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Change in The C&MA Polity Regarding Women in Leadership

Historical Position on Women in Leadership

The Early Simpson View

According to Paul King, “Before 1900, the Alliance and Simpson did hold the view that women are not to serve as pastors or elders.”¹ Simpson communicated his views in the *Alliance Weekly*.

In 1891, in the *Alliance Weekly*, Simpson referred to Anna’s role at the incarnation and Mary Magdalene’s at the resurrection when he stated that “woman has been God’s special instrument for publishing the glad tidings of salvation.” He went on to say, “It seems to me that the New Testament prohibits woman from the formal and official ministry of the Christian church in the strictly ecclesiastical sense. She is not called to be a pastor, an elder, a bishop; but besides the official ministry and government of the Christian church there is an infinite room, for proclaiming a glad message of salvation. To woman is given the prophetic ministry undoubtedly (1 Cor 15:5) . . . Any word, therefore, of edification and exhortation is proper for a woman to speak in the Christian assembly.”²

Leslie Andrews pointed out that Simpson seemed to struggle about the position of women. It was her opinion that, “Simpson was never able to resolve the ambiguity of his view of women. Woman is to be praised ‘in the gates’ for her works. She is not to be hindered in her ministry. But it is a ministry with ‘true limitations.’³

¹ Paul L. King, *Anointed Women* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2009), 21.

² A. B. Simpson, “Ministry of Woman,” *The Christian Alliance and Missionary Weekly*, vol. VI. no. 13, March 27, 1891, 195.

³ Leslie A. Andrews, “Restricted Freedom: A. B. Simpson’s View of Women,” *The Birth of a Vision, Essays on the*

Simpson wrote an editorial on the “Practical Christianity, or the Principles of Christian Service” in 1893 where he indicated his position on the equality of women’s role within church ministry. He referred to two women in Romans 16:1,12 and how they contributed to the “direct work for the kingdom of God”. “Woman too, has her ministry. Phoebe is a servant or ‘deaconess’ of the church Cenchrea, and ‘the beloved Persis labored much in the Lord;’ ever of course in a true womanly way and sphere, but with equal liberty in all except the pastoral office and the official ministry of the Christian church.”⁴

The next year Simpson wrote an article, “The Holy Spirit in the Book of Judges” in which he described Deborah as “the first example of a woman called to public service by the Holy Ghost.” Simpson stated that Deborah was specifically “called to exercise the public functions of a leader” and he stated: “The Holy Spirit has distinctly recognized woman’s place in the church, not only to love, to suffer and to intercede, but to prophesy, to teach and to minister in every proper way to the bodies and the souls of men.”

Although he acknowledged that the Holy Spirit used women within the church, Simpson went further to make a differentiation between the role of men and women in ministry context:

After all that can be said on both sides of this question, it seems to remain as the practical conclusion of the whole matter that woman is called without restriction to teach, to witness, to work in every department of the Church of Christ, but she is not called to rule in the ecclesiastical government of the Church of Christ, or to exercise the official ministry which the Holy Ghost has committed to the elders or bishops of His Church: and whenever she steps out of her modest sphere into the place of public leadership and executive government, she weakens her true power and loses her peculiar charm.⁵

Simpson would also field questions from readers of the *Alliance Weekly* about the role of women. Regarding 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 and 1 Timothy 2:9,10 he was asked, “What authority

Ministry and Thought of Albert B. Simpson Founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, ed. David F. Hartzfeld and Charles Niekirchen. (Alberta, Canada: Buena Book Services, 1986), 223.

⁴ A. B. Simpson, “Practical Christianity, or The Principles of Christian Service,” *The Christian Alliance and Missionary Weekly*, vol. X, no. 5, February 3, 1893, 69.

⁵ A. B. Simpson, “The Holy Spirit in the Book of Judges”, *Christian Alliance Foreign Missionary Weekly*, vol. XIII, no. 23, December 7, 1894, 533.

have the women of the C.A. (Christian Alliance) for preaching or teaching in the churches?”

Simpson responded with:

They do not say that the women of the C.A. must not preach or teach in the churches; and other passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:11,5 distinctly recognize the right of woman to prophesy in public . . . If she has a message from God, God forbid that anybody should stop her delivering it, and there are plenty of Scriptural and womanly ways in which a true woman can represent her Master and speak for the edification of His people.⁶

Simpson restated his view the next year by responding to a question regarding “keeping quiet in the churches”. At this time, he stated:

Woman has, according to the Scriptures, perfect liberty to speak and testify or preach the gospel whenever the Holy Spirit qualified her and sends her to do so; but that she has no right to exercise the official ministry of the Church or govern it as an ecclesiastical ruler. This ministry and leadership are given to man, and not to woman. It does not lower her at all; she is the equal of man, but just as in the Trinity the persons of the Godhead are all equal, and yet there is a due subordination on the part of the Son and the Holy Ghost, so it is in the Church of Christ. Man has his place, and woman has her subordinate place of equal influence and spiritual ministry. She is always strongest in her own true, modest place.⁷

Leslie Andrews referred to Simpson’s view of women in ministry as “restricted freedom” and stated that Simpson attempted to resolve the ambiguity of his position through the principle of headship. Andrews points out that “Simpson modified his permission [for women to speak in the Christian assembly] by suggesting that ‘the less formal her testimony is, the better.’ Simpson made a differentiation between the two Greek words: *kerago* and *laleo*. The first “to proclaim officially with a trumpet” was attributed to man’s ministry and the second “to talk” to women’s ministry. Simpson, according to Andrews, used this “questionable exegesis” as his attempt to make a distinction between the ministry of men and women.⁸

According to King, Simpson’s position “at the time was quite broad-minded with greater

⁶ A. B. Simpson, “Queries”, *Christian Alliance and Foreign Missionary Weekly*, vol. XII. no. 16, April 20, 1894, 437.

⁷ A. B. Simpson, “Queries”, *Christian Alliance Foreign Missionary Weekly*, vol. XIV. no. 5, January 29, 1895, 79.

⁸ Leslie A. Andrews, “Restricted Freedom: A. B. Simpson’s View of Women,” *The Birth of a Vision, Essays on the Ministry and Thought of Albert B. Simpson Founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance*, ed. David F. Hartzfeld and Charles Niekirchen. (Alberta, Canada: Buena Book Services, 1986), 224.

liberty for women in that era.” Simpson was also influenced by prominent women of that time “including Phoebe Palmer, Frances Willard, Hannah Whitall Smith, Jessie Penn-Lewis and Mrs Catherine Booth, wife of the Salvation Army founder.” Some of these women spoke at Alliance meetings and conferences.⁹

Simpson “went on to decry the emerging feminism of his day, yet supported great liberty for women’s involvement in ministry”.¹⁰ Although he would not support a woman to serve in a pastoral role he continued to endorse that women could preach and teach men. According to King’s research, Simpson endorsed prophesying as stated in 1 Corinthians 11:5. Simpson, in 1898, spoke of the place of woman in the work and worship of the church per the apostle Paul, “as women’s legitimate ministry, including speaking unto men ‘unto edification, exhortation and comfort.’ Therefore, women’s right to speak to men as well as to women for their instruction, quickening and comfort is clearly recognized.”¹¹

Simpson’s Changing View

Simpson’s, and the Alliance position on women seemed to go through a gradual change by the end of the century. A.J. Gordon who was a lecturer at the Missionary Training Institute in Nyack and frequently spoke at Alliance conventions wrote a paper in December 1894 on “The Ministry of Women” which was based on Acts 2:19 and Galatians 3. He ended with this warning, “*Beware, lest, in silencing the voice of consecrated women, they may be resisting the Holy Ghost.*” According to Paul King, this was the “Magna Carta for women”¹² A. J. Gordon was a close friend of Simpson and was influential on Simpson’s shifting view. Gordon’s entire message was later published in the *Alliance Weekly*.¹³

⁹ Paul L. King, *Anointed Women* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2009), 22.

¹⁰ Paul L. King, *Anointed Women* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2009), 23.

¹¹ A. B. Simpson, “The Worship and Fellowship of the Church”, *Christian and Missionary Alliance, For the Fullness of Jesus and the Evangelization of the World*, vol. XX. no. 6, February 9, 1898, 126.

¹² Paul L. King (Historian of the Christian & Missionary Alliance) interview by Donna J. Smith, May 2021.

¹³ A. J. Gordon, “The Ministry of Women”, *The Alliance Weekly, A Journal of Christian Life and Missions*, vol.

Simpson and the Alliance began to make changes regarding their views on women in leadership. An unsigned article in the *Christian and Missionary Alliance* on “Women who Helped in the Gospel” seemed to be an indication of that change.

It was true that the Apostle Paul did not at that time suffer a woman to teach, or to usurp authority over the man. Doubtless at that time there were no women competent to act as teachers, and in Corinth, which was a sink of all abominations and licentiousness, the Apostle saw fit to say, “Let your women keep silence in the churches.” 1 Cor 14:34. But the Gospel of Christ lifts the yoke and burden from womanhood, rescues her from ignorance and degradation and introduces her to a new and better condition, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, but all are one in Jesus Christ. And women thus enfranchised by the Gospel of Christ, has been a most successful worker in the cause and service of the Lord.¹⁴

King quotes Leslie Andrew’s statement, “Here the emancipation of woman and her equality and effective ministry are clearly declared.”¹⁵ Although the above article is not signed, we must conclude that Simpson, as editor, would have endorsed its publication, or possibly authored it himself.

Simpson’s primary task and passion was to evangelize the world and as Andrews states, “If women furthered the primary mission of the Church to reach lost souls for Christ, then he enthusiastically endorsed their ministries to achieve that objective.”¹⁶ According to Gerald E. McGraw, Simpson was a “liberal innovator” and had no time for “conservative” churches unresponsive to his innovative ideas of evangelizing immigrants, abandoning pew rents, or ministering diving healing. He did not hesitate to use women on his platforms and boards and wrote of the Holy Spirit as portraying feminine qualities within the Godhead.”¹⁷

LXIII. no. 50, December 15, 1928, 820.

¹⁴ A. B. Simpson, “Women Who Helped in the Gospel”, *The Christian and Missionary Alliance For the Fullness of Jesus and the Evangelization of the World*, vol. XVIII. no. 25, June 18, 1897, 592

¹⁵ Paul L. King, *Anointed Women* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2009), 24.

¹⁶ Leslie A. Andrews, “Restricted Freedom: A. B. Simpson’s View of Women,” *The Birth of a Vision, Essays on the Ministry and Thought of Albert B. Simpson Founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance*, ed. David F. Hartzfeld and Charles Niekirchen. (Alberta, Canada: Buena Book Services, 1986), 219.

¹⁷ Gerald E. McGraw, *The Legacy of A. B. Simpson*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 16. No. 2, April 1992, 75.

Simpson was practical in his theology, emphasizing that “the importance of sound orthodox doctrine is to be joined with dynamic application of biblical principles.”¹⁸ Simpson’s adjustments in ministry became known as his “irregulars”, which was taken from one his articles, “The Training and Sending forth of Workers” where Simpson referred to “the need of irregulars in the work of the gospel. God has always done a great deal of His work out of season as well as in season, irregularly as well as regularly.”¹⁹

By the early 1900’s Simpson was making exceptions in terms of women’s ministry. For example, in *The Christian and Missionary Alliance* in 1900, Simpson responded to a reader’s question regarding women anointing the sick for healing.

We believe the teaching of the Scripture recognizes the elder as the proper one to anoint, but we do not consider that this should be carried to such an extreme; that in the absence of a proper elder, a suffering child of God should be compelled to refuse the ministry of a believing woman simply on a technical ground. God’s methods in matters of outward form are flexible enough to allow of exceptions and adjustments, and while every true woman will ever seek to take the more quiet place, yet we believe that where the regular officer is not available or even prepared for this ministry, that God will accept hers.²⁰

Evidence of the expanding role for women serving in various ministry positions is recorded in the C&MA historical records including both Mrs. V. H. Field and Mrs. A.B. Simpson who served on the Board of Managers of the C&MA.²¹ The requirements for admission to The New York Missionary Training Institute in 1900 illustrates that they did not restrict women but were affirming that women could serve in the same positions as men.

The Institute is unsectarian and open to all men and women called of God to engage in Christian work at home or abroad. Special attention however, is given to the equipment of foreign missionaries and securing their adaptability to their various fields of labor. The students are entirely free to choose their future work as the Lord may lead them in

¹⁸ Paul L. King, *Anointed Women* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2009), 25.

¹⁹ A. B. Simpson, “Women Who Helped in the Gospel”, *The Christian and Missionary Alliance For the Fullness of Jesus and the Evangelization of the World*, vol. XVIII. no. 18, April 30, 1897, 419.

²⁰ A. B. Simpson, “Our Mail Box”, *The Christian and Missionary Alliance For the Fullness of Jesus and the Evangelization of the World*, vol. XXIV. no. 23, June 9, 1900, 385.

²¹ *The Story of the Christian and Missionary alliance*, (Nyack, NY: Christian & Missionary Alliance, 1900), 93.

connection with an evangelical church or providential field at home or abroad.²²

An important recognition of women's place in ministry occurred in 1906 when it was officially designated as an "open question". During the years following women were called pastors and after Simpson died in 1919 the leadership of the C&MA reaffirmed this designation in 1922.²³

In 1927, T. J. McCrossan, a Greek scholar, wrote, "God is now again pouring out His Spirit upon both His male and female servants, and when He says His female servants in the last days shall preach and expound Scripture publicly, let some of us beware we condemn 'women pastors,' who are Spirit-filled."²⁴

Harry M. Shuman reported, "The Apostle Paul, in recording the ministries of the early Church, did not fail to make mention of the work of godly women helpers. Especially in the early days of the Alliance, there was a host of Spirit-filled women who labored as evangelists and Bible teachers with great effectiveness."²⁵

²² *The Story of the Christian and Missionary Alliance*, (Nyack, NY: Christian & Missionary Alliance, 1900), 16.

²³ Paul L. King, "Women as Pastors in the Early Twentieth-Century Christian and Missionary Alliance," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 68-86.

²⁴ T. J. McCrossan, *Speaking with Other Tongues: Sign or Gift—Which?* (Christian Publications, 1927), 5.

²⁵ Robert B. Ekvall, Harry M. Shuman, John H. Cable, William Christie, Alfred C. Snead, Howard Van Dyck and David J. Fant. *After Fifty Years*, (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, Inc., 1939), 37.

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