conservative Protestantism, one in which moral agency is determined by individual preference rather than by a transcendent point of reference and in which individuals have a "religious preference" rather than a "confession of faith." This can be seen most clearly among the more progressive evangelical feminists who have come to rely on personal experience as authoritative in their interpretation of scripture, thereby weakening their commitment to external, transcendent authority. They have incorporated a broader array of theological, social,

and faith perspectives, and their organization, the Evangelical Women's Caucus, is more inclusive. The more traditional evangelical feminists also have been affected by secular American culture, though more subtly. They remain more exclusive in their faith beliefs and maintain a strong conception of biblical authority. In doing so, the more traditionalist evangelical feminists have provided a genuine, alternative, feminist theory to secular feminism, one based on a preestablished, external moral order. Still, the impact of a consumerist, therapeutic culture can be seen in the heavy weight these traditionalists place on the ability of individual reason to correctly understand the words of scripture unaided (which deemphasizes the traditional authority of the institutional church) and in their focus on using the Bible to meet the perceived needs of the individual. Such trends, which stress individual preference and reason, among evangelical feminists indicate that the modern ideals of pluralism and individualism have made a greater impact on American religion than previously acknowledged, thereby reducing the scope and force of religious authority in America.

What is more, the story of evangelical feminism suggests that evangelicalism may have inadvertently contributed to the loss of its own dominance in American society because it does not challenge the increasingly consumerist culture. For as evangelical feminists illustrate, evangelicalism—with its voluntary nature, democratic tendencies, anti-institutionalism, use of modern tools, and cultural relevance—fits quite well in an increasingly consumerist American culture. Precisely because of this, it has helped shape a new pluralization in America. As many scholars have argued, America has always been pluralist. Along with the pilgrims in Massachusetts, there were Quakers, Baptists, and Jews in the religiously free Rhode Island; Catholics in Maryland; and Anglicans in Virginia.[5] But since the time of the First Great Awakening beginning in the 1730s, evangelicalism has been the dominant faith and influence, and pluralism referred to religious people identifying themselves with a particular faith tradition to which they were bound, with rules and behaviors they tried to maintain. Today's situation, however, involves faith practitioners choosing among religious beliefs and practices, rather than between them, which is substantively different from the past. Today's progressive biblical feminist, for example, may combine in her "evangelical feminism" some Buddhist, some Daoist, New Age, Jewish, and Christian beliefs. Pluralization is now the dominant fact of American religion. As such, religion and faith are not at risk of being destroyed by modernism

in American society. However, the binding nature of those faiths is at risk, and evangelicalism, despite its own apparent health, has participated in the destruction of the acceptance of faith (of all kinds) as binding.

Definition of Terms

Several historians have told the history of American evangelicalism, beginning with its roots in nineteenth-century revivalistic religion and the modernist-fundamentalist controversy. Ernest Sandeen, George Marsden, Virginia L. Brereton, and Joel Carpenter, among others, have recounted this story compellingly.[6] It is not my intention, therefore, to retrace their steps but merely to provide enough clarity to help those readers unfamiliar with these histories. In sum, most scholars generally agree that what now is referred to as *evangelicalism* arose after World War II among a group of believers who subscribed to the basic doctrines of fundamentalism but rejected its lack of theological sophistication and its cultural excesses. These reformers, called *new* or *neo*-evangelicals, hoped to bring fundamentalism out of its intellectual isolation, broaden its evangelistic appeal, and return it to its revivalistic roots. They maintained a high view of biblical authority, including the Princeton definition of inerrancy and a belief in the "fundamentals of the faith," such as the virgin birth, substitutionary atonement, Jesus' bodily resurrection, the second coming, and the need for a personal salvation experience. A crucial change that new evangelicals made to achieve their goals, however, was to use modern theological methods, including some aspects of higher criticism.

I use the term *evangelicalism* with two connotations in mind. The first is a historical definition that takes into consideration the historical situation of American evangelicalism as a pietistic, revivalist movement embedded in the American milieu of democracy, individualism, and capitalism.[7] In this sense, evangelicals are those who shared the Reformation tradition of the Pietists, Puritans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Wesleyans, and the Holiness movement.[8] Evangelicals are those who are following in the path of their historical forbears and who share similar beliefs and characteristics. Accordingly, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Wesleyans, and the Holiness churches in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century are seen as heirs to the evangelicals of the earlier revivalist movements, whereas Unitarians are not. Later, fundamentalists acceded to the label of evangelical, and their modernist opponents be-

came the "liberal" mainstream church. In contemporary America what was known as the *neo-evangelical* movement in the 1950s and 1960s (along with pentecostals and, often, fundamentalists) is known now simply as mainstream *evangelicalism*.

Part of what marked all these disparate groups as evangelical was a common set of beliefs, such as the authority of scripture, the efficacy of Christ's atonement on the cross, the necessity of a personal salvation experience, and the importance of evangelism and a transformed life.[9] But they also had a similar style or character. Across all these time periods, evangelicals have been marked by certain affinities. Thus, evangelicalism has been democratic in the way it has stressed individual agency in conversion, popular preaching, and a lack of respect for tradition, authority of the clergy, and institutional organization. Evangelicals tend to lack denominational loyalty, follow charismatic teachers, and be innovative organizationally, whether that has been in splitting and forming new denominations or through parachurch groups to promote missions or a particular issue. The desire to be culturally relevant is another characteristic that has marked evangelicalism across historical periods. Evangelicals have used the tools of modern technology and the marketplace to spread the good news of the gospel, by way of circuit riders, television preachers, and megachurches. They also have been willing to use the philosophical ideas of their day to reach nonbelievers, in their desire to be culturally relevant. This has led evangelicals to make rational arguments for the reliability of the biblical witness and to incorporate the latest scholarship into their methods of biblical interpretation.

The second connotation of the term *evangelicalism* is a sociological one. In this sense, the definition is about who is inside and who is outside the evangelical fold.[10] For this reason, such a definition is more precise than the historical one and more debated among sociologists and historians of religion. It is for sociological reasons therefore that historians such as George Marsden and Virginia Brereton and sociologists like Christian Smith have struggled with defining evangelicalism.[11] For it is whom you study that determines what you will find. For example, evangelicals from the Holiness and Reformed traditions look quite different from each other. They share a commitment to the basics of the faith and theological conservatism, but those from a Holiness background appear to be more emotional. Conversely, those from a Reformed background appear more rational. The charismatic women of the Women's Aglow Fellowship, studied by R. Marie Griffith in her book *God's Daughters*, with their ties

to the Full Gospel Businessmen's Association, look quite different from the mostly male theologians of Marsden's study of the Fuller Seminary and the women in this book.[12]

I begin by using Marsden's sociological definition of evangelicals as those who are consciously evangelical, that is, that community or coalition rooted in a commitment to a transdenominational infrastructure of institutions, including churches, schools, colleges, parachurch organizations, and the media. I also use the insight of Jon R. Stone, who, building on Marsden, focuses on the coalitional nature of evangelicalism.[13] Stone concentrates on the role of social issues in evangelicals' attempts at self-definition during the post–World War II years, the immediate historical context of my study.[14] According to Stone and Marsden, the early leaders of postwar evangelicalism (neo-evangelicalism) were concerned with making evangelicalism a theologically conservative movement that would apply faith to a broad range of social issues affecting American life. Neo-evangelicals desired to reclaim the center of nineteenth-century American evangelicalism, positioning themselves as its true heirs and bringing about the kind of social reforms seen in that era of American Protestantism. As such, postwar evangelicalism became coalitional in nature, incorporating a variety of groups with disparate special interests.

It is here that the story of evangelical feminism fits into the sociological and historical definition of evangelical. Biblical feminism was one of those "disparate" special interests that made up the neo-evangelical coalition in the 1970s and 1980s. It began among a group of well-educated, upper-middle-class women (and a few men) who believed that women suffered injustices and discrimination because of their sex and that the Bible offered a viable solution. As one evangelical feminist argued, "The real hope for humanity lies not in discarding the Bible but in coming to a more profound understanding and implementation of it."[15] The individuals who made up the movement were self-consciously evangelical and were associated with a variety of evangelical organizations, including the journals *Eternity* and *Christianity Today*, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Fuller Seminary, Northpark Theological Seminary, Gordon College and Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Word Books publishing, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Evangelical Theological Society, and a variety of evangelical churches and denominations (including the Wesleyan, Baptist, and Reformed traditions). They also adhered to the basics of evangelical theology. Biblical feminism was distinct from the rest of (neo)-evangelicalism, however, because of its social progressivism on

the issue of women's equality, and at the same time it distinguished itself from secular feminism "by its insistence on the centrality of biblical authority on the issue of women in church and society."[16]

Method and Organization

At the center of my study are the two leading biblical feminist organizations—the Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) and Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE)—and the women and men who have articulated their theologies.[17] Because questions of authority are addressed in theology, this book looks first at the intellectual history of evangelical feminist theology (principally on the view of biblical authority) and second at the history of its leading institutions—the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus and Christians for Biblical Equality—and their social agendas. I am not trying to prove that every member of the two groups subscribes to every theological or social position of their leading spokespersons. I am arguing, however, that the ideas and positions of those leaders have filtered down to influence their organizations' structure and membership, both socially and theologically.

Most of the women in the organizations that represent evangelical feminists—women like Anne Eggebroten, Nancy Hardesty, Ginny Hearn, Catherine Clark Kroeger, Alvera Mickelsen, and Virginia Mollenkott—are unknown to most evangelicals and scholars of evangelicalism. Several recent studies have assessed women's power within evangelicalism or documented women's contributions to evangelicalism, revealing that gender issues and women's work in missionary and benevolence societies and in Sunday schools have played an important role in shaping its churches. But no study as yet has analyzed the history and theology of contemporary evangelical feminists to discover what impact they have made and how they might illuminate the situation of contemporary American religion. I hope this book will help give the women in evangelicalism their due, not just as majority members in the pew and service societies, but also as intellectuals and leaders. I hope, too, that this information will serve as a resource for those evangelicals who may want to consider the influence of the contemporary milieu on the future of their movement. For in many ways, this is a story about unintended consequences.

I have structured my writing around four periods in the history of evangelical feminism. Chapter 2 begins with the development of biblical

feminism as an organized movement and its first theological forays. This chapter also sets the movement in the context of American evangelical religion and the secular women's movement. Chapter 3 describes the early years of biblical feminism, between 1975 and 1984, in which the movement grew amid apparent unity, and its early theology. The next, chapter 4, addresses the explosion of diversity among evangelical feminists. Those years, from 1984 to 1986, were a watershed for evangelical feminists as they addressed divergent views on biblical authority, precipitated by the issue of homosexuality in the EWC.

In the next two chapters I examine the period from 1987 to the beginning of the new millennium. The theological consequences of these different views of biblical authority are covered in chapter 5, in which two distinct biblical feminist theologies are described. This chapter is devoted to evangelical feminists' biblical interpretations of passages traditionally seen as limiting women's leadership in the church and the home. The institutional consequences of the disagreement over biblical authority, including the split into two separate biblical feminist organizations, the Evangelical Women's Caucus and Christians for Biblical Equality, is the focus of chapter 6. Here I assess the shifts in biblical feminist theology, especially in relation to views of biblical authority, and look at those changes in relation to American evangelicalism. In these last two chapters, I consider two separate groups of biblical feminists: the traditionalist evangelical feminists, who still believe that the Bible is the ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice, and progressive evangelical feminists, who consider reason and experience to be sources of authority equivalent to scripture.

Chapter 7 summarizes my findings and looks at the importance of the story of evangelical feminism to American religion in general and to religious ideas on public culture, in order to consider the effect of biblical feminism on American public culture.

2

We're on Our Way, Lord!

The Birth of Biblical Feminism, 1973–1975

In 1969 Nancy Hardesty, an assistant editor of *Eternity*, a Christian magazine, left her position and moved to the Chicago area to teach English at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. During her first month there, Hardesty received a letter from a writer, Letha Scanzoni, with whose work she was familiar from *Eternity*. Scanzoni remembered Hardesty because she had sent her a supportive note after one of Scanzoni's articles challenging traditional evangelical views of women's roles received a lot of criticism. In the letter, Scanzoni invited Hardesty to join her in writing a book on women's liberation from a Christian perspective. Hardesty accepted.

Scanzoni lived in Indiana at the time, a five-hour drive from Chicago. Nonetheless, the two women frequently visited each other and sometimes communicated every day. The interaction changed both women's lives. Scanzoni found in Hardesty a "writing partner," "friend," and "sister" and credited Hardesty with helping her juggle family, career, and school.[1] Hardesty called their collaboration "a union of two souls."[2] Scanzoni gave her "acceptance, empathy, and love," according to Hardesty, at a time when she was "bitter, lonely, insecure, frustrated, and troubled." Without intending it to, their partnership became an illustration of the kind of community that feminism advocated.

Their collaboration changed other lives as well when *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation* was finally published in 1974. In 1971, when Scanzoni and Hardesty finished writing the book, no publisher thought that women's liberation would interest conservative Christian women, despite the growing women's liberation movement. They were wrong. *All We're Meant to Be* was a publishing hit, winning

awards and going through at least five printings. More significantly, it helped show evangelical women around the United States that they could be both evangelicals and feminists. The book, along with the Evangelical Women's Caucus, also was instrumental in initiating a biblical movement for women's rights in the church, home, and society.

The Founding of the Evangelical Women's Caucus

In the summer of 1973, Ron Sider, acting director of the Philadelphia campus of Messiah College, sent a letter of invitation to a select group of approximately sixty evangelicals to a workshop on the topic of evangelicals and social concern to be held at the YMCA hotel in Chicago on November 23 through 25, Thanksgiving weekend. Sider, Jim Wallis (editor of the *Post-American*, a socially conscious, politically left-leaning, evangelical journal), and several others connected to the *Post-American* formed a planning committee consisting of progressives from a variety of evangelical institutions.[3] The goal of the 1973 conference was to determine specific ways in which evangelicals could express their concern for social justice and make an impact on the political arena. The issues in which these evangelicals expressed interest included U.S. militarism, economic justice, racism, and women's liberation, a topic to which the fall 1974 edition of the *Post-American* was dedicated.

Few women were invited to this first gathering of socially conscious evangelicals. Although the planning committee tried to include women, they came up with a list of only eight, not all of whom attended. Several wives, however—who themselves were not invited but whose husbands were—did attend the conference. Their presence increased the number of women participating to approximately seven. Among the invited women who came were Sharon Gallagher, coeditor of *Right On* (which later became *Radix*), and Nancy Hardesty.

The conferees were informed that the purpose of the conference was to foster discussion, prayer, and planning, eschewing formal paper presentations. Although no specific topics were mentioned, Hardesty quickly accepted the invitation and submitted proposals on women's rights, abortion, and pornography. She also suggested discussing the following:

> All persons, male and female, are created in God's image and are thus equal.

> All persons are given equal responsibility by God for the propagation of the human species and for the preservation of the earth.
>
> Thus women must be treated equally with men. In the church women should be allowed to exercise fully whatever gifts the Holy Spirit has endowed them with, including public leadership in worship and administration on both local and national levels.
>
> In the home women should exercise equal rights and responsibilities with their husbands in the marital relationship and in regard to any children. A woman's homemaking should be considered of equal value with other work outside the home and compensated accordingly.
>
> In the business world, women should be given equal pay and equal benefits commensurate with their training and experience without regard to sex or marital status. This includes so-called "Christian" organizations.
>
> In education, women should be given equal opportunity to pursue their goals without discrimination in admission, course offerings, financial aid, athletic facilities, faculty appointments, promotions, etc.[4]

Hardesty indicated that the Christian community needed to "clean up their own houses" before they could speak to the secular world, especially about women's rights. This meant that women needed to be given equal access to jobs, pay, and education in Christian organizations. In regard to abortion, Hardesty suggested a prochoice stance that promoted a woman's right to choose to terminate a pregnancy, especially in the case of rape, incest, or when it threatened the health of the mother. She added, however, that the church should urge women to deliberate carefully before opting for abortion while offering objective counseling, support, and assistance to pregnant women and single mothers. Her main concern regarding pornography was that Christian organizations should be careful not to violate freedom of speech or advocate censorship.[5]

The organizers allocated much of the time at the conference to drafting a declaration on social concerns, but there also were small group meetings, whose purpose was to suggest concrete proposals for action. According to Gallagher, participants in the women's task force were united by their shared feelings of isolation as feminists within the Christian community. Participants in this small group meeting approved a

resolution calling for the condemnation of the improper exegesis of biblical passages and encouraged new hermeneutical studies of scriptures regarding women.[6] Another statement concerning women that came out of the conference appeared in the final draft of the "Chicago declaration" (as it became known), along with ten other statements on topics ranging from forgiveness to poverty and racism. It stated: "We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship."[7]

After the conference, which became known as the Thanksgiving workshop, Sider and others circulated the declaration for more signatures via mail and in publications such as *Christianity Today*, which printed it along with an article about the Thanksgiving workshop. Additional endorsements were collected from William Starr, president of Young Life; Timothy Smith, professor at Johns Hopkins University; and James Sire, editor at InterVarsity Press. Encouraged by the success of their signature drive, a planning committee began to organize a second conference for 1974. This time, two women joined the committee: Hardesty and Cheryl Forbes, an editorial associate at *Christianity Today*. With their help, almost thirty women attended, including Anne Eggebroten, then a graduate student in English, and Letha Scanzoni, author of several of the earliest articles on feminism from a Christian perspective and Hardesty's coauthor of *All We're Meant to Be*.[8]

The format of the second gathering was similar to that of the first and included plenary sessions. But most of the proposal work took place in smaller groups. The women's task force, which Hardesty chaired, came up with a number of concrete ideas. Some of these urged their Christian brothers and male leaders to be more sensitive, to affirm women, and to provide avenues for women to participate and lead. Specifically, the women appealed to husbands for help with child care so as to give mothers some free time. They urged the church to support and affirm nontraditional families, such as singles, the elderly, and one-parent households. They also asked churches to evaluate their educational materials for evidence of sexism.

The women did not leave all the responsibility for change in the hands of pastors and husbands but set ambitious goals for themselves. The women planned to organize Bible studies on women in the family, church history, the contemporary church, and the working world. They intended to develop criteria for churches to help evaluate their educational materi-

als for sexist views and then called on conference attendees to use this material in their own churches. They made plans to contact every evangelical college and seminary to encourage offering women's studies programs. On an individual level, the women were encouraged to attend consciousness-raising workshops and to think of ways to live as role models of gender equality. They called for women in hiring positions to promote qualified women and made Cheryl Forbes a contact point for women seeking employment. They also suggested readings on the use of nonsexist language for personal development and recommended establishing a committee to evaluate translations of the Bible for their use of sexist language.

A great deal of unanimity was necessary for so many proposals to be accepted in such a short time, although there was some disagreement. A large minority of women dissented from a proposal that approved women's ordination and affirmed solidarity with the eleven women ordained by the bishop of the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia (against the bylaws of the denomination) in July of that year. Some men at the conference complained that the women were mimicking the secular feminist movement and were fighting too hard for their proposals, one of which was to endorse the equal rights amendment, which included a pledge to work for its passage. The black women at the conference were not enthusiastic about aligning themselves with white women's causes, deeming race a more important issue for them. Therefore, they eschewed the women's task force to attend the African American caucus, which drew up strong statements about the white evangelicals' lack of concern for black issues. (As a result, a third Thanksgiving workshop addressed those complaints.)

Still, at least two of the projects proposed at the second Thanksgiving workshop materialized, and they were significant to the future of biblical feminism. The first was that *Daughters of Sarah* agreed to act as a clearinghouse to coordinate many of the proposals from the Thanksgiving Day conference. *Daughters of Sarah*, a journal dedicated to biblical feminism, was not itself an outgrowth of the meeting, as the first edition was published just prior to the second Evangelicals for Social Action conference in November 1974. Its founders were academically oriented women in the Chicago area involved with Evangelicals for Social Action, including Hardesty. Lucille Sider Dayton, the assistant director of the Urban Life Center in Chicago (also sister of Ron Sider, wife of Donald Dayton, and one of the "uninvited" wives to attend the first conference), was the

first editor of *Daughters of Sarah*. She stated that the periodical's aim was a modest one. The staff wanted to establish a network of women and men who shared a concern for Christian growth and wanted to explore the historical tradition of women in Christianity and how faith was relevant to all areas of women's lives. The inaugural issue included an historical article by Sider Dayton, an exegetical article by Hardesty that looked at the creation accounts, a gender-neutral parenting article, and a suggested reading list. With their skeletal organization already in place, *Daughters of Sarah* gave the biblical feminists at the second conference a central place to coordinate materials and information.

As part of its coordination role, *Daughters of Sarah* agreed to maintain the address list for the second significant action of the women's task force, the development of the Evangelical Women's Caucus to coordinate and implement the workshop proposals. Sider Dayton, Gallagher, Forbes, and Pat Ward, a professor of French at Penn State University, were among those listed as contact persons for the new organization. Ward compiled the names, addresses, and interests of women who wished to participate, and by January 1975 a steering committee was formed. The committee recommended a national conference, to be held in November, and hired a staff person. They also suggested organizing in local chapters, much like those of the National Organization for Women. Already Maryland, New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Michigan, California, and Minnesota had several groups beginning to coalesce. Thus, within two months, the first biblical feminist organizations were born.

Historical Context

What prompted fifty-three men and women to declare at the first Thanksgiving workshop in November of 1973 that men and women are called to mutually submit to one another? The impetus for the gathering that resulted in this statement was a presumed resurgence of conservative theology within evangelicalism. Events at "Explo '72," a conference sponsored by the Campus Crusade for Christ and focused solely on training in personal evangelism, illustrate the lack of social concern and evangelicalism's return to conservatism that Sider, Wallis, and others deplored. During "Explo," Wallis and a few others attempted to promote an antiwar agenda by distributing literature and carrying placards. Initially, officials

from the Campus Crusade expressed concern about the demonstrators' political agenda in protesting the war but allowed the group to continue its activities. But when Wallis and his friends, who called themselves the People's Christian Coalition, began demonstrating behind the speaker's platform during a flag ceremony by military personnel (replete with signs stating "Cross or Flag" and "Christ or Country" and chants of "Stop the War"), the officials silenced them. This lack of left-wing social concern seemed to be proof to Wallis and Sider of a new conservatism in evangelical ranks, reminiscent of an earlier, more militant fundamentalism. In the letter of invitation to the first Chicago conference on social concerns, Sider explained:

> A development of historic significance has occurred in the last decade. Eight years ago the "Death of God" theology captured national headlines; today Key '73 [an event similar to "Explo '72," also sponsored by the Campus Crusade] and the Jesus People have replaced that deceased fad. A conservative religious tide is sweeping the country. Will evangelicals meet the challenge and take advantage of this historic opportunity by proclaiming the biblical message of concern for the whole man? Or will one-sided evangelicalism help to provide an excuse for a revival of theological liberalism by proclaiming and living a truncated message?[9]

In offering this challenge, Sider was appealing to larger, more enduring themes in American Protestantism than the shorter-lived, liberal "Death of God" or the conservative "Jesus People" movements. Sider was reminding his readers of the ongoing struggle between liberalism and conservatism in American evangelicalism.

At this time, those struggles revolved around the issue of biblical inerrancy. In brief, biblical inerrancy is concerned with the issue of scriptural authority. Those who subscribe to this doctrine believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, completely true and faithful in all matters on which it touches. In the early 1970s, evangelicals were not far removed from their fundamentalist heritage and thus were struggling to both identify with and separate from their forefathers, who formed one branch of the successors to nineteenth-century evangelicals. Contemporary evangelicals attempted to maintain theological continuity through their adherence to the fundamentalists' "fundamentals of the faith."[10] In their behavior, however, evangelicals in the 1970s had more in common with the

Protestant liberals, the mainline heirs of nineteenth-century evangelicalism, as seen in their commitment to social activism, ecumenicism, intellectualism, and modern social mores. Thus, the energy expended by evangelicals debating inerrancy served the purpose of delineating boundaries between themselves and American Protestant liberals, on the one hand, and their fundamentalist ancestors, on the other.[11]

The historian Martin Marty observed that in particular, the younger evangelicals significantly parted company with the fundamentalist pattern. He singled out the Chicago declaration, the statement released by the participants of the 1973 Chicago workshop, as an obvious example of this.[12] The difference between the older and younger evangelicals was significant, as illustrated by father and son in the Fuller family. The first generation of contemporary evangelicals, like Charles Fuller, had originally been fundamentalists. Hence they well remembered the struggle against modern liberalism. The next generation of new evangelicals, typified by Dan Fuller (a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary) and his younger colleagues, were influenced more by the contest against fundamentalism on the right. Biblical feminism was born out of the social activism and openness to the modern theological methods of these younger, more progressive evangelicals. Biblical feminism highlights this second generation's struggle over biblical interpretation and accommodation to modern culture, both intellectually and socially.

"Neoevangelicalism"

The beginning of contemporary evangelicalism, known as "new" or "neo-evangelicalism," can be traced to the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals in 1942 and Fuller Theological Seminary in 1947.[13] It was not until the 1950s, however, with the publication of *Christianity Today* in 1956, that evangelicalism could be distinguished from fundamentalism. These new evangelicals still accepted the fundamentals of the faith and emphasized the need for a personal salvation experience. They still firmly held to the authority of scripture. But as they sought to move beyond the cultural and intellectual isolation of the fundamentalist movement, they began to engage with nonevangelicals and consider what they could learn from contemporary thought. One instance of an evangelical attempt to broaden this cultural horizon was

Billy Graham's 1957 New York City crusade. As was his habit, Graham came at the joint invitation of local churches. But in this case, Graham refused to work only with fundamentalist churches and came instead at the invitation of the Protestant Council, a consortium of nonevangelical, liberal churches. This event caused an uproar among fundamentalist churches, many of which refused to cooperate with the liberals. To expand their intellectual framework, many new evangelicals also returned to the tradition of earning degrees from nonevangelical institutions.[14] Daniel Fuller, son of the radio evangelist and Fuller Seminary founder Charles Fuller, initially attended Princeton Theological Seminary, despite his parents' suspicion that it had become theologically liberal.[15] Later he even studied neo-orthodoxy with Karl Barth in Switzerland. In 1956, the cultural and intellectual changes among some fundamentalists led *Christian Life*, itself a fundamentalist magazine, to laud the younger generation and declare that "fundamentalism has become evangelicalism."[16]

Young Evangelicals and Theological Reform

This willingness to engage contemporary thought created tension not only between fundamentalists and evangelicals but also between the first generation of evangelicals and their younger colleagues. Younger scholars like Bernard Ramm, Edward J. Carnell, and Daniel Fuller were willing to use modern theological methods to reconsider the traditional conception of the inspiration of scripture, an issue at the heart of evangelical theology. In 1954 Bernard Ramm, a Baptist teaching at Baylor University, caused a stir in evangelicalism by challenging the notion that a high view of biblical inspiration necessarily implied biblical reliability in science as well as in faith.[17] By 1958 Edward J. Carnell, then the president of Fuller Seminary, was selected by Westminster Press to write a book on the case for orthodoxy. In it, Carnell took pains to distinguish his evangelical theology from fundamentalism even more than from neo-orthodoxy or liberal theology. Some of the aspects of fundamentalism that Carnell challenged were its separatist tendencies and the theological influence of dispensationalism that caused many fundamentalists to ignore current social problems.[18] He also decried the intellectual stagnation that an emphasis on the classic Princeton view of inerrancy (called this because it was developed by leading Princeton theologians) had caused, that is, that the

only things worth knowing were in the Bible. Dan Fuller maintained his strong commitment to a commonsense reading of scripture but believed that this meant the Bible could be upheld according to the intellectual standards of the day. In particular, then, evangelicals needed to review their defense of the Bible as being without error "in whole and in part."

The younger evangelicals believed that intellectual honesty required a reconsideration of the old Princeton definition of biblical authority because they found it exceedingly difficult to claim that no errors existed in the biblical record. From Switzerland, Dan Fuller sent a letter explaining to his parents that some biblical chronologies were simply wrong.[19] Other scriptural inaccuracies included numerical errors (such as the discrepancy between Numbers 25:9, which states that 24,000 died in a plague and 1 Corinthians 10:8, which states that 23,000 died), phenomenological errors (when Jesus called the mustard seed the smallest of all seeds), and differing accounts of the same event in the four gospels. For example, three gospels had Jesus saying that Peter would deny him three times before the cock crowed; the fourth records that Jesus said Peter would deny him three times before the cock crowed twice.

Ramm, Fuller, and Carnell did not believe that these errors in any way limited biblical authority but saw them as minor discrepancies, "bookkeeping errors." None of the mistakes was in an area essential to the faith. But it made evangelicals look foolish to the outside world to claim that scripture was entirely without error. Thus the Bible was still inerrant, but not "in whole and in part." The more progressive evangelicals preferred to limit biblical inerrancy to matters of faith and practice or to say that the Bible was the only infallible guide to faith and practice. Their goal was to reform the concept of inerrancy, not to abandon biblical authority. As Fuller pointed out to his parents, he and the others wanted to strengthen it by making it more intellectually credible.

The younger generation of evangelicals believed they could make biblical authority more convincing by applying the hermeneutical skills they had learned from Protestant liberalism in a more traditional way. One of those tools was the use of higher criticism. Higher criticism (called this to distinguish it from textual—or "lower"—criticism, which attempts to restore the language of the original texts) was concerned with evaluating the literary structure, date, and authorship of biblical texts. By uncovering possible sources of a biblical author's text and thus imputing creativity to human authors, conservative Protestants feared that higher criticism could be used to dispute traditional authorship of biblical passages

or dating, thereby undermining biblical authority. The young evangelicals, however, did not use higher criticism to test the genuineness of a text but continued to subscribe to the doctrinal approach to biblical interpretation, which assumed that scripture was divinely revealed. In using this new theological tool, the theologian's goal was to uncover God's eternal principles and apply them to everyday life, not to find the most authentic and objective texts. Evangelical scholars used higher criticism to reveal historical information that added understanding about the context in which a text was written. By using higher criticism in this way, the young evangelicals did not destroy the authority of the text. Instead, they gained a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding its composition and, in doing so, helped make the Bible more credible.

By the mid-1970s, however (around the time of the first Thanksgiving Day workshop), the disagreement among evangelicals on the topic of inerrancy had taken a toll. At Fuller Theological Seminary, the faculty had split along the lines of conservative and progressive evangelicals over the issue. Fuller's original statement of faith read much like the Westminster confession used by the Presbyterians: the scriptures "are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice." But as the controversy over biblical authority grew, Fuller's creed was changed in 1949 to state: The original autographs of scripture "are plenarily inspired and free from error in the whole and in the part."[20] This satisfied conservative evangelicals that inerrancy was still a part of Fuller's statement of faith. After many years and further struggles, though, the progressives won control of the seminary.[21] Dan Fuller was appointed dean of the faculty, and in that position he played a crucial role in establishing David Hubbard, a graduate of Fuller and a progressive evangelical, as Fuller's president. In the wake of these changes, many of the conservative evangelicals left Fuller. One of these was Harold Lindsell, a founding faculty member and later vice president, who took a position at *Christianity Today*. Later, Lindsell played a leading role in the ongoing inerrancy controversy with his book *The Battle for the Bible*. In 1972 Fuller finally adopted a new statement of faith that removed the word *inerrancy* and the premillennial clause. (Premillennialism, although not always tied to dispensationalism, was the aspect of dispensationalism that gave it its otherworldly focus.) Also, in keeping with progressive evangelicalism's commitment to social activism, Fuller began to emphasize spiritual formation and added two schools of practical ministry in the areas of psychology and world missions. The first female faculty member, Roberta Hestenes, joined the

school at this time, and Jack Rogers, who was soon to play a leading role in the inerrancy debates, was hired as a professor of the philosophy of religion.

Young Evangelicals and Social Reform: Initial Forays into Biblical Feminism

In addition to reforming evangelical theology, progressive evangelicals hoped that they could improve biblical credibility by reconsidering what the Bible said about contemporary social issues. With its growing impact on American society, women's equality was an obvious question to address. As early as 1966, Letha Scanzoni warned conservative Christians that in an age of enlightenment when women were educated and aware of other cultures, questions about the status quo were bound to arise.[22] In 1973, when the first Thanksgiving workshop occurred, secular feminism was an active and vocal movement.[23] In 1963, Betty Friedan's *Feminist Mystique* appeared and roused American housewives to action with its critique of their domestic role and complicity in the U.S. consumer economy. The National Organization for Women (NOW) was founded in 1966, and *Ms.* magazine began publishing in 1972, just one year before the Evangelicals for Social Action gathering. In the same year as the Chicago workshop, the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that state antiabortion laws violated women's right to privacy. Also by this time, both houses of Congress had passed the equal rights amendment, though it still needed to be ratified by the states.

Women in the church, too, were struggling with how to achieve equality. Several denominations, primarily from Wesleyan and Holiness traditions, already regularly ordained women as pastors,[24] and the United Methodist and Presbyterian U.S.A. churches had been ordaining women for almost twenty years. Yet in 1975 women still made up less than 1.5 percent of ordained ministers in the Presbyterian Church, and of those, only about thirty were head pastors of their own congregation.[25] Two Lutheran denominations, the Lutheran Church in America and the American Lutheran Church, began ordaining women in 1970. That same year, the Episcopal Church U.S.A. recognized women as deacons for the first time, the first step toward ordination in that denomination; but in 1973, Episcopalians again voted to refuse ordination to the priesthood to women. Despite this, or rather because of it, in 1974 three former bish-

ops ordained eleven women in Philadelphia's Church of the Advocate. The ordinations were declared invalid, but by 1976, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church approved women for ordination.

During this period, female theologians from the mainline churches based their arguments for women's equality largely on the charge of "androcentrism" and on liberation theology. In 1960, Valerie Saiving published an article in which she contended that the theologian's sexual identity had a large influence on perceptions of the divine. Historically, she argued, theology had been conceived through a male lens, which ignored women's experience and thus relegated women to a subordinate position. Theology had been "androcentric," meaning that as the traditional interpreters of biblical texts, men put male experience at the center of their hermeneutic. In the late 1960s into the 1970s, Mary Daly, Letty Russell, and Rosemary Radford Ruether all published books critical of androcentric theology and proposed a feminist liberation theology instead.[26] Based on South American liberation theology, they each began their theological reflections from the experience of women's oppression rather than from traditional (male) dogma or biblical interpretation.

By contrast, socially conscious evangelicals hoped to make the Bible more relevant to Americans' lives by addressing issues related to women's equality from a biblical perspective. They were not merely conceding to the secular and more liberal Protestant cultures around them; young theologians began with the Bible, using contemporary hermeneutics to reinterpret traditional understandings of women's roles in the church and home. From the beginning, Scanzoni and other evangelical feminists paid more attention to historical argumentation and biblical exegesis than to arguments from secular culture. In "The Feminists and the Bible," Scanzoni describes the historical connections between women's rights and American Christianity—especially in the Quaker, Methodist, and Holiness churches—before proceeding with the argument that Paul had been misinterpreted as teaching women's subordination. By arguing both theologically and historically that the call to use women's gifts in leadership was an important part of authentic Christianity, Scanzoni hoped to divert complaints that she was just adding a feminist veneer to Christianity.[27]

The use of Genesis 1 and Ephesians 5 is another example of the way that progressive evangelicals and conservative theologians reinterpreted scripture differently. Traditionally, conservative Protestants believed that Genesis taught that God created women to be submissive to men. Man was created first; Adam was commanded to subdue the earth; and woman

was told that man would rule over her. Ephesians 5:21–22 states: Submit "yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (King James Version).[28] Traditionalists emphasized verse 22 and wifely submission. Many conservative ministers failed even to refer to verse 21. Progressives instead pointed to the earlier verse and the larger context of the passage—a calling to live in the power of God's spirit—inviting men and women to submit to one another in love. Thus, young evangelicals assumed that both men and women were equally created in the image of God and were given equal responsibility to steward the earth. This is why in the press statement from the Evangelicals for Social Action's first Thanksgiving conference, both women and men were called to "active discipleship" and "mutual submission."

By the early 1970s, a number of younger evangelicals were applying modern hermeneutical methods to the issue of women's roles. In 1971, Nancy Hardesty published an article in *Eternity*, and in the same month, Ruth Schmidt, a professor of Spanish at the State University of New York at Albany (who later served as president of Agnes Scott College from 1982 to 1994), wrote an article for *Christianity Today* proposing that the Christian community reexamine all scripture dealing with women's roles. Nor was it only women who held these convictions. In a series in the *Post-American*, Donald W. Dayton argued along much the same lines as Scanzoni had earlier, suggesting that a hierarchical view of male and female relationships was based more on Neoplatonic misreadings of the text than on scriptural teachings. He contended, too, that American evangelicalism had a long tradition of social activism and women's equality.[29]

The most prominent theologian to use modern hermeneutical methods to help correct past interpretations was Paul K. Jewett, who focused on the writings of the apostle Paul. His conclusions and the fact that his was the first book-length reinterpretation questioning the biblical status of women gave needed theological weight to the evolving women's movement within evangelicalism. In 1975 when he published *Man as Male and Female*, Jewett was a professor of systematic and historical theology and a close friend of Dan Fuller. In that book he addressed the problems of dualism and patriarchalism found in traditional interpretations of Paul. Jewett was convinced that those passages relating to the role of women in the church were among the least understood in the Bible because the historical context had been ignored. To gain insight into the cultural and historical setting in which the texts were written, Jewett turned to historical-

cultural criticism. Other advocates of women's equality suggested that Paul meant something other than it appeared or that Paul's statements were culturally limited. Jewett drew the still more radical conclusion that Paul was mistaken in his statements suggesting women's subordination to men based on his (Paul's) misinterpretation of Genesis. This caused an uproar in the evangelical community because many people thought he was undermining the authenticity, and therefore the inerrancy, of the scriptures. In the end, the seminary censured Jewett for his hermeneutical approach to the Pauline texts, but it remained convinced of his commitment to biblical authority, and no other action was taken against him.

All We're Meant to Be

The most influential work in helping launch the evangelical feminist movement was Scanzoni and Hardesty's book *All We're Meant to Be*. When it came out in 1974, Scanzoni and Hardesty received a hailstorm of appreciative letters from women at seeing their feelings and opinions in print. In 1975, based on a survey of 150 evangelical leaders, *All We're Meant to Be* received *Eternity* magazine's book-of-the-year award, placing it ahead of George Eldon Ladd's *A Theology of the New Testament* (Ladd was a preeminent New Testament scholar) and Paul K. Jewett's *Man as Male and Female*. According to many biblical feminists, it also helped raise their consciousness to the possibilities and responsibilities for women in the evangelical church.

Before *All We're Meant to Be* was published, evangelical feminists used a variety of theological methods to make a biblical argument for the liberation of women. Often this focused on those theological traditions that emphasized the leading of the Holy Spirit (such as the Methodists, Quakers, and Holiness churches) over systematic doctrine (such as the Presbyterians). For example, most evangelical feminists read the curse in Genesis 3 ("Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you") as descriptive, not prescriptive. They then pointed out that Christ came to relieve the penalty of the curse. At Pentecost, the prophecy was fulfilled, demonstrating this reversal:

> This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream

> dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." (Acts 2:16–18)

Increasingly, however, biblical feminists were relying on evangelicalism's younger New Testament and biblical scholars to give them the means to uphold a high view of scriptural authority while reinterpreting passages traditionally understood to teach women's subordination. Scanzoni and Hardesty represented this new approach. For example, they used a course outline from Jewett's systematic theology class at Fuller to help them interpret the creation accounts and drew on neo-evangelical methods of biblical interpretation that relied on historical-cultural criticism to help them place documents in context. By using these methods, Scanzoni and Hardesty could show that many of the passages traditionally seen as limiting women's roles were situationally limited and still maintain a strong view of biblical authority. For a text to be situationally limited means that its teachings are not intended to be normative commands for all people at all times but are provisional principles given to a specific church to deal with a particular situation.

In addition to the younger evangelical scholars, Scanzoni and Hardesty studied nonevangelical theologians popular with progressives, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Helmut Thielicke, and they followed their mentors' model by interacting with the contemporary broader intellectual culture. They drew on feminist (Germaine Greer, Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, Betty Friedan), psychological (Eric Fromm, Sigmund Freud, Abraham H. Maslow, Erik Erikson), sociological (Max Weber, Mircea Eliade), anthropological (Margaret Mead), and scientific (Masters and Johnson) sources to help them address issues of sexual roles, gender, and their cultural formation.

In contrast to others in their current intellectual milieu, however, Scanzoni and Hardesty accepted the authority of the Bible. Their theology began with scripture and what it said about God and women, not with their feminist convictions or personal experience. Their aim was to show that biblical Christianity liberated, rather than oppressed, women. To do this, they had to show that the prevailing teaching of the church stemmed from misunderstanding the scripture. Thus, the defining chapter of their book explains their biblical hermeneutic and highlights it as central to the issue of women's equality.

The authors begin their discussion of biblical interpretation with a quotation from G. C. Berkouwer, the theologian to whom many progres-

sive evangelicals turned when they became dissatisfied with the fundamentalist conception of scriptural authority.

> The Word has to be free to remake and reform the Church over and over again. The moment the Church loses interest in working the mines of the Word because it thinks it has seen all there is to see, that moment the Church also loses its power and its credibility in the world. When the Church thinks it knows all there is to know, the opportunity for surprising discovery is closed. The Church then becomes old, without perspective, and without light and labor and fruitfulness.[30]

This serves notice that from Scanzoni and Hardesty's perspective, a high view of biblical authority is not inconsistent with the use of new hermeneutical methods as they become available, including, in this case, historical and cultural criticism. In the rest of the book, Scanzoni and Hardesty apply these methods to the creation accounts and, primarily, to the Pauline corpus to reinterpret common conservative readings of those texts.

Scanzoni and Hardesty first examine the creation accounts, since it was on these passages that traditional scholars based their belief in women's subordination. This was both because the creation accounts supposedly revealed God's intended relational order and because the apostle Paul often appeared to use Genesis to support his view of women. Traditionalists focused on Genesis 2 and 3: Eve's creation out of Adam's rib and the fall. They based their view on chapter 2, verse 18, in which God says he is making for man a "helper," *ezer k'neged*, and chapter 3, verse 16: "Your desire will be for your husband; and he will rule over you." Conservatives believed that these passages taught a created order in which women are subordinate to men. They then used this to interpret Paul's statement in 1 Timothy 2:12–14 that women are prohibited from teaching in church because "Adam was formed first, then Eve" and because "Eve was the one deceived," not Adam. Traditionalists claimed that Paul's reference to the order of the creation and fall proved that the apostle intended his injunction against teaching to be normative for all times and places.

Scanzoni and Hardesty suggest that this logic is fundamentally flawed, since the creation accounts, including Genesis 1, do not teach a divine relational order in the first place. They believe that the essential unity of men and women with God is the main lesson of Genesis 1: "And God

created them male and female, in God's image God created them" (1:27). The primary teaching is not that God is male or that men are intended to rule over women in a divine relational order. Also, in verse 28 (which is addressed to *h'adam*, "humankind," not only to males), men and women are given equal responsibility to care for the earth: "Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." This further illustrates the essential unity of woman and man, not man's superiority to woman.

In regard to the fall, Scanzoni and Hardesty argue that just as men and women were given equal responsibility to care for the earth, they also were assigned equal blame for their sin. Looking at scripture as a whole clearly shows that both Adam and Eve were at fault for sin, not that Eve was more at fault, since she was deceived first. Scanzoni and Hardesty point out that scripture never uses *ezer k'neged* to refer to a subordinate helper. Instead, it is most commonly used to refer to God. Finally, Scanzoni and Hardesty agree with earlier analyses of Genesis 3:16 that the curse "he will rule over you" represents a perversion of God's intended relational unity, which Christ came to redeem.

After reexamining the creation accounts, Scanzoni and Hardesty could finally deal with Paul's statement in 1 Timothy. A survey of the historical situation at Ephesus (the city where Timothy was pastor of the church) reveals a congregation that faced unique problems owing to female, ecstatic religious practices. The church was struggling to maintain its Christian witness in a pagan society that included women's being led astray by false prophets. When combined with the proper understanding of Genesis, that historical context, Scanzoni and Hardesty insist, proves that Paul did not prohibit all women for all time from teaching based on their role in the fall; rather, it indicates that the prohibition on women's teaching is situationally limited. Paul intended to limit the teaching of women, who were new to the faith and who could have been led astray by false teachers, at that time and in that place only, to preserve the witness of the church.

Scanzoni and Hardesty proceed to exegete other "problem passages" (i.e., those that had been traditionally interpreted to teach that women's roles in the church, home, or society were limited) using historical studies to set the cultural context for how women were treated in the biblical world. In each analysis, they determine that in the New Testament, only Galatians 3:28 makes a theological statement about women. Since a part of their biblical hermeneutic is that theological passages should be used

to interpret situational passages, Scanzoni and Hardesty conclude that all other New Testament passages on women should be read in light of Galatians. Adding to this their corrected reading of Genesis, which undermined its use to support women's subordination in the New Testament, they conclude that the "problem passages" were situationally conditioned.

Not only did Scanzoni and Hardesty's hermeneutics in *All We're Meant to Be* push the limits of evangelical reforms, so too did their social practice. Along with being prochoice regarding abortion, they advocate shared parenting and egalitarian marriages in which the husband is not the hierarchical "head" of the household. In the chapter on singleness, in which Hardesty deals with the sexual needs of single women, she rules out adultery for the single Christian, but she approves of masturbation and leaves open the possibility of lesbianism. Hardesty points out that even though the scripture prohibits homosexual acts, "neither Paul nor any other biblical writer speaks of a 'homosexual orientation' or of an attraction for members of one's own sex."[31]

Despite some of these controversial suggestions, reviews of the book in the evangelical press were almost unanimously favorable. Even *Christianity Today*, a less progressive evangelical publication than *Post-American* or *Eternity*, whose editor and publisher at the time was Harold Lindsell, a strict inerrantist, ran a very positive review written by Cheryl Forbes.

Still, the negative comments that the book did receive often were related to the authors' hermeneutics. A review in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* praised *All We're Meant to Be* as a "fine work" but still asked how theologians could determine when a biblical passage was culturally limited. The reviewer was not convinced that Scanzoni and Hardesty had used the best method, and thus he was not sure they had proved their claim.[32] It is important, though, that no reviewer criticized *All We're Meant to Be* for moving beyond the boundaries of evangelicalism in its view of biblical authority, a common criticism of Jewett's *Man as Male and Female*. Thus, despite some controversial ideas, Scanzoni and Hardesty were able to locate themselves—and. therefore, biblical feminism—within the broader evangelical coalition.

Such positioning could not have been possible without shifts in evangelicalism on the issue of biblical authority. It was the increasing acceptance of new hermeneutical methods and a limited definition of inerrancy that

enabled biblical feminism to convince a growing number of evangelicals over the next ten years that their movement was, indeed, "biblical," that it held itself under the authority of God through his revealed word. In turn, evangelical feminists helped foster these changes through their widespread use of new interpretive methods. One theologian, Gerald T. Sheppard, contemplating the role of progressive evangelicals, including biblical feminists, and the role of the inerrancy debates in neo-evangelicalism concluded:

> Perhaps the most significant threat to the older hermeneutical language of evangelicalism arises from an articulate feminist position being explored by young evangelicals. As set forth by Paul Jewett and Virginia Mollenkott, the issue centers on whether or not certain of Paul's statements about women are "culturally conditioned." Once again the function of biblical hermeneutics as the social contract of evangelicalism becomes obvious.[33]

Sheppard is specifically referring to Paul Jewett's book *Man as Male and Female*, to which Mollenkott wrote the foreword. Sheppard's point is that the hermeneutical differences within evangelicalism correspond better to sociological than to theological realities. Hermeneutics operated as a means of maintaining symbolic boundaries for the community. Evangelicals may have disagreed with fundamentalist excesses, but they agreed about the tendency in modern liberal thought toward epistemological relativism. Inerrancy began to serve as a way to limit how far toward liberalism the fundamentalist reforms would go. As a boundary, it could guard against both witting and unwitting accommodation to outside influences.

Others agreed with Sheppard. Historian George Marsden argued that in their efforts to redefine fundamentalism intellectually and culturally, evangelicals had put themselves in an ambiguous middle ground, needing to define themselves on both the left and the right:

> Having broken with fundamentalism, the conservative wing of the new evangelicals needed a meaningful test to limit how far reforms of fundamentalism might go. Inerrancy could play that role. It was distinctive of the fundamentalist movement, yet shared by some other conservative traditions. Since fundamentalist evangelicals usually lacked authoritative church bodies, inerrancy was an effective tool for drawing a boundary for the movement.[34]

In their effort to promote women's equality, feminist evangelicals began to play a crucial role in the changing nature of American evangelicalism by changing the way it understood biblical authority. And despite the controversy within the broader American evangelicalism that they helped foster, the productivity and impact of the burgeoning biblical feminist movement continued to grow over the next decade. But it was also during this period that the apparent unity among evangelical feminists began to break up, and again, biblical authority played a pivotal role in their disagreements.