

AUTHOR MEETS CRITICS:
REFLECTIONS ON LEAH PAYNE'S

*GENDER AND PENTECOSTAL REVIVALISM: MAKING A FEMALE
MINISTRY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY* (New York:
Palgrave MacMillan, 2015)

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AND LEAH PAYNE

LINDA M. AMBROSE: Leah Payne's book, *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism: Making a Female Ministry in the Early Twentieth Century*, is important on a number of levels but as a historian, I would like to begin by setting it in place on the historiographic timeline. For many years now, especially since the second-wave women's movement of the 1970s, scholars have been engaged in the enterprise of doing Pentecostal women's history. To date, most of that scholarship has been dominated by what I call "the great woman theory" of history where researchers find women in the Pentecostal past whom they deem exceptional, and worthy of record. With that goal of recovery and celebration in mind, many important untold or forgotten chapters have been added to the annals of Pentecostal scholarship. I am thinking here of the recent important work of fellow SPS scholars like Estrela Alexander and Amos Yong, *Phillips' Daughters: Women in Pentecostal-Charismatic Leadership* (Wipf and Stock, 2009) and Alexander's *The Women of Azusa Street* (Seymour Press, 2012) or Abraham Ruelas, *Women and the Landscape of American Higher Education: Wesleyan Holiness and Pentecostal Founders* (Wipf and Stock, 2010) and *No Room for Doubt: The Life and Ministry of Bebe Patten* (Seymour Press, 2012) to name but two scholars among many. Whether such scholarship is written with a tone of celebration and recovery or social justice and equity, it serves the purpose of disrupting the meta-narrative of Pentecostal great men and their often-unnamed helpmates and colleagues. Putting women at the center of the story, naming them, and recognizing their contributions to the Pentecostal and revivalism past is still an unfinished task. More work in that area will always be welcome.

Payne's work rests on the shoulders of those scholars that went before her, but her work takes the attention to women in revivalist and Pentecostal traditions to a different level. Although many people make the mistake of assuming that women's history and gender history are synonymous, in fact, they are not. Payne knows this very well and it would be more accurate to describe her work, not as women's history – the act of recovering and retelling the untold stories of female founders and preachers – but as gender history. She is not doing recovery work here since the two subjects she uses for her study are already well known and have been often studied. What Payne offers instead is a fine example of gender history as she takes two familiar characters and demonstrates her masterful analysis as a scholar of gender.

Gender studies, at the core, pays attention to much more than recovering untold stories. What it does instead, is to take theories about social construction to understand how power is created and maintained through a series of social acts. This is the sophistication of Leah Payne's work: her confident and insightful application of those gender theories to the case of two Pentecostal women preachers: Maria Woodworth-Etter and Aimee Semple McPherson. Payne considers how each of these women "performed" their femininity and in doing so, created and maintained great power and influence. Looking closely at the way that these two female ministers conceived of and executed their ministries, Payne also works with theories of "embodiment" to understand how, for example, Sister Aimee constructed her personae of "the bride of Christ" through an elaborate series of gestures, physical props, voice and movement. McPherson was a consummate performer, and as Payne argued, she embraced and embodied her role by acting upon her "sexy intimacy with Jesus."

Maria Woodworth-Etter was not sexy. But she too was a powerful and influential woman of God whose story makes another fascinating case for gendered inquiry. What Woodworth-Etter capitalized upon was not her sex appeal or Hollywood star power. On the contrary, Woodworth-Etter was a mother figure. Having dealt with a great deal of personal tragedy around the death of her own children, Payne emphasizes how Woodworth-Etter framed her preaching around the role of child of God, and herself as the mother of the large flocks of Christ followers who came to her meetings and made up her

congregations. Her femininity was constructed around the maternal role, not that of intimate partner.

But Woodworth-Etter serves as more than just a foil to McPherson. What Payne clearly communicates through her insightful analysis and commanding use of gender theory is that there are many ways of being female in ministry. Not all will adopt the extroverted drama of a Sister Aimee with her exaggerated femininity expressing spiritual influence as a trope of heterosexual intimacy with Christ. Woodworth-Etter shows an entirely different way of being female in the pulpit. She too fully occupied the role, embraced the authority it afforded her, and utilized the power of her commanding call to ministry. But she did so very differently than Sister Aimee.

When Payne writes her clear and powerful analysis of these two women, she does so with an economy of words. The book, although less than 150 pages in length, points a path for future scholarship and I predict we will all be talking about it for many years to come. I do not give that praise to flatter, but because I am convinced that Payne's scholarship demonstrates the effective application of gender theory and provides a solid example of how historians and other scholars of Pentecostalism can benefit from an immersion in the literature and theoretical approaches of scholarship drawn from the widest sources of our various disciplines.

Moreover, I think this book could also be suggestive in a completely different way. Simon Coleman, has described Pentecostalism as "such a fertile theoretical topic – a religion made to travel but also one that is newly good to think with and one that has been able to traverse so many textual as well as ethnographic terrains."¹ I am suggesting that Leah Payne's *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism* is also "good to think with." Beyond its value to those of us most interested in women's history and women's ministries, this book just might be the beginning of an enterprise that has not yet been seriously tackled: a gendered approach to the making of a *masculine* ministry. In the same way that Payne has explored the gendered constructions of women in the pulpit, we need a similar exploration of

¹ Simon Coleman, "Pilgrimage as Trope for an Anthropology of Christianity," *Current Anthropology* 55, S10 (December 2014), 282.

the social constructions of male power in Pentecostalism. Where is the scholar among us who will dare to inquire into the question of how it is that male power is constructed, maintained, and reinforced in the pulpits, pews, and board rooms of Pentecostal movements, churches and institutions of higher learning? I am not talking about establishing gender equity here with equal quotas of men and women in various roles. Nor am I talking about adding token women to various committees, board tables, and teaching rosters. I am talking about a sustained, serious academic inquiry into the question of how Pentecostal-charismatic movements have become bastions for male power.

A tentative suggestion might be based on the work, once again, of Grant Wacker, whose scholarship is so often cited in Pentecostal studies circles. But here I am not talking about his award-winning *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*, but his latest work about the social and cultural influence of Billy Graham, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation*. Wacker does not position himself as a scholar of gender, but when I read *America's Pastor* and reviewed it last summer, I saw how he was beginning to get at the question of how Graham's all-American masculinity, southern charm, and winsome smile gave him such strong cultural currency.² In light of that, I began to think about what might be produced if a scholar followed the path that Wacker was on, but coupled that kind of inquiry with the influence of the scholarship of Payne. This could help us to ask the intriguing and difficult questions required to begin to unpack the constructed reality of Pentecostal masculinities.

How about this for your classroom: have students read Leah Payne and consider how a similar model of gender history might be a useful tool for unpacking the gendered politics of contemporary discussions about power dynamics in the patriarchal male worlds of Pentecostal leadership. To me, such thinking has great potential. When I was reading Leah Payne on McPherson and Woodworth-Etter, and in

² Linda M. Ambrose, "Review of Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation*. *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal Charismatic Christianity* 6 (2015): 88-90.

<https://journal.twu.ca/index.php/CJPC/article/view/146/119>

the same month also reading Wacker on Graham, it made me think that there is great potential in using Payne's work as a torch to light the way on a trail that is yet to be travelled by scholars of Pentecostalism: the path of exploring how gender constructions apply not only to women, but also, to men. With Payne's work as our guide, I believe we could begin to give serious academic attention to the particular expressions of masculinities that we observe all around us in Pentecostal subcultures.

CAMILLA BELFON: In recent years, there has been much debate about where biblical studies falls. Is it a field of study or is it a discipline? Is it a part of the humanities or is it a part of social sciences? Specific rules of analysis and interpretation in biblical studies can distinguish it in such a way as to create a dissociation between what the biblical scholar does and what the historian does. However, if we are careful to note the similarities between both branches, we find that they are, in so many ways, doing the same work. Both are invested in a kind of recovery of people and events in the past with the end goal of bringing understanding to the sensibilities of the modern person. Accordingly, they share similar habits of drawing lines of comparison between what they find in the past to ideologies and practices of genetic origins that persist today. In this sense, biblical scholars are historians of antiquities. As such, while a certain kind of fish taken out of its familiar pond and transported to another still remains that same kind of fish, so I approach Leah Payne's monograph. Although I am not the same species of a fish as Payne, (I a biblical interpreter of Second Temple Judaism and she a historian of Pentecostalism), I now venture into her pond where the examination of two early twentieth-century female evangelists will be explored.

Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism tells the story of Aimee Simple McPherson, a Pentecostal faith healer and pastor of Angelus Temple in Los Angeles, and Maria Woodworth-Etter, also a Pentecostal healing evangelist and founder of Lakeview church in Indianapolis. Both were pioneering women of their day in the sense that they trouble hardened boundaries of gender normativity by dually serving and ruling in the public arena. The success of McPherson and Woodworth-Etter did not come without personal cost. Their courage was tested with frequent public criticisms and failed marriages; and,

while they healed many in public campaigns, they suffered privately from physical illnesses at different times. Payne's account of these Pentecostal giants demonstrates their balanced leadership roles under submission to the Holy Spirit in the face of disturbing early twentieth-century American gender norms. As I made my way through the book, I could not help but see noticeable comparisons between Payne's subjects and another twentieth-century woman evangelist whose archives I had studied some years earlier.

As a student of the late Pentecostal historian Gary McGee, I first encountered the relatively unexplored life and ministry of healing evangelist, Louise Nankivell (1896-1972) at the Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center in 2004. In the archives, one consistent pattern I observed was that all across the country, newspapers would publicize Nankivell's campaigns frequently dubbing her as "the Second Aimee Semple McPherson." One such assessment was made in 1926 when she preached a two-week evangelistic campaign in the Pittsburgh Memorial Hall. The *Pittsburgh Sun*, referring to Nankivell, compared her to McPherson as displaying "the same dominating personality, the same magnetism that wins crowds, the sweeping hypnosis of a well-modulated voice that whispers a message and shouts its joy."³ To such equivalences, Nankivell would not become seduced, but would simply respond, "Of myself I am nothing... All I can do is point the way to God."⁴ Despite her sincere effort to wave off such public attention newspapers continued to give attention to the evangelistic magnate. Her fame continued to sweep across the nation.

Although Payne's *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism* focuses squarely on McPherson and Woodworth-Etter, Payne pauses at certain points to compare these popular evangelists with Carrie Judd Montgomery, another prominent female evangelist known for her battle with sickness and a compelling miraculous healing story. Nankivell admired the ministry of Montgomery and was somehow brought into the faith healing ministry by this influence. But what separates evangelists like Montgomery and Nankivell from McPherson and Woodworth-Etter is that the former two were married throughout much of their ministries while the latter two were not. Moreover,

³ *Pittsburgh Sun*, October 5, 1926.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Nankivell remains generally forgotten, whereas the others have continued to live on within the pages of encyclopaedias, history books, and monographs that chronicle the Pentecostal experience. I would like to take up the matter of marriage and ministry as it relates to certain highlights from Payne's *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism*. In order to express how Payne addresses ideological and cultural notes regarding the life and ministry of McPherson and Woodworth-Etter, I briefly will sketch highlights of Nankivell's story, follow up with a description of key chapters in Payne's text, and conclude by making a statement of how *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism* positions itself in the broader Pentecostal feminist discourse.

At the close of the General Council in Minneapolis, September 1941, Nankivell collapsed from what the doctors described, as "labored breathing." Reports say that her body was completely failing, her internal organs were "burned out," and she was close to death. She had collapsed six weeks earlier, and was unable to sit, eat or sleep. She had suffered with an acute burning sensation on her right side, somewhere about her waistline. Her fainting at the General Council gave clear indications that her condition had advanced. This was the same illness that caused her aunt's death at the ripe age of 80, except Nankivell was barely half that old.

Up to this point, Nankivell had prayed for thousands who were subsequently healed of an assortment of fatal and otherwise serious diseases. However, this time, the need for a divine touch was desperately personal. The doctors could offer her no treatment except sedatives to quiet her at night along with supervision by a bedside nurse. She remained in Minneapolis while her condition remained grave. She was initially diagnosed with chronic inflammation of the gallbladder and liver disease.

Nankivell purposed that if she would die, she would do so while in prayer. Though the pain was unbearable and she felt too ill to pray, she resolved to keep this commitment to the Lord. When she was able to travel by plane, she returned home to Chicago with her husband, Alfred Ansel Nankivell. After a year and nine months of praying, there was no change. Finally in complete desperation, she offered God this final plea, "Oh, Lord, if you will bring me out of my hopeless condition in a short time by some supernatural act of Divine

intervention, so that all can see that YOU have done this, I'll go out and preach your gospel dressed in sackcloth."⁵ Two or three weeks passed with no change when one Saturday night she prayed again, "Lord, all I am, all I have, my life, my health is in Your hands; I rest it all with you."⁶

With that simple prayer on the night before Palm Sunday, the Lord appeared to Nankivell in a vision, which she explains in detail in the original account titled, "The Appearance of Christ to Me." Three days later, her health improved and she began to feel like a new person. She again consulted her doctor who confirmed her healing. After speaking with her husband, and her pastor and his wife, they all concluded that in obedience to the vow made at the time of her illness, she should wear a dress of sackcloth every time she preached.⁷

This dramatic event in Nankivell's life resulted in a growing belief in divine healing that became more pronounced evangelistic meetings. Specifically, Nankivell believed this episode led her to understand that the condition of one's heart before God was really the critical factor in whether or not one received the requested healing. In light of this background, the question that continues to percolate as I read *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism* is, "Why is it that most people are not familiar with Louise L. Nankivell's name as they are with personalities such as Maria Woodworth-Etter, Aimee Semple McPherson, Carrie Judd Montgomery, and the more recent, Kathryn Kuhlman?" In my 2004 article on Louise Nankivell, I submitted two possibilities I have modified as a result of Payne's thesis.⁸ My first argument for Nankivell's unpopularity is that fame often has a lot to do with public perception. If the public perceives a person as interesting or controversial, she person becomes the topic of what is otherwise known as "pop gossip." Aside from her vow to wear sackcloth, there really was no big controversy associated with her

⁵ Louise Nankivell, "The Appearance of Christ to Me: Why I Preach in Sackcloth," *The Voice of Healing*, October 1949; republished in Gordon Lindsay, *Men Who Heard from Heaven*, 101-16.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Heather-Gail Rhoden Belfon, "The Life and Ministry of Evangelist Louise Nankivell," *Assemblies of God Heritage* 24, 2 (Summer 2004): 4-12.

ministry; neither were the denominations nor agencies with which she was associated controversial or heretical in any way.

Second, almost everything available on Nankivell's life comes from primary sources. There has been no biography or documentary of her life; she cannot be studied in any church history text. Aside from the healing testimony published in Gordon Lindsay's *Men Who Heard from Heaven* and brief mention in David Edwin Harrell's *All Things Are Possible*, other references to her life and ministry are gleaned from articles she submitted to the *Pentecostal Evangel*, *Voice of Healing*, newspaper articles, correspondence, and personal papers. Payne has contributed to my work is a fresh way of understanding the regional popularity of Louise Nankivell in relation to the national appeal of Semple McPherson and Woodworth-Etter in *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism*.

As Payne recounts, unlike Nankivell, born some 50 years earlier, Maria Beulah Woodworth-Etter (*née* Underwood), became a national sensation. Woodworth-Etter engaged in a traveling holiness revival ministry, "featuring preaching, altar calls, and prayers for healing along with her husband, P.H. Woodworth (3). But due to his embarrassing behavior which included strong language and advances toward other female disciples on the road, coupled with the increased distance that grew between the him and Woodworth-Etter, the couple divorced in 1891. It was after the divorce that Woodworth-Etter's ministry began to soar.

While Louise Nankivell's preaching ministry flourished around the Great Lakes states, Woodworth-Etter preached from California to Massachusetts. She assumed the role of bishop, planted churches, and appointed male ministers to accompany her on evangelistic journeys. With a growing volume of autobiographies, she developed a superstar reputation. In 1902, at the age of 58, she married Samuel Etter, who became an important support to her ministry. Because her ministry assumed a very similar portrait to that of the Pentecostals, in 1904, she joined the Pentecostal movement. In 1918, she settled in Indianapolis and began what would become a successful pastoral ministry (85).

As Woodworth-Etter's ministry localized its headquarters in Indianapolis, Aimee Elizabeth Kennedy, just 6 years younger than

Louise Nankivell, carried Woodworth-Etter's torch to new heights. In 1908, Aimee married revivalist Pentecostal preacher, Robert Semple, and they set out on a mission in China (4-5). Plans in China came to an abrupt halt with Robert's tragic death; then ensuing birth of their daughter necessitated Aimee's return to the US. She continued her ministry, preaching between New York, where her husband was connected, and Canada. Not long after, she met and married Harold McPherson, a young hotel manager. It was on the grounds of "spousal abandonment" due to her heavy travels that Harold later divorced Aimee in 1921.

Payne argues that Woodworth-Etter and Semple McPherson managed to straddle two seemingly dissimilar tasks as evangelist-pastors and mothers (both of the church and, in Aimee's case, her own biological daughter). Payne shows how Woodworth-Etter and Semple McPherson shattered stereotypes that understood femaleness in terms such as passivity, submission, fertility, and weakness. Both women embodied a gender dynamic that seemed to challenge American social categories, during a time that would later be understood as first-wave feminism. While men were being emboldened in a post-Victorian age, with idealizations around virility, strength, dominance, military service, and often around the intellectually elite white Protestant, Payne points out Woodworth-Etter and McPherson did not succumb to the likely stereotypes that fell to the female side the ruling gender binary. They were not women who demurred in submission to the Victorian ideological apparatus. Though they embraced nurturing models, they showed fear in demonstrations of power and authority (19-33).

Nankivell, in contrast to McPherson and Woodworth-Etter remained married throughout the course of her ministry. As Payne points out, "Married women ministers often argued that as long as they were dutiful wives with happy husbands and home lives, they were entitled to minister: their responsibilities to the men in their lives were fulfilled, and their free time could be invested in a pastorate." Perhaps that was the logic the followed Nankivell's ministry, whose husband was known to accompany her in song, but did not have the same call to preach and gift of healing. While it is unknown to me that she ever had a child, her conformity to the social norm of marriage seemed to serve dually to legitimize her profession, but also limit the scope of her

popularity. Having said this, while Nankivell's ability to maintain her marriage distinguishes her and others like Carrie Judd Montgomery, these women did not escape criticism.

In 1930, a radical against women in ministry came forward during one of Nankivell's Bible classes in Westwood, New Jersey. Her accuser cited the Bible to support his view that "women in particular are susceptible to the wiles of Satan" and that their involvement in politics and public life is a menace to mankind."⁹ In response, Nankivell defended the role of women in society and ministry "Christ always did honor and respect women ... though a woman's accusers were many, Christ was always first in her defense. And how they loved Him – last at His cross, first at the tomb." She leaves this provoking question at the end of the article. "Would it seem likely that the Lord would endow woman with talents which could be effectively used to His glory, and then deny her the privilege of using them?"¹⁰

Payne demonstrates that between roughly 1890 and 1920, the issue of female ministers was an American hot button topic. On the one hand, many proponents made use of Old Testament narratives such as Deborah (Judges 4-5) and Joel 2:28-29: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." Payne highlights the responses of McPherson and Woodworth-Etter to their detractors and shows how these women understood their respective callings; Woodworth-Etter saw herself as "Mother of Israel", and McPherson, "the lover, confidant and bride of the coming bridegroom, Jesus" (60-62).

In chapter 3, Payne makes critical points in regards to gender and the ideological apparatus of image in a comparison narrative between McPherson and Woodworth-Etter. Inasmuch as women preachers typically often adorned themselves modestly, wore simple dresses and pinned coifs, Woodworth-Etter seemed to align with this convention. With respect to more progressive fashions, she was public

⁹ *The American Way* [tabloid], New York, 1930.

¹⁰ Ibid.

in warning against, “elaborate accessories and hairstyles and condemned ‘bangs and frizzes’ as ‘the devil’s implement of war’” (69). Not so with McPherson. Due to proximity to Hollywood, McPherson was not reluctant to find creative ways to punctuate her sermonic points with visual cues. She could be seen elaborately made up as Ruth or Rebecca, in authentic Arab garb or as a Southern belle. No doubt, this practice made her very controversial not only to visitors, but also regular church goers.

Ironically, Nankivell attracted attention by way of her commitment to wear sackcloth upon her miraculous healing of pernicious anemia. She defended her attire, saying that she wore sackcloth in symbolic representation of America’s need to repent. While the image associated with femaleness for Nankivell portrayed deep humility and piety, McPherson utilized her dress to enhance her sermonic flair.

As Payne instructs us, Woodworth-Etter and McPherson are important subjects for gender studies. They demonstrate early challenges faced by women who boldly defied society’s demand for quiet docile wives. And perhaps, in so doing, they suffered the loss of personal intimacy in order to see the booming success of their ministries on and off stage. With this book, Leah Payne has produced an important contribution to Pentecostal history and gender studies, one that I hope future studies will replicate.

ERICA M. RAMIREZ: I find Leah Payne’s pragmatic, ritual-centric approach imperative to understanding how women have created authority in Pentecostalism. At the 2016 meeting of Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) on the day before this discussion of Payne’s book, another session focused on women in Pentecostal leadership, and it was handily acknowledged that conscious *belief in the calling of women to the ministry* in no way guarantees women will occupy positions of leadership in churches or denominations. A hundred little obstacles seem to conspire to get in the average woman’s way: the odd tithe-payer on the board who feels “uncomfortable” with women in ministry; colleagues who perceive her as “difficult.” As always, women are advised to hold their heads high, to overcome gendered limitations with grace, and to seek recourse only in their own assurance of a higher personal calling.

Still, one woman at the SPS session reported that her ordination papers had been languishing in the denominational process for no less than *nine years*! Clearly, belief in the equality of women in ministry does not stop the practices which continue to dominate women and exclude them from the pulpit.

Before Pentecostal denominations staked out their positions about the fitness of women for ministry, there were Pentecostal foremothers and fore-sisters laying claim to that exalted territory. Those women did so, not with the pointed rhetoric of women's equality, but with alternative, performed constructions of authority. Payne invites us into the spectacular world of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century revivalist meetings to witness the tremendous rhetorical strength wielded by two revival preachers: Maria Woodworth-Etter, who was known as "Mother," and Aimee Semple McPherson, who was known affectionately as "Sister."

Payne's approach makes visible the complicated maneuverings that women preachers like Woodworth-Etter and McPherson successfully negotiated. Establishing a female ministry required the successful mobilization of biblical symbols of femininity, a complimentary organization of space, choice of attire, and most importantly, a strategic sidestepping of overt attempts to disqualify their ministries based primarily on gender. Payne showcases Woodworth-Etter's valiant "Deborah," commanding armies of warriors for righteousness, assuming authority over male and female lieutenants alike. Payne's introduction includes a helpful table that diagrams explicit binary constructions of gender operative in this time period in the United States (16). It is clear that Woodworth-Etter's march for evangelization charted a fresh public trajectory for woman that mobilized her away from the ideological confines of private domesticity. Woodworth-Etter's portrayal of the "Mother in Israel" was presumably so compelling, her audiences cared very little that this "Mother's" public stature was socially aberrant.

In contrast to the militant austerity of Woodworth-Etter, Sister Aimee's public persona thrived on an enduring image of herself as the Bride of Christ. A widow from her truly happiest and

first marriage, Sister Aimee transformed herself instead into Christ's radiant lover-bride. Dressed in gleaming white, Sister Aimee headed to the pulpit with flowers in hand, so that the pulpit doubled as a marriage altar. Payne invites readers to visualize Sister Aimee kneeling like the romantic starlet Mary Pickford, except under the hand over her heart there is a bible and around her head emanates a halo of light. This image of the ingénue in love, McPherson powerfully invoked, surprisingly spiritualized, and, through the additional magic of her love poetry for Christ, finally alchemized into authority in the pulpit. She was a woman in love and, she strongly implied, a woman especially beloved by the Savior.

It is clear from Payne's work that the performative preaching style of Pentecostal and proto-Pentecostal revivalism proved to be a malleable medium for women preachers. I am struck by the versions of womanhood that Pentecostalism not only tolerated, but on which it actually thrived. Our subjects vivified, rather than rationalized, these modes; revivalism's currency has always been the vivid. Had they been drawn into an official proceeding to give rationale for women in ministry, Sister Aimee and Mother Maria's metaphorical embodiments might not have proved to be convincing. Yet, within revival space and time, their performed enactments of a liberating gender Pentecostal ritual script hit the mark much more often than it missed. Then, as ever, seeing was believing.

It appears that McPherson and Woodworth-Etter were adept at sidestepping attacks on their rightful place in ministry as females. Sister Aimee's response seems to have itself become part of the authorizing script: *What woman could deny the call of such a loving and gentle Savior?* For better and for worse, meek acceptance of a calling has become a time-honored part of the script for Pentecostal women in ministry.

The SPS session referred to above, (concerning Sister Aimee's own denomination, no less!), demonstrated that women in Pentecostal leadership still feel obliged to avow a general reluctance to preach, disavow ambition, and acknowledge their awkwardness for office. "*Who me, Lord?*" is a common enough refrain from men and women faithful alike. However, women take on the work of

disavowing their own perception of themselves as potential leaders, whereas men often reference their perceived shortcomings (60). Moses stuttered, but he did not have to imagine himself across a chasm of gendered division for leadership. Conscious of their sex as itself a problem, it is fascinating that Sister Aimee and Mother Maria were able to so successfully downplay their additionally complicated statuses as divorcées. Was divorcée status easily smuggled into the terms of accepting a woman with so much personal power in the first place?

Much of the difficulty in grappling with gender as a category of thought as well as a social fact of life is its inevitable association with sex. There are countless instances in which power dynamics attain gendered symbolic relations, but sexual relations is where they derive their power and force.¹¹ Yet, Payne pointedly notes that Sister Aimee's career as a preacher was established in the relative absence of a husband, while Woodworth-Etter's career blossomed after she ridded herself of her promiscuous husband. My interest is piqued here at the possibility that the functional celibacy at work in women revivalists' lives eased the sexual implications of their female ministries. Is it possible that their shared divorcée status was counterintuitively helpful because it rendered the preachers sexually unattached? The absence of spouses spared McPherson and Woodworth-Etter the public's perception of their being too dominant over a particular embodied man. The absence of an actual sexual partner, in a husband, might also have helped to temper the threatening sexual subtexts of Sister Aimee's preaching *oeuvre*. For example, in her invocation of Esther's forbidden audience with King Ahasuerus as an allegorical meeting between herself and the Lord, McPherson rehearses Esther's grasp of the scepter of love (not power?) as a *timid touch* after which she seemingly swoons, exclaiming "Oh!" (54). The difficulties in navigating the phallic

¹¹ See Roger Friedland, "Drag Kings at the Totem Ball," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 239-273; and Roger Friedland, "Money, Sex and God: The Erotic Logic of Religious Nationalism," *Sociological Theory* 20, 3 (November, 2002): 381-425.

imagery in this scene might well have been alleviated by Sister Aimee's presumed chastity. It seems beyond the pale to conceive of a never-married woman of marriageable age invoking the same themes in mixed audiences so successfully. Yet a divorcée had some peculiar latitude. Payne notes that Sister's adult children were pressed far into her rhetorical background in service to her persona as "the perpetual bride" of Christ. As Sister could not be always the heavenly bride and at the same time a "normal mother with earth-bound concerns" (61), one notes she could not ever be a blushing bride at the cusp of consummation with an actual husband right beside her.

Payne argues that Sister Aimee marvelously compounded, and indeed it seems held in sexual tension, the popular imagery of the Church as the Bride of Christ by "exploiting every detail about the bride's womanly qualities" and by interpolating herself specifically into the role of the bride of Christ. At one point, Sister even shared an ecstatic vision in which she realizes the face of the Bride was, in fact, her own face (57-59). Yet Payne instructively notes this idealized version of biblical womanhood granted Sister Aimee only a limited means to earthly authority, one which schematically bound her to assume a posture of feminine passivity even when founding her own denomination, an initiative she owned to have only *received*, not authored.

Still, as Sister's construction of ministerial authority opportunistically innovated on the popular use of bridal metaphor at the time, Payne's work makes possible an assessment of Sister Aimee's editorial decisions in her deployment of bridal figures. Compare the schemas of feminine power encoded in Esther with those in a more suggestive text, one that Sister Aimee left comparatively under-exploited: that of Ruth and Boaz on the threshing floor. Space for this essay will permit only the briefest sketch, but important differences can be grasped. In contrast to Sister's timid Esther, literary and cultural theorist Nehama Aschkenasy suggests Ruth is best read as the sexual aggressor. Aschkenasy portrays Ruth's statement to Boaz, "...spread therefore thy skirt [or wing] over thy handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman [or, a redeemer]" (3:9) as a double-entendre. Ruth's invocation of

Boaz' wing echoes Boaz' previously spoken blessing, that she might find respite and provision from God's *wing* (2:12). Building on different interpretations from the Hebrew, Aschkenasy casts Ruth speaking these words to Boaz while standing, disrobed, at his feet. In this reading, Ruth invites/incites Boaz to spread his blanket, a metaphorical wing, over her as a means to claim her.

Aschkenasy's Ruth transgresses into Boaz' private chamber, upending traditional gender roles by proposing intercourse and marriage. I raise Esther and Ruth together because they enact differing scripts of female empowerment. Agreeing to submit herself even to capital punishment for her gendered trespass, the palpable fate of her predecessor, Esther reluctantly seeks audience with the King. It is possible to read Esther as timid, but Ruth is decidedly assertive in trespassing Boaz' space. Under Naomi's advisement, and during a strategic time of seasonal festivity when social rules were relaxed, Ruth provokes Boaz to satisfy Naomi and Ruth's shared aims. Though McPherson does indeed invoke Ruth as a bridal figure, Payne recounts that Sister intertwined Ruth into a "wedding on the mourn" discourse for the Bride of Christ yet waiting on earth. In so doing, McPherson emphasizes a *waiting* passivity in the bride that undercuts Ruth's daring night-time initiative.

Placing Esther and Ruth into comparative relation illustrates again the narrative achievements of Sister Aimee, while locating where they stopped short of what they might have been. As a woman with a 5300-member church, demonstrating monumental power by invoking these sexual themes with freedom and autonomy, Sister Aimee still appeared careful to enact a gendered political economy in which female empowerment was female sexualized submission, receptivity, or passivity. The limits of McPherson's authority may have been constrained more by her editorial decisions than by the agency and authority of biblical brides per se.

How fully Sister Aimee exploited the power of her series of biblical brides is a question I do not presume here to have satisfied but only raised. There is no question, however, that McPherson transgressed the textual limits of the symbol of the Bride of Christ, a

symbolic figure, rich with political and eschatological import. On the contrary, I propose that McPherson's purchase into the importance of the bride figure signals a more ingenious, intuitive grasp of a critical feature of the ritual structure of Pentecostal revivalism: namely, *liminality*. Various scholars have espoused an interpretation of the emotional, egalitarian atmosphere of revivalism's altar space as being an instance of Turner's *anti-structure*.¹² Liminality denotes a ritually allowed interval of time when social norms are relaxed; in one of Turner's most influential models this suspension of norms/laws/hierarchy enables the transformation of individual's social status.¹³ If we understand the Pentecostal altar as a space of transformation, the act of responding to the altar call to become a believer in Christ can be understood ritually as a Turnerian social drama-- a transformation of the seeker for which the time-space of the altar is a liminal and transitional period. The space of the altar is ostensibly not the space of the normal ordered world, but rather a spiritual threshold of renovation of identity and attending egalitarianism, often called *communitas*.

Within this type of threshold, Turner notes the functional and symbolic suspension of hierarchical structure which symbolically enacts a free space for individual renovation. However medieval historian Carolyn Walker Bynum has challenged Turner's theoretical development for its relative inattention to gender, asserting that, to her knowledge, only men undergo liminal transformations of identity

¹² Margaret Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Lanham, MD: Altamira, 2003), 59-85; Bobby C. Alexander, "Pentecostal Ritual Reconsidered: Anti-structural Dimensions of Possession," *JRS* 3, 1 (1989): 109-116; Bobby C. Alexander, "Correcting Misinterpretations of Turner's Theory: An African-American Pentecostal Illustration," *JSSR* 30, 1 (1991): 32-35; Dan Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 209-217; Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 247-56; Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 160-165; and Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 135-140.

¹³ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 2008). First published in 1969.

whereas women are more often themselves perpetually liminal personae. Bynum offers examples of medieval male saints who, when anxious and overtired, abandoned their professional offices, referred to themselves as female, and sought the counsel of saintly women like Catherine of Sienna, as a means of restoring their health and power.¹⁴ After a period of time, men in liminal crisis most often re-emerge to resume their official roles and power. Walker Bynum's reading suggests that social hierarchical order is performatively, (and thus also symbolically), *male* in relation to liminality's undifferentiated femaleness.¹⁵

In a telling parallel logic, Payne demonstrates that salvation and healing encounters verbally feminized responders, who were exhorted to *yield* and *surrender*. Critically Payne notes that, men preachers acted as "masculine initiators" ostensibly maintaining gender hierarchical order as the context for the altar's feminine, liminal space. By contrast, McPherson's *bride* and Woodworth Etter's *mother* instantiated a fully feminized liminality for revival's time-space, absented of a masculine hierarchical order. Their chosen metaphorical roles mirror those of Bynum's medieval women saints who, as they grew into sainthood, only deepened their affiliations with their roles, whether wife, nurse, or mother.¹⁶ Ingeniously, Sister Aimee's performative bridal role, maintained a liminal feminine symbolic (a-)structure even while she pursued hierarchical organization as head of her own denomination. Equally riveting is Sister Maria's "Warrior Mother," a gendered liminal figure mobilized in holy antagonism against the ungodly (though masculine and patriarchal) order of the day. Woodworth-Etter exercised a dominant feminine liminality aiming to expand its territory by force.

Some scholars might read this differently and conclude that while Sister Aimee's bridal persona served to deepen the liminality of Pentecostal ritual, it could not succeed in accruing, even to its most famous of women, the kind of priestly authority that

¹⁴ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Urzone Books, 1991), 34-35.

¹⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 118-120.

¹⁶ Bynum, 33-47.

Pentecostal *denominations* granted nearly exclusively to men.¹⁷ It seems possible, however, to understand Pentecostalism differently, as itself a tradition which most highly esteems revival liminality over and against structural order. And, to the degree that this liminality has been historically and ritual-schematically female, Sister Aimee and Mother Maria stand as important historical cases of Pentecostal women on top.

LEAH PAYNE: I want to thank Linda Ambrose, Camilla Belfon, and Erica Ramirez for their thoughtful and careful engagement with my work. I am humbled and grateful that *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism: Making a Female Ministry in the Early Twentieth Century* has inspired ongoing exchange at the intersection of gender, theology, practice, and Pentecostalism. And, I am delighted that Ambrose, Belfon, and Ramirez have applied their fine analytical minds to this project. Their comments are rich; I will not attempt to address them in their entirety. Instead, I will tease out a few points that they raise along with my own questions in hopes of moving this conversation forward in helpful ways. In the spirit of Pentecostal-Charismatic preaching, it is worth noting that the while the performance of Ambrose, Belfon, and Ramirez at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies (and the lively response of the attendees) cannot be duplicated in written form, I am grateful to the *Canadian Journal of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* for continuing this discussion by publishing these remarks.

Linda Ambrose makes a case for recovering women's history and doing gendered histories of Pentecostalism. This distinction is important because while it is essential that we resurrect the stories of Pentecostal founders who have been buried for too long in archives because of their sex, scholars must not stop there. Ambrose points out that gender history is a helpful methodological tool for analyzing the Pentecostal movement. I heartily agree. A presumption behind *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism* is that traditional methods of Pentecostal historiography that focus on intellectual histories and/or historical theology may give students of the movement valuable insight but these yield only part of the Pentecostal story. Gender is a useful prism that

¹⁷ Lisa P. Stephenson, *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

refracts the movement and parses out helpful elements of its theology and practice. My work is certainly not the first to use such a model; Ambrose herself is a noteworthy contributor to this scholarly agenda as are Anthea Butler, Pamela Holmes, and Lisa P. Stephenson to name a few.¹⁸

Gender is not the only useful category for analysis. Robert Mapes Anderson's *Vision of the Disinherited: the Making of American Pentecostalism*¹⁹ and Grant Wacker's *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*²⁰ show the promise of class as a category for analysis when it comes to Pentecostal theology and practice. Iain MacRobert's *The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA*²¹ and Butler's *Women in the Church of God in Christ*²² prove that using race and/or ethnicity as a category for analysis (as well as gender and class) can reveal previously obscured aspects of the movement. For example, MacRobert's analysis demonstrates that while Pentecostals in the United States certainly held distinct theological convictions, those convictions often fell too conveniently along racial/ethnic lines to be ignored. What more insight can scholars gain by looking to traditional intellectual histories that focus on trickle-down theologies and including studies of Pentecostalism through the lenses of material histories, the histories of gender, class, ethnicity, modernity, technology, etc.?

¹⁸ Linda M. Ambrose, "Establishing a Gendered Authority through Pentecostal Publications: The Writings of Zelma Argue, 1920-1969" *Historical Papers* (2009): 68-80; Anthea Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Pamela Holmes, "Ministering Women in the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada: a Feminist Exploration," in *Canadian Pentecostalism: Transition and Transformation*, ed. Michael Wilkinson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009); Lisa P. Stephenson, *Dismantling the Dualisms for American Pentecostal Women in Ministry* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

¹⁹ Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1979). Anderson's work is one of the earliest academic treatments of Pentecostalism and while many subsequent scholars (including myself) disagree with the conclusions of his class analysis, his approach remains influential in scholarly circles.

²⁰ Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²¹ Iain MacDonald, "The Black Roots and White Racism of Early Pentecostalism in the USA" (London: Macmillan Press, 1988).

²² Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World*.

Ambrose also calls for scholars of Pentecostalism to expand their vision of gender studies – specifically to include the gendering of men as well as women – in their analysis of the movement. This expanded view of the movement has potential to help us answer many contemporary questions of Pentecostalism. I will honor her request in my response to Belfon and Ramirez.

Camilla Belfon's comparison of Maria Woodworth-Etter, Aimee Semple McPherson, and Louise Nankivell shows how much theological and practical insight scholars gain by analyzing Pentecostal clothing and personal appearance.²³ Like Woodworth-Etter's strictly modest garb, and McPherson's flashy bridal gear, Nankivell intuited the value of sackcloth as a visual mark of holiness, repentance, and a covenant with God. She invites us to further inquire how contemporary ministers embody particular narratives and how that embodiment is in itself an interpretation (or even an adjustment) of the Bible. For example, how do Paula White's tight leather skirts and thigh-high boots contribute to or detract from her stated mission to "bring Truth, transformation, wholeness, and happiness to all?"²⁴ Similarly, how do Juanita Bynum's form-fitting dresses and carefully manicured nails enhance or impair her "empowerment" messages? What sort of biblical ideal is she embodying in her overt sexiness? What figures of womanhood are Bynum and White announcing in their apparel? Like McPherson before them, White and Bynum both leverage their personal beauty in the media outlets available to them (via television, websites and social media accounts, etc.). Are their good looks supposed to represent good theology and practice?²⁵ Are their looks simply the best possible vehicle for a gospel characterized by attraction? Perhaps both?

²³ Arlene Sanchez Walsh has done some quality analysis of 21st century Pentecostal modesty codes in Bible colleges across the country in Arlene Sanchez Walsh *Pentecostalism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

²⁴ Paula White, "My Mission," accessed August 30, 2016, <https://paulawhite.org/my-mission>.

²⁵ Kate Bowler argues that their looks (and general health and wealth) indicate for their followers that they do in fact have good theology and practice. Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Women Pentecostal preachers are hardly alone in their embodiment of the Bible. Belfon's comments can also be extended to male ministers. What do T. D. Jakes' tailored suits say that enhances and/or supplements his "Mega Faith" message? What does Joel Osteen's perfectly coiffed hair tell us about the "Healthy, Whole, and Free" Christian life he espouses? One could argue that given the rise of social media and ubiquitous news cycle, Pentecostal pastors are more savvy than ever when it comes to making theological meaning through personal appearance and embodiment. Asking good questions about their appearance will help us understand their theologies and practices.

Belfon also points out that Nankivell's marriage – by her account a happy, long-lasting union – likely limited her professional appeal. If history is the judge, it is very difficult for a female celebrity preacher to maintain a happy marriage. For every Louise Nankivell and Carrie Judd Montgomery, there is a Maria Woodworth-Etter, Aimee Semple McPherson, Rheba Crawford, Uldine Utley, Kathryn Kuhlman, Tammy Faye Bakker, Juanita Bynum, Paula White, and so on. Of course, one can argue that it is also very difficult for a Pentecostal man to minister and have a happy marriage (one only needs to point to the likes of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker for proof of this claim and I suspect if we surveyed celebrity pastor's wives, many would agree). Nevertheless, Pentecostal male celebrities at least *seem* to stay married (and perception, as they say, is more powerful than reality) while historians pay a lot of attention to Pentecostal women celebrities who divorce. Scholars of Pentecostalism should ask what it is about being a woman and being a celebrity pastor that makes marriage tenuous. We should also ask why celebrity Pentecostal revivalists of any sex connect so intimately and passionately with their audiences and yet notoriously struggle when it comes to their own intimate partnerships.

Conversations about sexuality are interwoven with any discussion about divorce, marriage, and intimacy. Erica Ramirez points out the undeniable role that sexuality plays in Pentecostal preaching and invites further inquiry into this avenue of research. For example, famous pastors like Paula White and Juanita Bynum transparently wield their sexuality as a means for attaining and displaying authority. Many of their male counterparts also display sex

appeal. “Christian hipster” pastor Rich Wilkerson Jr. (also known as Kim Kardashian and Kanye West’s pastor) sports leather jackets and provocative poses, which bring as much attention to his ministry as do his celebrity devotees. Gabriel Swaggart, grandson of the notorious Jimmy Swaggart, has inherited his grandfather’s telegenic three-piece suits and onscreen warmth and intimacy. Pentecostals are often reluctant to admit the clear use of sex appeal when it comes to their leaders, but refusing to acknowledge the obvious does nothing to illuminate the theological meaning of displaying sexuality in the pulpit. Aimee Semple McPherson charmed and seduced her audiences and her efforts reflected and produced a bride-bridegroom relationship between herself and her congregation. What new meanings do White, Bynum, Wilkerson and Swaggart create?

Ramirez also observes that ritual analysis “makes visible” the obscured “maneuverings” of female preachers as they create and maintain authority. When I first began exploring the possibility of using ritual theory to examine Pentecostalism, I found myself having to explain my reasoning to fellow North American religious historians. Pentecostals and students of North American religion both asked: “Pentecostals are opposed to ritual, are they not?” These kinds of questions are helpful because they unveil how easy it is to misunderstand ritual theory and its applications to movements like Pentecostalism. Ritual analysis is helpful for decoding not only the denominations that publish centuries-old liturgy with proper grammar; ritual theory can also illuminate the performances of groups lacking such markers of middle-class respectability. Similarly, Pentecostals may claim that they do not use rituals like “cold” or “formal” high church traditions, but Pentecostal services employ repetitive and recognizable elements in their services that signal something special is going on, most notably the centrality of preaching and all that it entails (sermons, altar calls, prayers for divine healing, etc.).

Ramirez argues that the key for McPherson (and others like her), when it came to becoming a top Pentecostal celebrity pastor, was the notion of liminality, which ritual theorists posit allows for an “interval of time when social norms are relaxed.” Something like an authoritative female minister, impossible in most settings, would be possible in the liminal time and space created during the ritualized act of preaching. Ramirez’ assertion brings to mind a fundamental

question about the origins of the movement that gets to the heart of women and Pentecostal ministry: did the movement ever have a “pure” sense of liminality? And, did these liminal spaces create opportunities for marginalized persons such William Seymour or Woodworth-Etter to lead? Has that changed or has it altered as Pentecostals have shifted socio-economically? And, what is the value of liminality? If denominational structures persist in gendering the office of pastor as male (through the style of education, hiring practices, hermeneutics, etc.), does it matter that liminal spaces and times exist? And if liminality has limited power in an organization like McPherson’s Foursquare church, then what was the nature of her accomplishment? Was she the exception that proved the rule of female exclusion? Or, did the power of her performance create a pathway for others to follow? The history of her denomination can be read both ways.

The study of gender and Pentecostalism is valuable, not just to illuminate the past, but also to help scholars of the movement discern its present and future trajectory. For example, on September 30, 2015, *Christian News* posted a video on YouTube wherein Paula White and Kenneth Copeland, along with several other Pentecostal clergymen prayed in a very Pentecostal manner over what can only be described as an awkward-looking, (now United States President-elect), Donald Trump. In the video, White’s head is bent, her hand rests on Trump’s wrist (which he pats from time to time), she strokes his chest, and she calls down favor from God, “security” for his children, kingly anointing, and many other blessings. What does this mean for Pentecostals today? What does this act show scholars about the relationship between Pentecostalism and politics? How should Pentecostals respond to this mix of Pentecostal spirituality and political power? This moment – and others like it – is why our robust investigation into gender and the movement must continue.