

Believing in Women? Examining Early Views of Women among America's Most Progressive Religious Groups

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Abstract

This paper examines the most prominent “progressive” American religious groups’ (as defined by those that liberalized early on the issue of birth control, circa 1930) views of women between the first and second waves of the feminist movement (1930-1965). We find that some groups have indeed had a long and outspoken support for women’s equality. Using their modern-day names, these groups, the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Church, and to a lesser extent, the Society of Friends, or Quakers, professed strong support for women’s issues, early, and often. However, we also find that prominent progressive groups –the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Presbyterian Church, were virtually silent on the issue of women’s rights – even as the second wave of the feminist movement was picking up steam – as late as 1965.

Introduction

Which American religious groups can truly be characterized as early and staunch feminists? This paper investigates this question by examining the most prominent American religious groups’ views of women between the first and second waves of the feminist movement

(1930-1965). It focuses on the eight Christian denominations that liberalized early, circa 1930, on birth control. Wilde and Danielson have demonstrated that these groups liberalized because of their concern about race suicide and belief in the social gospel movement (Wilde and Danielsen 2015). However, until now, there has not been a detailed investigation into their views of women.

We find that some groups have indeed had a long and outspoken support for women's equality. Because of mergers, these "feminist" groups represent more than half of the early liberalizers on birth control. Using their modern-day names, these groups, the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalist Church, and to a lesser extent, the Society of Friends, or Quakers, professed strong support for women's issues, early, and often. However, we also find that prominent early liberalizers on birth control –the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Presbyterian Church, were virtually silent on the issue of women's rights – even as the second wave of the feminist movement was picking up steam – as late as 1965.

Background: The First and Second Waves of the Feminist Movement

Although the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 is often credited as the birthplace of the first wave of the women's rights movement in the United States, historical accounts indicate that women had been organizing around political and social issues much earlier in time.¹ Women in the early to mid-19th century often gathered in sewing circles and other church-related functions but some also formed or joined anti-slavery societies.² Within these abolitionist circles, women "first won the right to speak in public" and developed their ideas about equality and the position

of women in the United States.³ The insights, skills, and experiences of many women abolitionists were carried into the first wave of feminism, starting in 1840 and continuing through the early twentieth century.

While notable leaders of the first wave, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, identified voting as an important objective of the movement, other activists were more concerned with women and girls' access to education, their inability to bear witness or sue in a court of law, employment, and issues of earnings, temperance, and divorce.⁴ Among early women's rights activists, there were a number of divisions, some rooted in the controversy generated by the 15th Amendment and its extension of suffrage to Black men over White women, the class privilege of many movement leaders relative to large swaths of women in the United States, and in the strategies and approaches taken by different women leaders.⁵ Some movement leaders, like Susan B. Anthony, were willing to "work with anyone, whatever their views on other matters, as long as they wholeheartedly espoused woman suffrage," while others like Lucy Stone, pursued a more selective, conservative image that would not be mistaken as encouraging divorce or "social evil."⁶ Consequently, the first wave included a range of issues, groups, and strategies aimed at improving the welfare and standing of women.

Black women, however, were largely excluded from the first wave of the women's rights movement. In part, the failure to include Black women was rooted in the very different living circumstances that White and Black women experienced. For instance, Black women were denied access to most forms of employment and faced great risk of racialized violence, even in the North, so issues concerning labor unions and suffrage were not of immediate priority for Black women or Black women activists.⁷

Moreover, some women's rights activists, like Alice Paul, were concerned that including Black women, on equal footing, would risk "alienating Southern supporters."⁸ By contrast, White, working-class women were the subject of intense focus by women's age-of-consent reformers and suffragists in the late 19th century and early 20th century.⁹ In fact, the two rival national suffrage organizations, the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association, both viewed the campaign for a state-regulated age-of-consent for sexual relations with women to be "an important battle in the larger struggle to overcome the subordination of women in home and society."¹⁰

By the time the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, industrialization meant that more women, especially unmarried and young White women, were working outside of the home, often in urban settings. Far from the supervision of their families and immersed in large city life, rather than tight-knit communal and rural life, these women often participated in mixed-sex, commercialized leisurely social activities.¹¹ Consequently, the movement of unmarried, young women away from home sparked great anxiety and was linked to social problems like family disintegration, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and the spread of venereal disease.¹²

In response, moral campaigns led by middle-class White women reformers emerged to secure "moral protection, provided by the state" for young, working-class White women. In particular, the reformers wanted to raise the age of consent so that men who engaged in sexual intercourse with women below the designated age of consent would be subject to legal penalties.¹³ With support from workingmen's groups, suffragists, and doctors, the reformers relied on a narrative whereby wealthy men preyed upon innocent, poor, White women. In this narrative, the victims would then go on to threaten society with disease and defective offspring.¹⁴ Much like the suffragists, the age of consent reformers also excluded Black women from their

activism. By overlooking the sexual exploitation of Black women, failing to condemn the racialized popular conceptions of Black men as sexual predators, and waging a campaign that referred to working-class women as “white slaves,” the reformers eventually garnered the support of southern White women, who were concerned primarily with the protection of White female purity.¹⁵

As women’s political activism continued, they also experienced increased “professional visibility” as they entered more diverse professions and earned advanced degrees.¹⁶ By 1945, demand for women’s labor reached new levels with the rise of clerical and sales industries.¹⁷ Having secured the right to vote and access to basic educational and employment opportunities, a second wave of feminists would not surface until the period between 1963 and 1966 and continuing through the early 1970s.¹⁸

Galvanized by discrimination in the workplace and disparate treatment by “men with whom they worked in the civil rights and antiwar movements,” the second-wave of women’s rights activists were college-educated women.¹⁹ This time, however, the key issues were bodily integrity and abortion, as well as the social construction of gender.²⁰ Unlike their predecessors, second-wave women’s rights activists largely referred to themselves as “feminists” and envisioned a sisterhood that crossed barriers of age, race, culture, and economics.²¹ Nevertheless, this wave also experienced fractures and divisions along race, class and ideology; with some women identifying with liberal feminism and others with radical feminism.²² Liberal feminists tended to build upon the experiences of mostly educated, White, middle-class women and they critiqued “gendered patterns of socialization,” and advocated for increased representation in public institutions.²³ The more radical feminism, which emerged from the anti-war, lesbian and

gay, and civil rights movements, tended to focus on “consciousness-raising” while critiquing patriarchy, power, and public institutions.²⁴

Of course, none of the sources reviewed above systematically examine the effect of either the first or second wave of the feminist movement on America’s religious groups. This paper examines America’s most “progressive” religious denominations, as defined by those who liberalized on the issue of birth control early (circa 1930), with the goal of determining which of them had noticeably feminist views, and which of them did not. We find that about half of the groups that liberalized early on birth control were feminist, while half of them were noticeably much more reticent regarding women’s issues.

Data and Methods

This data on which this paper relies is part of a larger research project that examines the views of thirty of the most prominent American religious groups on the issue of contraception. The data begins in the decades leading up to the first wave of birth control reform (beginning in 1918) and was gathered until 1965, the year that marked both the Summer of Love and FDA approval of the pill. The data come mainly from what these more than thirty of prominent religious groups wrote about, for and said to themselves and each other. Everything from census and archival data, to more than 10,000 articles, statements, sermons and treatises from more than 70 secular and religious periodicals form the basis of the overall project. Together, these sources provide an account of how America’s religious groups’ geographic locations coincided with their beliefs about America and its destiny, and their concerns about race, class, capitalism, and

fertility, especially whose was desirable and whose was not. For more information on the sample, key words, terms and methods used, please see AUTHOR REFERENCE REMOVED.

America's Feminist Religious Groups

The Unitarian Universalist Church, and its precursor denominations the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist General Convention were always openly supportive of women's rights. As early as 1929, the Unitarian periodical the *Christian Leader* noted with approval that: "woman is coming into her own, [and] is entering all fields of endeavor and is making good."²⁵ After asserting that, "We cannot go backward and womans gains must stand," the article went on to assert the religious basis for these sentiments:

Jesus stood for the equality of the sexes, making no distinction except in accordance with the attitude of the day. For he accepted the ministrations of women always and women were of his close followers.²⁶

A few years later, in 1932, an article titled "Some Women of the Bible," in the same periodical argued that biblical figures such as Eve and Deborah were leaders among both men and women:

Eve was not a club woman (I refer to organizations) but she certainly was not one to stay at home all day after her husband had gone to work...Besides an explorer, Eve was a pioneer scientists...the first potential political economist." It goes on to state "Who...was so spectacular a figure as Deborah, the fourth Judge of Israel? At a time when a great military genius and leader was needed, Deborah was the outstanding figure. She

possessed courage, foresight, will, determination, and the ability to pick the men capable of carrying out her designs.²⁷

The Congregational Christian Church, which was formed in 1931, and its precursor groups of the Congregational Church and the Christian Church were both openly supportive of women very early on. For example, in their 1929 article titled, "A Tribute to Women," *The Congregationalist* reported on a service that was held "as a tribute to the distinguished leadership of women in the great movements of the time and in recognition of the essential democracy of the feminine creative achievement."²⁸

In 1935 the American Unitarian Association's *Christian Register* asked provocatively, "Are churchwomen people?" The answer, according to this periodical was not entirely positive:

Ten or a dozen persons, churchwomen themselves, have to this rather flippant question, made an entirely serious answer--'Not necessarily.'...it seems to me that the question loses its flippancy and becomes a challenge. Are churchwomen people? If they are not, why not?

The article then went on to answer this question by comparing the histories of various Christian denominations in relation to women's roles:

...In spite of the fact that the New Testament was written by bachelors, the names of several women important in the early church are preserved to us. Even before that time, we know that women played a part in Jesus' life...There have always been famous women connected with the Christian Church...The Catholic Church discriminated against women in politics and education, so also inevitably in religion. But the Protestants have no such high-church doctrine, so that it is possible for women to have an equal position. Still even as late as in Colonial times women were discriminated against.

The article continued on by emphasizing that Unitarianism was ahead of these other religious groups, but still closed asserting that more must be done:

Indeed, women had no recognized place in the church until the advent of Unitarianism. Not even Congregational churches before that time ever had a woman in office except as deaconess. This position was largely nominal, and was accorded to a widow woman of sixty or over. Theoretically, Unitarianism makes no distinction between men and women, either in pew or pulpit... But one wonders whether women pastors do not still feel at a slight disadvantage at times, and whether the old prejudice does not still exist under cover... equality is what we must demand... Let us forget sex distinction. May the best person, most fitted for the job, fill the place. I know of twelve churches which have or have had women as chairmen of their parish committees... Early Unitarians rightly earned the title of liberal, and unless we are to be unworthy of our heritage we, too, must be more liberal, more open-minded and more progressive.²⁹

Consistent with their open advocacy for women's equality a decade earlier, in 1945 the American Unitarian Association's *Christian Register* forcefully asserted that, "equal opportunity must be guaranteed all Americans, regardless of race, color, creed, or sex." The article continued by asserting that "Restricting woman workers, for example, cuts our national productivity by as much as a fourth."³⁰ And, in a quote that showed ownership of the suffrage movement decades after its success, the *Christian Register* argued that same year that,

Whether it be apathy, a fear of social change, or sheer ignorance of history that moves men to speak... from pulpit and in private conversation. It would be well for us to remind such men that not only has morality been legislated, but so also has immorality.

Unitarians should be the first to remember that our present degree of democracy and

equality came through legislation for compulsory education, for a new status for millions of slaves, for a ballot in the hands of every woman.³¹

It was common for these more feminist groups to report positively on any leadership positions that were already being filled by women. Thus, in 1945 the *Christian Leader* reported that their “national organization of Universalist young people has had a woman president for some years.”³²

Of course, the most obvious leadership position at issue for many religious groups was that of minister. Many feminist groups also emphasized their openness to or desire for female ministers. For example, in 1929 *The Herald of Gospel Liberty* stated proudly that “the Christian Church has always been rightfully proud of the fact that we were the first to ordain women to the ministry.”³³ In 1945, the Unitarian periodical *The Christian Leader* wrote:

The Universalist church needs more ministers—many more, if it is to be in the best sense a really missionary church. And this its gospel requires it to be. If it is to fulfill this mission, our church must have as recruits young men and women of character who are eager” [to serve].³⁴

After the Evangelical Synod of North America and the Reformed Church in the US merged to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church (another precursor to the United Church of Christ), the merged periodical *The Messenger* made it clear in 1955 that women who wanted to “should be given an opportunity to serve on an equal status with men.”³⁵

As they did with the ministry, it was common among the feminist groups to emphasize the important leadership roles that women had already been doing in many of their churches. For example, in 1945 and 1955, articles in *The Advance* said respectively:

For many years women in our denomination have taken a prominent part in the life of the local church as trustees, members of the church committee, delegates to church meetings, teachers and leaders in the church school. In these same ways they have come to share also in the work of the association and conference to which their church belongs. Often they serve as moderators or in other positions of responsibility...as women of the church, we reach out beyond the borders of our own country through the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council...As women, working together, as near before to 'help cultivate the spirit of Christ in every area of human life, we seek to carry forward the torch which our great grandmothers lighted long ago in the churches of America.³⁶

Time was, and not very long at that, when there was no place in our Protestant churches for women with a call to Christian vocation except, perhaps, as missionaries. Of course, women have always done an immense amount of volunteer work but no provision was made for full-time paid service. Why this has been the case is not the subject of this article. The need now is to acquaint young women with the great opportunities open for Christian service. Recently a distinguished theological school opened its doors to women students...when the announcement was made in the bulletin to alumni, the notice included, however: 'it is not expected that women will prepare for the pulpit.' As a matter of fact, as we all know, the people of many states can testify that women are in pulpits, though not always, thoroughly prepared to be there. They are keeping little churches from dying out, they are uniting churches and serving, as best they can, on tiny salaries, the parishes that male ministers with wives and children can hardly afford to serve or where

they do not want to serve. Hats off, then to the ‘backwoods work’ often unknown and sometimes heroic, of our rural women ministers. And may our seminaries give more of them the best possible preparation and encouragement.³⁷

These feminist groups also reported positively on the women known to be leaders in the early women’s right’s movement. Thus, upon the death of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Advance* called Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt,³⁸ “her friend and fellow warrior in the battle for women’s rights and in women’s warfare for a better social order...”³⁹ That same year the closely related American Unitarian Association’s *Christian Register*, which would soon merge with the *Advance* reminded readers that Abigail Adams was a Unitarian:

“In the new code of laws...I desire you would remember the ladies,” wrote Abigail Adams to her husband at the Continental Congress. This Unitarian and first politically-minded woman was urging the founding fathers to share with their wives and mothers some of those rights which they were claiming for themselves... Yet even the Revolutionary leaders had no thought of changing the dependence of their women... and John Adams, in spite of his Abigail, reflected the usual view when he noted that Mrs. John Hancock was in mixed society ‘totally silent as a lady ought to be.’ It took courage therefore for the wives and daughters of the Revolution to apply to themselves the new republican self-confidence. They had to lose their sense of guilt (which stemmed of course from Eve’s fondness for apples!) and accept the idea that even ancient rules should meet the test of truth. Furthermore, they had to believe that all human beings had within them God-given gifts which it was a duty to develop. In short, it took those very traits which Unitarianism supplied. It was not by chance therefore that Unitarians acted as

catalysts on society, and in a crucial period supplied much of the leadership. This leadership had to start by building confidence in women as people.⁴⁰

These groups also often reported positively when barriers to women's advancement were removed.⁴¹ For example, in 1935 *The Advance* reported that, "Oxford University has recently removed the last barrier of discrimination against women students. The effect of the statute making all degrees equally open to men and women has bearing particularly upon the degrees of Bachelor and Doctor of Divinity, which were a subject of controversy at the time women were admitted to Oxford."⁴² As another example, that same year the same periodical asked, "'Now that women are... as free as the law can make them, are they any happier?'" The article quoted a woman 'answering emphatically in the affirmative... suggesting that the question could only be asked by a generation that is simply ignorant regarding what has been done.'" It closed, "A complete revolution in the status of women has been effected even in the last twenty-five years, and those who doubt the value or desirableness of the changes should try putting the legislative clock back for even one decade and hear what men as well women have to say about it."⁴³

Sometimes, their words of support for women's right were clear and unquestionable, and it is worth noting that this was the case at least a decade before the second wave of the feminist movement had taken off.⁴⁴ Thus, in 1955, *The Advance* wrote emphatically, that "the fact is that in the church of Christ, as scripturally understood, there is no differentiation between men and women except that which has been introduced arbitrarily from outside."⁴⁵ Similarly, that same year, the Quakers asserted that they have "always done more than accord women a mechanical recognition of equality," especially when compared to other churches... within the Society of Friends women never had to struggle for their rights."⁴⁶ That same year, the *Christian Register*

devoted an “entire issue” to the “celebration of the 75th birthday of the Unitarian Women’s Alliance.” The introduction to the issue noted:

Two guest editorials by the heads of the two women’s organizations in the Universalist and Unitarian Churches follow. ‘Hats off to the Ladies!’ we find ourselves saying. Yes, of course. But the lifted hat is a mark of deference only. Instead we offer a handclasp, a symbol of fellowship, of mutual understanding and mutual respect.⁴⁷

That same year, the *Register* reported that “We have moved into an era in which equality of status, companionship on a single level, and participation in the same range of activities mark the relations of men and women, both socially and religiously.” It went on to note, though that “Yet division of labor between the sexes,” and then asked provocatively:

How many churches would really consider a woman minister; how many faculties a woman professor; how many organizations a woman chief executive, how many law firms a woman colleague? There are in truth numerous career women, many of them unmarried, who serve with distinction in posts just below the top in government agencies and other organizations, yet have no hope of advancement to the chief positions because of unspoken customs—just as in many associations the secretary is usually a woman, but never the president. Gratitude is due these women who so effectively serve society; but let us not rest satisfied until opportunity for such as they becomes truly equal to that of men. Let the church look to its own house in this regard and at least strive to match the record of social work and of elementary and secondary education, where for obvious historical reasons women are closer to equal status.⁴⁸

By 1965, then, it will come as no surprise that these groups were unequivocal in their support for equal rights for women. For example, the Society of Friends asserted that

Women have a heritage in religion to regain, develop, and carry forward. In this careful study of the Old and New Testaments and the history of the Christian Church, Margaret Crook details women's loss of status and function in religious leadership...in the centuries since, women have been limited largely to domesticity or to special religious Orders. Occasionally in recent centuries the status quo has been challenged by those (including Elizabeth Fry and the Society of Friends) who accepted and encouraged the spiritual ministry of women. Gradually the climate has changed, until today more and more emphasis is being put on 'partners in religion.'⁴⁹

The nondenominational periodical *Christian Century* wrote an article on the book credited with starting the second wave of the feminist movement, and the negative implications it had for the Church:

[W]hile Christ gives women a new stature, the church in practice sells women short in the following ways: 1) by producing theology that claims that women are 'mysteriously different,' the implication being that women are inherently incapable of life in its fullest sense, 2) by quoting and interpreting Scripture to limit women to a feminine role or to enable women to stomach their servitude and lack of full personhood...4) by endorsing marriage manuals that present marriage as an exclusive profession to be chosen over other vocations, paid or voluntary, when the truth is that marriage is but one part of life...5) by limiting women's church work to housekeeping-teaching-calling functions and omitting capable women in the policy-making, executive or liturgical areas. All of which adds up to a failure to see women as persons, to accept them as persons, through

their work, money, and prayers are most acceptable. The author concludes by stating “there is no Christianity for women separate from Christianity for men...”⁵⁰

That same year, the same periodical published an article which asked “Are Women People?” in the title. It noted that:

[I]n recent years, the problem of woman’s rights has loomed second only to that of civil rights. Many commentators in the daily press, periodicals, and books have taken sides in the great debate: ‘who comes first, the mother or the child? Is the single woman the most maligned minority?...certainly some women are destined for careers outside the home while others exult in the realization that they need never leave it...some women, of course, have combined home and career successfully. A career in writing is easier to accomplish at home than one, in say, politics, medicine, or law...perhaps the best thing to be said of *The Feminine Mystique* and *Sex and the Single Girls* is that they urge women to be themselves. The solution for many women, and for men too for that matter, lies in Betty Friedan’s own solution: ‘I could sense no purpose in my life. I could find no peace, until I faced the question and worked out my own answer.’⁵¹

That same year, the United Church of Christ reported that among “other significant recommendations,” a recent conference “urged the U.S. Congress to ratify UN conventions on genocide, slavery, forced labor and political rights for women.”⁵²

Silent or Critical of Women’s Issues

In contrast to the outspoken support women’s issues received among the precursor denominations that would later form the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist

Church, and quieter, but still strong support they received from the Quakers, three of the denominations that liberalized early on birth control were much more circumspect in their support of women's issues, especially early on. These were the Methodist Episcopal Church (which became the United Methodist Church in 1968 when it merged with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South) the Protestant Episcopal Church, and the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A and its precursor the Presbyterian Church in the USA.

Of these three groups, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the most vocal about women's issues early on, with a regular column in the *Christian Advocate* called, "The Methodist Woman."⁵³ However, the articles in these columns and in the periodical as a whole tended to emphasize that the women chronicled performed important missionary work for the Church without neglecting their duties as a "wife, mother or grandmother."⁵⁴

In comparison to what the more feminist groups said about women in the ministry, often discussing their early ordination of women with pride, in 1955, the northern wing of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, a precursor to the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. was noticeably more hesitant about it. Although, they also reported on Harvard's Divinity School's decision to admit women,⁵⁵ a series of other articles reported on the fact that the denomination was also addressing the issue for themselves that same year.⁵⁶ In December, the periodical reported with caution that while "the official results received by the Office of the General Assembly," indicated that "there is strong support so far for the ordination of women to the Presbyterian ministry," the article stressed that "delegates are giving this decision careful thought without regard to public argument."⁵⁷

By 1965, *Presbyterian Life*, had come around to a more feminist view, but the sole article in that publication that year which promoted that view restricted itself to discussing how

women's roles in the Church should be expanded. The article began by asking, "What is the biggest waste in most churches today?" The answer?

In my opinion, it is the time, the talent, and the energy of the women in the congregation...look at those activities: Sunday-school classes where valiant but comparatively untrained women match wits with bored children; bake sales, bazaars, and church suppers where women who could afford at least three dollars an hour for their time spend countless hours baking, sewing, and cooking in order to meet their organizational budget quota of five and ten dollars apiece. This is how most churchwomen are spending most of their church-oriented time while the needs of a complex and crying world outside the sanctuary doors beg for the most creative thinking and the very best efforts of concerned Christian women everywhere.

After continuing on and asking why the "churches unwilling or unable to tap the reservoir of woman-hours and woman-skills either lying dormant or being used elsewhere by the women of the congregation?" the article closed by arguing that "we can begin by to look at the women in our church as individual human beings with varied talents. We can forget the nonsense that certain jobs are women's work and certain jobs are not...we must forget the propaganda that most women won't tackle a really difficult job."⁵⁸

The Protestant Episcopal Church was even more reserved in its statements on women, reporting often on women's organizations and their importance to the Church,⁵⁹ but in carefully circumscribed tones, and had as many articles promoting the recruitment of more men for Church leadership positions⁶⁰ as it did on women's activities or issues. Thus, for example, the *Living Church* argued the following about women's roles at the upcoming convention in an article that was ironically called, "Womanpower:"

Although the General Convention is itself an all-male gathering, there will be women present in abundance when that body meets in Honolulu in September. Not only will many of the members of the Convention be accompanied by their wives—who will take their places with other female visitors but the great triennial meeting of the Woman’s Auxiliary, held at the same time and place of General Convention will bring to Honolulu 300 or more women of the Church. The women were chosen by the several diocesan branches of the Woman’s Auxiliary to represent the diocesan auxiliaries at the big meeting...they were chosen by women elected by the several parish branches of the WA to represent the parish auxiliaries at their respective diocesan meetings. Thus they represent the Church’s woman-power.⁶¹

Even in 1965, the *Living Church* emphasized that “the church does have an office of ministry to which women may be ordained—the office of deaconess in the Church of God.” The article went on to emphasize that:

There is no precedent for women priests in Catholic tradition. Our Lord chosen men to be His Apostles; the Seventy sent to preach were men; the Holy Communion was instituted in the presence of men only; the Great Commission and the power to pronounce forgiveness to the sinner, were given only to men. Women, however, ministered to the Lord, stood faithful at the cross, and were chosen the first witnesses of the resurrection...the office of deaconess was created in apostolic days within the framework of the Church’s ministry. It offers abundant opportunity to use the best talents and abilities women possess.⁶²

That same year, however, in another article, the same periodical did emphasize that “women have proved their capacity for doing every kind of work which is to be found in the work of the

ministry. Who will question that they are equal to men in ability to pray, to preach, to teach, to counsel, to seek out the lost, to minister to the needy in Christ's name?" However, such sentiments seemed to be the minority, rather than the norm in the *Living Church*.⁶³

Conclusion

In sum, some of America's most prominent religious groups did indeed speak up early and often about women's rights – but others – just as prominent and just as progressive on the issue of contraception – were much more hesitant. As *Birth of the Culture Wars* describes in much more detail, what all of the groups chronicled in this paper had in common was a deep belief that legalizing birth control was crucial to the racial health of the nation, and, that making pronouncements about it was their religious duty. Thus, while the issue of contraception is most certainly gendered, and for many, deeply tied to issue of feminism today, early support for it among America's most prominent religious groups was not dependent upon a belief in feminism.

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- Male and female created he them.' This is another simple fact with occupational implications. It suggests immediately that woman's vocation, by virtue of creation, is that of mother. Let no one sell this vocation short--it is the home that God's most important creative work is done, where young life is nurtured until it becomes distinctively human. Because the home is the institution most fundamental in human existence, girls should give it prior consideration and both sexes should determine never to engage in work which undermines the home (Million, Elmer, G. 1955. "What will it be: Job or Vocation?" *Advance*. 147(2): 11).
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