

SA(L)VAGING THE *WOMAN'S BIBLE*: READING INTERPRETIVE  
COMMUNITIES ACROSS CONTEXTS

by

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(Under the Direction of Bonnie J. Dow)

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the *Woman's Bible*, over its 100+ year lifetime, became a pliable cultural symbol, exploited by various interpretive communities to serve their argumentative ends. The *Woman's Bible* was compiled and published by American woman suffragist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in the 1890s, but was promptly denounced by her suffrage colleagues. In the decades that followed, the *Woman's Bible* was put to argumentative use by anti-suffragists, who used it to demonstrate the radicalism of the woman suffrage movement. The book was not re-published until the 1970s, when it became a symbol of Christian feminist liberation. In each of these cases, the book was read according to the terministic screens and structures of relevancy unique to each interpretive community. Reading the *Woman's Bible* across its contexts of reception allows for insight into the intersections between two social movements: feminism and Christianity.

INDEX WORDS: Woman Suffrage, Anti-suffrage, Feminist Theology, Reception Studies, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Woman's Bible*

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## DEDICATION

*For Rachel,*

*May you be nurtured and grow in the faith of our courageous mothers and foremothers—*

*Karen, Jan, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the Coalition Task Force—and all the others who  
have challenged what it means to be a Christian and a feminist.*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE BOOK “THAT SCORCHED AND EXPOSED THE CHURCH AND CLERGY AS GROTESQUE[LY] MALE-ORIENTED”: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE *WOMAN’S*

#### *BIBLE* AND AUDIENCE-CENTERED CRITICISM

The questions of whether or not a Christian can be a feminist and a feminist can be a Christian run as deep as the shared history of Christianity and the movement for woman’s rights. Since the beginning of agitation for woman’s rights in the United States, activists within the movement have argued over the role of the Bible in prescribing woman’s position. In the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Cady Stanton identified a fundamental divide between her co-workers on the subject of the Bible. While some found the Bible too sacred to criticize, others argued that it was hopelessly patriarchal and unworthy of analysis or use. Stanton hoped her publication of the *Woman’s Bible*<sup>1</sup> in 1895 (volume 1) and 1898 (volume 2) would reconcile this divide, and in her introduction to the *Woman’s Bible*, she identified and responded to these two classes of objections. On the one hand, she quoted a woman who wrote to say that it was “‘ridiculous’ for ‘women to attempt the revision of the Scriptures’” (10). In contrast, she went on to describe, “again there are some who write us that our work is a useless expenditure of force over a book that has lost its hold on the human mind. Most intelligent women, they say, regard it simply as the history of a rude people in a barbarous age, and have no more reverence for the Scriptures than any other work” (11). Gathering together a group of women to comment upon the scripture, Stanton would

bridge this gap. She would take the Bible seriously, as the first group tended to do, but also look at it critically, as the second group tended to do.

Even though Stanton's production and publication of the *Woman's Bible* drew much attention from the leadership of the woman suffrage movement and the mainstream protestant denominations, she was not the only woman's rights activist to take seriously the issue of women and religion. In fact, she was part of an extensive and ongoing tradition of feminists struggling with Christianity. When Sarah and Angelina Grimké began their public speaking careers in New England in the 1830s, the Council of Congregationalist Ministers of Massachusetts promptly criticized them for their unwomanly behavior by. These clergymen drew on the Biblical mandates for women's roles, noting that "the appropriate duties and influence of women are clearly stated in the New Testament" ("Pastoral letter," 1837, p. 51). Sarah Grimké responded to those Biblical arguments in her 1838 pamphlet, *The Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women*, reading the scriptures in terms of their cultural origins, and arguing that they had not been divinely authored. Further, Grimké made the case that the Scripture did not assign woman an inferior position. She wrote, "God has made no distinction between men and women as moral beings" (p. 122). In her essays, Sarah Grimké engaged the issue of Scripture directly, not allowing it to be used to constrict her public activism. The Grimkés—like other mid-nineteenth century woman's rights activists, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, Antoinette Brown Blackwell—recognized that the Bible had been used to limit woman's sphere. However, these advocates relied on a strategy of apology: they reinterpreted and explained away the Bible's maltreatment of women.

At least by 1848, Stanton and her colleagues were struggling with Christianity's role in subjugating women. Their Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions at the Seneca Falls convention included two indictments of man's use of religion to oppress women. The Declaration states, "He allows her in Church, as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church...He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God" (Campbell, 1989, p. 36). Even in this very early, and largely mild, statement of woman's rights ideology, mainstream woman's rights activists demonstrated their awareness of Christianity's role in subjugating women.

In 1893, Matilda Joslyn Gage published *Woman, Church, and State*, which was her own criticism of the institutional church. She attacked the church's influence over politics and its infiltration of the state. The church, according to Gage, had gained unfair political power, and had used that power to oppress women. Given the opportunity, Gage argued, the church would seize more power, and would use it to continue this tradition of oppression.

In the 20th century, this engagement between feminists and Christianity has continued. In 1972, Arno Press republished both Stanton's *Woman's Bible* and Gage's *Woman, Church and State*. In 1974, the *Woman's Bible* was republished by a group of Christian feminists, the Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion. In the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, feminist Biblical criticism has also become more prominent within scholarly studies of religion. Cullen Murphy (1998) notes in the first chapter of *The*

*Word According to Eve* that feminist papers have nearly come to dominate the annual joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature (the largest gathering of religion scholars). And two feminist theologians, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Phyllis Tribble have served as presidents of that joint organization. Simultaneously, however, feminists who study religion continue to struggle with this same question of whether a Christian can be a feminist and a feminist a Christian. In their introduction to *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse*, Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (1989) begin with the question, “Is it possible to be a feminist and retain some attachment to the Christian tradition?” (p. xiii). Kathi Kern (2001) notes that, “The survival of Stanton’s Bible and its impressive ability to resonate with different people in different historical contexts reveal the extent to which, over a century later, we are still hard at work determining the relationship of feminism to Christianity” (13). Even though the conflict between Christianity and feminism can be seen as early as Sarah Grimké’s response to the Massachusetts clergymen in 1838, present-day feminist writings demonstrate that the argument has not been finished, and the question has not been answered.

This study examines the changing relationship of Christianity and feminism by looking at the conflicted and evolving interpretations of the *Woman’s Bible* throughout its 100+ year life. This study focuses on the ways that various interpretive communities engaged the *Woman’s Bible* and used it as an argumentative resource in three distinct contexts—its initial controversial publication in the 1890s, its use by the anti-suffragists in the and 1910s, and its republication by second wave feminists in the 1970s and beyond. In the rest of this chapter, I will briefly review the history and content of the

*Woman's Bible* ; review the literature on rhetorical audiences, reception studies, polysemy, terministic screens, and relevancy, which will guide this audience-centered criticism of Stanton's *Woman's Bible*; and offer a description of subsequent chapters.

### The Development of the *Woman's Bible*

Stanton's *Woman's Bible* project arose out of the clash between her increasing radicalism and the increasing conservatism of the woman's rights movement.

Conservative members had come to dominate the movement in the 1870s, '80s, and '90s, especially with the added influence of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. These women had joined the mainstream woman suffrage movement largely so that they could win the vote in order to pass prohibition laws and related progressive-era social reforms. They brought their larger conservative ideology into the woman suffrage movement, and while they would agree with radicals like Stanton on basic issues such as suffrage, they did not necessarily concern themselves with Stanton's broader platform for woman's rights (Flexner, 1996). The *Woman's Bible* was an expression of the radical ideology that was losing ground in the mainstream woman suffrage movement.

Stanton claimed that the *Woman's Bible* grew out of her experience of decades of arguments with clergymen. In interviews and articles about the *Woman's Bible*, she stated repeatedly that clergymen had been able to use the Scripture to keep women in a limited sphere, and she hoped that the *Woman's Bible* would make such arguments more difficult to sustain. In the introduction to the *Woman's Bible*, Stanton talked about the ways that the Bible had been used to oppress women. She wrote,

From the inauguration of the movement for woman's emancipation the Bible has been used to hold her in the "divinely ordained sphere," prescribed in the Old and New Testaments. The canon and civil law; church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man. Creeds, codes, Scriptures and statutes, are all based on this idea. The fashions, forms, ceremonies and customs of society, church ordinances and discipline all grow out of this idea. (1895/1898/1974, p. 7)

Stanton wrote that she wanted to emancipate women from the ways that the Bible had been used against them. In a letter to the Freethought paper, the *Boston Investigator*, of May 9, 1896, she wrote of women, "They believe that the Bible is the 'Word of God,' and that it teaches their subordinate position. *Now I want to teach them that the Bible, like any other book, emanated from the brain of man*, and that the Great Creator of the Universe never said to the Israelites all they claim that he did" (italics original, n.p.). The *Woman's Bible* grew out of an explicitly political impulse: to respond to the Biblically based arguments that served to keep women in an inferior position.

Stanton envisioned this *Woman's Bible* being compiled by a diverse group of women in a "Revising Committee." An article in the *New York Sun* of May 26, 1895 quoted her as saying,

It has all along been my idea to have all phases of thought represented in this work—Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Gentile, evangelical, and liberal—fairly giving the views of the educated women of the nineteenth century as



to the significance and authority of the teachings of the Bible with reference to the position of woman. (“The Woman’s Bible,” n.p.).

To that end, as early as 1886, Stanton began extending invitations to women in England and the United States. She received very little positive response, and the membership of her committee seemed to fluctuate. For instance, the March 17, 1895 *New York World* listed, “with Mrs. Stanton have been associated Miss Frances Willard and Lady Somerset, Mrs. Mary Livermore, Rev. Olympia Brown, Rev. Phoebe Hanaford, Sarah A. Underwood, Frances Ellen Burr, Helen Gardner, and Miss Frances Lord, of London” (n.p.). The May 13, 1895 *Chicago Times-Herald* listed Carrie Chapman Catt as a member of the committee. However, Stanton indicated that these women removed themselves from the committee: “Twenty women who pledged themselves six years ago to lend their aid gradually withdrew. Women are afraid. It is unpopular to question the bible... No, I have no confidence in women in this bible matter. I have written hundreds of letters to women in all parts of the world. Miss Willard and Lady Henry Somerset agreed at first, but when they read my comments on the first book of Genesis they withdrew” (qtd. in “Bible for the women,” n.p.). Willard withdrew her own and Somerset’s name from the committee, saying that “as she and Lady H. Somerset would be out of the country for the greater part of next year, the committee had better not include them” (“The Woman’s Bible,” 1895a). And Carrie Chapman Catt later denied vehemently that she had ever agreed to work on the project (Kern, 2001). Stanton explained in an interview with the *Chicago Record*, “Women are afraid. It is unpopular to question the bible. They are creatures of tradition. They fear to question their position in the testament, as they feared to advocate suffrage fifty years ago.” Whatever the

circumstances of these women's relationships with the Revising Committee, it is clear that the committee never achieved the diversity Stanton had hoped for. In the end, she would write volume one with seven of her ideological comrades, Lillie Devereux Blake, Rev. Phebe Hanaford, Clara Bewick Colby, Ellen Battelle Dietrick, Ursula N. Gestefeld, Mrs. Louisa Southworth, and Frances Ellen Burr. By the second volume, Blake, Colby, and Gestefeld would leave the group, and Lucinda B. Chandler, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Clara B. Neyman would join the writing team. Additionally, each volume lists the 25 members of its Revising Committee, whose participation in the project was minimal (Kern, 2001). The members of the Revising Committee and the writing team came largely from the radical side of the woman suffrage movement, and some were friends of Stanton's from her participation in the Freethought movement. The Revising Committee never achieved the level of ideological diversity for which Stanton said she had hoped.

Stanton wanted to respond to the arguments being made by the clergy, and she wanted to do so with a diverse group of women, but what would their response look like? Chapter Two argues that Stanton's statements about the form and content of the *Woman's Bible* were often contradictory or ambiguous. However, her descriptions of the content of the project usually centered around the idea that the women of the committee would write responses to the "plain English" of the Scriptures that pertained to women (which Stanton always stated made up either one-tenth or one-eleventh of the Bible). Whereas men had been commenting upon the Scriptures for centuries, women had never been invited to do such a thing. Similarly, no one had ever examined the role of women in the Scriptures. Stanton would repair those omissions. In a letter to the *Critic*, of March 28, 1896, Stanton wrote, "the work proposed, which is simply to comment, in plain English,

on the few texts relating to woman, and to ascertain her status, as a factor, in the Scriptures. As she is mentioned in only one-tenth part of the Old and New Testaments, the work is by no means Herculean” (n.p.). Stanton did not claim herself or the members of her committee to be well educated or trained in the Higher Criticism (the method of Biblical interpretation growing popular at the time) or the ancient languages.

Stanton and her collaborators began the work by identifying the passages which pertained to women and cutting those out of a Bible. They would paste the cut-out onto a piece of paper and then pen their commentaries below. In a letter to the *Woman's Tribune* of April 27, 1895, Stanton encouraged more women to write commentaries and send them to her. According to Stanton, all they had to do was “buy a cheap Bible, the revised edition of 1888, choose the book desired for comments, cut out the text, half a dozen or more verses, paste at the head of the sheet, and write the comments below, as legibly as possible with *black* ink, so they can be easily read. Head the chapters as those now being published” (n.p.). The final redaction of these commentaries provides evidence of this writing process: each chapter of the book is made up of a short passage of the Bible followed by one or more commentaries. As Stanton did significantly more writing than any of the other members of her committee, most of the Scripture passages are followed by commentary by Stanton and then occasionally by one or two more members of the committee.

Kern argues that, stylistically, their commentaries fell into two categories: historical critical and dialogical. According to Kern, “historical-critical readings draw on the insights of science, history, biblical criticism, and Positivism to steer the interpretation of the text. Dialogical readings offer political, social, or even personal

analysis of biblical passages and reflect an interaction between the text, the reader and the interpretive community” (151). Using these two styles of argumentation, the authors of the *Woman’s Bible* made a variety of arguments about the Bible: (1) they showed that the Bible was not the divine “Word of God”; (2) they condemned passages that were derogatory toward women; (3) they questioned translations; (4) they used science to expose biblical error; (5) they analogized biblical stories and contemporary realities; (6) they highlighted the omission of women from the biblical record; (7) they pointed out passages that could be uplifting or liberating for women; and (8) they suggested new religious tenets.

As Stanton had stated it was her intention to do in the *Woman’s Bible*, she and her co-authors argued that the Bible was not the divinely authored, and they pointed out passages that cast into doubt its divine authorship. For instance, Ellen Batelle Dietrick wrote of the second creation story in Genesis, “My own opinion is that the second story was manipulated by some Jew, in an endeavor to give ‘heavenly authority’ for requiring a woman to obey the man she married” (18). God would not have written a story so derogatory to women, she argued, so it must have been written to serve man’s ends. The Revising Committee showed the flawed character of the humans who had authored these passages, and they rescued the Scripture from the non-existent pen of God.

The most dominant type of argument throughout the *Woman’s Bible* was the condemnation of passages that the Committee deemed derogatory toward women. One of the most often quoted passages from the *Woman’s Bible* exemplifies this strategy. Stanton wrote,

The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. Here is the Bible position of woman briefly summed up. (p. 7).

Repeatedly throughout the *Woman's Bible*, Stanton and her colleagues argued that such derogatory passages should be expurgated from Christian theology.

Another of Stanton and her committee's strategies was to question the translation of certain words or passages. As Kern notes, "particularly vexing for feminist commentators was the translation, or imposition, of the word 'obey' in biblical discussions of marital relations" (p. 154). Commenting on a passage from Genesis, Colby argued, "the word translated *obey* between husband and wife, is in but one instance in the New Testament the word used between master and servant, parent and child, but is the word that in other places is translated *defer*" (p. 37). In her discussion of the term "obey," Colby switched back and forth between examples from the Old and New Testaments, which complicated her argument about mistranslation, since the Old was written in Hebrew and the New in Greek. However (un)successfully articulated, though, Colby's argument demonstrates the Revising Committee's attempt to expose mistranslations.

Stanton and her colleagues also used science to challenge Biblical stories.

Weighing science against faith had become a central practice of the Freethought movement, which informed the Revising Committee's work (Kern, 2001). For instance, Lillie Devereux Blake used archaeology and geology to comment on the flood narrative in Genesis. She wrote,

According to the latest geological students, Wright, McGee and others; the records of Niagara, the falls of St. Anthony and other glacial chasms, indicate that the great ice caps receded for the last time about seven thousand years ago; the latest archeological discoveries carry our historical knowledge of mankind back nearly four thousand years B.C., so that some record of the mighty floods which must have followed the breaking of great glacial dams might well survive in the stories of the nations (p. 38).

Blake used the geological evidence to try to link the flood narrative to the end of the glacial epoch. She then went on to connect Abram (Abraham) to another flood narrative, that of the Chaldean people of Ur (his homeland). She assumed that his people would have carried on the tradition of the flood narrative. In this case, science was used to both prove and disprove the Scripture. Blake did not argue that the flood never happened; instead, she used science to prove that the flood probably did happen. But by linking the flood narrative to the Chaldean story of the flood and the receding of the glaciers (which did not cause the flood, as recorded in Genesis), she challenged some of the details of the flood story, thereby challenging the divine inspiration and a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Stanton and her colleagues also frequently pointed out places where women had been omitted from the Scripture. For instance, Stanton noted that women had been left out of the meticulous record keeping in the book of Numbers. She described, “In this chapter Moses is commanded to number the people and the princes of the tribe, males only, and by the houses of their fathers. As the object was to see how many effective men there were able to go to war, the priests, the women, the feeble old men and children were not counted” (p. 97). Both the experiences and the physical presence of women had been forgotten about by the Biblical authors.

Some of the most often quoted passages from the *Woman’s Bible* come from Stanton’s attempts to analogize Biblical stories to contemporary political realities. For instance, Stanton commented on the story in Exodus where Aaron instructs men to take the jewelry from their wives, sons and daughters, and he uses that jewelry to construct a golden calf. Stanton compared Aaron to the leaders of the American Revolution, “To procure the gold he took the jewelry of the women young and old, men never understanding how precious it is to them, and the great self-sacrifice required to part with it... It was just so in the American Revolution, in 1776, the first delicacy the men threw overboard in Boston harbor was the tea, woman’s favorite beverage” (p. 84). Other times, Stanton analogized from the Bible stories to U.S. property laws and the ensuing public debate over minting coins.

In some not-too-rare moments, Stanton and the Revising Committee highlighted the liberating statements that the Bible provided for women. Kern (2001) says of Stanton, “Believing that ‘two distinct lines of argument can be woven out of those pages on any subject,’ she desired her contributors, wherever possible, to reread the Bible in

ways that reflected positively upon women.” (p. 151). In the introduction to the *Woman’s Bible* Stanton explained that the Bible had redeeming qualities, “There are some general principles in the holy books of all religions that teach love, charity, liberty, justice and equality for all the human family, there are many grand and beautiful passages, the golden rule has been echoed and re-echoed around the world” (p. 12). She believed that the first creation story in Genesis was especially liberating for women. When the Coalition republished the *Woman’s Bible* in 1974, they used a copy that had originally belonged to Mary Elizabeth Marsh. In it, Stanton had inscribed a short message for Marsh. She wrote, “Genesis chapter I says man and woman were a simultaneous creation. Chapter II says woman was an afterthought. Which is true?” Since the first creation story was more liberating for women, Stanton argued that it should be exalted above the second creation story. In the text of the *Woman’s Bible* itself, Stanton celebrated the first creation story, writing “if language has any meaning, we have in these texts a plain declaration of the existence of the feminine element in the God-head, equal in power and glory with the masculine. The Heavenly Mother and Father!” (14). The *Woman’s Bible* urged women to pay more heed to these liberating moments than to all the derogatory things the Bible had to say about women.

Finally, Stanton and the Revising Committee sometimes expanded upon Biblical passages to suggest new religious tenets. For example, Stanton extended the argument about the first creation story to argue that “instead of three male personages, as generally represented, a Heavenly Father, Mother, and Son would seem more rational” (14). Since man and woman had been created equally in God’s image, according to Stanton, a Heavenly Mother and Father would be a better system of representation for God. Stanton



and the Revising Committee's suggestions of new religious tenets were only short and scattered ideas, and were never formulated into a system of religion.

The first volume of the *Woman's Bible*, which contained commentary on the Pentateuch—Genesis, Leviticus, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—was published in 1895. Even before it was published, however, pieces of the commentary had run serially in Clara Colby's suffrage paper, *The Woman's Tribune*. Once it was published in book form, sales were very successful initially: volume one went through seven printings in the first six months after its publication (Murphy, 1998). The book received almost instant notoriety, even before many people had read it. In fact, much evidence suggests that very few people ever read it. For instance, in the Spring of 1896, an article entitled "Is the Woman's Bible a Success?" contained the commentary of five women, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Of those five women who reflected on the *Woman's Bible*, two admitted their limited knowledge of it. One wrote, "I know little of Mrs. Stanton's Bible. I have no interest in any variety of unorthodox statements, and I am quite sure that the same feeling exists among Christian people in general" (n.p.). Another stated, "without having studied the Woman's Bible, or noted its success among women, I can affirm as my conviction that the Bible as it has been accepted for centuries, has been a drawback, a positive detriment to the advancement of women" (n.p.). Yet these were two of the five women chosen as qualified to comment on the success of this book. The *Evening Star* of January 23, 1896, gave testimony to the same phenomenon. That paper covered the 1896 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), where the *Woman's Bible* was debated extensively. An *Evening Star* article quoted Lillie Devereux Blake at the convention and described what followed, "'Now, for example,' said Mrs.

Blake, ‘let’s see how much we know about it. Let every woman who has read the book hold up her right hand.’ Eight hands in all went up” (“Woman Suffrage,” n.p.). Over one hundred suffragists from around the United States were in attendance at the convention, and only eight of them had read this book that was written by their organization’s honorary president, and that went through seven printings in six months.

That same group of woman suffragists in 1896 who largely had not read the *Woman’s Bible* passed a resolution distancing the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) from it. When the resolution to censor the book was offered, it led to a heated convention dispute that pitted Stanton’s allies—Lillie Devereux Blake, Clara Bewick Colby, and Susan B. Anthony—against the newer, younger, and more conservative leadership of the NAWSA—Carrie Chapman Catt, Rachel Foster Avery, and Anna Howard Shaw. The latter group of women had introduced a resolution that stated “that this association is non-sectarian, being composed of persons of all shades of religious opinion, and that it has no official connection with the so-called ‘Woman’s Bible’ or any theological publication” (Avery, 91). Their rationale for offering such a resolution was that they believed the publication of the *Woman’s Bible* was hurting the work that the NAWSA was doing on behalf of woman suffrage. These women had been out in the field organizing for suffrage, and they spoke of doors being slammed in their faces because their work was associated with the *Woman’s Bible*. After an extensive argument on the floor of the convention, in which numerous amendments were offered and defeated (such as one to strike the words “the so-called ‘Woman’s Bible’ or”), the body finally passed the resolution as initially written, in a vote of 53 to 41 (Kern, 2001).

Even in the face of such censorship, Stanton and a modified writing group continued to compose and publish their commentaries on the remaining parts of the Bible. Having lost the support of suffragists, including Clara Bewick Colby, Stanton had to turn to another outlet for serial publication; this time, the chapters ran in the *Boston Investigator* prior to their compilation in book form. Even after the official denunciation, Stanton still had not given up her quest to include commentary from women with a wide variety of ideological perspectives. To that end, she mailed letters to woman's rights activists, asking them to answer two questions: "1. Have the teachings of the Bible advanced or retarded the emancipation of women? 2. Have they dignified or degraded the Mothers of the Race?" (p. 185). She printed 19 responses to these questions, plus her own, in an appendix to the second volume of the *Woman's Bible*. Stanton received responses from conservative women, such as Frances Willard, as well as more radical women, such as Josephine K. Henry. The appendix shows a wider range of theological diversity than that contained within the body of the *Woman's Bible*. However, partly due to the censorship of the first volume and partly due to Stanton's distance from the political spotlight by 1898, the publication of the second volume received minimal attention by woman suffragists, religious leadership, and the mainstream press.

After the initial flurry of activity around the publication of the *Woman's Bible*, the book received minimal attention from within the suffrage movement. As suffrage leaders attempted to minimize conflict within the ranks so as not to threaten their chances of winning the franchise, the *Woman's Bible* was quickly buried in the hopes of being forgotten. Lisa Strange adds,

scholars generally have praised Stanton as an astute, even brilliant public advocate, but few have counted the *Woman's Bible* among her greatest works. Some have largely ignored the *Woman's Bible*; in her 225-page biography of Stanton, for example, Elisabeth Griffith dedicates only four pages to the work. In an attempt to sanitize their mother's image, Stanton's own children expunged all references to the *Woman's Bible* from the 1922 edition of her autobiography. Still other scholars have judged the *Woman's Bible* a rhetorical blunder that tarnished Stanton's reputation and cost her the leadership of the suffrage movement.

Even though work on the *Woman's Bible* dominated the last decades of Stanton's life, because of the disgrace it brought her, it has largely been forgotten about or ignored. After its initial publications in 1895 and 1898, the book was not again available new until 1972, when it was republished by Arno Press.

Even though the book was not widely available at the beginning of the 20th century, anti-suffragists used it and its symbolic legacy in their arguments against the woman suffrage movement. The anti-suffrage movement, which had begun in the late 1860s in response to a Massachusetts referendum campaign, grew to its fullest force in the final decade before the nineteenth amendment was passed, organized as the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS). Thomas Jablonsky (2002) notes, "Most anti-suffrage clubs came into existence in response to pro-suffrage activity. In this manner, they were reactive, responding—often belatedly—to the work of women and men who supported the franchise" (p. 120). Arguments against woman suffrage varied greatly. Many anti-suffragists responded to the two primary types of arguments made by

woman suffragists—expediency and natural rights (Kraditor, 1965). In response to an expediency argument, woman suffragists could cite all the states where women had gained the franchise, and argue that those states were no more progressive than the states where women did not vote. For instance, the National Anti-Suffrage Association wrote, “The *net result* of Woman Suffrage wherever tried has been A LOSS TO THE STATE AND A LOSS TO WOMEN” (emphasis original, p. 3). To a natural rights argument, anti-suffragists could respond that women and men were different, and therefore did not deserve or need equivalent rights. The same National Anti-Suffrage Association pamphlet argued, “Men and women were created *different* and designed to work in *different spheres* for the *common good*—to cooperate with and supplement each other and *not to compete*” (emphasis original, p. 3). Further, some anti-suffragists argued that women received great benefits under the benevolence of male suffrage. Arguing that woman suffrage would threaten “Home, Heaven, and Mother,” anti-suffragists did believe that women should participate in public affairs, but “that this civic duty had to be accomplished away from the tumult of the political arena because women by their nature were different from men” (Jablonsky, 2002, 126). Anti-suffragists used Christian ideals to support this world order that contained separate roles for men and women. Anti-suffragists, “were earnest believers in a male Christian godhead. This supreme being had placed humanity on earth with specific duties in mind, duties that were to be completed by following his natural order” (Jablonsky, 2002, 127). In 1917, the national anti-suffrage movement moved sharply to the right, and they argued against all sorts of radicalism. More specifically, they argued that woman suffrage was tied to a larger radical ideology, and that passing suffrage could bring about a new social order.

Stanton's *Woman's Bible* became a tool in these arguments because it exemplified the radicalism of the woman suffrage movement. Even though Stanton did not speak for the mainstream suffrage movement, as a suffragist she was challenging the Bible, which challenged the natural world order that the anti-suffragists promoted. The *Woman's Bible* demonstrated the sort of challenge to the social order that anti-suffragists feared woman suffrage would bring about.

After its use by the anti-suffragists, the *Woman's Bible* was largely forgotten about until the 1970s, when it was published first by Arno Press and then by the Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion. In their "Editor's Preface" in the 1974 edition, the Coalition outlined four goals in re-publishing the *Woman's Bible*. First, they endeavored to complete a business venture run entirely by women. Decision making, production, printing, advertising, distribution and funding were all done by women. Second, the Coalition aimed "to provide this historical document in a competitively priced paperback for wide distribution" (Kinnear, 1974, p. xviii) since it had been unavailable for so many years. Third, the Coalition hoped the book would "prove an important study document for feminist groups, churches, classes and that it will be used in libraries, schools, colleges, etc." (Kinnear, 1974, p. xviii). Finally, the group wanted to use the proceeds from book sales to host a women's conference in Seattle, finance publication of other feminist documents, and support other Coalition projects.

Beyond its initial publication by these small publishing groups, the *Woman's Bible* received considerable attention in the 20th century from Christian feminist theologians. Beginning in 1990, feminist theologians at the joint convention of the American Academy of Religion and Society for Biblical Literature held annual panel

discussions on the significance of the *Woman's Bible*, especially in preparation for the 100 year anniversary of its original publication (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1993). In conjunction with this 100 year celebration, two books were published by feminist theologians, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *Searching the Scriptures* (1993) and Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe's (1992/1998) *Women's Bible Commentary*. Both of these books took Stanton's work as inspiration and justification for their own.

The most comprehensive historical scholarship on Stanton's *Woman's Bible* is Kathi Kern's (2001) *Mrs. Stanton's Bible*. Kern focuses on Stanton's personal history, her relationships to the woman suffrage movement and other social and religious movements of the 19th century, and the creation and publication of the *Woman's Bible*. Some historians of the woman suffrage movement, including Eileen Krador (1965) and Eleanor Flexner (1996), treat the *Woman's Bible* briefly in their books and focus on its relationship to the larger woman suffrage movement. Lisa Strange's (1999) article in *Gender Issues* situates Stanton's book in the larger tradition of feminist theology. In addition to scholarship in the area of feminist history, the *Woman's Bible* has received some attention from scholars within religious history. For instance, one chapter of Elizabeth Clark and Herbert Richardson's (1977) *Women and Religion* sourcebook is devoted to the *Woman's Bible*. Further, James Smylie (1993) and Elaine Huber (1993) both have chapters on *The Woman's Bible* in a book focusing on the modern history of Protestantism. Even though the *Woman's Bible* has received scholarly attention from historians of feminism and religion, its reception has not yet received the sort of critical attention provided by this analysis.

### Critical Perspective

As part of her justification for studying the *Woman's Bible*, Kathi Kern noted “the survival of Stanton’s Bible and its impressive ability to resonate with different people in different historical contexts” (p. 13). Kern went on to say, though, that her book “is not about that” (p. 13). My project is about just that: the remarkable resonance that the *Woman's Bible* had with audiences in at least three contexts: its original publication and distribution among suffragists, its use in the following decades by anti-suffragists, and its republication by second wave feminists. Although Kern noted that the book resonated among audiences in a variety of contexts, she did not explore how it did so. She did not explicate the variety of meanings and uses it took on in those contexts.

As a rhetorical critic, I am uniquely situated to examine a text in relationship to its contexts. Since Herbert Wichelns distinguished rhetorical from literary criticism in 1925, rhetorical critics have at least claimed to ground their analyses in the situated nature of discourse. In his famous and lasting definition of rhetorical criticism, Wichelns asserted that “it is not concerned with permanence, nor yet with beauty. It is concerned with effect. It regards a speech as a communication to a specific audience, and holds its business to be the analysis and appreciation of the orator’s method of imparting his ideas to his hearers” (p. 23). The task of the rhetorical critic, at least in part, according to Wichelns, is to discern the relationship between a text and its audience in its specific historical context. Such analysis allows the critic to notice not only how the meaning of the text was created in the interaction between the text and its audience, but also how the contextual features of that historical moment aided in the construction of meaning for the given text.



Rhetorical critics since Wichelns have defined rhetorical criticism in ways that also pay close attention to context and audience. For Medhurst and Benson (1991), rhetoric is an “attempt by a person or group to influence another through strategically selected and stylized speech” (p. vii). Their definition includes three key components: “a person or group,” “another” and “speech.” The function of that speech is for the “person or group” to bring about some sort of change in “another,” or the audience.

Returning to the tradition of classical rhetoric, Thomas Farrell (1993) recognizes the situated nature of discourse. Farrell distinguishes the rhetorical method from the analytic and then elaborates upon rhetoric’s fundamental role in the creation of community. Farrell writes, “rhetoric in the classical sense provides an important inventional capacity for the conventions, emotions, and cognitions necessary for affiliation in a community of civic life” (p. 76). Farrell also notes that the functioning of rhetoric as a tool of civic life requires a shared knowledge that is unique to the particular context of its community. The uniqueness of rhetoric, according to Farrell, is its contingency. He writes, “the operative mood is not necessity, but contingency” (p. 47). Finally, if rhetoric is a locally stable, contingent practice reliant on social knowledge and concerned with practical wisdom, the rhetorical audience becomes important. First, Farrell notes that the audience is the reason that rhetoric exists, writing “it is the rhetorical audience (the ‘one who decides’) that functions as the efficient cause of the enactment of rhetoric as practical art” (68-69). Second, not only is the audience the cause for the rhetoric, but, according to Farrell, the audience also decides the fate of discourse.

Medhurst and Benson (1991), Gaonkar (1989), and Jasinski (2001) all return to Aristotle for their definitions of rhetoric as well. Like Wichelns 70+ years previously, these authors use the traditional Aristotelean distinction between rhetoric and poetics in order to define rhetoric and rhetorical criticism. While poetry may strive for permanence, beauty, and timeless expression of the human experience, rhetoric has a functional task, which is to persuade a specific audience within a particular historical context. If rhetorical critics are to treat discourse as rhetoric, rather than as poetry, we are called to examine the work that it performs in its particular social situation.

Even though rhetorical critics claim to focus attention on the context and audience of the texts they study, their criticism has remained largely text- and author-centered, and rhetorical critics have left themselves open for attack, especially from cultural studies, for failing to fully consider the role and work of audiences in decoding texts. As Gaonkar (1989) suggests, the inherent danger of text-centered criticism is that it shifts the focus on oratory from a “readerly” to a “writerly” text. Similarly, DeLuca (1999) has accused rhetorical studies of adhering too closely to a linear model of transmission for communication. Rhetorical critics have focused on the issues of style and arrangement at the moments of construction and delivery, at the expense of other contributing factors—including the audience—to the meaning that the text assumes in the world.

J.D. Peters (1999) encourages awareness of audience and context by exploring two analogies of the transmission of meaning. Peters sets two Western notions of communication transmission against each other—Socrates’ dialogic, as in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, and Jesus’ dissemination, as in the parable of the sower in the synoptic gospels—and argues that rhetorical studies has foolishly privileged the first over the

second. According to Peters, the utility of the dialogic model for Socrates/Plato is that the orator has complete control over the meaning taken from the text. He can ensure that his disciple takes from him exactly what he intended. Jesus, conversely, tells the parable of the sower who spreads his seeds far and wide. That sower cannot control how, where, when or whether they will grow. Under this model of dissemination, the context where the seed lands has as much control over whether or not it grows as the sower does. Rhetorical criticism that follows the dialogic model of communication will automatically be text- and author-centered because the meaning of the text is controlled by the author's intentions. Rhetorical criticism that follows the second model has to take context and audience much more seriously, since the power to grow the seeds is relinquished by the sower to the land when he spreads those seeds.

As Stanley Fish (1980) describes, a given text does not have a fixed meaning of its own, but rather a text's meaning comes about in its interaction with an interpretive community. That interpretive community draws on its own standards and structures of meaning in order to make sense out of the text in question. Fish writes, "communication occurs within situations and that to be in a situation is already to be in possession of (or to be possessed by) a structure of assumptions, of practices understood to be relevant in relation to purposes and goals that are already in place; and it is within the assumption of these purposes and goals that any utterance is *immediately* heard" (p. 318, emphasis original).

In particular, interpretive communities make meaning out of texts through the terministic screens at their disposal (Burke, 1966), as well as the structures of relevancy salient to them (Morley, 1980, 1986; Cooper, 1998, 1999; Rockler 2002). According to

Burke, human sub-groups operate according to particular terministic screens. Individual interpretive communities develop their own terministic screens, through which they come to understand the components of their own environments. Burke likens terministic screens to color filters: just as the same object can be portrayed differently in photographs developed with different color filters, so too can differing uses of language define the meaning of a given object, person, behavior, etc. According to Burke, "even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (emphasis original, 1966, p. 45). Through the processes of reflection, selection and deflection, a specific terminology defines reality for the people who live and work within that terminology. Burke talks primarily about the ways that particular interpretive communities use terministic screens in order to create their own reality. In that way, the use of terministic screens is part of the *encoding* process.

Morley (1980, 1986), Cooper (1998, 1999) and others use the concept of relevancy to talk about the reverse: the ways that specific interpretive communities *decode* texts according to the filters of their own particular subject positions. According to these theorists, interpretive communities focus on features of a text most salient to their experience and evaluate the text through those features. Cooper (1998, 1999) looks at audience members' reliance on relevancy for reading mass media texts, specifically the movies *Do the Right Thing* and *Thelma and Louise*. She argues that audience members' race affects their reading of *Do the Right Thing*, as African American viewers understood the film through a lens of race, while non-African American viewers understood it through a lens of racism. In *Thelma and Louise*, the difference was coded according to

gender: the chief relevancies for women were sexism and oppression, while neither of these was salient for men. In both of these cases, the varied readings by social group led to differing evaluations of the film. African Americans enjoyed *Do the Right Thing*, while non-African Americans did not, and women enjoyed *Thelma and Louise*, while men found it an offensive exercise in male-bashing. According to Cooper, audience members' readings of these films were rooted in their own cultural subjectivities, and the ways that those subjectivities made particular themes more or less relevant. Most previous criticism drawing on the concept of relevancy has focused on audience members' social positions, as in Cooper's analysis of race- and gender-based differences. Research on relevancy has largely failed to consider audiences in terms of membership in interpretive communities defined by common ideology or political goals. This analysis of the *Woman's Bible's* reception considers audience members not only in terms of social position, but also in terms of ideology and political goals.

The calls for greater attention to context and audience, as well as awareness of interpretive communities' agency in decoding texts, lead rhetorical scholars into the argument that rhetorical discourse is naturally polysemous. According to this line of reasoning, a text cannot be fully controlled by the intentions of its author, and the audience member is central to the meaning-making process. Arguments that give such agency to audiences came about in response to Marxist theories of hegemony and dominant ideology. Critics in cultural studies, including John Fiske (1986, 1987), David Morley (1980, 1986), and others, have refused to believe that the ideological state apparatuses control popular thought so as to keep the masses limited to the role of "dupes." These theorists have argued that popular media texts are fundamentally

polysemous, that is, open to multiple readings. Investing in the idea of polysemy allows theorists to believe that audiences have agency over the ideological state apparatuses.

Important as the idea of polysemy has been for re-examining the meaning-making process, Ceccarelli notes that, at least in rhetorical studies, as a concept, polysemy has become an unwieldy beast. She argues that rhetorical critics agree on a basic definition for polysemy—"the existence of plural but finite denotational meanings for a single text"—but put the term to use in different ways. Surveying instances of the term in the field, Ceccarelli narrows "polysemy" down to three primary uses. The first comes directly from the scholarship in cultural studies: texts are open to multiple interpretations defined by audience members, and thus, polysemy gives popular audiences agency over the ruling elite. Ceccarelli cites McKerrow, who defines polysemy in this way and "celebrates polysemic interpretation as an inversion of typical power relationships" (p. 396). Critics in this tradition applaud the polysemy itself as well as resisting audiences who exploit that polysemy. Under the second definition that Ceccarelli identifies, polysemy works "as a subtle instrument of the skillful rhetor" (p. 396). The rhetor encodes the text with multiple meanings, "and its power to make a text popular with diverse audiences primarily serves the interests of the 'skillful' producers who are selling the text" (p. 396). This sort of strategic ambiguity accords with Fiske's (1986, 1987) assertions that media texts become popular because of their polysemy: the competitive marketplace rewards a polysemous text because it resonates with the widest possible audience. Referring to the work of John Angus Campbell, Ceccarelli notes that these first two definitions of polysemy can work in conjunction with one another. According to Ceccarelli, "at one point Campbell seems eager to recognize the strategic polysemy that

originates with the rhetor, and at another point he calls for an increased interest in the resistive polysemy that originates with the audience” (p. 397). Finally, Ceccarelli explains a third type of polysemy, which is the “product of rhetorical criticism in the academy” (p. 397). A viewpoint expounded by Gaonkar, this sort of critical plurality stems from scholars who “are seeking to increase the hermeneutic depth of their artifacts” (p. 397). Scholars who can demonstrate that their texts of choice have multiple meanings show that language is not a simple transparent container for meaning, and thus, they legitimate scholarly inquiry into their texts of choice. Ceccarelli summarizes her three definitions of polysemy as audience, author, and critic polysemy. She associates these three types of polysemy with political goals, and with the power of each of these three agents. With the power to create resistive readings, audiences can have agency over the dominant ideology espoused by the text. For an author, strategic ambiguity gives power to control the audience. And for the critic, demonstrating hermeneutic depth brings about institutional political power.

Scholarly attention to context, audience, and polysemy thus far may have been inhibited by methodological hesitation, especially within rhetorical studies. While scholars in cultural studies have drawn heavily on quantitative research methods in order to uncover audience reactions to texts, rhetorical studies has been slow to do the same. In a rare exception, Ramsey, Achter, and Condit (2001) surveyed undergraduates in order to answer their question of why a book, *The Bell Curve*, that received terrible book reviews had become a best seller. They tested their hypothesis—that negative reviews of *The Bell Curve* had stimulated aversive racism and led to increased book sales—by asking audience members in a laboratory situation to read book reviews and register their

responses on survey instruments. Similarly, Kevin A. Carragee (1990) describes the development of interpretive social scientific research strategies for exploring the audience. Resting on the same assumptions of audience agency, polysemy, etc., the interpretive approach has provided another method for locating these same phenomena. Whereas Ramsey et al. relied on administering surveys in a laboratory, interpretive researchers have used ethnographic research strategies such as interviews and participant observation.

Whether they are epistemologically skeptical, intellectually uninterested, or mathematically incapable, rhetoricians have tended to avoid such social science research methods. However, even though many scholars in cultural studies and some in rhetorical studies have relied on these methods for studying audiences, others have demonstrated that the traditional tools of text-centered criticism prove useful for audience research as well. Fiske (1987) points out that texts do not live as solitary creatures, but rather they exist in intertextual relationships with other texts. Fiske explores numerous horizontal and vertical intertextual relationships, but the most useful concept here is of secondary texts. Secondary texts are those which refer explicitly to the text in question and thus shape the popular meaning made of that text. In her analysis of feminist fiction in the 1970s, Lisa Hogeland (1994) draws heavily upon such secondary texts. She reads book reviews as both artifacts of audience response and also as opinion leaders who guide further audience response. She reads reviews in mainstream publications, as well as both liberal and radical feminist publications, in order to draw conclusions about audience responses to feminist fiction.



Ceccarelli's (1999) brief analysis of Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural provides the best model for the sort of audience-centered criticism I pursue with the *Woman's Bible*. She uses responses to the speech as printed in Northern and Southern newspapers to argue that these segments of the audience interpreted the speech differently. The Northern audience, like Lincoln himself, believed that the speech suggested that North and South were both "sinners being judged by a retributive Providence" (p. 402). Southerners interpreted the speech as a condemnation of them. It was "a typical wartime diatribe, an inaugural of clear 'anti-slavery sentiment' that constructs a moral hegemony for the North, and depicts the war as a righteous battle against the slaveholders" (p. 403). Whereas Northerners interpreted Lincoln's speech to distribute blame evenly among the two parties in the war, the Southerners felt that blame was being placed solely on them. Ceccarelli's interpretation of the audience reception of Lincoln's speech is quite short (less than 2 pages). Rather than a complete work of criticism, her brief argument simply suggests the potential of such audience-centered criticism.

The reception of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *Woman's Bible* across three contexts provides a unique opportunity for audience-centered criticism. Its popularity and use across a variety of contexts allows the critic to make comparisons that show how meaning is context-bound. The *Woman's Bible* stirred enough controversy and created enough attention that its textual entailments are bountiful. In the 1890s, woman suffrage papers and conventions, religious papers, and even non-partisan papers covered its publication. In the first two decades of the 20th century, anti-suffragists used the *Woman's Bible* in their propaganda against the franchise for women. While the *Woman's*

*Bible* went largely unnoticed by mainstream feminists in the 1970s, its republication received much attention among Christian feminists. The life of the *Woman's Bible* has been textually rich, providing ample material for audience-centered rhetorical criticism.

The series of conditions under which Ceccarelli argues resistive readings are especially likely suggests why the *Woman's Bible* is a particularly fruitful point of analysis. Ceccarelli writes,

Rhetorical critics looking for other examples of resistive readings will do well to examine texts that are experienced by both dominant and marginalized groups in a society and that are interpreted within the structure of intergroup conflict. Differences in class, race, culture, and gender are likely to underlie the power relations that drive resistive readings, and moments of intense social unrest or inequality are potential fruitful sites of study.

The contexts for the original and subsequent publications of the *Woman's Bible* meet these criteria. Published by a suffragist and distributed within suffrage groups, the *Woman's Bible* was the product and tool of a marginalized group. Moreover, it was the product of a marginalized group (radical suffragists) within a marginalized group (mainstream suffragists). The book reached the dominant group in its interactions with church leadership, and also with conservative suffragists. In both contexts of publication, the *Woman's Bible* was birthed into great social unrest, with the impending threat of women actually winning the franchise in the late nineteenth century, and with the flurry of radical social movements in the early 1970s.

The *Woman's Bible* and accompanying audience reactions are also useful texts for inquiry because they problematize some of the central assumptions about polysemy and dominant and resistive/oppositional readings. Whereas the concept of polysemy was created to celebrate audience members' agency in response to powerful interests, Ceccarelli reminds us that "polysemy should not always be praised. While it may seem right to celebrate the marginalized groups who have resisted the hegemonic control of a rhetor by taking control over textual meaning, it is sometimes the case that a resistive reading represents an opposition that is harmful to both the rebels who initiate it and the larger social body..." (409). The *Woman's Bible* was not written or published by a dominant group, but it is a fundamentally subversive document. The *Woman's Bible* itself offers a resistive reading to a dominant text. Resistive or oppositional readings of the *Woman's Bible*, thus, re-inscribe dominant ideology. At the very least, they complicate the notion that the function of polysemy is to subvert the dominant ideology. At the same time, because the *Woman's Bible* does not fall into the categories delimited by the polarized debate over hegemony and polysemy, this project allows us to examine the audience without falling into all of the predictable traps of this well-trod argument.

The *Woman's Bible* also complicates idea of polysemy because it is a multi-authored text. Stanton's vision for the project was for it to contain multiple and competing voices. When audience members tried to summarize and reduce the book to a political position, when they tried to state its "argument," they necessarily highlighted some voices and silenced others. The controversy around the *Woman's Bible* allows analysis of these processes of foregrounding at the expense of marginalization and silencing.

Since audience studies have primarily happened in media and cultural studies, the only audiences that have been studied are those of popular culture and mass media texts. However, like Ceccarelli on Lincoln's speech, analysis of audience reactions to the *Woman's Bible* moves audience-centered criticism out of late-twentieth century mass media criticism. Even though some of the audiences for the *Woman's Bible* are no longer alive today, textual criticism provides access to their reception of the book. While other audience research methods are inappropriate for studying historical audiences—e.g. survey, ethnographic research—with textual criticism these audiences do not fade any faster than the text themselves.

#### Outline of Subsequent Chapters

The following analysis of the *Woman's Bible* and its attendant controversy and audience reactions takes seriously rhetorical criticism's call to locate a text in its historical context. The *Woman's Bible* was important in at least three historical contexts—its publication in the 1890s, its use by anti-suffragists in the 1910s, and its republication in the late twentieth century—and the following analysis devotes one chapter to each of those contexts. Following Peters' use of the parable of the sower, I will examine how particular contexts became more or less fertile grounds for particular readings of the *Woman's Bible*.

The *Woman's Bible* enflamed social unrest when it was published in the 1890s, and Chapter Two examines the book's interactions with its interpretive communities in that time period. I argue that because of the public ambiguity around the text, particular interpretive communities could reduce the argument of the book to one of its parts, and

use that reading of the *Woman's Bible* to support their own arguments. For fundamentalist religious leaders in the 1890s, they could use the radicalism that they believed the *Woman's Bible* contained in order to support their argument about the growing infidelity in American society. For woman suffrage leaders already vying for control of the movement, they could use the *Woman's Bible* to argue about the present and future direction of the movement. Conservative suffrage leaders argued that it would hinder local organizing—which they wanted to be the focus of the national association—while liberals in the movement argued that the *Woman's Bible* fit within the broad platform of woman's rights that their association advocated. The dispute over the *Woman's Bible* was one manifestation of the ongoing tensions within the suffrage movement, and the conservative victory in the *Woman's Bible* dispute signaled the conservative leadership's rise to power within the movement more largely.

Just like 1890s feminists feared that the *Woman's Bible* could be used to hamper their organizing efforts, the anti-suffragists attempted to do just that between 1918 and 1920. Chapter Three examines how the shift to anti-radicalism in the anti-suffrage movement allowed the *Woman's Bible* to become a valuable resource for anti-suffragists. Even though it had not been a helpful tool in their arguments prior to 1918, with this shift in ideology the *Woman's Bible* provided a link between suffrage, socialism and feminism, which the anti-suffragists exploited.

At the end of the twentieth century, Christian feminists and Christian feminist theologians marked the *Woman's Bible* as an originary moment for their own theological work. When the *Coalition Task Force* republished the *Woman's Bible* in the 1970s, they did so arguing that it would help them in their effort to reform Christianity for women

and for feminism. I argue that the *Woman's Bible* was particularly well suited for this task because Coalition members could situate it within the developing practice of consciousness-raising, as well as the tradition of liberal (rather than radical) feminism. When feminist theologians reflected on the *Woman's Bible* in the 1890s, they used it to justify the political nature of their academic scholarship. They also used it to legitimate radically different critical projects: using it as a model for both a new apologist reading of the Bible, as well as a radical transgressive reading of the Bible. I argue that the feminist theologians' unique contribution to the history of interpretation of the *Woman's Bible* was that some of them were the first to read the *Woman's Bible* as a radical attack on the Scriptures, and still argue that it is a useful resource. Previously, groups who had read it as a radical attack on the Scripture—the conservative suffragists and the antis—had universally condemned it, while those who praised the book—the Coalition Task Force—focused on its apologist tendencies.

Finally, the concluding chapter offers a summary of the argument, and reflections on its significance for social movement and rhetorical theory.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "ALL THE TROUBLE AROSE FROM A MISNOMER": THE *WOMAN'S BIBLE*'S NINETEENTH CENTURY INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

Reports vary as to how Elizabeth Cady Stanton reacted when the 1896 convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) passed a resolution officially distancing itself from the *Woman's Bible*, or any theological publication, for that matter. In her ailing health, Stanton had been unable to attend the convention in Washington, D.C. that January, and instead remained in her home in New York, where she was dependent upon telegraph, mail, and newspaper to keep her abreast of the happenings of the convention. Some sources suggest that Stanton delighted in the convention's censure (Kern, 2001). She seemed to thrive in the midst of such controversy; after all, Stanton would go on to publish a second volume of the *Woman's Bible* in 1898, even after the first volume had been repudiated. Other reports suggest that Stanton was crushed by the NAWSA's resolution. For example, just a few days after the convention Anthony conveyed her concern to a reporter, who transcribed the conversation: "'Do you think that such an action will cut Mrs. Stanton?' 'Cut her,' exclaimed Miss Anthony, 'why, it is equivalent to a censure. This action will stab at the heart of a woman who has devoted all her days to...[illegible]...conditions for the betterment of the very people who hurt her'" ("Susan B. Anthony is for free Cuba," 1896, n.p.). In her biography of Anthony, Ida Husted Harper (1898) claimed that Anthony herself was shocked when the resolution committee presented what would become

known as the "Bible resolution." Anthony probably was not surprised that her colleagues disliked or feared the *Woman's Bible*, but instead that they would try to censure it through a resolution. After all, the Saturday before the convention, as the *Washington Post* reported, the NAWSA executive committee had agreed not to bring about any official convention action on the subject of the *Woman's Bible*. Even after that decision, it was Anthony's fellow members of the executive committee—Carrie Chapman Catt and Rachel Foster Avery—who introduced the resolution to censure the *Woman's Bible*. Conceivably, then, Anthony (and Stanton) could have been surprised that a resolution arose to censure the *Woman's Bible*.

However, they could not have been shocked that the book was so controversial within the movement. After all, there had been "numerous paragraphs afloat" in the mainstream press, religious press, and woman suffrage press since the *Woman's Bible* chapters began to run serially in *The Woman's Tribune*. In these articles, which became the public's greatest source of information about the *Woman's Bible*, Stanton's allies, foes, and ostensibly neutral newspaper reporters had offered their own interpretations of the *Woman's Bible*. Since only eight of the more than 100 delegates to the 1896 NAWSA convention admitted to having read the book, their opinions had to have been influenced by these "numerous paragraphs afloat" around the *Woman's Bible*.

The discourse around the publication of the *Woman's Bible* is key to understanding the NAWSA's "Bible resolution." The immediate discourse around the *Woman's Bible* came from Stanton herself in the public statements, letters, and editorials she wrote to publicize the project, both in the woman suffrage press and the mainstream press. As the following analysis argues, those statements themselves were highly



ambiguous and seemingly contradictory. In turn, the newspaper coverage that followed was itself highly ambiguous and seemingly contradictory. The interpretive communities into which the *Woman's Bible* was born then exploited this ambiguous discourse, fitting the *Woman's Bible* into the structures of meaning relevant to their own agenda. The 1890s were turbulent times for Christianity and feminism, individually and together, and the *Woman's Bible* became both a lightning rod and a litmus test for the members of these communities. Indeed, it was the tumult within religion that allowed the *Woman's Bible* to become such a problem for the suffrage movement.

"I thought it would be a good idea": Public Ambiguity about the *Woman's Bible*

Stanton officially announced her plan for the *Woman's Bible*, and the progress she had made on it, in her September 5, 1891 "Reminiscences" column in *The Woman's Tribune*. She continued to publicize the *Woman's Bible* while the first few chapters ran serially in the *Woman's Tribune*, and then shortly before and after the 1895 publication of the first volume. Stanton publicized the *Woman's Bible* by sending letters to a wide variety of periodicals—including the *New York Sun*, the *Pleasanton Observer* (Kansas), the *Critic*, and the *Independent*—and by granting interviews to reporters from other papers—including the *New York Times*, the *San Francisco Call*, the *Chicago Record*, the *New York World*, and the *Chicago Times-Herald*. Additionally, a handful of newspapers provided their own coverage of Stanton's work, often relying heavily on interviews with her.

A close reading of Stanton's public statements and this newspaper coverage about the *Woman's Bible* gives a sense of the resources that the *Woman's Bible's* audience

members had to draw upon in reading and interpreting the *Woman's Bible*. In this section, I want to explore Stanton's public statements and the newspaper coverage about the *Woman's Bible*, without making any claims to explicate Stanton's intentions or goals. Instead, I will show that Stanton's descriptions of the project were broad in scope and her statements of intention wide-ranging, and when the newspaper coverage followed her lead, together they offered the public an ambiguous sense of her project. Stanton's friends and enemies in the nineteenth century relied on her public statements and the accompanying newspaper coverage about the *Woman's Bible* to interpret the book as a cultural symbol, exploiting the ambiguity and contradictory nature of this public discourse in order to use the *Woman's Bible* for their own purposes.

According to Stanton's public statements, the political utility of the *Woman's Bible* was that it would benefit woman either by emancipating her within the church, or within the political sphere, or perhaps both. Sometimes Stanton asserted that the *Woman's Bible* would allow women an expanded role within the church. In the "Reminiscences" column where Stanton announced the *Woman's Bible*, she argued, "As they are now studying theology in many institutions of learning, asking to be ordained as preachers, elders, deacons, and to be admitted as delegates to Synods and General Assemblies, and are refused on Bible grounds, it is high time for women to consider those scriptural arguments and authorities" (1891, n.p.). Thus, the *Woman's Bible* would help women advocate ordination and participation in conventions. At other points, Stanton maintained that the political utility of the *Woman's Bible* was that it would help women outside the church. As the Bible's influence had been larger than the church—it had restricted woman's political role—the effect of a *Woman's Bible* would be to repair

that damage. In 1896, the *Boston Investigator* printed a letter that Stanton had written, in which she asserted, "To emancipate woman from all belief in bibles and in priests is the first step in her emancipation. To attack Bible, priest and church would increase the agitation fourfold and would ultimately help the suffrage movement" (n.p.). The *Woman's Bible*, then, might change woman's role within the church, or in government, or both. Stanton created a moment of ambiguity by suggesting at least two political outcomes of the *Woman's Bible*. Each of these potential outcomes could have been threatening or promising to a different audience: those who wanted to change woman's political role, but not change the church, those who wanted to change both, those who wanted to change neither. This ambiguity would allow activists with a variety of political standpoints to appropriate the *Woman's Bible* for their own arguments.

Stanton alternately justified the *Woman's Bible* project by constructing the clergy and the Church as the great enemy of liberated women, or by arguing that the Bible itself was the primary obstacle to woman's emancipation. The newspaper coverage added an origins myth of its own, that Stanton had compiled the Revising Committee and written the *Woman's Bible* in response to woman's exclusion from the revising project of 1888.

In the Introduction to the volume itself, in a widely quoted passage, Stanton accused the institutional church and clergy of being the greatest opponents of woman suffrage. She wrote that through woman's participation in the church, she was the "chief support of the church and clergy; the very powers that make her emancipation impossible" (p. 8). The *San Francisco Call* echoed this sentiment, noting, "The women who have worked long and faithfully for the emancipation of their sex have long ago come to realize the powerful weapon their enemies hold in these three words. 'The Bible

says"" ("The Woman's Bible," 1895d, n.p.). The political motivation for the project, then, was to give women argumentative resources for responding to "the Bible says." This phrase was usually uttered by church leadership, such as the clergy, who twisted the Bible to support their own political motivations, which made them the great enemy of woman's emancipation.

Other times, in Stanton's discourse it was not just the church that was oppressive to women, but also the Bible itself. In what would become one of her catch phrases, also frequently quoted, and inscribed in Volume Two of the edition republished in 1974 by the Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, Stanton asserted "The Bible in its teachings degrades Woman from Genesis to Revelations" (p. 2). Under this line of thinking, the *Woman's Bible* came about because the Bible itself was fundamentally, and irreparably, oppressive to women. That Stanton alternately blamed both the church and the Bible for woman's subservience left this point open for audience members to exploit. For instance, those who agreed that the church was the enemy could cite that as Stanton's political motivation, and support her project. Conversely, those who wanted to protect the Bible could claim attacking the Bible as her rationale, and then urge denunciation of the *Woman's Bible*.

Newspaper coverage developed an additional originary narrative for the *Woman's Bible* that said that Stanton was prompted to write the *Woman's Bible* because men had excluded women from Biblical studies, including from the 1888 revision of the Bible. Women had not been allowed to study the Bible in recognized intellectual environments and woman had not been a topic of concern for men studying the Bible. The *New York World* quoted Stanton herself as saying, "Men have never touched questions concerning

women... If man will not correct errors in translation which reflect on woman then women must do it" ("New Woman's Bible revised by women," 1895, n.p.). Since the *New York World* quoted Stanton as making these allegations about men's exclusion of women from Biblical studies, this concern must not have been far from her mind. However, the newspapers played up this theme much more than Stanton did in her own writings.

As the explanation of the political motivations for the *Woman's Bible* was mixed and ambiguous, so was the discourse about how the *Woman's Bible* responded to those motivations. Stanton's public statements were contradictory about whether it was the church or the Bible that was the enemy of liberated womanhood, and the public discourse that followed ranged from suggesting that the book highlights the promise of equality for men and women contained within the Bible, to pointing out the hopelessly patriarchal nature of the Bible itself. Stanton frequently praised the equality in creation of men and women in the first chapter of Genesis, as well as the "broad principles of justice, mercy and equality enunciated by prophets and apostles" ("Is the Woman's Bible a Success?," 1896, n.p.). Not only did Genesis promise equality, then, but so did the prophets and apostles (a grouping that could include nearly any book of the Bible outside the Pentateuch). But at other points, Stanton's public discourse suggested that the *Woman's Bible* would only condemn the Bible. The Introduction to the *Woman's Bible*, in what would become the most frequently quoted and excerpted passage, Stanton argued that all of Christianity was premised on woman's subjection, and therefore this value system could not be redeemed, if woman was to be liberated. Stanton wrote,

The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital questions of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. Here is the bible position of woman briefly summed up. (p. 7)

Writings such as this suggest that the authors of the *Woman's Bible* found little hope for salvaging the Christian testaments and liberating woman simultaneously.

The newspaper coverage of the project echoes this confusion. Quoting two similarly structured statements from Stanton, two different newspapers offered conflicting descriptions of the *Woman's Bible's* perspective on the Bible's perspective on women. In the *New York World* Stanton was quoted as saying,

If they [women] could only be brought to see that instead of that they were represented in the Godhead at the creation, that woman was consulted and woman was created in the image of the motherhead, then they might regain their self-respect. This, it seemed to me, could only be accomplished by a revision of the Bible. ("New Woman's Bible revised by women," 1895)

Here, Stanton referred to her own interpretation of Genesis, suggesting that the first creation story promised women equality. Under this argument, if women could only see

that the Bible was actually liberating for them, they could use it to their advantage as a tool in their arguments for rights. However, the *Chicago Record*, quoted Stanton as saying,

If women could only see and realize the true position they hold in the bible I believe the main obstacle for suffrage would be removed...I consider the bible the most degrading book that has ever been written about women. There are many noble, inspiring women in the bible, it is true, but the tendency of the whole is to degrade her, as God never intended she should be. ("Bible for the women," 1895)

According to this statement, the Bible is wholly degrading for women, and Stanton thought that suffrage goals would only be attainable if women could come to see how damaging the Bible was for them. Newspaper coverage offered two possibilities for the *Woman's Bible's* opinion on the Bible: it was wholly degrading, or it had been wrongly interpreted and actually it was liberating for women. This ambiguity over the Revising Committee's stance on the Bible related to the ambiguity over political motivation for the project: if the Bible was wholly degrading, it was the problem, but if it was just wrongly interpreted, then the church and the clergy were the problem.

Whether the Bible was inherently oppressive or liberating for women would necessarily dictate what the *Woman's Bible's* response to the Bible would be. If it was inherently liberating, but it had just been clouded by mistranslation and misinterpretation at the hands of the church and clergy, then the *Woman's Bible* would simply need to remedy these translation and interpretation issues. However, if the Bible was fundamentally oppressive, then maybe the *Woman's Bible* argued for its abandonment by

progressive women and men. However, not only did Stanton's and the newspapers' statements not clear up this confusion, but they added to it. Stanton's descriptions of the form of the *Woman's Bible* ranged from calling it a series of commentaries to suggesting that it would or did expunge offensive passages from the Bible. When she introduced the *Woman's Bible* in her "Reminiscences" column, Stanton began by saying "I had long heard so many conflicting opinions about the Bible, some saying it taught woman's emancipation, and some her subjection, that I thought it would be a good idea to collect every reference to her in one small compact volume and see on which side the balance of influence really was" (1891, n.p.). The goal of the *Woman's Bible*, then, was to gather together commentary on all of the Scripture that pertained to women. And that commentary would represent the diversity of woman's views on the Bible. The *San Francisco Call* agreed, describing that "the women who conceived this idea...have only in view an interesting compilation of comments touching upon those portions of the Holy Writ that especially relate to women" ("The Woman's Bible," 1895, n.p.).

In other statements, though, Stanton called for an expurgation of the Bible, reflecting her less benevolent opinion of the Scripture. In her "Reminiscences" column of September 12, 1891, Stanton wrote, "In view of the fact that our children are taught to reverence the book as of divine origin, I think we have a right to ask that in the next reunion all such passages [those that are oppressive to women] be expurgated, and to that end learned, competent women must have an equal place on the revising committee" (p. 290). Newspapers covered this idea, noting alternately that Stanton was either proposing a new translation of the Bible, or a wholly new Bible. One article was titled, "Bible for woman... New woman sets out to make a new Bible which shall seek to right wrongs



done to her," and it described the division of work for the project, saying "Mrs. Chandler is to have the revision of the Book of Timothy... Matilda Gage will revise Matthew and Revelation, while Mrs. Stanton herself will edit, expurgate and interpolate Genesis" ("Bible for woman," 1895). The project, at least for Stanton, would involve expurgating the traditional Scriptures.

Other newspaper coverage shows the level of controversy and confusion surrounding these questions about the form of the *Woman's Bible*. The *San Francisco Call* explicitly contested that the Revising Committee had created a wholly new Bible.

From the numerous paragraphs afloat, one is led to suppose that there is to be a new edition of the Bible arranged to suit the fancy of the nineteenth-century woman. That is all a mistake: there never was the slightest intention on the part of the feminine revision committee of revising the entire Bible or even any part of it for the purpose of giving the public a new edition of the great volume. ("The Woman's Bible," 1895, n.p.)

The *New York World* complicated this disagreement by asserting that the present *Woman's Bible* project was not an expurgated edition of the Bible, but that such an edition was part of the revising committee's grand plan. They wrote, "it has been decided by the revisionists not to issue any literal translation of any portions of the Bible until the entire work is completed. The committee has, however, prepared an informal interpretation or paraphrasing of certain important passages, with comment" ("New Woman's Bible revised by women," 1895, n.p.). So, the *Woman's Bible* as it had been published was simply a set of commentaries on the scriptures, but an expurgated edition of the Bible would soon follow.

In addition to creating public uncertainty about the *Woman's Bible*, newspaper coverage also tied the project to the authors in a way that allowed audience members to judge the book based on their prior knowledge of its authors. The *New York World* encouraged audience members to understand the work through the character of its authors, stating, "it is interesting to know something of the women who have labored patiently and conscientiously as members of the Revision Committee" ("New Woman's Bible revised by women," 1895, n.p.). By 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was a well-known public figure, and newspaper coverage always explicitly linked the project to her name. For instance, the *San Francisco Call* of June 30, 1895 titled its article, "The Woman's Bible: Interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton: She has met with chilling indifference for the sex she is trying to help," and the *Chicago Record* of June 29, 1895 announced "Bible for the women: Elizabeth Stanton's work: Priestess of woman suffrage is at work upon the revision of the scriptures, which has already occupied her time for six years." From the outset of the articles, then, the project was rooted explicitly in this historic leader of the suffrage movement.

Beyond the titles, much of the newspaper coverage of the book introduced the project through Stanton herself, specifically her character, work habits, workspace, ideology, and more. An article in the *Chicago Record* opened with an extended narrative about Stanton, and then the article itself focused on an interview with Stanton, in which all the questions probed Stanton's personal thought-process and experience in developing the idea, working with the committee, publishing chapters serially, etc. The narrative at the article's lead read,

A third-story window of a cozy flat in the vicinity of Central park frames every morning the handsome, picturesque head of one of the most interesting women of modern times. As she sits at her modest desk it is difficult to trace in the clear blue eyes, the delicate pink and white of the almost wrinkleless face, the marks of eighty years of aggressive life.

However, if the family bible does not err Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton will by next fall be an octogenarian. ("Bible for the women," 1895, n.p.)

From the outset, this article framed the *Woman's Bible* in terms of Stanton's experience as a woman's rights leader, and as the originator of this specific project. The *Woman's Bible* was significant primarily because it was the last great endeavor of a well-respected, or at least well-known, activist. As this article proceeded in question-answer format, the first question printed was to Stanton, "'What led you to think of a woman's bible?' I asked this remarkable woman, as I watched her arrange the book of Genesis for the printer" ("Bible for the women," 1895, n.p.). The rest of the questions followed suit, defining the *Woman's Bible* in terms of its author's experience preparing it.

With the project rooted firmly in its author, some sources could use Stanton's previous public statements and actions regarding religion in order to make judgments about this project. For instance, the *Chicago Times-Herald* headed one section of its article, "Mrs Stanton an unbeliever," and then quoted Mrs. Helen M. Barber saying, "I believe Mrs. Stanton is an avowed unbeliever. For this reason alone Miss Willard and Lady Henry Somerset would not collaborate with her in the translation of the Bible, even were such a work feasible or necessary" ("Bible for woman," 1895, n.p.). Helen M.

Barber and the *Chicago Times-Herald* used Stanton's status as an "unbeliever" to assess the *Woman's Bible* as a blasphemous, atheistic "translation" of the Bible.

Some of Stanton's high-profile collaborators were also cited in conjunction with the project, most often Carrie Chapman Catt and Mrs. Robert Ingersoll. Newspapers would often refer to the *Woman's Bible* as having been authored by these three women (Stanton, Catt, and Ingersoll) and "other suffrage leaders," or some other vague descriptor. Ironically, neither Catt nor Ingersoll had actually done any writing, but both were listed as members of the "Revising Committee," a membership that Catt would later deny (Kern, 2001). Of all of the names on the revising committee and writing team, Stanton, Catt and Ingersoll were probably the most famous: Stanton and Catt for their leadership in the suffrage movement, and Ingersoll because of her husband, a well-known Free Thought intellectual. Listing Catt as an author allowed audience members to associate the project more closely with the suffrage movement (from which Stanton was growing increasingly distant). And linking Ingersoll to the project encouraged audience members to associate it with the very radical Free Thought movement, which had become quite popular in the Northeast during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

Frances Willard, a prominent American suffragist and long-term president of the powerful Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and Lady Henry Somerset, a prominent British suffragist, were also mentioned variously in conjunction with the project, sometimes assuming that they had participated (since their names were listed with the committee), and sometimes explicitly telling the story of their refusal to join the committee. The *Chicago Times-Herald* described that Willard and Somerset's reasons for declining to participate were related to the committee's composition. It explained that

Willard and Somerset "agree to be members of a committee to prepare an exegesis of these passages in the Bible that relate to women's position in the church and state, with the understanding that Miss Elizabeth W. Greenwood and a number of women evangelists should be associated with themselves and other leading women in the undertaking" ("Bible for woman," 1895, n.p.). Similarly, the *San Francisco Call* offered that the project might be worthwhile if the committee was diverse, but then noted that such a committee had not been put together. Its writer argued,

Such a book would have inestimable value as a reflection of the mental attitude of the woman of to-day toward the Bible, provided it were possible to have comments from intelligent women who still believe the Bible to be inspired from cover to cover, as well as from those who look upon it as merely a history of the Jewish people and the events incident to the coming of Christ and perhaps as fallible as other histories. But it appears this is not altogether feasible. ("The Woman's Bible," 1895, n.p.)

For lack of a diverse revising committee, the *Woman's Bible* was a failure from the outset, these writers concluded. Newspaper writers could judge for themselves, just as they could summarize Willard and Somerset's judgment, that without a diverse revising committee, the project was not a worthwhile effort.

Finally, some newspaper writers were acutely aware of Susan B. Anthony's non-presence on the revising committee. In its narrative about Stanton, the *Chicago Record* article pointed out, "Susan B. Anthony smiles from the wall upon her lifelong champion of the 'cause' as she daily [unclear] her pen in the effort to make women see themselves as she does in the book of books. But Susan B. Anthony's name is not found in Mrs.

Stanton's list of co-laborers" ("Bible for the women," 1895, n.p.). Because Stanton and Anthony had worked together on most every other cause in their public careers, Anthony's absence was notable.

By providing information about the book's authors, and by situating the book itself in its authorship, newspapers provided resources for judging the project based on its authors, and they even cast some of those judgments themselves. The information, including as authorial biography, that the newspapers provided about the *Woman's Bible* would prove instrumental in the interpretations of the book constructed by its nineteenth century audience members. Further, the press' ambiguous and contradictory statements about the purpose of the book, whether it was to change the church or the Bible, and the form of the book, whether it was commentary or a new Bible, allowed members of interpretive communities to employ whichever reading of the *Woman's Bible* suited their arguments. The 1890s were turbulent years for Christianity and for the suffrage movement, and the *Woman's Bible* affirmed and fed this turbulence.

#### Christianity and the Woman's Rights Movement in the 1890s

The ambiguity of these public statements provided a resource for making the *Woman's Bible* a contested cultural symbol, but it was the internal turmoil within both Christianity and feminism that provided motive for such a dispute. In the 1890s, Christianity and woman's rights were not alone in their volatility; indeed, their volatility was both a cause and effect of the greater uncertainty of American society in that time. Historians note this as a time of social change within America, citing especially the unrest associated with immigration, urbanization, and industrialization (DeBerg, 1990).

For Christianity in the United States, the late nineteenth century brought about the challenge of a confrontation with modernism, and Christianity was forced to respond to the challenges of scientific rationalism, and in some cases, evolve on account of those challenges (Walker, 1959; Peterson, 1993). In the 1890s, the woman's rights movement encountered a shift to the mainstream, which included interdependent changes in ideology, strategy, leadership, and membership. Even though the 1890s were a crucial turning point for the woman suffrage movement, this time period has received minimal attention from suffrage historians (Kern, 2001). Thus, the 1890s deserve scholarly attention both because of their historical importance to the suffrage movement, but also because of their traditional neglect by suffrage historians.

#### *Christianity Meets Modernism and Fundamentalism*

Evangelical protestantism began the nineteenth century as a social movement and was an institution by the end of that same century. In early America, when the Church of England was the primary institutional religious force, the evangelicals—Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians—were loosely organized bands of revivalists and circuit riders who developed working-class followings through camp meetings and revivals. By the end of the nineteenth century, though, those groups had built churches, started universities, and developed denominational organizational structures (Mathews, 1977).

The rise in intellectualism in American universities (some of which had been begun by churches) was taking its toll on religion as the nineteenth century neared its close. Academic studies in comparative religion, anthropology, ancient languages, and the physical sciences, among other subjects, were challenging traditional interpretations

of the Bible. Similarly, the practice known as higher criticism, which had come to dominate European Biblical studies in the mid-nineteenth century, reached the United States in the 1880s. The Society for Biblical Literature and Exegesis, the predecessor to the Society for Biblical Literature, which still dominates American Biblical studies, was founded in 1880 to study science and history as they pertained to the Bible (Gausted, 1989). In the 1880s, a committee of scholars published the English Revised Version of the Bible, the first major revision since the King James Bible. As soon as the English version had been produced, a committee set to work on an American version, which would follow in 1901 (Gausted, 1989). The significance of these two new editions of the Bible cannot be underestimated. Western Christendom had existed with one primary English version of the Bible for more than three hundred years, and suddenly a committee of scholars was offering a new Bible. Further, the 1890s also brought an onslaught of Biblical scholarship in the United States, in the form of concordances, dictionaries, encyclopedias, historical geographies, and critical commentaries (Gausted, 1989). Notably, in 1895, the *Methodist Magazine's* "Literary Notices" column announced *The People's Bible: Discourses Upon Holy Scripture*. Protestants, especially, were embracing their right to personal engagement with the scripture, and drawing upon intellectual advances to do so. Finally, the 1890s were the height of social gospel theology in the nineteenth century, an ideology that would continue to grow into the twentieth century (Peterson, 1993). Christians took seriously the call they found in the gospel to care for the sick and needy. This social gospel theology manifested itself in the progressive reform movements that emerged in the late nineteenth century.



The clash between Christianity and modernism led to the birth of fundamentalism in this country. Beginning in the 1880s, Protestant leaders organized to defend Christianity against modernism (Swift, 1998). By the 1890s, the three religious movements that DeBerg (1990) argues would ultimately lead to fundamentalism—dispensational premillennialism, the Keswick Holiness Movement and the Moody Bible Institute—were gaining popularity. In the same year that Stanton published the first volume of the *Woman's Bible*, the basic tenets of fundamentalism, the five fundamentals, were established at the Niagra conference—Biblical inerrancy, virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and the promised second coming (Walker, 1959; Peterson, 1993). In issuing these basic principles, early fundamentalists declared their own orthodoxy and challenged mainstream Christians to be so orthodox. Thus, in the 1890s, the institutionalized Protestant church was being challenged by these new movements of Christians, who embodied the same evangelical fervor that had characterized their own denominations a century earlier (Mathews, 1977). These fundamentalists, who existed both within and outside the bounds of institutional Protestantism, drew distinctions between "sincere Christians" and "infidels," and would use the latter to charge anyone who didn't adhere to their developing dogma.

These changes in American Christendom were also accompanied by a change in woman's status and role within the church. Prompted by the social gospel theology, women in all of the major denominations developed mission societies. In 1869, the first Christian women's society was formed by the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. That one was followed by nine more in the Protestant and evangelical denominations in the next 25 years (Scott, 1991). While some of these groups formed as sub-agencies of

boards run by men, many would become independently functioning auxiliaries of their denominations (Scott, 1991). These agencies not only allowed women to do fundraising and social service work in their own areas, the home and foreign mission societies also created a new career, or at least job, for single women: missionary (Swift, 1998). In addition to their mission work, some women began to seek ordination in their churches, and in response to their requests, some denominations actually ordained them. (One such example is the widely told story of Amelia Frost of Littleton, Mass. who was ordained a member of the Congregationalist clergy in 1894 ["Women in the churches," 1894a, p. 64].) Many Protestant and evangelical denominations began ordaining women "deaconesses," creating separate orders of ordination for preaching and for service (the first designed for men and the second designed for women). Finally, as early as 1880, women had also been lobbying to be allowed as members of the general conferences and conventions of their denominations. In that year, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) had sent some of its leaders to the major national conventions of the denominations. A stir arose when the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North refused to seat delegates Frances Willard and Jennie Duty (Bordin, 1986). Stanton would later use this controversy to respond to accusations that Satan was at work behind the *Woman's Bible*, by saying that he could not have been, since he was too busy attending General Conferences and Conventions prohibiting women's participation.

*Suffrage Movement Evolves in Ideology, Leadership, and Strategy*

Like Christianity, the woman's rights movement also underwent major shifts in the 1890s. By the time of the publication of the *Woman's Bible*, some contentious elements of movement organizing hung in the balance—specifically, ideology, leadership

and strategy. The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) and National Woman Suffrage Association had just merged in 1890, and coming into that merger, the AWSA had a larger, more conservative membership than the NWSA (Flexner, 1996). The AWSA's largely-Christian membership was due especially to an influx of members who had been active in the WCTU, as well as other progressive reform movements. Many women (and men) involved in these other reform movements had come into the woman suffrage movement, believing that if woman suffrage could be won, women would pass temperance, child labor laws, sanitation laws, prison reform, etc. According to Aileen Kraditor, "by the last decade of the nineteenth century, woman suffrage had become respectable, and women who held orthodox opinions on every other issue could now join a suffrage organization without fear of ostracism" (1965, p. 84). Woman suffrage was a mainstream social movement. The 1896 convention that censured the *Woman's Bible* contained delegates from more states than ever before, especially southern states, and elected the first southerner, Laura Clay of Kentucky, to its executive council (Avery, 1896). In the mid-1890s, the conservative strain from the AWSA and the liberal strain from the NWSA were still working together in their newly formed NAWSA. However, their work together was a careful balancing act, and in retrospect we know that ultimately, the scale would tip, and the more conservative element would win out. Aileen Kraditor sums up the major change when she writes, "In the 1890s suffragism was obviously changing from a visionary movement, whose sole task was to educate the public, to a practical cause with a real chance for success" (1965, p. 86).

Historians usually mark the beginning of the organized movement with the Seneca Falls Convention that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott planned and

hosted in 1848 (Flexner, 1996; Campbell, 1989; Kern 2001; Kraditor, 1965). Thus, by the mid-1890s, 45 years had passed, and the movement's original leadership was retiring (and many had already retired). Elizabeth Cady Stanton ended her term as honorary president of the NAWSA, and Susan B. Anthony, who had come into the movement by way of temperance organizing in the early 1850s, was serving her final stint as NAWSA president (1892-1900) (Flexner, 1986). Aware of her own impending retirement, Anthony had begun to recruit and train new leaders for the movement. Anthony, who had been responsible for engineering the 1890 merger of the NWSA and AWSA, was known for her reconciling spirit, and had connections with members of both branches of the movement (Harper, 1898). She had actually encouraged some conservative women—ideological descendants of the AWSA—to succeed her, including Carrie Chapman Catt, Rachel Foster Avery, and Anna Howard Shaw.

The shifts in leadership and membership for the NAWSA were accompanied by shifts in ideology. In the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and their colleagues had laid out a broad platform for woman's rights based on the natural rights ideology of liberal enlightenment philosophy (Campbell, 1989). Woman suffrage had just been one of many resolutions in that Declaration (and a controversial resolution at that). However, the influx of members in the suffrage movement who advocated woman suffrage so that they could pass other reforms (for reasons of expediency), cared little about the broader demands for woman's rights (Campbell, 1989; Flexner, 1986).

Finally, in the 1890s, the suffrage movement was changing its strategy. Stanton and Anthony's branch of the suffrage movement had always concerned itself primarily

with passing a federal suffrage amendment, especially after the defeat in Kansas in 1867, and to that end, the NWSA held its annual convention in Washington, D.C., where delegates could lobby legislators and testify in committee hearings (Flexner, 1986). The AWSA, conversely, had focused more of its energy on passing woman suffrage on a state-by-state basis, and they had moved their national convention around the country each year, so as to generate greater participation from women and men across the country. The merger of the two organizations had led to some tension between these competing strategies. Then, the early 1890s generated hope for the state-by-state method, as Colorado, Idaho and Utah all passed woman suffrage. And the influx of Southern members into the movement in the 1890s also advocated the state-by-state method, as they still embraced their Civil War states' rights ideology, and as they feared a federal suffrage amendment might endanger their states' rights to the disenfranchisement of African-Americans (which had been universally achieved by the mid-1890s in constitutional conventions across the South) (Flexner, 1986). Focusing on the state-by-state strategy, the NAWSA sent 15 organizers into the field each year (Avery, 1896), who travelled specific regions of the country building suffrage organizations and garnering support for the cause.

Amidst all the changes in both Christianity and feminism, the historical record is mixed over whether the clergy and the institutional churches were the greatest foes of the woman's rights movement (as Stanton and her ideological comrades suggested) or its greatest allies (as Willard and others suggested). At the 1896 convention, Miss Yates, of Maine, described that during her organizing in the South "we met with a great deal of opposition among clergymen. The ministers are more opposed in the South than

elsewhere, although there are exceptions" ("The Washington Convention," 1896, p. 57). Similarly, in her description of their cross-country organizing trip, Anna Howard Shaw stated, "you can no longer get a lawyer or a business man in San Francisco to take the negative in a debate on woman suffrage; but a minister is going to do it in the spring—a Jewish rabbi" ("National American Convention," 1896, p. 34). At the same time, though, *The Woman's Journal* (the more conservative of the two national suffrage papers) ran a semi-regular column called "Women in the churches," which charted woman's progress within the church. And a July 7, 1894 article in *The Woman's Journal* talked about the Rev. C.C. Miller's paper that showed Biblically-ordained equality for men and women, and then went on to cite exemplar women in the church ("Women in the churches," 1894b). Considering the amount of change underway in both movements, it is not shocking that the clergy were conflicted over the issues of woman's rights and woman suffrage.

### The *Woman's Bible* and its Interpretive Communities in the 1890s

#### "Perilous times are upon us": Christian Fundamentalists and the *Woman's Bible*

Even though the dispute within suffrage circles suggested that the *Woman's Bible* had created a stir among the clergy and churches (see below), the mainstream religious press largely failed to recognize or comment upon the *Woman's Bible*. In the years 1894, 1895, and 1896, the *Woman's Bible* received no attention in the papers of the mainstream protestant denominations or the popular interdenominational papers—the *Methodist Review*, *Methodist Monthly*, *National Baptist Magazine*, *Christian Advocate*, *The*

*Century, Christian Union, Independent, Outlook, Christian Advocate, or Christian Herald.*

However, the burgeoning fundamentalist press did take note. Fundamentalism grew out of dissatisfaction with the social order, and its leaders seized upon controversial cultural symbols like the *Woman's Bible*, which they treated as indicative of the impending peril for society. As mainstream Christianity was one of fundamentalism's primary target, and as mainstream Christianity was associated with suffrage (especially through progressive reform connections like the WCTU), and as the *Woman's Bible* was connected with the suffrage movement, fundamentalists could use the *Woman's Bible* as an argumentative resource in their commentary about mainstream Christianity, and society more largely. Two publications—*Our Hope and Truth, or Testimony for Christ*—each published more than one article on the subject. Neither publication paid much attention to what the *Woman's Bible* itself was, but rather on what it signified for the present social order. These periodicals fit the controversy over the *Woman's Bible* into the categories that they had clearly already developed for understanding the social order in American society. Through their polarized understanding of the world—the faithful and the unfaithful—these Christians came to understand the *Woman's Bible* as a manifestation of the latter pole. The fundamentalists' primary structure of relevancy was "faithfulness," and the *Woman's Bible* was symptomatic of the "unfaithfulness" that they argued was developing within American Christendom.

Because of the ambiguous public discourse about the *Woman's Bible*, fundamentalists were able to make arguments that assumed and implied that the *Woman's Bible* was anti-Bible in its commentary, or maybe even a new Bible in form. They did

not engage these disputes over what the *Woman's Bible* actually said, or how it said it, but rather relied on the account that supported their argument about the threats to the Christian social order. For instance, in a brief article about the *Woman's Bible*, the fundamentalist periodical *Truth: or, Testimony for Christ* criticized the authors of the *Woman's Bible*, including Mrs. Robert Ingersoll, "who will probably consult her husband about the best way of improving the Bible" ("New woman's new Bible, 1895, p. 249). Without explicitly entering the dispute over the content of the *Woman's Bible*, *Truth* assumed and asserted that Stanton and the Revising Committee were publishing some sort of new Bible that would be an improvement upon the old. Moreover, they relied on authorial information to link the *Woman's Bible* to the radical Free Thought movement, through one of the Revising Committee members, who was married to a leading Free Thought intellectual. Whether or not the *Woman's Bible* was actually a new version of the Bible, the fundamentalist press benefited from the public perception that it might be, in that it allowed them to argue that the *Woman's Bible* was a threat to Christianity and the social order.

Since the fundamentalist movement was developing in the 1890s out of disgruntled protestants who felt the threat of higher criticism upon their faith, they had simplified their social world into "sincere Christians" and "infidels." The "infidels" were the modernists and others who threatened pure Christianity, and the "sincere Christians" were those who held true to what fundamentalists perceived as orthodox Christianity even in the face of scientific rationalism, higher criticism, and other intellectual movements. (Fundamentalists' version of orthodox Christianity is most clearly defined in the five fundamentals listed above.) Following, the lead of the popular press,



fundamentalist papers tied the *Woman's Bible* closely to its authors, and then judged the book based on its authors, and its authors based on the book. According to their basic conceptual scheme, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the revising committee naturally fell into the category of "infidels"; *Truth* noted that Stanton was "long ago reported as a pronounced unbeliever" ("New woman's new Bible," p. 249). Penned by such "infidels," the *Woman's Bible* was automatically defined as dangerous. The fundamentalist press was especially threatened by the suggestion that Frances Willard might be associated with the project. After all, they had judged the book's authors to be infidels, and the book dangerous, so to find out that Frances Willard was associated with these infidels, would have been to disgrace one of their heroines. *Truth* proclaimed Willard "too sincere a Christian, and too refined a lady, to lend herself to work which at best can only bring dishonor on the Holy Scriptures" ("Miss Willard and the Woman's Bible," 1895, p. 25). Finally, at its 1897 convention, the WCTU settled this issue when it passed a resolution acknowledging that the name of their "national President has been wrongfully associated with the production of the Woman's Bible" and that they asserted "with her, positive disapproval of all attempts to substitute any perverted or distorted version of the Scriptures for the Holy Bible." *Truth* (1897) covered this convention in an article called "Good for Miss Willard and the women" and applauded them for having "nothing to do with that miserable abortion called the 'Woman's Bible,' that is only the impudent utterance of infidelity." The mainstream press' strategy of linking the book closely to its authors helped the fundamentalist press to pass judgment on the book: after all, Stanton was so widely known as a radical unbeliever that her name immediately suggested the dangerous nature of the project. This strategy of judging the book and its authors

together almost became problematic for the fundamentalists when they discovered the potential affiliation between Willard and the Revising Committee, but fortunately for their sake they were able to rescue Willard from this disgrace, and keep the *Woman's Bible* situated neatly in their conceptual scheme of "sincere" and "infidel."

Not only did the major players in the *Woman's Bible* controversy re-affirm fundamentalists' categories of sincere Christians and infidels, but the controversy itself affirmed their fears about the current state of the social order. Some premillennialist fundamentalists argued that the *Woman's Bible* signified the coming of the endtimes. In an article called "A striking sign of the times," (1895) *Our Hope* argued "We leave our readers to judge for themselves, if this is the way in which the wives and mothers of this land are being trained to look at and speak of God's Word, how long it will be before we are ready for the utter collapse and corruption of organized society?... Truly, perilous times are upon us! Let us watch and be sober" (p. 33). *Our Hope* readers were called upon to combat the *Woman's Bible*, and combat the coming of this perilous social order. The *Woman's Bible* functioned as an argumentative resource for fundamentalists to reify the social divisions and threats to the social order that they had been proclaiming. They operated through their already-established terministic screens, to fit the *Woman's Bible* into the imminent doom of the social order. This particular discursive system for coming to terms with, and finding a use for, the *Woman's Bible* was unique to the community of religious fundamentalists. Using these terms, they made the case that the *Woman's Bible* accorded with the current social order, in that it was just another manifestation of the growing threat to orthodox Christianity. At the same time that this terminology reflected their reality, fundamentalists were also deflecting reality through their discursive choices.

They did not deal with the *Woman's Bible* in terms of what it meant for the suffrage movement, or for Biblical scholarship, or anything else. They deflected those parts of the book's existence, as they were outside of their terministic screens. Christian fundamentalists understood the relevance of the *Woman's Bible* through the lens of modernism and its threat to Christianity. The *Woman's Bible* led them to argue that the woman's rights movement was a threat to their desired Christian social order.

Ultimately, it was partially because of the tensions within mainstream Christianity that the *Woman's Bible* could become so controversial for suffrage. Since Christianity was still a major force for a social movement to reckon with, and since a majority of the suffrage movement's members defined themselves as Christian, the movement took its cues from Christianity, or at least kept the Christian temperament within its radar screen. The threat that mainstream Christianity perceived on its orthodoxy—from both the fundamentalists who claimed to be the truly sincere Christians and modernism's menacing infidelity—made it a volatile force that suffragists then felt pressure to placate. *"Who are these people who are troubled about this?": Suffragists and the Woman's Bible*

As much as the general public and the religious community may have paid attention to the publication of the *Woman's Bible*, it was finally the woman suffrage movement that felt compelled to do something about it. Suffragists who opposed the *Woman's Bible* argued that its association with the suffrage movement would injure the movement's relationship with the church and the clergy, and cause irreparable damage to the movement. As was described above, institutional Christianity perceived itself as under siege in the 1890s, and was guarding itself against infidelity. As church members, mainstream suffragists recognized these threats to Christianity, and perceived danger for

the suffrage movement if it participated in threatening the institutional church. The church had been particularly sensitive to the advances of modernism, and suffragists knew that their movement could fall victim to the church's response to modernism, if the movement was too closely associated with such radicalism as the *Woman's Bible*. It was especially because of the ongoing controversies within both the institutional church and the suffrage movement that the *Woman's Bible* could become the lightning rod for suffrage that it did. The relationship between the church and the suffrage movement formed a primary structure of relevancy for the conservative suffragists, and they judged the *Woman's Bible* based on the threat they perceived it might have on this relationship.

Leading suffragists knew that their movement had been implicitly tied to the *Woman's Bible*. The book and the movement had been linked through its authors, who were leaders of the mainstream movement. In relying heavily on the roles and reputations of the book's authors in its descriptions of the project, the popular press had opened up the possibility of assessing and evaluating the book based on its authors, which necessarily linked the work to the suffrage movement. Even though Stanton had never claimed to produce the book on behalf of the movement, she had served as the NAWSA's honorary president while she worked on it, she had recruited high profile suffrage leaders for the revising committee, she had run chapters of the book serially in Clara Colby's suffrage paper, *The Woman's Tribune*, before it was published in book form, and her political motivations for the book were clearly tied to the political motivations of the woman's rights movement. In the context of its first publication, then, the *Woman's Bible* grew out of the suffrage movement and its target audience was suffragists or potential suffragists. The *Washington Post* summarized the concern that this

affiliation became for suffragists when it wrote, "some of the members of the association are opposed to having the association made sponsor of the woman's Bible simply because Mrs. Stanton is honorary President of the organization" ("Women are for Reed," 1896, n.p.).

The *Woman's Bible* made its debut in the suffrage community: it was first introduced in Stanton's "Reminiscences" column in the September 5, 1891 edition of *The Woman's Tribune*. Of the two woman suffrage papers published in the 1890s, *The Woman's Tribune* was the more radical. Its historical and ideological ties were to Stanton and Anthony's previously-existing suffrage organization, the National Woman Suffrage Association. The other paper, *The Woman's Journal*, had been connected with the rival American Woman Suffrage Association, and had been under the editorship of Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell (Huxman, 1991). From the start, then, not only did Stanton's name on the project link it to the radical side of the movement, but its original venue for publication also helped it achieve its classification as radical.

Throughout the 1890s, *The Woman's Tribune*, through Stanton's columns, Colby's articles, and the letters it published, provided a supportive narrative for the *Woman's Bible*. The *Tribune* consistently acknowledged the political nature of the *Woman's Bible*, such as Colby's February 23, 1895 justification for the project, where she wrote, "before the great mass of people in any land can change their ideas on any subject, they must be convinced it is not inconsistent with the tenets of their faith" (n.p.). In that same issue, Stanton wrote that "Men have never made the most of the varied spheres filled by women, as instanced in the Scriptures" (n.p.) These statements suggest a political motivation for the project: to show women that suffrage, and the woman's rights

movement more largely, is not inconsistent with their faith, only with what men have done to their faith. The *Tribune* consistently talked about the *Woman's Bible* as a series of commentaries on the Scripture. Of course, *Tribune* readers also got a sense of the book's content from the serial publication of its first few chapters in the *Tribune*. The February 23, 1895 issue of the *Tribune* described the book as "Commentaries on such portions of the Bible as refer to women" (Colby, n.p.). On March 7, 1896, the *Tribune* published in full Rev. Alexander Kent's laudatory sermon on the *Woman's Bible*, in which he called it "a collection of comments on a few detached passages of the Bible that refer in some way to woman. It is not, therefore, even a commentary on the Bible" (n.p.).

While *The Woman's Tribune* was running Stanton's column and chapters from the *Woman's Bible* serially in the 1890s, the *Woman's Journal* gave the book no print attention. However, this suffrage periodical was also paying close attention to issues of religion and the church. The *Woman's Journal* ran a semi-regular column called "Women in the churches," where it charted the progress of women in the churches, in terms of ordination, admittance to denominational conventions, and other major policy issues. It also acknowledged perceived growing support for the suffrage movement among clergy in the 1890s. Even without paying any attention to the *Woman's Bible*, the *Woman's Journal* had made an implicit argument against its status within the movement. Since one of the book's perceived premises was that the clergy were the greatest enemy of woman's rights, the *Woman's Journal*, by showing woman's improving and increasing status within the church, provided counter-evidence to this premise, which made Stanton's project seem uncalled for, and unnecessarily radical. Demonstrating that the clergy were actually supportive of woman suffrage also made the *Woman's Bible* that

much more threatening to the cause. If the clergy and the church were the movement's enemies, as Stanton suggested, the *Woman's Bible* only risked alienating those who already opposed the movement. If, however, as the *Woman's Journal* suggested, the church and clergy were allies of the movement, wide-spread distribution of the *Woman's Bible* threatened to alienate some of the movement's confirmed supporters. Without even mentioning Stanton's project, the *Woman's Journal* contributed to the eventual debate over the book, by framing at least one of the issues around it.

With the *Woman's Journal* ignoring it and the *Woman's Tribune* talking about it, the irony is that the *Woman's Bible* was never used in the woman suffrage press, or possibly within the woman suffrage movement, to make arguments for the political rights of women. The book became an invitational resource for groups outside of the movement—initially, the religious fundamentalists, and, as will be argued in Chapter Three, later for the anti-suffragists. It was publicized and praised within the pages of *The Woman's Tribune*, and ignored by *The Woman's Journal*, but no one from either camp seemed to find invitational use for it, even though such argumentative use was basic to Stanton's stated purpose for the project.

Leading into the 1896 NAWSA convention, the only explicit attention the *Woman's Bible* had received in the woman suffrage press came from Clara Colby's *Tribune*. Suffragists at the convention claimed wide knowledge of the book, however, even though few admitted to having read it. In fact, it was at that convention, during a dispute over the merits of the *Woman's Bible*, that Lillie Devereux Blake asked how many of the 100+ delegates had actually read the book, and the *Washington Evening Star*

reported that only eight hands went up ("Woman Suffrage," 1896). Nevertheless, the delegates to that convention were passionate about the *Woman's Bible*.

The *Washington Post* suggested that stirring about the *Woman's Bible* began at least the Saturday prior to the convention. On that day, the executive committee of the NAWSA—a group consisting of Susan B. Anthony, Anna Howard Shaw, Rachel Foster Avery, Alice Stone Blackwell, Harriet Taylor Upton, H. August Howard, Annie L. Diggs and Carrie Chapman Catt—concluded that the issue of the *Woman's Bible* need not concern the NAWSA. The *Post* reported that they "decided that the Bible question was a personal one, and therefore had no place in the proceedings of the association. It was thought this action would dispose of the matter for this session at least, and the defenders of the new Bible and the promoters of harmony were very well pleased with the action of the committee" ("Women are for Reed," 1896). According to the *Post*, this action by the executive committee should have staved off any official convention discussion of the *Woman's Bible*, or at least should have kept executive committee members themselves from introducing any such discussion.

Executive committee members betrayed this decision, however, when Rachel Foster Avery's corresponding secretary's report was read to the convention (by Isabel Howland, in Avery's absence). Ida Husted Harper (1898), in her biography of Anthony, claimed that the corresponding secretary's report was prepared in secret, and when it was read, it shocked other members of the executive committee, including Anthony.

Concerning the *Woman's Bible*, the report read,

During the latter part of this year, the work of our Association has been in several directions much hindered by the general misconception of the



relation of the organization to the so-called "Woman's Bible." As an association we have been held responsible for the action of an individual (an action which many of our members, far from sympathizing with, feel to be unwise) in issuing a volume with a pretentious title, covering a jumble of comment (not translation, as the title would indicate) without either scholarship or literary value, set forth in a spirit which is neither that of reverence or inquiry ("The Washington Convention," 1896, p. 34).

The proceedings record that after this report was read, Clara Colby moved to adopt the report without the paragraph about the *Woman's Bible*. Mrs. Upton followed with an amendment to postpone this decision until Rachel Foster Avery could be present. (The proceedings report that Avery "was necessarily absent from the convention, but would return later" [p. 20].) And according to the Proceedings, "after a brief discussion, the motion to lay on the table was carried" (p. 20). Sources outside the official proceedings offer stronger descriptions of the discussion that took place. Colby's motion to expunge the reference to the *Woman's Bible* from the report was accompanied by a speech "eulogizing Mrs. Stanton as one of the grand, heroic characters of the century" and upholding the right of free speech (Kern, 2001). Immediately, other delegates countered Colby's arguments and berated the *Woman's Bible*. When the convention returned to the issue of the corresponding secretary's report on Tuesday afternoon, the proceedings record that "it was voted that the Corresponding Secretary's report be taken from the table and adopted, with the exception of the part relating to the Woman's Bible, and that this be expunged" (p. 97) Of course, by the time they approved the corresponding secretary's report without the *Woman's Bible* passage, convention delegates had already passed the

"Bible resolution," which officially distanced the NAWSA from Stanton's work. Its expulsion from Avery's report, then, was no victory for Stanton or her supporters.

The *Woman's Bible* bashing did not stop with the corresponding secretary's report. Some of the conservative members of the executive committee ensured that one of the fifteen resolutions issued by the Resolution Committee also concerned the *Woman's Bible*. That resolution read, "That this Association is non-sectarian, being composed of persons of all shades of religious opinion, and that it has no official connection with the so-called 'Woman's Bible,' or any theological publication" (Avery, 1896, p. 91). According to the *Woman's Tribune*, "Resolution 8, referring to the Woman's Bible, was the subject of sharp discussion" ("National American Convention," 1896, p. 10). Immediately after it was introduced, Colby tried to table it. When that motion failed, it was clear that the convention was going to have to consider this resolution. Stetson moved to amend by striking everything after "religious opinion." According to the descriptions of the debate as contained in the *Tribune* and the official proceedings, most of the dispute over the *Woman's Bible*, including Susan B. Anthony's defense of the project, took place while the convention considered this and another amendment. Ultimately, the convention voted both amendments down, and then proceeded immediately to approve the resolution.

Even though most reports suggest that the dispute over Resolution 8, which became known as the "Bible resolution," was long and heated, no transcript for the dispute exists, and the reporting of the dispute is bare. That Tuesday afternoon's events can be pieced together between the reports in *The Woman's Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, the *Mail and Express*, and the official convention proceedings. *The Woman's*

*Journal* made no mention of the dispute over the resolution, or of the otherwise frequently-quoted speech made by Susan B. Anthony. Analysis of the debate around the resolution suggests that audience members framed their arguments according to a limited number of terministic screens. Pro-*Woman's Bible*, anti-resolution advocates argued about the dispute through an audience-centered frame. The relevance, for them, lay in the relationships between the convention, the resolution, the book, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The advocates of the resolution, though, largely framed the debate in pragmatic terms: they argued for doing what would be best for advancing the cause of woman suffrage immediately. Opponents of the resolution countered with a pragmatic frame of their own. They understood the resolution through the longer-term damage it could do to the movement, especially in terms of setting a precedent for censoring things that did not accord with the association's platform.

By the time of the NAWSA convention dispute about the *Woman's Bible*, the book had become so well known in the public that the delegates did not have to spend any floor time discussing the book itself. Of course, to say that it was well known is not to say that all of the delegates had similar impressions of the book's argumentative content, or its form. Delegates to the convention, after all, had been informed about the book by the ambiguous discourse summarized above. After she asked the delegates to the 1896 convention how many had read the book, and only eight answered in the affirmative, Lillie Devereux Blake chastised her fellow suffragists, as the *Evening Post* summarizes, "'we are a nice body to pass criticism on a matter of this sort, now, aren't we?' said Mrs. Blake in a caustic manner" ("Woman suffrage," 1896). It is no wonder that the book became so divisive, when the delegates arguing over it did not even agree on the

nature of the thing. In fact, the *Mail and Express* noted that "Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake, of New York, stated that all the trouble arose from a misnomer. It was not a woman's Bible, but a woman's commentary" ("At work on congress," 1896, n.p.). Of course, no matter how she argued, her opponents still believed that the book was indeed a new Bible. Blake and her allies could support the *Woman's Bible* because they believed it was a set of commentaries, while her adversaries opposed it because they believed it was a new Bible. This conflict grew directly out of the ambiguity in the public discourse about the book.

The NAWSA dispute also followed the newspapers' lead in judging the *Woman's Bible* project based on the stature of its authors. The *Washington Post* recorded that "the eighth resolution provoked considerable debate and a little personal abuse" ("Women are for Reed," 1896, n.p.). Considering the transition that the leadership of the NAWSA was undergoing in the mid-1890s, and considering that the book's authors were some of the high-profile leaders of the movement, this question of authorship became especially important for the association.

Many of the book's advocates appealed to the stature of its editor in praising the book's merits. Stanton had been, after all, the most visible leader of the woman's rights movement in its nearly fifty year history. Of the corresponding secretary's report, the *Evening Star* recorded that it "occasioned a good deal of feeling among the delegates, some of whom were actuated by affection and respect for Mrs. Stanton" ("It is now over," 1896, n.p.). Phebe Hanaford had argued along these lines previous to the convention. She wrote, "From what I know of Elizabeth Cady Stanton as a logician and profound thinker, I feel confident that every effort she puts forth will be for the elevation of

womankind, for their permanent benefit and freedom from old-time shackles in religion, as well as civil life" ("Is the Woman's Bible a success?," 1896, n.p.). Clara Colby brought this argument into the convention itself when she "made a speech in which, after eulogizing Mrs. Stanton as one of the grand, heroic characters of the century" ("At work on congress," 1896, n.p.), she went on to argue that "it would not be a disapproval of the Bible but a personal attack on Mrs. Stanton" ("Women are for Reed," 1896, n.p.). These delegates used Stanton's character to suggest that anything produced by her could not be worthy of censuring, and also to argue that passing the resolution would bring denunciation to a woman that did not deserve such criticism from the movement that she helped found. Other delegates, such as Frances A. Williamson, explicitly challenged this strategy of judging the book based on its author. Her logic argued that "it's author was a great woman, but this did not make the book greater" ("At work on congress, 1896, n.p.).

This strategy of praising the book's author was not universal among suffragists who opposed the resolution. Susan B. Anthony, who spoke at length on the resolution, barely mentioned Stanton at all throughout her speech. Even when she did mention Stanton in the second half of her speech, Anthony spoke explicitly about the historic Stanton. She talked about when Stanton had first introduced the idea of woman suffrage and when she had proposed drunkenness as a cause for divorce. Both of those ideas had since become largely favorable in the eyes of NAWSA delegates, so Anthony could safely associate Stanton and by extension the *Woman's Bible* with those ideas. However, Stanton's more recent activism (on behalf of educated suffrage, dress reform, coin reform, and other social platforms) was more controversial. Stanton's current activism was not

universally favored, so if Anthony was going to use Stanton's good name to bring favor to the *Woman's Bible*, she would have to root her comments in the historical Stanton.

Suffragists also took the book's authorship into account when they argued against the resolution on the grounds that the NAWSA convention had no business passing resolutions about an individual's, or a small group's, work. Linking the *Woman's Bible* explicitly to its authors, then, reminded delegates that it was only the work of a small group of women, and not of the organization as a whole. The *Woman's Tribune* recorded the argument of Charlotte Perkins Stetson, who "thought the organization should not take cognizance of the action of individual members" ("National American Convention," 1896, p. 10).

For the advocates of the resolution, this author-centered frame was less salient than one that allowed them to frame the dispute in terms of the pragmatic effects of the *Woman's Bible* on the suffrage movement. As was suggested by the corresponding secretary's report, conservative members of the NAWSA claimed that the *Woman's Bible* was an important matter for the convention to discuss because it had begun to impinge on the work that they were doing, specifically field organizing. Laura M. Johns described that those doing field work were "finding doors slammed in their faces," and "people saying that they would not have anything to do with your organization as long as it had anything to do with the *Woman's Bible*" ("National American Convention," 1896, p. 10). Carrie Chapman Catt, who had been very involved in field organizing, challenged anyone who had not been so involved, saying, "No lecturer who has not been in the field since December 1 has any right to say that it has not injured us. I have had hundreds of letters expressing this" ("National American Convention," 1896, p. 10). Some opponents of

the resolution challenged Catt's account of field organizing. The *Washington Post* reported that Clara Colby argued "that the organizers met no opposition on the ground of the Bible" ("Women are for Reed," 1896). And according to *The Woman's Tribune*, Miss Keyser of New York said she had been engaged in organizing, and she had never had such an objection offered" ("National American Convention," 1896, p. 10).

At points, these two frames—author-centered and pragmatism—were at odds with each other. Some delegates recognized the needs to respect Stanton's individual rights, but still feared the harm that the *Woman's Bible* might do to the movement. The *Woman's Tribune* described one argument that identified this tension. According to their accounting of the debate, "Mrs. Johns said that many of us were in entire sympathy with Mrs. Stanton. But if those who oppose our disavowing anything were doing fieldwork and finding doors slammed in their faces; people saying that they would not have anything to do with your organization as long as it had anything to do with the Woman's Bible, they would change their opinion" ("National American Convention," 1896, p. 10). In Johns's case, she was even sympathetic to Stanton's argument, but she knew that many of her colleagues were not, and that it could do damage to the movement. Here, when these two frames collided, Mrs. Johns advocated prioritizing the good of the movement over the ideology of a particular member, or even the right to that ideology.

In her speech to the convention, Susan B. Anthony did not confront the pragmatic questions directly. Anthony had built her suffrage career as an organizer who travelled the country extensively and had been successful in garnering wide-spread support for the cause. Had she wanted to, then, Anthony could have spoken authoritatively on these issues surrounding field organizing. However, she did not directly address this perceived

threat made by the *Woman's Bible*. In fact, Anthony barely addressed the book itself at all. Instead, Anthony rooted the present controversy in the history of the movement. According to Anthony's narrative, one of the founding principles of the woman's rights movement was of a platform broad enough for everyone's individual opinions. Even though the movement had been "beset at every step with the cry that somebody was injuring the cause," it had never chosen to censor or censure anyone's individual opinion (Anthony, 1896, p. 91). According to Anthony, the movement's platform had been broad enough to include Ernestine L. Rose, even though some objected, claiming that she "did not believe in the plenary inspiration of the Bible" (Anthony, 1896, p. 92). The movement had been broad enough to include free lovers, even when "a person, once, in the early days...wanted us to pass a resolution that we were not free lovers" (Anthony, 1896, p. 92). When Stanton had been so radical in 1848 to suggest that women seek the franchise, or in 1860 when she had favored making drunkenness a cause for divorce, the movement's platform had been broad enough to include her radicalism. According to this very brief historical narrative, and the four examples cited within, the woman's rights movement had consistently maintained a broad platform, and had refused to censor the viewpoints of its members, even when to do so might have been in its immediate interest. The *Washington Post* put Anthony's call for a broad platform in conversation with the religious discourse about the *Woman's Bible*, noting that she pleaded for the NAWSA to open its platforms to "all sympathizers in the movement, whether infidels or Christians, orthodox or free thinkers" ("Women are for read," 1896, n.p.). Whereas fundamentalist leaders had used the *Woman's Bible* to distinguish between sincere Christians and



infidels, Anthony argued that the NAWSA platform could be broad enough for both these groups.

Some of Anthony's allies echoed her argument, arguing that passing judgment on the *Woman's Bible* was beyond the bounds of the convention's work. For instance, Caroline M. Everhard "took the position that the book, whether a marvel of scholarship or not, did not concern the convention or the cause" ("At work on congress," 1896, n.p.). Ironically, Everhard's argument sounds much like the arguments that Garrison and Phillips had used during the 1860 divorce debates, in which they advocated narrowing the movement's platform (Conrad, 1981). In Garrison and Phillips' case, they had argued that, as it pertained to men and women, the issue of divorce pushed beyond the limits of the woman's rights movement. According to Conrad, this argument signaled the narrowing of the woman's rights movement to the woman suffrage movement. In 1896, though, since the weight of the convention seemed to be against the *Woman's Bible*, an argument that the *Woman's Bible* was outside the bounds of the convention's work was actually a move in favor of a broad platform. Since the convention was in the business of condemnation, to consider the issue was going to lead to censure of the book. The way to maintain a broad platform, then, was not to deal with controversial issues, and to protect, as Anthony suggested "the right of individual opinion for every member" (Anthony, 1896, p. 91)

Invested in this conflict between Anthony and Catt over the *Woman's Bible* were all of the issues of strategy and ideology that had hung in the balance since the NAWSA merger of 1890. Whereas Catt, as a member of the conservative strain of the movement, wanted to pass suffrage, even at the expense of other potential woman's rights goals,

Anthony, as a member of the radical strain of the movement, urged protecting the broad platform above all else. The *Woman's Bible*, and the resulting "Bible resolution" drew the heat from this already established controversy. They became an object of this conflict, and a victory for the *Woman's Bible* or the "Bible resolution" would signal a victory for one side of the movement or the other. Of course, ultimately, the "Bible resolution" passed, its proponents became the leaders of the movement, and the conservative strain developed its stronghold.

### Conclusion

Simply because no one read and engaged the *Woman's Bible* does not mean it was ignored or received no cultural attention. Without ever being read, the *Woman's Bible* became a noteworthy social and political phenomenon. Those who formed opinions about the *Woman's Bible* did so not through what was contained in its pages, but primarily through two other types of sources: texts that talked and argued about the *Woman's Bible*, and their own prior knowledge of the authors. The texts around the publication of this book, as have been shown, included Stanton's own articles and public letters, newspaper stories, commentary by other women activists, arguments by religious leaders, and reporting by the woman suffrage press. These texts around the *Woman's Bible* usually tried to synthesize a complex text into a one or two sentence description of its contents, with maybe another sentence or two devoted to its political implications. In these summaries, the radically complex nature of the *Woman's Bible* as a political argument was lost. Audience members usually settled for a limited understanding of one aspect of the text, e.g. commentaries where Stanton praised the Bible, or her tirades

against claims to Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and that summary was assumed to encapsulate what was actually a much more complex text.

In the 1890s, the *Woman's Bible* entered a heated political and religious dispute, and the ambiguity surrounding its interpretation allowed suffrage and religious leaders to fit it into their own argumentative frames. At issue more largely, with the rise of modernism, was what role the Bible and the church would play in public life. The *Woman's Bible* joined this dispute by commenting on the role that the Bible and the church did and should play in the lives of women. Historically, progressive reformers had admitted that the Bible had been oppressive, but they had ameliorated that oppression by reinterpreting troublesome Scripture passages. Woman's rights advocates had dissociated the church's interpretations of the Scripture from the true Word of God, and had worked to find fairer renderings of that true Word of God. Stanton and her supporters sometimes challenged that distinction, arguing that the Bible itself was inherently patriarchal, not just the church's interpretations of it.<sup>1</sup>

The other heated issue that Stanton's book emerged into was the dispute within the NAWSA about the organization's future. The book became a symbolic point of contention for the forces that were arguing about whether the organization should embrace a broad or narrow platform. For conservative advocates of the narrow platform, the *Woman's Bible* provided unarguable proof that the broad platform would be dangerous to the narrow goal of woman suffrage. These advocates appealed to a locus of immediacy, arguing that pressing issues take precedence over broad and far-reaching goals. The appeal to expediency was used to silence divergent minority viewpoints. The *Woman's Bible* did not create an issue for the NAWSA that had not previously existed. It

just provided a concrete manifestation of this issue, and one that realistically could be disputed on the floor of the convention.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### "BRISTLING FROM COVER TO COVER WITH CHEAP WIT AND BLASPHEMY": THE *WOMAN'S BIBLE* AS AN INVENTIONAL RESOURCE FOR ANTI- SUFFRAGISTS

At the point when the mainstream suffrage movement officially denounced the *Woman's Bible*, opposition to their movement was still small and localized. Groups of men and women had come together in short-term stints to oppose specific proposals for woman suffrage, but by 1895, this opposition did not cohere as an organized movement. Thus, the fears that Catt, Avery, Shaw and their allies expressed about the danger of the suffrage movement centered around the effect it could have on potential suffragists, the undecideds. They envisioned a scenario in which individuals would read the *Woman's Bible* and make judgments of woman suffrage based upon it, or that church leadership, such as clergy, would read the *Woman's Bible*, make judgments, and then opine to their parishioners about woman suffrage, based on the ideology expressed in the *Woman's Bible*. Many of those original opponents of the *Woman's Bible* would live to see it utilized in a scenario much more damaging than the one they had proposed. By the end of the 1910s, they would witness anti-suffragists chastising the suffrage movement on the grounds of its radicalism, with one of the primary pieces of evidence of that radicalism being the *Woman's Bible*. According to Kathi Kern, the *Woman's Bible* became "the most devastating weapon in the antisuffrage arsenal" (p. 5). While that claim may be a

bit overstated, the antis did exploit the book in their arguments against woman suffrage and against the suffrage movement itself.

Whereas the suffragists of the 1890s had claimed they were compelled to deal with the *Woman's Bible* because of the damage it was doing to their movement, the antis chose to invoke the *Woman's Bible* as it served them as an invitational resource. To do so, they had to bring the book out of the obscurity where it had hidden for more than twenty years. The *Woman's Bible* had received no public attention since the low-profile publication of its second volume (covering, as Stanton titled it, the "prophets and apostles"), and no major public attention since the first rush of printings in 1895 and 1896. When it was originally published, the *Woman's Bible* received enough press coverage, and its leader was of a high enough profile, that the communities into which it was introduced had to respond to it. The book became something to be dealt with, and, as was described in the last chapter, it became a lightening rod within the religious and suffrage communities. As I argue here, those who engaged the text after the turn of the century were choosing to do so in order to buttress their own arguments. The anti-suffragists chose to pick up the book because they could agree on the radical nature of its argument, and use it in opposition to the suffrage movement.

In direct contrast to the general trend of the suffrage movement, the anti-suffrage movement, over the course of its history, grew from a narrow platform to a broad one. Initially, remonstrants (the early name for anti-suffragists) came together to oppose specific proposals for woman suffrage. However, as both the suffrage and anti-suffrage movements grew more powerful, the anti-suffrage movement took on a broader platform, specifically opposing all sorts of "radicalism." When the National Association Opposed

to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) began to promote this broad anti-radicalism platform in 1917, the *Woman's Bible* became an especially useful resource for the antis because they could use it to demonstrate the radicalism of the suffrage movement, specifically its ties to socialism, bolshevism, pacifism, and feminism. These antis could also tie the *Woman's Bible* to the suffrage movement and its leadership, so the *Woman's Bible* became an argumentative link between the suffrage movement and these radical -isms of the late 1910s.

### The Development of Anti-Suffrage Ideology

#### *Anti-suffragism Before 1917*

Historians disagree about the source of the strongest opposition to woman suffrage. Some argue that the strongest opposition came in the form the powerful lobby of the liquor and industry interests in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Flexner, 1989). Flexner even goes so far as to argue that the women's anti-suffragist groups simply served as a front for these interests; female anti-suffragists were the puppets of male antis, who controlled them. Under this argument, the corporate interests were moved to oppose woman suffrage because it was particularly threatening to major industries such as liquor, railroad, oil and manufacturing, because of the progressive reform legislation that suffragists, under their expediency arguments, promised women would pass if enfranchised. These corporate lobbies remained vigilant in their anti-suffrage activities through the ratification campaign in 1920. Sims (1995a) argues that in the special legislative session in Tennessee (the thirty-sixth and ultimate state to ratify the amendment), the primary opposition to the suffrage amendment came from the liquor,

railroad and textile industries. In the campaigns where they were involved, these corporate lobbies worked largely behind the scenes, offering legislators money if they would vote against woman suffrage. Reportedly, even during the Prohibition-era Tennessee battle, legislators would gather every night in parties organized and funded by liquor companies, where they had nearly-unlimited alcohol available to them (Sims, 1995a).

More recently, though, historians have contested this characterization of anti-suffrage, arguing that this sort of argument is the result of scholars' over-reliance on suffrage documents to understand who opposed suffrage (Thurner, 1995). According to Camhi, "it was characteristic of those who worked the longest and hardest for woman suffrage to see the forces behind the opposition as liquor, big business, the church—in short, as almost anything except women" (1994, p. 101). If the suffragists mis-estimated their opponents, and historians have relied on suffrage documents to understand anti-suffragists, historians have then, necessarily, painted an unfair picture of the forces that opposed suffrage. In response, more recent historians have granted primacy to the social movement of men and women who argued against suffrage on Biblical, biological, and even pragmatic progressive grounds, among other arguments (Camhi, 1994; Jablonsky 1994, 2002; Thurner, 1995; Sims, 1995b). This movement got its start in local and state campaigns, especially in Massachusetts and New York. Slowly it grew into a national organization that fought woman suffrage during the last ten years before it was codified into law as the Susan B. Anthony amendment. As a national movement, anti-suffrage went through two major phases, the first from the inception of the NAOWS in 1911 until 1917, and the second from 1917 through the ratification drive of 1920. In the transition



of 1917, the NAOWS changed leadership, from Josephine Dodge as president, to Alice Wadsworth, and its rhetoric turned to the extreme right. The *Woman's Bible* was not a useful inventional resource for the arguments of the first incarnation of the NAOWS, but it became an indispensable tool once the movement shifted to the right.

The anti-suffrage movement got its start in its organized resistance to a Massachusetts woman suffrage referendum in 1868 and 1869. In this case, about two hundred women responded to the suffrage proposal with a remonstrance encouraging legislators to resist the opportunity to "impose" the franchise upon women (Jablonsky, 1994). According to these remonstrants, women did not want the ballot since it would diminish woman's purity and higher morality, and it would threaten the stability of the family. In the following years, small groups of men and women opposed to extending the franchise to women sprung up in response to suffrage referenda in states throughout the Northeast. It was not until 1895, with the founding of the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women (MAOFESW) that these remonstrants decided to keep their organization ongoing (Benjamin, 1991; Camhi, 1994). Massachusetts antis had begun publishing a paper, the *Remonstrance*, in 1890, and that paper would become the official organ of the MAOFESW (Jablonsky, 1994). Soon after, the New York State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NYSAOWS) would also become a powerful opposition body (Camhi, 1994), with its organ *The Anti-Suffragist* (Jablonsky, 1994). By 1900, there were state associations in California, Illinois, New York, Oregon, South Dakota and Washington.

Following its initial development in local and state associations, the anti-suffrage movement consolidated as the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage

(NAOWS) in 1911, with the *Woman's Protest* as their official organ. From its start, the national organization was under the leadership of president Josephine Dodge and general secretary Minnie Bronson (Jablonsky, 1994). In addition to their anti-suffrage organizing, both women were involved in the progressive causes of their day. Dodge had been active in promoting day nurseries since the 1870s, and had founded and served as president of both the Association of Day Nurseries of New York City and the National Federation of Day Nurseries (Camhi, 1994). Bronson's reform involvement had centered around the conditions of working women, and she had served as a special agent of the United States Bureau of Labor investigating the conditions of working women. Ultimately, she opposed woman suffrage on the grounds that it would not ameliorate the situation of working women.

In founding the NAOWS, Dodge and Bronson tied their progressive ideology to the anti-suffrage movement. Unlike some characterizations of anti-suffragists (e.g. Flexner, 1989), the leaders of the NAOWS were not elite women who simply feared the threat to the social order that woman suffrage might bring. Instead, they were often progressive reformers who argued, for a variety of reasons, that woman suffrage itself was a misguided reform (Turner, 1995; Jablonsky, 2002). As leaders of the NAOWS, Dodge and Bronson would travel the country organizing women in opposition to suffrage, much as Anthony, Shaw, and Catt had done on behalf of suffrage. They would largely recruit women into their ranks, and by 1915, the NAOWS had grown to include 25 state associations, with a total of 200,000 members (Turner, 1995). One year later, the organization claimed 350,000 members (Sims, 1995b). The strength of this organization, and the anti-suffrage movement, was in the urbanized, industrialized

Northeast, much like that of the suffrage and progressive reform movements (Jablonsky, 2002).

The fundamental argument guiding the anti-suffragists from 1911 to 1917 was based on separate spheres ideology (“The case against woman suffrage,” 1916; Kraditor, 1965; Green, 1997). This argument, grounded in Biblical and biological arguments, expanded into a variety of other arguments offered by the antis. Under the separate spheres ideology, antis maintained that women and men had unique innate capacities which led to unique functions they were designated to fill in society. Kraditor (1965) notes that this ideology rested on both theological and biological evidence. Antis argued that God had created men and women to fill distinct functions and had ordained a natural order of relations between them. The antis cited passages from the Bible, especially from Genesis and Paul's letters, to demonstrate this natural order. The antis' biological argument was tied closely to the Biblical argument for separate spheres, but it took as proof the differences in men's and women's bodies. Women were clearly designed to fill a certain purpose—reproduction—while men, not bothered by this function, were capable to work in the public sphere full time. Antis further argued that women enjoyed special advantages and protections under this system of separate spheres, and that they were better served not to tamper with a system that already filled their needs.

This separate spheres ideology did not necessarily preclude social organizing or other reform activities on the part of women. Indeed, anti-suffragists of the progressive era largely supported social reforms, and many, like Josephine Dodge and Minnie Bronson, had been involved in reform organizing prior to joining the NAOWS. One of the guiding arguments of the NAOWS was that granting the franchise to women would

be damaging to the cause of progressive social reform (Thurner, 1995). These antis argued that women had been and would continue to be effective participants in the public sphere without the aid of the ballot. Even though suffragists characterized the anti argument as being that woman's sphere should be limited to the domestic, antis explicitly stated that they believed that the public sphere was also woman's but that she could be most effective as a non-partisan, disinterested worker (Thurner, 1995), who was not tainted by her first-hand participation in the political process (Jablonsky, 2002). Women owed their success in civic work to their own disfranchisement, and access to the vote would hinder that work. Antis often noted the amount of resources that had been devoted to organizing for woman suffrage and suggested that society would have been better served by the suffragists devoting that energy to other social reforms. Anti-suffragist Helen Kendrick Johnson went so far as to argue that woman suffrage organizing had delayed the movements for abolition, temperance, and woman's rights (Thurner, 1995).

Antis buttressed this argument by providing data that suggested the inexpediency of woman suffrage ("The case against woman suffrage," 1916, p. 7, 10-17). The *Woman's Protest* ran a regular column where they would enumerate and compare the laws of a suffrage and a non-suffrage state, e.g. Colorado vs. Pennsylvania, Colorado vs. New Jersey, or Colorado vs. Michigan. (This column consistently compared Colorado to non-suffrage states. One is only left to assume that non-suffrage states would not have fared so well against other suffrage states). Similarly, the *Woman Patriot* and the *Anti-Suffragist* both ran a regular column called "Where women vote," in which they would compare the status of progressive reforms in the states where women had the franchise.

According to their comparisons, the states where women voted were always under worse conditions than the states where women did not vote.

Seeing that suffrage could be damaging to progressive reform, and seeing that women had not made use of the ballot where they had it, anti-suffragists argued along these lines that most women did not want the vote (Green, 1997). Where women were allowed to vote, they did not exercise their right in great numbers. Those who did vote, voted in line with their husbands and fathers. These antis argued that women were content with their separate sphere, and that to grant women the franchise would be to burden 90% of the women with what 10% of the women wanted (“The case against woman suffrage,” 1916, p. 3, 20; Goodwin, 1913, pp. 27-31).

Anti-suffragists identified that one of their primary disagreements with suffragists was over whether the family or the individual was the basic unit of society (Kraditor, 1965; Green, 1997). Antis argued that the family was the basic unit of the society, and that one person (the man/husband/father) could vote on behalf of the family. A system of woman suffrage would suggest, the antis argued, that the individual was the basic unit of society. Some antis went so far as to predict the dissolution of the traditional family unit because of women voting (Sims, 1995a). They argued that mothers would be too busy to take care of their children. Plus, if both men and women voted, divorces would result from married couples disagreeing on political issues.

Some anti-suffragists characterized their fundamental difference with the suffragists as self-denial vs. self-fulfillment (Camhi, 1994). According to this characterization, antis recognized woman’s calling to self-denial, and were willing to make personal sacrifices for the greater good, usually the good of their husbands and

children. Suffragists, conversely, were only concerned with what was good for women, even at the expense of the greater good. They concerned themselves with self-fulfillment, as Stanton herself had encouraged in her 1892 Solitude of Self speech (Campbell, 1989).<sup>1</sup>

Anti-suffragists also argued against woman suffrage on the grounds that it would be bad for the government (“The case against woman suffrage,” 1916, p. 3). In direct response to natural rights arguments, the anti-suffragists argued that the right to vote did not exist a priori, and that it was the prerogative of the government to grant that right in its best interest. For these antis, the central value criterion was not what was best for the individual, but instead what would give greatest benefit to the state. They argued that in a democracy, the vote was backed up by the threat of force. As women did not participate in that threat of force (i.e. they did not serve in the military), women could not vote. The state would crumble if its democratic election process was not backed by the threat of force (“The case against woman suffrage,” 1916; Jablonsky, 2002).

Some anti-suffragists also argued that woman suffrage by federal amendment would be harmful to government. Especially in the South, where the wounds of reconstruction were still fresh, antis could make states' rights arguments against a federal suffrage amendment (Green, 1997). These states, after all, had resented the imposition of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments upon them by federal decision, and they were reluctant to make laws to which all states would be bound. According to this argument, it was unfair for 32 states to force 12 other states to enfranchise women (32 of the 48 states would constitute the 3/4 needed for ratification) (Kraditor, 1965).

These arguments about what would benefit the state led into blatantly racist arguments (Green, 1997). According to some antis, it was in the best interest of the state to keep African-Americans disenfranchised (Sims, 1995a). In the Massachusetts campaign the issue had been Catholicism: antis argued that the danger of woman suffrage was that it would enfranchise Catholic women. In either case, woman suffrage might bring about universal suffrage, which was a much greater danger than just enfranchising middle-class anglo-saxon women. During the final ratification campaign in Tennessee, the race issue became central, much as it had been in most Southern states. There, antis suggested that woman suffrage would lead to three things: 1) surrender of state sovereignty, 2) suffrage for African American women, and 3) race equality. These three things would bring about another period of reconstruction, interracial marriage, and the downfall of white supremacy (Sims, 1995a).

During these early years of state-by-state organizing, and during the first phase of NAOWS organizing, the public discourse of the movement focused heavily on separate spheres ideology and the political inexpediency of the franchise for women, with brief attention paid to racial and other issues. Under this argumentative frame, the *Woman's Bible* did not become a useful resource. The first mention of the *Woman's Bible* by the anti-suffragists actually came in a short article, "Is man woman's enemy?," in *The Remonstrance* in 1896. This article is only notable because it was much friendlier to the *Woman's Bible* than was the treatment that Stanton's project would receive at the hands of the anti-suffragists between 1918 and 1920. That article gauged Stanton's political motivation as arming woman to "deprive her enemy, man, of a reason for his oppression and a weapon of attack." This article also captured Stanton's argument under two main

points, that Stanton wanted to introduce a female figure into the trinity and that "she sought to relieve the disproportion" that woman was only represented in one-eleventh of Scripture. What is more remarkable is that the author of this article did not take issue with Stanton's claim that women were underrepresented in the Bible, nor with Stanton's attempt to relieve that disproportion, nor even with the threat that Stanton would introduce a female figure into the Godhead. Instead, this author decried Stanton's political motivation as the author had described it: that woman could disarm man in his quest for supremacy. Stanton was dangerous because she might help women uplift themselves so as to be out of the reach of man's oppression. There was one anomalous mention of the *Woman's Bible* in an anti-suffrage article in 1909, but anti-suffragists did not pay it serious attention until 1918.

*Anti-Suffrage After 1917: A Turn to the Right*

The arguments summarized above were developed and used heavily by leaders and members of state organizations, and then of the NAOWS in the first few years of its existence. However, by the end of the 1910s, these arguments, although still in use, would be overshadowed by vindictive, anti-radical rhetoric on the part of the new leadership of the NAOWS. In the years 1916 and 1917 both the anti- and suffrage movements underwent serious change, as did the nation and world more globally. In the spring of 1917 the United States entered the European war that it had been able to avoid up until that point. While it was fighting socialism in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, its former ally, Russia, went through its own socialist (Bolshevik) revolution, and withdrew from its allegiance to the United States and Britain in the Great



War. Anti-suffragists largely supported this war, while some of its most vocal opponents were woman suffragists (Jablonsky, 1994).

In 1916, the suffrage movement had ended its 20+ year focus on the state-by-state method for achieving the franchise. Under Carrie Chapman Catt's "Winning Plan," proposed that year, suffrage organizers would finally focus on the federal amendment again (Campbell, 1993). Jablonsky (2002) argues that this shift from state-by-state campaigns to federal lobbying was difficult for antis, who had thrived in defeating local (often popular) referenda, but who had minimal experience with the formal legislative arena. Also in this time period, national visibility of the suffrage movement increased greatly through the efforts of the Congressional Union (later known as the National Woman's Party [NWP]), led by Alice Paul. Beginning in January of 1917 these militant suffragists had been picketing the White House, and by summer time they were being arrested for their public demonstrations (Evans, 1997).

The arguments summarized above were popularized by the NAOWS under the leadership of Josephine Dodge and Minnie Bronson. These arguments continued to circulate even after Dodge and Bronson left leadership, but they were upstaged by more virulent attacks on the suffrage movement for its perceived radicalism. In 1917, as Green (1997) summarizes, the NAOWS experienced a "palace coup," in which Dodge and Bronson were replaced by a relative newcomer to the movement, Alice Wadsworth, and the national headquarters moved from New York to Washington, D.C. (where Alice Wadsworth and her husband Senator James Wadsworth, Jr. resided) (Jablonsky, 1994). This change in the presidency was accompanied by dramatic turnaround in the membership of the executive committee and the national officers. Jablonsky records that

only three of fifteen the members of the 1916 executive committee attended the 1917 convention, and they were accompanied by only two of the ten 1916 national officers. The membership and leadership of the NAOWS would also grow to include many more men than it had during Dodge's administration (Jablonsky, 1994). Most importantly, this shift in leadership and membership was accompanied by a marked change in the tone and content of anti-suffrage arguments. Historians have not offered any convincing explanations for this rapid turnover, and Jablonsky (1994) even asserts that there is no reasonable justification. He notes that there is no evidence of a power struggle, or that any of the initial cast of leaders were unhappy with the organization or their leadership roles. He can point to no specific evidence that this massive turnover occurred through the strategic action of any of the individuals involved, but considering the dramatic nature of the change in both leadership and ideology, he also refuses to believe that it happened by chance. Even though there is no explanation for what brought about this change, the marked difference between pre- and post-1917 anti-suffrage rhetoric remains. The new leadership of the NAOWS changed the organization's paper from the *Woman's Protest* to the *Woman Patriot*, even the name change reflecting the new rhetoric that would dominate the movement.

The NAOWS, under the leadership of Alice Wadsworth, took a sharp turn to the right. Unlike the suffrage movement, which had transformed its focus from broad to narrow, and by 1920 was focused almost exclusively on the franchise, the anti-suffrage movement had moved from narrow to broad. Anti-suffragists had come together to oppose one specific policy—woman suffrage—and had expanded to oppose all things radical. As Green (1997) puts it, "antisuffrage ideology thus reached out to target a wide

range of enemies from which the home needed protection" (p. 90). Specifically, in a time of global conflict, the anti-suffrage movement marked itself as explicitly patriotic, and publicly challenged "unpatriotic" activities on the part of the suffragists. More specifically, they charged the suffragists with treason and subversion, and accused them of being pacifists, which meant they were also socialists, bolsheviks, or "unpatriotic German sympathizers" (Green, 1997, p. 90). Antis warned that through their unpatriotism, suffragists were harming the United States' military abroad. Antis portrayed suffrage negatively simply by associating it with other movements that already had a negative image in the public eye. Further, according to Camhi (1994), even if suffrage was not actually associated with these radical -isms, "it was the necessary harbinger of these and similar horrors" (67). This anti-radicalism would become so closely related to the Wadsworth administration of the NAOWS that suffragists would call this strategy of mudslinging "Wadsworthly" (Jablonsky, 1994). This "Wadsworthly" would come to dominate the pages of the National's *Woman Patriot*, as well as the Massachusetts *Remonstrance*.

In addition to challenging suffragists as socialists and pacifists, antis accused them of being "feminists" (Camhi, 1994). In retrospect, such an accusation seems fitting, as suffrage became one plank in the larger platform of feminism. However, for the activists who worked for suffrage in the first two decades of the twentieth century, the label "feminist" was unfair. Through most of the nineteenth century, the term had been used to refer to the qualities of women, much as the term "feminine" is used in the early twenty-first century. Alice Rossi (1973) traces its first use as a descriptor for the woman's rights movement to an 1895 book review in *The Athenaeum*. In that article, the

author describes one of the book's characters' "coquettings with the doctrines of 'feminism'" (Rossi, 1973, xii). Subsequently, variations on the term "feminism" appeared in European periodicals in the following years, but always in quotation marks. By the early twentieth century, though, feminism had become a common term to describe women's rights organizing. In these days, women outside the suffrage movement—such as Jane Adams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman, and Margaret Sanger—were organizing for a wide variety of feminist-related causes (Rossi, 1973). These women could properly be called "feminists," but the suffrage movement did not take on that label for itself. Thus, in the 1910s, feminism and suffrage were distinct movements. For the antis to accuse the suffragists of being associated with feminism, then, was to accuse them of being more radical than they would have admitted to themselves.

In the final push for passage and ratification of the federal suffrage amendment, the national anti-suffrage movement took a dramatic turn to the right, and broadened its platform to oppose all things radical, especially as they were connected with the woman suffrage movement. Their rhetoric, according to Jablonsky (1994), "shifted from a conservative but non-vindictive articulation of the female role in society to one filled with innuendo and character assassination" (p. 98). It was in that character assassination, directed toward both the NAWSA and its leaders, that the *Woman's Bible* became a particularly useful inventional resource for the anti-suffragists.

"The Suffragists had a new version of the Bible": Anti-Suffragists Use the *Woman's Bible* to Serve their Arguments

In the hands of the anti-suffragists, some of the issues that had been so controversial for the *Woman's Bible's* earlier audiences, specifically its form, content, and political motivation, became indisputable. 1890s newspaper coverage of the book, and the suffragists who followed its lead, had disagreed over whether the book was a commentary or a new Bible, whether it attacked the church or the Bible, and whether it wanted to reform or abandon Christianity. Twenty years later, the anti-suffragists who referred to the *Woman's Bible* agreed on a reading of the book, and on what it signified for the suffrage movement, for woman suffrage as a policy, and for society in general. The antis agreed that the *Woman's Bible* had come about as a product of suffragists who were so confident in an impending suffrage victory, that they could move on to bigger goals, in this case, overthrowing the church. Their tool for overthrowing the church was the *Woman's Bible*, a new Bible which attacked the original, denied its divine authorship, and called for a new religion.

In the anti-suffragist originary narrative for the *Woman's Bible*, the book had been created by suffragists who believed that because woman suffrage was imminent, they could move on to new reforms. The NAOWS' organ, the *Woman Patriot*, told the story, "Flushed with their victories in Wyoming, Utah, Idaho and Colorado the suffragists thought the time had come to realize their long held hopes of overthrowing 'the monopoly of the pulpit' held by man" ("A short history of woman suffrage," 1919). So clear was the book's political motivation for antis, the columnists who discussed the book paid minimal attention to this issue. One article gave a terse statement of the motivation for

the project, "Mrs. Cady Stanton and all her revising committee say the Bible has retarded the progress of woman" (Calloway, 1920). Antis also quoted Stanton's statement that the whole Christian religion "rests on the temptation an man's fall, hence the necessity of a Redeemer and a plan of salvation" (Calloway, 1920) and Matilda Joslyn Gage's statement in volume II that "'The Christian theory of the sacredness of the Bible has been at the Cost of the world's civilization. [...] Its interpretation by the church, by the State and by society has ever been prejudicial to the best interests of humanity. That even the most enlightened nations are not yet out of Barbarism is due to the teachings of the Bible'" (Calloway, 1918).

The anti-suffragists also agreed on a fairly consistent description of the content of the *Woman's Bible*, unlike its audiences in the 1890s. For anti-suffragists, the *Woman's Bible* was a new Bible, which attacked the original Bible, denied the divine authorship of the original Bible, and called for a new religion. One article in *The Woman Patriot* called the *Woman's Bible* "one of the most virulent attacks on the Christian Bible ever printed in this country, ridiculing the Birth of Christ and bristling from cover to cover with cheap wit and blasphemy" ("Woman Suffrage and the Church" 1919). Another anti-suffragist writer described that the *Woman's Bible* "denied the divinity of Christ, and ridiculed nearly every passage in the Bible which referred to women" ("A short history of woman suffrage," 1919). *The Woman Patriot* described that the *Woman's Bible* was "an attempt to discredit not only the clergy, but Moses and Christ himself" ("Sic semper," 1918). Whereas the *Woman's Bible*'s 1890s audience could not agree whether Stanton was challenging the church or the Bible, the anti-suffragists answered "all of the above." The *Woman's Bible* challenged the clergy (representatives of the institutional church) as well

as Moses and Christ (the Bible). Not only did Stanton and her colleagues attack the Bible, but they also provided a new one. *The Woman Patriot* referred to "this attempt to revise 'Bibles, prayer-books and creeds'" ("Women as ministers, priests and bishops," 1919) and called the *Woman's Bible* "a crude attempt to make over the Bible according to suffrage and feminist ideas" (Robinson, 1918). And another suffrage paper, reporting on the ratification defeat in Delaware, noted that "Mrs. Henry B. Thomson, president of the Delaware Association, declared that the suffragists had a new version of the Bible, that they had said man's backbone, instead of his rib, was taken to form woman" ("The public triumph of anti-federalism in Delaware," March 27, 1920). For the anti-suffragists, Stanton's *Woman's Bible* was just part of the new religion that Stanton was proposing. They wrote that Stanton was "Carrying out her ambition to smash the 'determined opposition of the clergy' and to abolish the Bible itself as an authority... As an excuse for this 'revision,' Mrs. Stanton wrote: 'We need a religion based on Science and Nature. We have made a fetish of the Bible long enough.' Every page of this 'Woman's Bible' is a fling at the Holy Bible'" (Watterson, 1918a). The *Woman's Bible* was simply one element in Stanton's effort to overthrow the accepted social order, including Christianity. Another article argued that the *Woman's Bible* would degrade man, saying "Winning three states from 1893 to 1896, Colorado, Utah and Idaho, the suffragists ambitiously started to dethrone man from the dawn of creation, publishing for this purpose the so-called 'Woman's Bible'" ("The Future is Ours," 1918). And Henry Watterson (1918a, p. 4) linked one of the Pankhursts (it is unclear which one) to the *Woman's Bible*, and stated, "Mrs. Pankhurst caught the meaning of this New Bible when she declared her 'object was to demoralize the world of society, shame the churches and upset the whole orderly

conduct of life.'" (Calloway [1918a]) made a nearly identical statement.) According to the antis, the *Woman's Bible* was to be a tool for dethroning man and overthrowing his power in the church.

*"The Germans have this same idea"*

In the context of the global situation in 1918, and considering the NAOWS' anti-radical bent, the anti-suffragists could use the *Woman's Bible* to contend that suffragists were revolutionaries who would overthrow the social order. As was described above, accusing suffragists of treason and subversion, or of affiliation with socialism and bolshevism were common argumentative strategies for the anti-suffragists. Since they understood the *Woman's Bible* as a revolutionary document, it became one more piece of evidence in their case that woman suffragists were radical infidels. The *Woman's Bible*, then, provided an argumentative link between suffrage and socialism, Germany and all things dangerous and scary in the 1910s. First, some anti-suffragists used the *Woman's Bible* as proof that the suffragists were calling for wide-scale revolution. For instance, Henry Watterson defined that woman suffrage "means revolution--far-reaching revolution," and then as proof went on to describe, "we have right here at home an organized body of highly educated and intellectual women who, planting themselves upon Mrs. Cady Stanton's "Woman's Bible," preach its gospel with resonant earnestness..." (1918a, p. 4). There were also more specific links to Germany. James Calloway (1918a) quoted Elizabeth Cady Stanton saying "'We have made a fetish of the Bible long enough and it has been the great block in the way of civilization,'" and then went on to compare her thoughts to socialism in Germany, writing "Curious enough, the Germans have this same idea until Germany is now an infidel nation--rejecting Christ and



His teachings." Since socialism was widely-known for its atheism, and the anti-suffragists argued that the *Woman's Bible* was encouraging atheism, the *Woman's Bible* was construed as congruent with socialism. Thus, suffrage, which was tied to the *Woman's Bible*, which was written by a bunch of infidels, could lead the U.S. to become socialist, like Germany. The *Woman Patriot* published another article, written with a slightly sarcastic tone, which chided the suffrage movement for anointing its leaders as saints, suggesting that suffrage would replace Christianity as a religion. The article described that the NAWSA paper had alluded to "Saint Carrie Chapman Catt," and then pondered whether the NWP would canonize "Apostle Alice Paul." Of course, it tied the *Woman's Bible* into its argument, as a concrete manifestation of this new suffrage religion. The article concluded by offering, "With Socialism and 'Saint Carrie Chapman Catt' in the suffrage 'heaven' and 'Apostle Alice Paul' establishing 'votes for women' as the 'new religion,' the suffragists, like the Kaiser, have their own private 'gott und himmel'" ("The suffrage 'Gott und Himmel,'" 1918). According to the antis' rendering, this new suffrage heaven would be occupied by Carrie Chapman Catt and socialism, which linked the suffrage movement to socialism and the Kaiser, through their irreverence for traditional Christianity. In this effort to link suffrage and socialism, another article tied Stanton to a specific socialist, writing "With the notorious George D. Herron, the socialist minister who was thrown out of the Congregational Church when he deserted his wife and four children for Carrie Rand--whose mother established the 'Rand School of Social Science,' the chief socialist propaganda bureau in America--Mrs. Stanton regarded Christ not as Divine, but as 'the great leading radical of his age'" ("What is feminism?," April 12, 1919, p. 5). Both of these statements were logical leaps in

argumentation, but such was the nature of the claims that the anti-suffragists were making.

At the same time, anti-suffragists used the *Woman's Bible* to link suffrage to this other ideological movement called feminism. Even though mainstream suffragists did not use the term "feminist" to describe themselves, anti-suffragists argued the similarity and interconnectedness of the two movements. The *Woman's Bible*, since it was authored by a known suffrage leader, but anti-suffragists could characterize its content as being related to this new "feminism," provided a concrete link between the movements. For instance, the *Woman Patriot* article that introduced the *Woman's Bible* to the paper's anti-suffrage readership was headed "Feminism versus Christianity" (Watterson, 1918a, p. 4).

Above all, anti-suffragists feared that these radical infidels would gain power in the United States government, a shift in power that could be tantamount to the socialist overthrows in Eastern Europe and Russia. Calloway (1918a) wrote in the *Woman Patriot*, "Queer, indeed, that those who rejected the Scripture and discarded Christ and Him Crucified should not dictate the domestic policies of the government" (p. 4).

The portrait that antis painted of the *Woman's Bible* made it so radical that it could be associated with revolutionary movements like feminism and socialism. Their strategy for illuminating the meaning of the *Woman's Bible* was to place it in relationship to other already-defined ideas, specifically the radical -isms. As Burke (1966) argues, a word can be understood in terms of its context, either the words around it, or its larger nonverbal or extraverbal context. In this way, a given sign can take on various meanings based on the context of the other signs with which it is associated. According to Burke, "the 'same' act can be defined 'differently,' depending upon the 'circumference' of the

scene or overall situation *in terms of which* we choose to locate it" (p. 360, emphasis original). Thus, the anti-suffragists were able to place the *Woman's Bible* in the context of socialist revolutions abroad, and then define it as a revolutionary document. Whereas Burke defines this contextual strategy of definition as part of regular language use, Perelman (1969) classifies it explicitly as an argument strategy, which he calls association. Perelman uses this term to describe arguments in which one concept is equated or related to another, in order that the first can be understood in terms of the second. In Perelman's (translated) words, "By processes of association we understand schemes which bring separate elements together and allow us to establish a unity among them, which aims either at organizing them or at evaluating them, positively or negatively, by means of one another" (p. 190). The first step in the antis' association was to tie the *Woman's Bible* to the radical -isms, and the second step would be to tie the *Woman's Bible* to the core of the suffrage movement, thus linking suffrage and the radical -isms.

*"This Woman's Bible was Susan B. Anthony's textbook"*

Anti-suffragists made a further link in this associative chain, when they not only tied the *Woman's Bible* to the radical -isms, but also tied the *Woman's Bible* to the leadership of the suffrage movement. According to the anti-suffragists, not only was Elizabeth Cady Stanton proposing to overthrow the social order, but she was doing so with the support of the suffrage movement. Once antis had made the link between the *Woman's Bible* and the radical -isms, they could also link the *Woman's Bible* to the core leadership of the suffrage movement, and it would tie together suffrage and radicalism. The antis gave a high estimate of the role that the *Woman's Bible* had played within the

suffrage movement. An article in *The Anti-Suffragist* gave credit to the entire suffrage movement for authorship of the *Woman's Bible*, noting that "practically all the suffragist leaders of the nineteenth century devoted much time and energy to the compiling of the 'Woman's Bible'" ("Mrs. Howe's article in the Outlook," 1909, p. 7). Not only had all of the nineteenth century suffrage leaders worked together in compiling these four hundred pages of blasphemy, but the text had then become a guiding document for the suffragists who followed. Watterson (1918b) argued, "On nearly every page of the 'Woman's Bible' is a fling at the Scriptures. And yet what a following Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton has! She was Susan B. Anthony's preceptor and this Woman's Bible was Susan B. Anthony's textbook. Suffragette writers in the magazines of the day teach what the 'Woman's Bible' teaches." Another writer went as far as to compare Stanton's influence to the very patriarchs they say she criticized, writing "While Mrs. Stanton's 'Woman's Bible' is out of print, yet it became the textbook of her disciples and followers, and her doctrines have been handed down as the mother of Moses handed down through her son the history of the Jews" (Calloway, 1918a). In rendering the role of Stanton and the *Woman's Bible* in the history of the woman's rights movement, the antis granted the book and its author high esteem, which then allowed the antis to disgrace the movement by disgracing the book.

The *Woman's Bible* became an invention resource for the anti-suffragists because it allowed them to characterize some of woman suffrage's key leaders--Stanton, Anthony and Catt--as radicals, infidels and socialists, and then by extension to apply those same characteristics to the movement more largely. When Helen H. Gardener (the vice-president of the NAWSA) was appointed to the Civil Service Commission by

President Wilson, *The Woman Patriot* pointed out Gardener's membership on the Revising Committee, and stated

And yet, one of the revisers, who, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mrs. Robert G. Ingersoll, Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt and other suffragists took part in the production of *The Woman's Bible*, now occupies the position of Civil Service Commissioner. What kind of a prize will Miss Alice Paul draw for *her* efforts in purifying politics and converting the President? ("Civil service and the Woman's Bible," 1920, p. 8)

Gardner was not the only suffragist that the antis could link to the *Woman's Bible*. They were especially vigilant in drawing connections between the book and, arguably, the two highest-profile leaders of the suffrage movement, Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt.

Once the suffrage amendment was named, and became widely known as, the Susan B. Anthony amendment, anti-suffragists could link Stanton's radicalism to Anthony, who was then easily linked to suffrage. For instance, after decrying the evils of the *Woman's Bible*, James Calloway (1918) noted that "the closest friend of Cady Stanton was Susan B. Anthony" (p. 4). Another anti suggested that Stanton's project was simply following Anthony's suggestion. It noted that Anthony had once advised her followers, "Let us discredit our opponents, then we can afford to ignore them," and then the article went on to note "The first and foremost [sic] opponents of woman suffrage were the clergy" ("Sic Semper," 1918). Anthony had suggested that suffragists discredit their opponents, who this article claims were the clergy, and Stanton's project was aimed at the clergy, so she must have been following Anthony's advice. Based on this logical chain,

anti-suffragists would begin articles about the *Woman's Bible* with a reference to Anthony, and thus use the book to vilify even the more mainstream voices in the movement.

Anti-suffragists also frequently pointed out Carrie Chapman Catt's "participation" on the revising committee. By 1918, she was again president of the NAWSA and arguably the most visible figure within the woman suffrage movement. As they were trying to do with Anthony, if the anti-suffragists could prove the evils of the *Woman's Bible*, and then tie it to Catt, by association, they would have proved the evils of woman suffrage. For instance, one article simply recorded "Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, present suffrage president, was one of the 'revising committee' of this attempt to revise 'Bibles, prayer-books and creeds'" ("Women as Ministers, Priests and Bishops," 1919). During the Tennessee ratification campaign (the final state needed for ratification), anti-suffragists pursued the Catt connection to the *Woman's Bible* especially vigilantly. At the Hermitage Hotel, which served as campaign headquarters, anti-suffragists made a display of "Mrs. Catt's Bible," with a sign that explained, "This is the teaching of National Suffrage Leaders. Are you willing for women who hold these views to become political powers in our country?... Everyone who believes that the word of God is divinely inspired, who desires to see his State Constitution not violated, and who believes in the purity of the family and the sanctity of marriage and would keep women out of politics" should vote against the amendment (qtd. in Kern, 2001). Also during that campaign, antis circulated an article called "Mrs. Catt and Woman-Suffrage Leaders Repudiate the Bible," which explicitly linked the project to the amendment, through Catt. It explained, "Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, who is the president of the National Woman Suffrage

League, and who is now seeking to get the present legislature to ratify the woman-suffrage amendment, was a member of the revising committee of the 'Woman's Bible'... Whatever we find in this Bible, therefore, has the indorsement [sic] of Mrs. Catt" (McQuiddy, 1920). Since the antis had found evidence of radicalism and revolutionary overthrow in the *Woman's Bible*, and since Catt's name was on the book, she must have endorsed radicalism and revolutionary overthrow. Since Catt was also the leader in the movement for suffrage, suffrage must entail radicalism and revolutionary overthrow.

Catt, though, had always maintained that she had not agreed to serve on the revising committee. But anti-suffragists would not quit even after public denials from Catt. When, in 1920, Catt again claimed publicly that she had not been involved, *The Woman Patriot* printed the response of anti-suffragist, Mrs. James S. Pinckard, who said

If Mrs. Catt condemns the Woman's Bible, let her say it now, even though it comes twenty-five years late, but a mere attempt to dodge responsibility by attacking the integrity of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the pioneer President of her own National American Woman Suffrage Association, will not in the least affect our use of the book as an exhibition of the doctrines received in and preached by the women who founded the suffrage cause (August 21, 1920).

The anti-suffragists exalted Stanton's position among suffragists, so that when they proved Stanton's radicalism, the whole suffrage movement would fall with her. Catt, Anthony, and the other suffrage leaders provided the logical link between the demonstrated radicalism of the *Woman's Bible* and the suffrage movement.

Under the antis' treatment, the *Woman's Bible* became the argumentative link between the radical -isms and the suffrage movement. They could tie the radical -isms to the *Woman's Bible* and the *Woman's Bible* to the leadership of the suffrage movement. Thus, even though the suffrage movement did not claim ties to socialism, the movement's leader, Carrie Chapman Catt, could be defined through her association with the *Woman's Bible*, which antis maintained was radical (socialist) in nature. Whether or not the suffrage movement did indeed have socialist leanings is an unimportant concern, since the antis were able to make that claim through the linkages in their associative strategy. The *Woman's Bible* became a unique inventional resource for this one particular line of anti-suffrage argument because it provided a concrete link in their associative chain.

### Conclusion

Suffragists of the 1890s were afraid of what the *Woman's Bible* could do in the hands of their opponents, and the answer, initially, was nothing. The arguments that guided anti-suffrage through most of its history found little use for the *Woman's Bible*. The Progressive Era leaders of the anti-suffrage movement largely agreed with suffragists about social reform, and the franchise for women was just one small point that could be argued in terms of political expediency or separate spheres ideology. Thus, for these anti-suffragists, the *Woman's Bible* was an extraneous document that was no more relevant to them than it had been to the suffragists. Since it did not concern the issue of suffrage specifically, it was not relevant for their anti-suffrage arguments.

However, following the broadening of anti-suffrage ideology to include opposition to anything radical, the *Woman's Bible* was used as evidence of the dangerous



radicalism invested in the suffrage movement. It was a particularly useful resource because the anti-suffragists did not face the same problem of ambiguity around the *Woman's Bible* that its previous generation of "readers" had faced. Whereas that ambiguity had both paralyzed and enflamed the nineteenth century public debate, the anti-suffragists' capacity to agree on connotations and denotations for the *Woman's Bible* allowed them to rely on it unilaterally as an inventional resource. Anti-suffragists agreed that the *Woman's Bible* was a blasphemous document with no reasonable political motivation except to allow radical women to rewrite the sacred scriptures. The *Woman's Bible* fit within the antis' structure of relevancy, confirming their fear that suffrage leaders wanted to bring about radical revolution. The claim that the suffrage movement signaled radicalism was not unique to antis' treatment of the *Woman's Bible*. Indeed, that was their primary claim during the final two years of organizing, and the *Woman's Bible* was a valuable resource within this already-established framework of meaning.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “PROMOT[ING] THE EQUALITY OF WOMEN IN ALL AREAS OF RELIGIOUS LIFE”: THE *WOMAN’S BIBLE* LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

Considering the damage that the *Woman’s Bible* did to Stanton within her own movement, and the damage it threatened to do to the movement itself at the hands of the anti-suffragists, it comes as no surprise that Stanton’s children expunged the *Woman’s Bible* from the story of her life, and that her biographers downplayed it. Two of Stanton’s children—Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch—removed the chapter called “Women and Theology,” when they re-issued Stanton’s autobiography in 1922 (Stanton and Blatch, 1922/1969); Kern, 2001). In that chapter, Stanton had described the creation of the *Woman’s Bible* and the ensuing controversy (see for comparison Stanton, 1898/1971 and Stanton and Blatch, 1969). Even Stanton’s later biographers minimize the importance of the *Woman’s Bible*: Elizabeth Griffith devotes only four pages to the project (1984). Stanton’s radicalism led her to fall from grace in the movement, and, as a result, Susan B. Anthony eclipsed Stanton in histories of the movement, and even replaced Stanton in a 1923 celebration of the 75th anniversary of the movement (Kern, 2001). At that event, feminists marched from the church in Seneca Falls where the 1848 convention had met to Anthony’s home, symbolically linking Anthony and the convention, even though Anthony had not been at that convention, as she had not become active in the movement until the early 1850s (Flexner, 1996). Cullen Murphy (1998)

argues, “it is not going too far to say (as some have suggested) that *The Woman’s Bible* is the reason that an image of Susan B. Anthony and not Elizabeth Cady Stanton graces the one-dollar coin that was first minted in 1978. Perhaps it is just as well. Stanton might have been uncomfortable peering out from the coin over the words ‘In God We Trust’” (p. 23).

Eighty years later, however, Stanton was redeemed when the *Woman’s Bible* finally found a receptive audience. It was republished in 1972 and 1974 by twentieth century feminists, including a church-related group of feminists called the Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion. That group used the book to further its own political argument for the increased role of women in the church, and for the viability of a mutually sustaining relationship between feminism and Christianity. In the twentieth century, as the Coalition used the book as an argumentative resource, the *Woman’s Bible* finally became the political document that Stanton had suggested it could be. It has been in print continuously since 1972, and since its initial use by second wave feminists, it has also become an important document for feminist theologians, who have come to dominate the religious academy in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. Second wave feminists, in recognizing and reifying the radical political nature of the document, so defined it as a political document, which allowed feminist theologians to use it to define their own scholarship as political.

### Feminism and Christianity in the Late Twentieth Century

The dormancy of the *Woman’s Bible* during the twentieth century can only be partly attributed to Stanton’s children’s efforts, but also owes some credit to the larger

dormancy of the woman's movement itself. Shortly after the passage of the Susan B. Anthony suffrage amendment in 1920, the large, organized woman's movement splintered into smaller groups—among them, the League of Women Voters and the National Woman's Party (Flexner, 1996). Without the unifying strength of one central policy goal, the movement faltered. The events of the following decades—depression, world war, cold war—did not foster social movements within the U.S., let alone the reemergence of feminism.

### *The Second Wave of American Feminism*

On the heels of Civil Rights and anti-war organizing, however, the 1960s and 1970s provided the necessary political climate for the re-emergence of feminism. By the time the *Woman's Bible* was re-published in the 1970s, feminism had been re-born as a major social movement in the United States. Unlike the highly-structured, -centralized, and -focused suffrage movement of the 1890s, feminism of the 1890s was a messy, largely amorphous mass of splintered small groups operating under a variety of ideological systems (Rosen, 2000). In the broadest sense, second wave thought can be loosely grouped into two ideological systems: liberal and radical feminism. Liberal feminism, which emerged first, advocated institutional change in women's roles: higher education for women, more women in the professions, equal pay for equal work, etc. (Rosen, 2000). The biggest feminist organization—the National Organization for Women (NOW)—operated under this guiding framework. Radical feminism grew as a response to liberal feminism, and also to other major social movements of the 1960s, such as the civil rights movement and the New Left (Freeman, 1975; Echols, 1989). Radical feminists advocated sweeping social changes; rather than suggesting changes to

the present social-political-economic system (as in demanding women have equal access to the professions), radical feminists encouraged eliminating the established system all together. They identified fundamental flaws in the system that would not be ameliorated by simply adding women to the system. To bring about justice and liberation, radical feminists argued, the social-political-economic system would have to be fundamentally reconceived.

The defining characteristic of radical feminism, and its primary contribution to the women's movement, was its practice of consciousness-raising (C-R). Hogeland (1998) notes that historians disagree on the origins of C-R for the feminist movement: two popular theories are that it developed within the New Left, and that it originated with the Chinese revolutionary practice of "speaking bitterness." C-R was important for women within the New Left as early as 1964, when it was their conversations with each other that led them to recognize their own maltreatment within movement organizing. At both the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's 1964 Waveland Conference and the Students for a Democratic Society's 1965 Rethinking Conference, women pushed the issue of their own role within the movement, which, through these conversations, they realized had been as coffee makers and note takers, but never as organizational or intellectual leaders of the groups (Rosen, 2000). Once they had split from the New Left groups, radical feminists continued and refined their practice of developing analysis through oral discussion, the process that became known as C-R (Evans, 1997). Operating with the slogan "the personal is political," radical feminists shared their experiences in small discussion groups, and used that discussion to formulate analysis and theory, and then planned and carried out actions based on that analysis (Dow, 1996). Radical

feminists operated under the assumption that women's personal experiences of oppression were products of a male-defined system, and that through conversations about their experiences, they could understand the structure of that system, so that ultimately they could abolish or radically restructure the system. Through their C-R groups, radical feminists pushed their analysis beyond the equal rights arguments that the liberal feminists were making to radical structural critiques of the prevailing cultural social order. Ultimately, the C-R format became so successful that even NOW tried to institute C-R groups (Dow, 1996).

By the early 1970s, when the *Woman's Bible* was republished, radical feminism had been beleaguered by internal disagreement, and was already waning (Freeman, 1975; Echols, 1989). Liberal feminism, which had waded through its own share of internal conflict, was still plodding along slowly. Both groups were focusing their remaining energy on the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, the same bill that the National Woman's Party had originally introduced in congress in 1923, just three years after the passage of woman suffrage (Rosen, 2000).

#### *American Christianity in the Late Twentieth Century*

At its republication, though, the *Woman's Bible* was not primarily birthed into feminism, but rather into religion. Religion in the United States, and Christianity more narrowly, had not escaped the tumult of the 1960s, of which the New Left and feminists of the 1960s had been both creators and products. The rise in popularity of modernism and intellectualism that was documented in Chapter Two challenged Christianity, and especially institutional Protestantism, through the first half of the twentieth century. The Protestant denominations were hindered by the development of fundamentalism at the

turn of the century, and the popularity of the holiness and pentecostal movements shortly after (Marty, 1989). The mainstream churches did not regain their strength until the post-war period, when the church stumbled upon the successful strategy of avoiding the challenges of modernity by de-emphasizing the role of Scripture and tradition in its spiritual practice, instead emphasizing rituals of friendship, such as the passing of the peace during worship services (Sweet, 1989). Modernism had made faith too demanding, and higher criticism had made the Bible harder for Christians to deal with in devotional terms. Sweet concludes that the institutional Protestant church thrived in the 1950s by avoiding the topics that had become so controversial with the rise of modernism.

The forced ignorance upon which 1950s Protestantism was based was necessarily short-lived. Christianity's boom was temporarily sustained by a shift to social gospel theology, but ultimately, by the late 1960s and 1970s, Protestants were back to questioning some of the fundamental tenets of their faith. Mainstream Protestantism in the late-1960s and 1970s revolved around this questioning, and according to Marty (1989), in the second sixties and 1970s, Protestant Christianity became more individualized, and churches encouraged their members to focus on a "spiritual journey." As a result, Christian organizations became more pluralistic (Sweet, 1989). At the same time, church bureaucracies were increasingly distrusted for being out of touch with the people, and an antiestablishment spirit emerged in modernist churches. Even Catholicism was becoming more democratic, with the increased agency that Vatican II had given to the laity in the mid-1960s. On January 19, 1974, *Seattle Times* religion editor, Ray Ruppert, wrote about young people joining extremist religious sects, such as the Moonies and the Children of God, and argued that they did so because they were

looking for (1) a leader, (2) a structural community, and (3) a coherent system of belief, none of which, for better or worse, mainstream Christianity offered in the 1970s.

At the beginning of 1974, the Religion Newswriters Association published a ranking of the top religion news stories of 1973 (Ruppert, 1974a). This top-ten list provides a few useful markers for the religious context into which the *Woman's Bible* of the 1970s was birthed. Within that year, the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church had threatened to split over issues related to the modernist controversy. In 1973, the newswriters also noted a trend away from social activism and toward personal religion (in the form of Bible studies, prayer groups, etc.). In 1973, Episcopal bishops had ordained 11 women, but the rest of the church hierarchy refused to recognize these women's orders, calling their ordinations "irregular." Throughout 1973, parents had been attempting to rescue their children from extremist groups like the Children of God, which were becoming popular due to reasons including the ones cited above. Finally, in 1973, the United Presbyterian Church agreed to return to the Council on Church Union. The UPC had been a founding member of this powerful ecumenical group, and its withdrawal had threatened the future success of ecumenism. Its return, however, symbolized the ongoing importance of ecumenical activities.

### *Christianity and Feminism*

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, mainstream liberal feminism paid a minimal amount of attention to Christianity. Both nationally and locally, NOW sponsored committees on religion, which focused primarily on forcing institutional change in how churches treated women (Zikmund, 1989; Rosen, 2000). NOW advocated ordination for women, and the appointment of women to local pastorates, since many denominations



had previously begun to ordain women but refused or failed to employ them as pastors of local churches. Liberal feminists like the members of NOW also argued for equal representation of men and women on powerful church committees, and many denominations formed committees to study the status and role of women within the church (Zikmund, 1989).

The church's response to such feminist advocacy is evident in the pages of popular Christian magazines, like *Christian Century* and *Christianity Today*. Both ran numerous articles describing the influence that women's liberation was having on the institutional church. *Christianity Today* even conducted a survey of church leaders from various denominations about the changing roles of women (Forbes, 1974). A majority of their respondents supported increased roles for women in the church, and they largely supported the ERA. Other Christian press coverage of the women's liberation movement included Biblical arguments for and against equal rights within the church, and coverage of the ordination of women across the denominations (e.g., Palmer, 1971; "Women priests rebuked," 1974). Feminist magazines did not give religion as much attention as religion gave feminism, but a 1974 issue of *Ms.* did focus on women and religion, with its feature article highlighting the story of the 11 women who had been ordained Episcopal priests (Boyd, 1974).

Linked to this liberal feminist organizing, the role of women within the churches had been changing. In the 1950s, some mainstream Protestant denominations—including the United Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church—had granted ordination rights to women, but little material change followed until the late 1960s and early 1970s (Zikmund, 1989). In 1968, the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican

Communion declared that there were no theological barriers to ordaining women, but then the Episcopal Church still refused to recognize their ordination in 1973, and women were not officially admitted to the Episcopal priesthood until 1976 (Zikmund, 1989). In the 1970s, women's enrollment in seminary increased significantly (Zikmund, 1989). Lay women were also acquiring more powerful position within the churches, and in 1974, Claire Randall, a Presbyterian laywoman, became the first female general secretary of the National Council of Churches.

The same issue of *Ms.* described above also included an excerpt, titled "Is God a verb?," from Mary Daly's 1968 book, *The Church and the Second Sex*. Mary Daly's radical theology, as explicated in that book, and in her 1974 *Beyond God the Father*, represents the other type of interaction between religion and feminism. Daly was associated with radical feminists, and their publication, *Notes from the First Year*, includes an article by her. Although she did not call herself a post-Christian until her 1974 book, Daly challenged the roots of patriarchal Christianity in both books, and she and her followers ultimately dismissed Christianity as hopelessly patriarchal.

Feminism's interaction with Christianity roughly paralleled its interaction with other aspects of society (e.g. the family, work, etc.): liberal feminism wanted to make changes to be able to live within the system, while radical feminism would do away with it altogether. For liberal feminists concerned with Christianity, these sorts of within-system changes included affording more institutional power to women, and granting women ordination rights. However, many radical feminists, as exemplified in Mary Daly's writings, argued that Christianity was so patriarchal that even these alterations to the system could not eradicate its fundamental sexism. In this way, it also paralleled the

division that Stanton perceived existed about Christianity in nineteenth century feminism: there were those who would revise it to be able to live within it (the apologists), and those would do away with it.

“It can be a ‘*springboard*’ for discussion”: Coalition Task Force Statements about the  
*Woman’s Bible*

The Coalition Task Force’s 1974 publication of the *Woman’s Bible* created a new position between both of the divisions summarized above. They offered a more radical critique of Christianity than liberal feminism’s proposals for women’s ordination had been able to do. But they did not abandon religion, as Mary Daly had been so compelled to do. Similarly, unlike Stanton’s nineteenth century colleagues, they did not consider the Bible too sacred to criticize, but they did consider it meaningful enough to engage. In 1974, the Women and Religion Task Force of the Church Council of Greater Seattle (a predecessor to the Coalition Task Force) issued a Statement of Confession, which read, in part,

We have found ourselves to be in a position of conforming to the cultures, attitudes, and systems of male dominance rather than seeking to transform them. Moreover, we have supported male dominance within the church itself, denying to women justice in receiving recognition and opportunity to participate as whole persons within the community of faith. (qtd in Cate, 1974, p. viii)

This task force was made up of church members, who were able to stake hefty claims against the church, but still remain devoted members of the church. The original

publication and the re-publication of the *Woman's Bible* have in common that both projects were accomplished through the collective work of a committee of women. The fundamental difference between the Coalition's project and Stanton's project, was that, organizationally, the Coalition was a church-related body. These women were drawn together by their active participation in their respective churches. Each of them was so active in her own church that she had become involved in the Church Council's activities. Thus, the body that drew the Coalition together was an explicitly religious institution, whereas the body (Stanton) that drew together the original revising committee was not affiliated with the church.

The Coalition Task Force on Women Religion was an offshoot of the Women and Religion Task Force of the Church Council of Greater Seattle. Part of the sweeping move toward ecumenism in the 1960s and 1970s, the Church Council was a body that brought together Christians of various sects. The Coalition Task Force itself was an ecumenical group made up, as Earl Hansen wrote, of "Protestants, Catholics, Jews, 'and Unitarians'" (Hansen, 1974, p. A8). Its members included Jessie Kinnear, who was then serving as the executive secretary of the Church Council (she and executive director Bill Cate were its only employees), Jan Cate (Bill Cate's wife), and Cathy Lux and Shirly Kaplan (both local NOW leaders), among others. They published the *Woman's Bible* in paperback in 1974, and, in an effort to complete an all-woman run operation, they had the book printed by a local woman-owned printing press. Coalition members introduced the book at the NOW convention in Texas in May of that year, where they sold 300 copies out of their first printing of 1000 copies. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer's* religion editor, Earl Hansen, ran a story featuring the Coalition Task Force and the *Woman's Bible*, and

the following week a local woman wrote in saying that the University Bookstore (one of the three outlets for purchasing the *Woman's Bible*) was out of copies. The Coalition Task force would print the book twice that year, and then once each of the following three years.

The Coalition expressed the spirit of its project in a 13-page “Editor’s preface” at the beginning of its edition of the *Woman's Bible*. In this preface, eight committee members reflected on the meaning that the *Woman's Bible* had for them and the meaning that they hoped it would have for its readers in their era. The Coalition also published an accompanying study guide shortly after they re-published the *Woman's Bible* itself. Co-authored by women other than those who wrote in the “Editor’s preface,” the study guide offers its own explanation of the *Woman's Bible*, and it and Stanton’s place in feminist history. The study guide then provides discussion questions for each chapter of the *Woman's Bible*. It includes two suggestions for how to use the *Woman's Bible* and the study guide with a discussion group, and it also leaves open the possibility that group members might devise their own use for the *Woman's Bible* and study guide. The eight letters that make up the “Editor’s preface,” as well as the study guide, provide an important example of a second wave reading of the *Woman's Bible*.

The Coalition Task Force made no secret about their intentions: to reform the church, and the role of women within it, and to stop the appropriation of their own faith for anti-feminist causes. The statement of their predecessor group, the Women and Religion Task Force of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, talked about “when we as the church begin to address the issue of women and religion” (qtd in Cate, viii), and the Coalition had charged itself with following through on addressing the issue. In her

opening letter in the Editors' Preface, Eleanor D. Bilimoria spelled out this stand when she wrote, "We invite you to join us in person or in spirit as we endeavor to promote the equality of women in all areas of religious life" (viii). The principal aim of the Coalition, then, was to bring about equality for women within the church, and they encouraged readers of their edition of the *Woman's Bible* to join this struggle.

The Coalition Task Force also responded to anti-feminist groups who used Biblical rationales to oppress women. Bilimoria noted that "in 1974, we find specific religious institutions leading and funding opposition to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, pushing amendments to kill the Supreme Court decision on abortion" (p. viii). Martha Solomon's (1978, 1979, 1983) analysis of StopERA rhetoric confirms Bilimoria's assertion. According to her reading of the discourse, anti-ERA proponents based their arguments upon a construction of a natural God-given order, which they argued feminist proposals would destroy. As feminists within the church, members of the Coalition were in a unique position to stop the appropriation of their own faith for causes they opposed. From their perspectives within the church, Coalition members recognized the dangerous power of Christianity "as preached and practiced," and their re-publication of the *Woman's Bible* was part of their effort to counteract it.

The *Woman's Bible* became a valuable argumentative resource for Christian feminists for four specific reasons, because 1) it was written as a political tool; 2) it redeemed the otherwise-oppressive scriptures for women, 3) it fit within the tradition of equal rights feminism, and 4) it operated through familiar forms: commentary and discussion.

*“Opening the doors of religious equality to women”: The Woman’s Bible as a Political Tool*

Just as the *Woman’s Bible* had responded to the political and clerical disempowerment that women had faced in the nineteenth century, Coalition members argued, it could respond to these injustices that still existed in the twentieth century. According to Coalition members, when the church and government had limited women organizationally and politically, its leaders had often done so using Biblical rationales. Thus, the *Woman’s Bible* had aimed to contradict the readings of the Bible that allowed church leaders to oppress women. According to Eleanor D. Bilimoria, the *Woman’s Bible* was created “to challenge the injustices to women contained in the Scriptures or in their interpretations” (vi). At the same time, women had not been allowed to study the Bible, nor had their concerns been represented in the Biblical scholarship published by men. The *Woman’s Bible* had provided a venue for women’s scholarship, and scholarship on the topic of women. Second Wave readers popularized the narrative that Stanton had constructed the *Woman’s Bible* in direct response to the revised edition of the Bible completed in 1888. According to this story, Stanton was so hurt that no women had been asked to participate on that revising committee that she formed her own revising committee. She was also angered that the revising committee had not even taken “the woman question” into consideration. M. Kathleen Lane wrote in the Coalition’s “Editor’s preface,” “Referring to the revised edition of 1888, Elizabeth Cady Stanton called the whole revision into question. ‘*Whatever the bible may be made to do in Hebrew or Greek,*’ she commented, ‘*in plain English it does not exalt or dignify woman*’” (emphasis original, p. ix). According to this rendering of the *Woman’s Bible*’s origin, it

came about because the religious establishment failed to take women's concerns into consideration in Biblical religion.

For twentieth century feminists who believed that such discrimination still occurred, the *Woman's Bible* could still be an appropriate solution to that same problem. Coalition members explicitly tied their work to Stanton's when they asserted that she and her colleagues had also been fighting for equal rights for women within the church itself and in the larger political sphere. In both cases, Coalition members tied Stanton and her colleagues' concerns to the concerns they had identified in their own twentieth century context. As Bilimoria put it, "little progress has been made in opening the doors of religious equality to women" (vii). Within the church, specifically, some of the injustices that carried over from Stanton's day to the Coalition's context were the refusal of the institutional churches to ordain women or give them significant positions of leadership within the church, as well as Biblical scholarship's ignorance of women's voices and women's concerns.

In addition to reforming women's role within the church, Coalition members argued that the *Woman's Bible* and its readership could reform religion itself. Both Ruth Whisler Shearer and Eleanor Bilimoria asserted that the Bible's use in the twentieth century had been to the church's detriment, especially in terms of membership. Re-examining the Bible, according to these women, would be beneficial for the church. According to Whisler Shearer, "larger numbers of women in the movement for human rights" had "already rejected all established religion and see the organized churches as the primary enemy to defeat" (p. x). In response to this problem that Whisler Shearer identified, Bilimoria offered that "clergy worried about the increasing drop in attendance



and membership might find clues in the Woman's Bible as to why they are not speaking to a large percentage of the population" (p. vii). Whisler Shearer agreed with Bilimoria that the *Woman's Bible* could have the positive effect of reforming religion. She wrote, "I cannot help but think that wider distribution of the Woman's Bible with its common sense interpretation and its reverence for the true greatness of God and the immortal teachings of Jesus Christ might hasten the transformation of the organized churches from laggards to leaders in the movement for freedom, self-respect and responsibility for all human beings" (p. x). According to both of these group members, the *Woman's Bible* could reform religion so that it could become more palatable to a wider variety of people. "*Reverence for the true greatness of God and the immortal teachings of Jesus Christ*": *The Woman's Bible Redeems the Scriptures*

Since the stated task of the Coalition, as a church-related agency, was to evaluate the relationship of women and the church, and their political goals grew to include improving the status of women within the church as well as reclaiming the church for women, redeeming the Bible itself was a key strategy for the Coalition. If they were to prove that women deserved a greater role in the church (a church which made its decisions based on the Scriptures), and if they were to invite progressives (feminists) back into the church, they would have to demonstrate the liberating nature of the Bible. In the Editors' Preface, Eleanor Bilimoria proposed that a re-reading of the Bible, especially of the Gospels, would prove "that Christianity is an Equal Rights religion" (p. vii), and the Coalition was suggesting that the *Woman's Bible* was a useful tool for that re-reading. Coalition members argued that the *Woman's Bible* redeemed the Scriptures for religious feminists.<sup>1</sup> For instance, the study guide praised Stanton's reading of the

first creation story. According to these Coalition members, “Stanton had a deep sense of...the *absolute rightness of equality*. This was a position she found firmly grounded in the first creation story in chapter one of Genesis which states that male and female were created equal” (p. 4, emphasis in original). Coalition members implicitly argue through Stanton’s voice that these stories that promote equality had been ignored by church leaders when they argued for women’s subjugation. By highlighting the “true” meaning of the Scripture, Stanton and her revising committee had given feminists like the Coalition a resource for responding to church leaders who argued that the Bible assigned woman a separate, and lesser, role. For Ruth Whisler Shearer, the *Woman’s Bible* further showed its readers the beauty of the Bible. She wrote, “the women of the Revising Committee who prepared this commentary on the Bible recognized God as the great creator of all that is good and beautiful... The view espoused by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Revising Committee exhorts and glorifies the Deity while freeing all of humankind to seek meaning and purpose in their lives” (p. x). According to Whisler-Shearer’s argument, the *Woman’s Bible* redeemed the Bible because it praised God’s beauty as revealed in the Scriptures. The *Woman’s Bible* could help the Coalition and its audience members rescue the Bible from the hands of those who had skewed it to aid their oppressive tendencies, and reclaim the Bible as a tool for those who sought liberation.

Coalition members, in deciding to study the Scriptures, assumed that they were worthy of engaging, and they argued that Stanton and her colleagues had shared that assumption. If the church had used the Bible to oppress women, but the Bible was redeemable, then the church must have been at fault for the oppression of women.

Coalition members believed that the Bible itself could become more palatable if it could be rescued from the grips of organized religion. According to Whisler Shearer,

Churchmen with years of college education are still unable to distinguish between the teachings of Jesus Christ to all of humanity and the letters of Paul to his peers, claiming to worship Jesus Christ as the Son of God while crediting Paul's unquestionably mortal words to the Deity even when they conflict with Christ's own words and actions. (p. x)

Parts of the Bible, then, were redeemable, but the church, which its continued insistence on the "incorporation of ancient superstitions" into its teachings, had failed to distinguish between various parts of the Bible. Thus, Coalition members' readings of Stanton's project, as well as their readings of the Bible, rested on a dissociation between Scripture and tradition (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). It had been the institutional church's tradition (in the form of its doctrines, arguments by clergy and other leaders, etc.) that had limited women. Shirlie Kaplan argued that Stanton saw "clearly that a major oppression of women lay in religion as preached and practiced" (p. xi). The problem was not with religion itself, but how it had been "preached and practiced." Coalition members wanted to join Stanton in rescuing the Bible from its treatment at the hands of the church.

By choosing to remain members of their individual churches, to continue to embrace their religious traditions (which were largely mainstream Protestant traditions), Coalition members were arguing that women's liberation would be possible within the confines of Biblical religion. Charged with the task of reconciling religion and feminism, the Coalition's structures of relevancy centered around what would redeem

Christianity for feminism, and feminism for Christianity. The *Woman's Bible* fit within this structure for Coalition members. It negotiated a space where feminists could find solace in Biblical religion, and Christians could allow the advances of feminism.

Operating from this unique niche between feminism and Christianity, Coalition members found the *Woman's Bible* relevant because it redeemed the Scriptures, thus reconciling Christianity and feminism.

*"So strongly for women's rights": The Woman's Bible and Liberal Feminism*

The second strategy that made the *Woman's Bible* politically useful in its twentieth century context was that the Coalition rooted it historically in the tradition of natural rights, equality, and liberal feminism. Before their "Editor's preface" to the *Woman's Bible*, Coalition members included a letter from Jane T. Walker, from whom they had acquired an original copy of the *Woman's Bible*. Walker told the story of that copy of the book, and how it had been handed down through generations of women in her family. She celebrated her female ancestors' commitments to feminism and their achievements on woman's behalf. In each case, she tied their attachment to the *Woman's Bible* to their loyalty to working for woman's rights. She described that Mary Elizabeth Meech, Walker's great aunt, did not marry, but instead "had a fascinating position as secretary or social secretary to a Mrs. Webb (of the Vanderbilt family)... I seem to recall she also worked in the Suffragist movement" (1974, p. iv). For Walker, her great aunt's feminism could be measured in terms of individual rights: she worked instead of marrying, and she advocated the franchise for women. Walker went on to describe her own mother's "amusement and delight in The Woman's Bible" (p. iv). And her own mother had been "an ardent women's rights activist," who was "so strongly for women's

rights that soon after the right to vote was passed, she organized a group of women who descended on the local political boss” (p. iv). Similarly, in her commentary, Eleanor D. Bilimoria defined a feminist as “one who believes in the equality of women and men” (1974, p. vii) and she rooted the *Woman’s Bible* specifically in Stanton’s broader tradition of activism, specifically linking it to the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, and the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. The Declaration was obviously a natural rights document, and Bilimoria even quoted from the most overt statement of this liberal enlightenment philosophy, “that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...” (p. vi).

According to the women of the Coalition, the *Woman’s Bible* grew out of this tradition of feminism by natural rights: that, as human beings, women deserve equal rights with men. In nineteenth century feminism, such arguments were more radical than their counterparts. Their counterparts were the expediency arguments that advocated woman suffrage on the grounds that given the vote, women would support important progressive reform. By the end of the nineteenth century, these sorts of expediency arguments had become mainstream, while Stanton’s type of appeals to natural rights were radical (Kraditor, 1965; Campbell, 1989). The Coalition, however, was not making a radical feminist argument. In their feminist context, such equality arguments corresponded with the more conservative liberal feminism, whereas radical feminists argued that more than simply giving women an equal place in the system, the whole system needed to be changed. By rooting the *Woman’s Bible* in its natural rights background, Coalition members found it a more mainstream home than it had known previously.

*“An important study document”: The Woman’s Bible as a Consciousness-Raising Resource*

Finally, the *Woman’s Bible* was able to become a useful argumentative resource for twentieth century feminists because it operated through a familiar medium: commentary and discussion. Unlike the book’s nineteenth century audience, these second wave feminists largely agreed on a description of the form of the *Woman’s Bible*. They explicitly contested what they considered a misconception about the book, when the authors of the study guide wrote “*The Woman’s Bible* is not an attempt to re-translate the Bible to make it more acceptable to women” (p. 1). According to Coalition members, the *Woman’s Bible* was not a new Bible, but instead a series of commentaries on the old Bible, which Elizabeth Cady Stanton had compiled in order to sort out all of the Bible’s statements about women. The study guide quoted a long passage from *Eighty Years and More* (from the chapter that her children had once purged from the book) where Stanton explained that she “had long heard so many conflicting opinions about the Bible” and she just wanted to straighten them out (p. 3). According to the authors of the study guide, “*The Woman’s Bible* is a commentary, i.e. a series of explanatory notes, annotations, remarks or observations” (1975, p. 1). For Shirlie Kaplan, the most useful analogy for the *Woman’s Bible* was a Talmud. Just as male scholars and rabbis had done in the two recognized Talmuds of the Jewish faith, the women of the revising committee had published a group of commentaries on the Scriptures. The Talmud analogy allowed Kaplan to understand the value of the *Woman’s Bible*—“there is a need for their existence for without earnest discussion, Scripture itself becomes irrelevant and dies” (p. xi).

Assessing the *Woman's Bible* as a series of commentaries—or even a discussion between the women of Stanton's day—Coalition members then urged a discussion model for using the *Woman's Bible*. In their Statement of Confession, which Cate's letter quoted, the group had admitted that they had conformed to the dominant culture, and had read the Bible in the terms of the dominant culture, which included male dominance. “As a result,” the statement concluded, “we tend to read and interpret the Bible selectively, emphasizing what supports our biases” (p. viii). The benefit of the *Woman's Bible* was that it allowed women to work together to move beyond those biases that they had admitted. The *Woman's Bible* was specifically designed for women to use in small study groups: it was a discussion tool. Simply the production of an accompanying study guide suggests this argument. Jan Cate made the argument explicitly in her letter when she wrote “the Woman's Bible should be included when women study the Scripture” (p. ix). Similarly, in outlining the group's four purposes for re-issuing the *Woman's Bible*, Jessie Kinnear noted, “a third purpose in providing The Woman's Bible is our hope that it will prove an important study document for feminist groups, churches, classes and that it will be used in libraries, schools, colleges, etc. While we do not always agree with the theological position of the writers of The Woman's Bible, it can be a ‘*springboard*’ for discussion” (p. xviii, italics original). She also went on to describe that committee members had “found ourselves stimulated by the thinking and often in sympathy with the arguments made by these feminists of the last century” (p. xviii). Coalition members also enacted this understanding of the *Woman's Bible* as a discussion starter by provoking discussions with the text. For instance, in her short contribution to the “Editor's preface,” Lane asked, “May I continue Elizabeth's open challenge with a few questions?,” and then

proceeded to make three challenges to the text—suggesting a new reading of the first creation story, questioning the authorship of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, and noting that some of Paul’s statements were contradicted by the very fact that he worked with women in the leadership of the early church (p. ix). Coalition members demonstrated what they advised their readers to do: they read and carefully considered both the *Woman’s Bible* and the Bible itself, and then entered into discussion with both documents.

Situating the *Woman’s Bible* into the C-R discussion model popular among second wave feminists meant that Stanton’s work could be valued in its own terms. Whereas nineteenth century commentators had made much of the fact that Stanton and her colleagues had minimal (or no) training in Biblical criticism, such complaints mattered little to second wave feminists. The commentary contained within the *Woman’s Bible* came from its authors’ personal experience, the very material that consciousness-raising, as a practice, was teaching women to value. Further, the book itself encouraged women to engage the Scriptures personally, through the lens of their own experiences. In contrast to the male establishment, which had consistently valorized intellectualism, twentieth century feminism was encouraging women to find truth through their own experience, which the authors of the *Woman’s Bible* had done.

The benefit of using the *Woman’s Bible* to study the Bible was that, as a discussion-starter, it did not offer any definitive interpretations of the Bible, but rather invited its audience members into conversation about the Bible. By encouraging this discussion model, Coalition members were appropriating and encouraging the broader movement’s technique for consciousness-raising. They did not stick to a strict model of



C-R (because they introduced a study document and method), but by the mid-1970s, a strict model of C-R was rarely in practice anyway. Using a C-R-like model with the *Woman's Bible* could transform this Biblical commentary into the sort of political action that the Coalition aimed for. Just like C-R, the Coalition suggested that discussion around the *Woman's Bible* would grow into analysis, which would lead to political action. Of course, it had been political action—around reforming the church, opposing Biblically-based anti-feminist arguments—that the coalition had been urging all along.

The *Woman's Bible*, even though it had been composed 70 years before consciousness-raising was adopted by the women's movement as a technique, fit neatly into this tradition. Because of its fit within C-R, but also because of its political nature, its redeeming statements about the scriptures, and its history within liberal or natural rights feminism, the *Woman's Bible* became a particularly useful resource for the Coalition in reforming the church.

#### “A valuable keynote to the future historian”: The *Woman's Bible* and Feminist Theologians

After the *Woman's Bible* was republished in the early 1970s, it became an important text within feminist theology—a new area of study in the 1970s, which has since become one of the most powerful academic groups within theology circles. Since these texts often cite Stanton's work as an originary moment for their own tradition of scholarship, they provide access to other twentieth century readings of the *Woman's Bible*.

The intellectual field of feminist theology has developed into a powerful subfield of the religious academy within the last two decades. As Cullen Murphy (1998) describes, feminist and gender concerns have come to dominate the annual joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature (AAR/SBL). Even in the pluralistic 1990s where “a sense of open-mindedness is at once pervasive and implacable” across the academy, Murphy argues that at AAR/SBL, “the engagement with women’s issues stands out among every other discrete concern” (p. 3). Even though Mary Daly and others were writing as early as the 1970s, formal and institutionalized feminist scholarship in religion did not take hold until the 1980s, and its contributions were especially felt by the 1990s. According to Murphy, most of the scholarship in feminist theology had been published within the ten or fifteen years prior to the 1998 publication of his book.

Feminist theology in the 1980s and 1990s has taken on a wide range of concerns, and the trajectories of the previous splits within Christian feminism are still evident in contemporary feminist theology. Feminist investigations into the text itself have sometimes continued in the nineteenth century apologetic tradition: they have sought to correct misinterpretations and mistranslations, or to better contextualize passages offensive to women, so as to redeem the Bible (Murphy, 1989). Much feminist Biblical scholarship seeks to uncover the role of women in the Israelite community and the early church, to discover the female counterpart to the male life that is so well recorded in the Bible. Upon discovering the patriarchalism of the Old and New Testaments, some feminist scholars have tried to theorize the implications of that patriarchalism on Christianity through the centuries, as well as popular culture historically and currently.

And for some scholars, that sort of theorizing has led them beyond the apologetic tradition to envision an egalitarian Christianity that would transcend present day Christianity's heavy reliance on the Bible. This growth in feminist theology has been accompanied by increasing attention to women in church history, and to issues of gendered institutional power in contemporary churches, among other concerns. As the textual analysis below will show, many of the leading scholars in feminist theology have taken Stanton's *Woman's Bible* as a point of origin for their own intellectual tradition.

Mary Daly, the first feminist theologian to gain national prominence, did not embrace the *Woman's Bible* like feminist theologians two decades later would. Unlike those feminist theologians, whose work forms the basis for most of the analysis below, Daly did not take the *Woman's Bible* as an originary moment or justification for her own work. Daly's public career began with her publication of *The Church and the Second Sex* in 1968, and then *Beyond God the Father* in 1973. In her first book, Daly still expressed hope for the Christian church, and argued that women's liberation could redeem it. By her second book, though, Daly was calling herself a post-Christian, and arguing that Christianity was hopelessly patriarchal. Notably, even Daly's second book, which was published after the first (1972) republication of the *Woman's Bible* gave minimal attention to the text. She cited Stanton once, agreeing with her assertion that the myth of feminine evil was central to the Fall, which was central to Christian theology, and then she set off two of statements from Stanton as epigraphs. However, Daly did not engage Stanton critically, or offer any thoughts beyond these brief citation and quotations.

Ironically, in an analysis of women's religious history, Joanne Carlson Brown (1995) groups Daly and Stanton together in the same category of feminist theologians,

even though Daly did not draw on Stanton herself. For Carlson Brown, Daly and Stanton represent a tradition of radical feminist theology that criticizes Scripture, and encourages women to abandon Christianity in order to pursue liberation. Carlson Brown calls the *Woman's Bible* "a scathing critique not only of the scriptural passages relating to women but of the very religion itself" (1995, p. 255). Carlson Brown, however, writes as a 19th century historian, and when she summarizes the content of the *Woman's Bible* she draws upon a nineteenth century understanding of the text. True enough, a nineteenth century reading of the *Woman's Bible* might be similar to Daly's theology. However, the buzz about the *Woman's Bible* in Daly's time, as exemplified by the Coalition's letters, portrayed it as far more Christian-friendly document than Carlson Browne describes it as. Thus, as much as Daly's theology may have been in step with the nineteenth century Cady Stanton, she was out of step with the twentieth century construction of Cady Stanton.

Beyond Daly, the *Woman's Bible* would be picked up by mainstream feminist theologians in the following decades. Beginning in 1990, the Women in the Biblical World section of the Society of Biblical Literature sponsored discussions of the *Woman's Bible* each year at the AAR/SBL convention, in preparation for the centennial of its original publication. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explained that these panel discussions were begun by herself and Esther Fuchs. Fuchs had initially approached Schüssler Fiorenza about collaborating on a centennial revision of the *Woman's Bible*, but Schüssler Fiorenza had declined, pushing instead for these panels as an opportunity "for exploring the theoretical boundaries and implications of the *Woman's Bible*" (1994, p. ix). As it turned out, though, Schüssler Fiorenza explained, "Westminster/John Knox

Press took up professor Fuchs's idea directly and published in 1992 *The Women's Bible Commentary*, which was edited by Carol Newsome and Sharon Ringe." Ultimately, Schüssler Fiorenza and Fuchs's panel discussion series would also turn into a book: a two volume edited collection called *Searching the Scripture*.

Both marking the *Woman's Bible's* centennial, these two dissimilar books suggest the ways that twentieth century feminist theologians appropriated the book to serve their own political and academic ends. First, they used the explicitly political nature of this Biblical scholarship to legitimate the political nature of their own Biblical scholarship. Second, they exploited the ambiguity of the book to make both reformist and radical arguments about the role of the Bible in feminist religion. Finally, they carefully distanced their work from the limitations they perceived in Stanton's book.

*"A profoundly political weapon with great flexibility": Feminist theologians embrace the Woman's Bible for its political edge*

Where Schüssler Fiorenza, Newsome and Ringe, and other twentieth century feminist theologians agreed was on the radical political nature of the *Woman's Bible*. In this respect, their use of the book accorded with the approach advocated by the Coalition Task Force. In celebrating the anniversary of Stanton's book, feminist theologians recognized her political impulses for publishing it, and drew some parallels between her political motivations and the political situation of their own day. First, they recognized that religion had served as a barrier to political liberation for women, and that Stanton published the *Woman's Bible* in order to respond to the religious arguments that had kept women in submission. Schüssler Fiorenza summarized, "Over and against those who saw the project as a waste of time, Cady Stanton insisted on its political necessity. She

argued that it is important for women to interpret the Bible, because scripture and its authority have been and continue to be used against women struggling for emancipation” (1994, p. 1). Similarly, in her review of another of Schüssler Fiorenza’s books, *Bread Not Stone*, Connie Koenenn described “Cady Stanton’s conviction, born of experience, that any advances women tried to make—in politics, education, or employment—would be opposed by the religious establishment as contradicting the will of God” (1985). Feminist theologians also noted that Stanton’s work came in response to women’s exclusion from participation in Biblical studies. Toward the end of the twentieth century, one of the most popular originary narratives for Stanton’s project was that it had grown out of her frustration with the revising project of 1888. The story goes that Stanton was so irritated that no women had been invited to participate in that project, nor had the men of the committee taken any time to consider the role of women in the Bible, that she formed her own women’s revising committee in response. The back of the edition of the *Woman’s Bible* published as a part of Prometheus Books’ Great Minds Series in 1999 summarized this narrative, “The 1870 revision of the Authorized English Version of the Bible by an all-male committee of the Church of England prompted Stanton to compile the works of many prominent feminists in *The Woman’s Bible*.” Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza echoed this argument when she wrote, “Since men have also been the Bible’s authoritative interpreters throughout the centuries, she argued, women must now claim their right to biblical interpretation” (1994, p. 1). According to the narrative summarized by the Great Minds Series as well as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the *Woman’s Bible* tried to carve out for women their well-deserved place in Biblical studies, where they had previously been excluded.

In addition to demonstrating that Stanton's work grew out of her own political situation, much like the Coalition, feminist theologians also argued that their own context was analogous to Stanton's. Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford used the *Woman's Bible* to call for radical and political feminist Biblical criticism, as opposed to the feminist criticism that she described as "a mere tinkering with the processes to ease or ameliorate a sexist system" (p. 61). According to DeSwarte Gifford, she and her colleagues were working in a situation much like that of Stanton's time: while other feminists were "tinkering," DeSwarte Gifford called upon the feminists of her time to respond in the same way that Stanton had responded to "tinkering," with a radical critique. Similarly, Connie Koenenn's review of *Bread Not Stone* draws upon concrete political situations of the twentieth century and likens them to the nineteenth century situation that prompted the creation of the *Woman's Bible*.

Today, with their awareness raised by the opposition of the religious right to the Equal Rights Amendment, to the 1973 Supreme Court decisions regarding legal abortions and to the ordination of women to the ministry, a new generation of feminist Bible scholars, both Jewish and Christian, is meeting the opposition on its own terrain, rereading the sacred texts with a critical and spiritual attention that calls into question key aspects of contemporary religious life...Like Cady Stanton, she [Fiorenza] understands the Bible as not simply a religious book but also a profoundly political weapon with great flexibility (1995).

It was only because twentieth century feminist theologians constructed their own political context to be similar to that of Stanton's day that they could find use for her political document.

As they were able to draw parallels between the two contexts, twentieth century feminist theologians were able to use the *Woman's Bible* as a model both for their own academic Biblical criticism, and for their social reform work more largely. They could use Stanton's project to prove that women were capable of doing Biblical criticism. In justifying her own project, Mary E. Hunt (1991) wrote, "The work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her Revising Committee on *The Woman's Bible* proved that women were perfectly capable of exegetical work, albeit in their time without modern tools of biblical criticism" (p. 63). More than any other feminist scholarship, *The Women's Bible Commentary* took the *Woman's Bible* seriously as a model for Biblical criticism. It followed the form of its predecessor closely; it was a series of commentaries written by women on the books of the Bible. Moreover, Newsom and Ringe describe in their introduction that contributors were encouraged not to try to cover an entire book of the Bible in their limited space allotments, but rather to focus in on the passages of most interest to women. Like Stanton's project, *The Woman's Bible Commentary* was a series of commentaries written by women on the passages of interest to women. Similarly, feminist theologians took on the *Woman's Bible* as a model for the social reform work they hoped to do through their scholarship. In her history of the book published in *Searching the Scriptures*, DeSwarte Gifford (1993) wrote "It can be a model of radical reform for late twentieth century feminists... it can be an empowering text for women of all times who struggle for a similar sense of dignity and worth" (p. 61). For feminist



theologians, then, the *Woman's Bible* served as a model narrowly for their scholarly work, and more broadly for the social reform that would grow out of that scholarly work.

*“A profoundly political weapon with great flexibility”: Feminist theologians use the Woman's Bible to justify radical and reformist projects*

At the same time that feminist theologians agreed that Stanton's work justified their own political work, they disagreed strongly over the content of Stanton's project, specifically the extent to which she attacked Scripture or argued for reinterpretation of it (the apologist strategy). In his review of twentieth century feminist Biblical scholarship, John Updike used the *Woman's Bible* as an anchoring point of analysis. He summarized his article with some speculation about what Stanton might say about twentieth century feminist theology. He wrote, “Or she might, in one of her swerves of independent thought, decide that the Bible is an incorrigible document, set forever in its ways, beyond any doctoring with gender-sensitive rewordings, and that women had best harken to what sings to them and turn a deaf ear to the rest” (p. 97). By suggesting that she might, in the twentieth century, decide to abandon the Bible because it is “incorrigible,” Updike implied here that she did not give up on the Bible in her own lifetime.

Other twentieth century readers of the *Woman's Bible* disagreed with Updike, however. According to the authors of *The Woman's Bible Commentary*, Stanton's project adopted both strategies summarized above—it argued for reinterpreting Scripture as well as asserted its fundamental misogyny. Of the revising committee, these authors wrote, “In their comments the authors attacked both the male bias that had distorted the interpretation of the Bible and the misogyny of the text itself” (p. xx).

According to Rosemary Radford Reuther (1998), though, earlier woman suffragists had practiced the first of these two strategies, and the second had been Stanton's alone. Reuther compared Frances Willard and Anna Howard Shaw to Stanton and Matilda Joselyn Gage, and noted that Willard and Shaw had relied heavily on apologia strategies, and had maintained their loyalty to Christianity. Of the others, she noted, "Some, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joselyn Gage, shifted from apologia to attack on the Bible and Christianity as the primary tools of female subjugation..." (p. 173) Schüssler Fiorenza agreed with Reuther, and she situated the *Woman's Bible* within the context of the apologetic tradition—"The *Woman's Bible* and its interpretive traditions remain positioned within the space defined by patriarchal argument and women's apologetic response to it"—but then went on to describe how Stanton and her collaborators had transcended this space. According to Schüssler Fiorenza,

its hermeneutics sought to expand and replace the apologetic argument of other suffragists who insisted that the Bible, correctly understood, does not preach women's subordination... Although Cady Stanton agreed with them that the translations and interpretations of the Bible reflect male bias, she nevertheless also insisted that the Bible has not just been misinterpreted but that scripture itself is androcentric and biased in the interest of men. (1993, p. 4)

Kathi Kern (2001) notes that Schüssler Fiorenza's unique contribution to the *Woman's Bible* tradition was that she read it as an inherently patriarchal document. Indeed, Schüssler Fiorenza wrote, "Yet it was exactly her critical insight that the Bible is not just misunderstood or badly interpreted, but that it can be used in the political struggle against

women's suffrage because it *is* patriarchal and androcentric" (1983, p. 12). However, Schüssler Fiorenza's useful insight is not only that the *Woman's Bible* attacked the Bible at its core; after all, Stanton's foes in the suffrage and anti-suffrage movements had been arguing that that was the case all along. Instead, Schüssler Fiorenza's unique contribution was that she read the *Woman's Bible* as a radical attack on the Scripture, and still found it a meaningful document. In previous generations, the interpretive communities who believed that it was an attack on Scripture dismissed it as a worthless, blasphemous book. And those who found political utility in the book—including the Coalition Task Force—did so because they believed that it simply helped women reinterpret the Scriptures. Schüssler Fiorenza's unique contribution, then, is that she interpreted the *Woman's Bible* as a radical attack on the Bible, and yet she still evaluated it as a helpful document for Christian feminism. Schüssler Fiorenza's treatment of the *Woman's Bible* highlights a radical transformation within feminism. What feminists a century earlier had found so threatening—the *Woman's Bible's* revolutionary nature—was precisely what made it intriguing to at least some feminist theologians. Moreover, those of Stanton's colleagues who had embraced the *Woman's Bible* did so because they situated it in the apologist tradition. (Recall here Lillie Devereux Blake's contention at the 1896 NAWSA convention that "all the trouble" had arisen "from a misnomer. It was not a woman's Bible, but a woman's commentary" ["At work on congress," 1896, n.p.].) For at least one branch of twentieth century feminist thought, though, Stanton's work was valuable precisely because it did not participate in that apologist tradition.

These divergent readings of the *Woman's Bible* allowed feminist theologians then to use the text to support their own divergent projects. The *Woman's Bible* served as an

originary moment for both the projects described above—*The Woman's Bible Commentary* and *Searching the Scriptures*. *The Woman's Bible Commentary* explicitly modeled itself after the *Woman's Bible* (and adopted a slightly edited version of the title). Its editors, as described above, asserted that Stanton's project simultaneously argued that parts of the Bible were fundamentally misogynistic (and unsalvageable) while others could be salvaged through re-translation and re-interpretation. Following her model, the editors and authors of *The Woman's Bible Commentary* shared this assumption, and took it as their task, as Stanton had, to find those passages that could be saved.

Schüssler Fiorenza, conversely, could take Stanton as a starting point because she argued that she and Stanton shared the premise that the Bible was fundamentally patriarchal and misogynistic. Her book, *Searching the Scriptures* was prompted by five years worth of convention panel discussions on the *Woman's Bible*, and it dedicated its second volume to the *Woman's Bible*.<sup>2</sup> According to Schüssler Fiorenza, as quoted above, Stanton would not be caught trying to rescue the Bible from its own patriarchalism. Schüssler Fiorenza, similarly, would not be caught trying to rescue the Bible. Her own project was one of a radical feminist Biblical hermeneutic that would move Christianity beyond the traditional canon, and that would not hesitate to accuse the traditional canon of the patriarchalism of which it was guilty. Schüssler Fiorenza, then, like the editors of *The Woman's Bible Commentary*, had created Stanton in her own image.

Each camp of feminist theologians could place Stanton's complex Biblical criticism within their own scholarly tradition. For Newsome and Ringe, Stanton's work was relevant because it supported their own reformist, apologist Biblical scholarship.

Schüssler Firoenza could also exploit Stanton to fit within her own structure of relevancy, that the Christian Scriptures were inherently oppressive, which called for a radical feminist reading of them. Stanton's work could be appropriated to support both the reformist and revolutionary projects.

*"Transforming the legacy": Feminist theologians on the limitations of the Woman's Bible*

Twentieth century theologians, though, were very explicit to explain that Stanton's work was only a starting point, or even an inspiration, for their projects, and that their work went far beyond what Stanton was able to do. The editors of *The Women's Bible Commentary* explained their rationale for the title of their book. According to Newsome and Ringe,

whereas she entitled her work the 'Woman's Bible,' we have chosen the plural, 'Women's Bible.' The reason for this is our recognition of the diversity among women who read the Bible and study it. There is no single 'woman's perspective' but a rich variety of insight that comes from the different ways in which women's experience is shaped by culture, class, ethnicity, religious community, and other aspects of social identity.

(p. xxi)

Newsome and Ringe pointed to one of the most-often noted twentieth century hesitations about the *Woman's Bible*—its narrow perspective, and the racist and classist implications of that perspective. In *Searching the Scriptures*, Schüssler Fiorenza took issue with these implications, as well as a whole series of problems she identified in the *Woman's Bible*. She then went on to describe how her own project transcended these problems, in an

introductory chapter appropriately titled “Transforming the legacy.” The issues that her project promised to transcend included Stanton’s narrow focus on the Biblical canon, her assumption of a stable subject position called “woman,” her reductionist approach to the scriptures, and her premise that a woman’s reading of the Bible would necessarily be a feminist reading. Schüssler Fiorenza compared her work to the *Woman’s Bible’s* reductive tendency, writing, “whereas the authors of the *Woman’s Bible* used a reductive approach, singling out passages *about women*, this commentary for the most part has adopted a *transgressive method of proliferation*. Rather than focusing only on the women’s passages, it generally seeks to analyze writings in their entirety” (1994, p. 4). She also noted that *The Women’s Bible Commentary* employed this same reductionist approach, and it also followed Stanton’s premise that a woman’s reading would necessarily be a feminist reading. For Schüssler Fiorenza, then, although she drew heavily on the legacy of the *Woman’s Bible* and dedicated her own work to it, Stanton’s project was just barely a starting point for her. Riddled with nineteenth century problems, the *Woman’s Bible* proved for Schüssler Fiorenza and her colleagues how much the tradition of feminist Biblical criticism had advanced.

Here, again, Schüssler Fiorenza’s argument about the *Woman’s Bible* demonstrates the radical reversal in feminist from a century earlier. Specifically, what Schüssler Firoenza called Stanton’s “reductionist approach,” her choice to comment on specific passages of Scripture, was what made the *Woman’s Bible* non-controversial for the few nineteenth century suffragists who affirmed it. Those who endorsed the book did so on the grounds that it was simply a narrow commentary on particular passages of scripture. For Schüssler Fiorenza, though, this approach was one of the limitations of the

*Woman's Bible* and of some of the Biblical criticism of the 1990s, including *The Women's Bible Commentary*.

### Conclusion

In the 1890s, the *Woman's Bible* had been radical discourse that the powers within Stanton's own organization had been eager to silence. And due to the tight organizational structure of the suffrage movement by the end of the nineteenth century, such silencing was possible. Nearly all suffrage organizing happened under the auspices of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. The leadership of that association could construct and control a unified message for the movement. Increasingly by the end of the nineteenth century, they did not hesitate to silence voices that detracted from the narrow focus of the association. Of course, by the twentieth century women's liberation movement, there was no such hegemonic feminist organization. Even though the National Organization for Women (NOW) became a semi-powerful force representing the interests of liberal feminism, many women organized in smaller explicitly feminist, but also explicitly non-NOW, groups. These radical feminists operated in small consciousness-raising groups that developed their own analyses and largely carried out their own actions. Even NOW experienced some diversity among its lower ranks: the small groups of its state and local associations. Like radical feminism, these groups developed their own analyses and carried out their own actions. Under this characterization of feminism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is clear to see why the *Woman's Bible* found a twentieth century home that had not existed for it in the nineteenth century. It is not simply that, ideologically, the

*Woman's Bible* was ahead of its time, that Stanton's radicalism was more appropriate for the twentieth century than the nineteenth.<sup>3</sup> Instead, Stanton's book found a home in the twentieth century because it did not have to speak to all feminists. Like any other text of the twentieth century women's liberation movement, it made a home in small groups that shared its political orientation. Hegemonic discourse could not silence radicalism in the 1970s as it had been able to do in the 1890s because space for alternative discourse had been opened up by the splintered nature of the women's liberation movement.

It is also important to note that the *Woman's Bible* in the twentieth century came about in a careful intersection between Christianity and feminism. The Coalition Task Force shared the characteristics of women's liberation cited above—it was a small, discussion oriented group—but it was, fundamentally, a religious group. It was created and sponsored by an ecumenical organization of churches, and nearly all of its members were devoted churchgoers, and even if some were not, they still held a degree loyalty to the institutional church. Unlike the committee that originally published the *Woman's Bible*, which was largely made up of women who had left the institutional church decades earlier, the Coalition was sympathetic to the needs of Christianity. They were not outsiders attacking sacred tenets, but rather insiders asking questions in the hopes of saving the religion they cherished. Thus, the second significant shift for the *Woman's Bible* in the twentieth century was that it grew out of a basically religious context rather than a basically feminist context.

The reception of the *Woman's Bible* also changed significantly in the twentieth century due to the creation of a new group of audience members. In the 1890s, Stanton had lamented that only two categories of people existed: those who held the Bible too



sacred to be criticized, and those who considered it of too little value to dwell on it. By the 1970s, though, the shifts in mainstream Christianity had led to the creation of a third category: those who held the Bible sacred, but found their faith enriched by critical engagement with the text. As summarized above, in the 1970s, American Christianity was increasingly pluralistic and democratic, and its practitioners focused on developing a personal faith. Like feminism, the Christian movement was more splintered in the 1970s than it had been in the 1890s, and its relaxed doctrine allowed members to pursue their own readings of the sacred texts. Whereas the *Woman's Bible* was one of a rare specimen of books in the 1890s, by the 1970s, it was just one of many books that helped Christians to challenge the Scriptures.

The fact that the *Woman's Bible* was published within a religious context rather than a feminist context probably diluted the effect it could have had on the women's liberation movement. In reality, religious systems never received much attention within second wave feminism, which may have been to the movement's detriment. Feminists largely belonged to the second of the two groups of people that Stanton had described: those who had deemed the Bible worthless, and discarded it. And, unfortunately, some of feminism's strongest opponents came from Stanton's first group: those who considered the Bible too sacred to criticize. Religious feminists, like those who republished the *Woman's Bible*, the individuals who made up that third group—those who considered the bible sacred and yet challenged it—could have abated the tension between feminists and some of their opponents. But unfortunately, this critical engagement with the scripture never became widespread among feminists, and the tension between Christianity and feminism has only been reconciled for brief moments, in small spaces.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### “THEY LIVE TRUTH AND DO NOT FEAR ITS LIGHT”:<sup>1</sup> CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was always ahead of her time. After all, as Susan B. Anthony recalled in her defense of Stanton at the 1896 NAWSA Convention, Stanton had proposed suffrage for women in 1848, when the other leaders of the woman’s rights movement thought it was far too radical a demand (Anthony, 1896). Of course, within 25 years, suffrage had become the guiding platform of the woman’s rights movement. Then, Anthony recalled, Stanton had suggested in 1860 that drunkenness be made a cause for divorce, again, a suggestion that was radical initially, but slowly moved to the mainstream of the woman’s rights movement (Anthony, 1896). In the last decade of her life, this radical Elizabeth Cady Stanton was again on to something. When none of her colleagues could see it, Stanton recognized that the church remained woman’s greatest barrier to emancipation. Some of her colleagues had previously engaged specific arguments made by clergy about woman’s status, as in the case of Sarah Grimké’s (1838) “Letters on the Equality of the Sexes,” but none had wholly and systematically taken on the Bible and Christian doctrine. Suffragists before Stanton had acted in response to the Bible, but none had seen cause to deal with the Bible pre-emptively, absent a specific threat. Stanton, “unbeliever” though she may have been, recognized the Bible as a cultural force important enough to be considered in its own terms, absent a specific threat from clergy or church leaders.

In line with Stanton's personal tradition of prophesy, she was again right. In her own time period, and in the decades following her death, the Bible has been one of the greatest barriers to woman's emancipation. Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, church leaders have opposed central feminist demands, and even when church leaders themselves have been supportive of feminist reform, anti-feminist leaders have relied on Biblical arguments to oppose abortion rights, the ERA, and other feminist advances. Much like Stanton's colleagues, though, the second wave of feminism also largely failed to pay attention to Christianity. Coalition Task Force members, part of the minority of feminists concerned with Christianity, were well aware that, by their time period, it was religious organizations who were "leading and funding the opposition to the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, pushing amendments to kill the Supreme Court decision on abortion" (Bilimoria, 1974, p. viii) Phyllis Schlafly's high profile and successful StopERA campaign relied heavily on religious warrants, specifically arguing the natural gendered order, created by God, ordained separate spheres for men and women (Solomon 1978, 1979, 1983). In 1999 the United States's second largest denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, with more than 33 million members, or over 16% of the United States population, adopted a "Faith and Message" statement on the family, specifying that God had created separate spheres for men and women and ordained an unequal power distribution between the sexes, with women called to obey men within marriage (available online at [www.sbc.net](http://www.sbc.net)). The public controversy over the November 1993 RE-Imagining event also suggests that the public is still unsettled about whether or not Christianity and feminism can be reconciled. That event, a gathering for Christian clergywomen and other church leaders, sponsored by

mainstream Protestant denominations, attracted media attention and public denunciation for its “milk and honey” communion-like ritual and its use of female imagery for God (see Schofield Clark and Hoover, 1997). The Southern Baptist Convention’s resolution and the public outcry over RE-Imagining suggest that institutional Christianity continues to have an oppressive force even into the twenty-first century. Stanton’s *Woman’s Bible* initially responded to the threat that she perceived from Biblical religion, and in the face of these ongoing Christian threats to feminism, the book remains relevant. Indeed, the book has been in print continuously since 1972, having been re-published by at least four different publishers. When the Coalition re-published it in 1974, they first sold 300 copies at that year’s NOW convention, and then the book could only be bought at three bookstores in Seattle, or by ordering it directly through the Coalition (Hansen, 1974). Now, however, a few clicks at [barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com) can get the book shipped in 24 hours. A quick google search will reveal the entire text of the *Woman’s Bible* on [sacred-texts.com](http://sacred-texts.com), and shorter excerpts on a handful of other sites. While one feminist impulse suggests that it is good news that this important historical and political document is still in print and widely available, another feminist impulse suggests that it only stays in print because of the continuing antagonism between Christianity and feminism. Stanton’s goal will be fully realized when the *Woman’s Bible* is politically useless.

Considering the skepticism and reluctance Stanton encountered when she initially tried to recruit a revising committee, and the condemnation she received upon publication of the book, this twentieth century respect for the book marks an important change. The book itself was not engaged on its own terms until the 1970s, and for most of its life, its significance has been in its status as a cultural symbol. Since the *Woman’s Bible* has

been interpreted and used variously throughout the 100+ years of its history, it can serve as a weather vane for the feminist movement, Christianity, and the interaction between the two. The history of changing interpretations of the *Woman's Bible* also suggests the importance of context for determining the meaning of a text. In the case of the *Woman's Bible*, audience responses indicate the reception of the *Woman's Bible* in specific socio-historic locations, and those audience responses also lead to the contextual features useful for explicating how context determined the meanings of the text. Isolating particular contextual features situates the *Woman's Bible* in seven interpretive communities within five contexts—fundamentalist Christians and conservative and liberal suffragists in the NAWSA controversy, anti-radical anti-suffragists in NAOWS, Christian feminists of the Coalition, and reformist and radical academic feminist theologians.

At its original publication, the cultural symbolism of the *Woman's Bible*, as explicated by fundamentalist and suffrage leaders, was largely defined by the tension between Christianity, modernism and fundamentalism, and between liberal and conservative suffragists. Conservative suffrage leaders and fundamentalist leaders agreed that the *Woman's Bible* challenged the traditional tenets of Christianity, and the conservative suffragist leaders feared that by challenging Christianity, the *Woman's Bible* would bring disfavor on the suffrage movement in the eyes of a Christianity trying to defend itself from fundamentalism. Where modernist intellectual advances had pushed Christianity away from some of its doctrines (e.g. Biblical inerrancy), fundamentalism encouraged Christianity to move back toward those doctrines. Christianity was balancing carefully between these two poles, and the *Woman's Bible* added weight to the side pulling Christianity away from its doctrine. Thus, the *Woman's Bible* threatened to upset

Christianity's careful balance, and for the suffragist leaders who perceived the clergy as their allies, a threat to Christianity could damage the suffrage movement.

These issues of what might endanger suffrage only became important to the movement once it shifted from a “visionary movement...to a practical cause with a real chance for success” (in Kraditor’s (1965) words, p. 86). In the mid-1890s, the suffrage movement was in the midst of what we can recognize in hindsight as a transition of ideology, strategy, and leadership. The ideology of suffrage moved from natural rights to expediency; the strategy changed from advocacy for a federal amendment to state-by-state organizing; and the first generation of leaders, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony included, retired, initiating conservative suffragists, Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw, as their successors. But when Stanton published the *Woman’s Bible*, these transitions were still in progress. Suffrage leaders contested the ideology and strategy of the movement, as well as the legacy of leadership for the movement. When Stanton published the *Woman’s Bible*, some women’s rights leaders were shying away from the broad platform of visionary ideas that had guided the movement for decades, and were focusing in on the one goal that they came to believe was attainable: suffrage. For these suffrage leaders, Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s pre-emptive strategy of challenging the Bible might hinder progress toward suffrage organizing, without making any clear gains for suffrage. Other leaders of the suffrage movement held their ground with natural rights arguments, and a broad platform for the movement, including Susan B. Anthony’s 1896 speech in defense of the *Woman’s Bible*. In the dispute over the *Woman’s Bible*, though, Anthony and her liberal allies lost out to Catt and the conservative suffragists, signaling the forthcoming change in the movement. The *Woman’s Bible* became a

resource around which this crucial transition in the woman's rights movement could play itself out.

The *Woman's Bible* also became a resource for anti-suffragists two decades later, when they were able to fit the *Woman's Bible* into the structure of arguments they had already created for attacking the suffrage movement. Anti-suffragists between 1918 and 1920 rooted their arguments against suffrage within a larger critique of all things radical in the 1910s, specifically socialism, bolshevism, and feminism. Without engaging the *Woman's Bible* itself so much as the public discourse around the *Woman's Bible*, anti-suffragists could make the case that the *Woman's Bible* conveyed a radical socialist/bolshevist/feminist platform. They could also associate the *Woman's Bible* with leaders of the suffrage movement, including Carrie Chapman Catt (who was, by then, the president of the NAWSA) and Susan B. Anthony (after whom the suffrage amendment was named). On account of these tenable associations, the anti-suffragists found the book to be a useful inventional resource within the structure of the arguments they were already making against the case for woman suffrage.

When the *Woman's Bible* was re-introduced in the second wave, its reception was grounded in at least three locally-stable interpretive communities—the Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, reformist/apologist feminist theologians, and revolutionary feminist theologians. Coalition Task Force members rescued the *Woman's Bible* from its legacy of disfavor within the feminist movement, and granted it primacy in the feminist arguments they were making. Specifically, Coalition members recognized the utility of the *Woman's Bible* for supporting their arguments for reform within the church. Unlike suffragists who perceived the *Woman's Bible* as dangerous because it

might threaten the institutional church, Coalition members embraced the book precisely for its potential to reform the church that they cherished. For the Coalition members, I have argued, the *Woman's Bible* was useful specifically because it redeemed the Christian scriptures, it followed the consciousness-raising model, and it fit within the tradition of liberal feminism (which was, ironically, the conservative branch of the women's liberation movement in the 1970s).

Unlike the Coalition members, who could agree on the political utility of the *Woman's Bible*, feminist theologians in the 1990s, while universally embracing the historical and political importance of the *Woman's Bible*, did not agree on its legacy for feminist hermeneutics. In the 1990s, feminist theologians were still divided over the reformist and revolutionary tactics for reading the Scriptures that had confronted Christian feminists for more than a century. And in this context, feminist theologians of both orientations argued that Stanton's work affirmed their own scholarly tradition. Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe's *Woman's Bible Commentary* followed what they considered Stanton's apologist lead: they engaged individual passages, reinterpreting them to find liberating messages for women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza affirmed Stanton for what she read as Stanton's revolutionary impulse. Schüssler Fiorenza's unique contribution to the *Woman's Bible's* legacy is that she was the first feminist leader to recognize Stanton's revolutionary impulse and still embrace Stanton's work. She embraced precisely what previous generations had either criticized or avoided. Conservative suffrage and anti-suffrage leaders had agreed with Schüssler Fiorenza that the *Woman's Bible* was revolutionary, and for that tendency, they chastised the book and its author. The feminists who had previously applauded the *Woman's Bible*—the



Coalition Task Force—had done so under the assumption that Stanton’s strategy was reformist, not radical. Schüssler Fiorenza reversed this divide, embracing the book for its revolutionary approach to the Bible.

“The ambiguous feminist heritage of Elizabeth Cady Stanton”<sup>2</sup> The social movement  
significance of the *Woman’s Bible’s* reception

Mary Daly (1984) argues in *Pure Lust* that in the nineteenth century, religion became more patriarchal as a response to woman’s rights organizing. Daly calls attention to the “killer instinct of patriarchal males,” who protect their patriarchy by squelching the empowerment of women (p. 102). Daly notes that the Immaculate Conception was not dogma of the Catholic church until 1854, precisely the same time that women began to organize for their rights in Europe and the United States. When women began to challenge the socio-political structure of patriarchy, Daly suggests, men protected their patriarchy by adding religious undergirding for it. The doctrine of Immaculate Conception was damaging for women, in Daly’s argument, because it destroyed the possibility of woman-centered spirituality, and it canonized divine rape, which “illustrates and legitimates the ineffable circularity of rapism” (106). While Daly’s work traverses ground superfluous to the argument here, the relevance of her point is clear: religion became an anti-feminist force only when women’s organizing made credible challenges to the patriarchy. Nearly a century before Daly, Clara Colby had expressed similar sentiments in an article about the *Woman’s Bible*. Colby (1895) wrote in her paper, “For ages the priests and theologians of our own faith held this position [equality of the sexes in the Scripture], and it was not until women in large numbers claimed the

right of interpretation for themselves, and rose in defiance of dogma...that religious teachers found anything between the lids of the Bible about woman's status but woman's subjection" (n.p.). Daly and Colby agree that feminism and religion have historically been at odds, with religion rising up to protect the patriarchal order that feminism challenges.

While Daly and Colby may be correct about the specific historic periods of interest to them, the larger history of the *Woman's Bible* shows that the interaction between these two movements is actually much more complex. The legacy of the *Woman's Bible* and its attendant interpretive conflicts serve as important markers of the changes in the women's rights movement and Christianity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As the bounds of the relationship between feminism and Christianity shifted, so did the placement of the *Woman's Bible* within that relationship. Tracing the reception history of the *Woman's Bible* allows us to trace the history of interaction between feminism and Christianity. As Conrad (1981) argues, movements "can be understood most fully when critics examine origins and search for points of re-definition, for moments when the character of the movement is altered" (p. 284). The *Woman's Bible* has offered numerous such points for both feminism and Christianity.

In the nineteenth century, whether Christianity was friendly or antagonistic to woman's rights was a highly contested issue for activists. As Joanne Carlson Brown (1995) argues, woman's rights activists gained their strength from this same institution that simultaneously inhibited their arguments for rights. In the second half of the nineteenth century, it was the institutional churches that were providing women with the greatest opportunities for organizing and leadership. Most major denominations

organized ladies' mission societies in those decades, and these mission societies served for many women as their only opportunity to participate in the public sphere (Scott, 1991). Many of these mission societies would operate independently of men's organizations, which meant that these auxiliaries were some of the largest-budget organizations ever run by women. Caught between the church as a source of strength and one of opposition, women in this early period tried to reconcile their woman's rights ideology with the church's patriarchal stance, and they did so by reinterpreting the Bible. Rosemary Radford Reuther (1998) places these women—Sarah Grimké, Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Frances Willard, and others—strictly within the tradition of an apologetic hermeneutic. When the clergy used the Bible to restrict woman's sphere, but these Christian women wanted to enlarge their sphere, they turned to the Bible itself to solve their dilemma. Under these women's interpretations, the Bible supported women's rights. The clergy's interpretations of the Bible must have been twisted. When Stanton's *Woman's Bible* was introduced into this apologist context, it necessarily seemed radical, or revolutionary. It did not respond to a specific threat from the clergy, like Sarah Grimké's "Letters" had responded to the challenge from the Massachusetts clergymen. Even though some of the discourse around the *Woman's Bible* suggested that it might have engaged in an apologist strategy, other discourse suggested that it attacked the Scriptures for their patriarchal bias, or even that it simply set out to uncover precisely what the Bible did say about women. Arising within the tradition of apologist Biblical hermeneutics, then, it was clear that the *Woman's Bible* set out to do something new, something that previous woman's rights activists had not done.

At first glance, then, it is easy to say that Stanton was simply ahead of her time. She was proposing a revolutionary hermeneutic strategy, for which the women and men of her generation were not prepared. In other ways, though, it seems that Stanton was far behind the times. She was trying to solve a problem—the Bible's oppression of women—that suffragist activists believed had been solved decades earlier, by the apologists. Indeed, as the nineteenth century progressed, these apologist arguments had settled some of the religious anti-feminist opposition, and the clergy were giving increasing support to the movement (as was frequently suggested in the *Woman's Journal's* regular “Women in the churches” column). Without arguing that the Bible was oppressive beyond what these earlier reformers had estimated, and without demonstrating why their apologist strategies had failed, Stanton was responding to a problem that many of her contemporaries believed no longer existed. She was trapped between times—too late to solve a problem that her contemporaries believed had been solved by the apologists, and too early for her radicalism to be widely embraced.

Then, by the time Stanton's book was re-published in the 1970s, she was no longer radical. Set against radical feminists like Mary Daly, this same book, complete with its same complex of arguments, seemed like a mild apology for the Scriptures. Whereas Daly was the radical voice of feminist religion, calling herself a Post-Christian, searching for the roots of a gyn-centered spirituality, Elizabeth Cady Stanton seemed conservative for even bothering to engage the Scriptures. The members of the Coalition Task Force still believed that Christianity and feminism could be reconciled, and they looked to Stanton as hope that the Bible could be redeemed for progressive women, since the radical feminists of their own day had already given up on Christianity.

In the 1990s, the *Woman's Bible* was resituated within both of the hermeneutic traditions where it had previously found a home. Writing about her own time period, Schüssler Fiorenza (1993) argued, "Today, feminist biblical discourses still appear to be caught up in this apologetic debate which seeks to show that the Bible, or at least parts of it, is *either* liberating and therefore has authority for women and other nonpersons, to use an expression of Gustavo Gutierrez, *or* that it is totally patriarchal and must be rejected" (p. 5). The feminist theologians who were caught in this debate brought the *Woman's Bible* with them. For those who believed that the Bible is liberating, the *Woman's Bible* supported their argument, and for those who believed it was patriarchal, the *Woman's Bible* also supported their argument. Ultimately, Schüssler Fiorenza (1993) argued that the same conflict existed for the women of her day as had for the suffragists of Stanton's generation: they found both their strength and opposition in Biblical religion. According to Schüssler Fiorenza,

In the footsteps of Cady Stanton, women's biblical studies have developed a dualistic hermeneutical strategy that is able to acknowledge two seemingly contradictory facts. On the one hand, the Bible is written in androcentric language, has its origin in the patriarchal cultures of antiquity, and has functioned throughout its history to inculcate androcentric and patriarchal values. On the other hand, the Bible has also served to inspire and authorize women and other nonpersons in their struggles against patriarchal oppression. Women's biblical studies today in one way or another still presuppose and seek to address this dual problematic (p. 6).

Just like Joanne Carlson Brown (1995) argued about the first wave feminists, feminists in the second wave and beyond have continued to find both their strength and opposition in the religious institution. The complexity and ambiguity of the *Woman's Bible* serves as a reminder of the pervasiveness of this conflict.

The shift that the *Woman's Bible* made as religious discourse—from revolutionary to apologetic—roughly parallels its shift from the liberal natural rights sector of the woman's rights movement to the conservative liberal feminism of the women's liberation movement. This shift is indicative of the changes in women's rights activism between the first and second waves. Throughout its history the *Woman's Bible* was always situated within the tradition of natural rights feminism. That the *Woman's Bible* moved from the radical fringe of suffrage organizing to the conservative end of second wave feminism shows how the natural rights ideology that has always been central to feminism shifted from its radical platform to its conservative platform.

While its role within religious discourse shifted, and its role within feminist discourse shifted, the *Woman's Bible* also moved from being a basically feminist text to being a basically religious text. In the 1890s, the book concerned suffragists so much that they were compelled to pass a resolution about it, while the mainstream religious newspapers of the day devoted no attention to it. By the 1970s, the book received minimal attention from the mainstream feminist movement (it was sold at a NOW convention), and the Coalition's re-publication project was covered on the religion page of the newspaper rather than the women's pages (where news related to the women's liberation movement was usually featured).

“To resonate with different people in different historical contexts”<sup>3</sup>: Implications for  
Rhetorical Theory

That a text contains the potential for multiple interpretations, that it can be polysemous, is hardly news anymore. Calls for rhetorical critics to pay attention to the polysemous nature of texts came to the field of rhetorical studies from cultural studies more than 15 years ago. Dilip Gaonkar's response to the 1988 Wisconsin Symposium on Public Address, included in that conference's book publication, *Texts in Context*, takes note of the challenge that the concept of polysemy was posing to the field at that time. In his response, Gaonkar recognizes the veracity of this claim that texts might be polysemous, and suggests that this claim “opens fundamental questions about the status of the oratorical text” (p. 271). Moreover, “the logic of polysemy when applied to the oratorical text generates a new set of problems for rhetoric criticism” (p. 272). At issue for Gaonkar is that acknowledging the polysemous nature of a text raises the hermeneutic burden for the critic. Under a more traditional model, according to Gaonkar, “if any hermeneutic labor is required to unpack an oratorical text, it consists primarily in placing the text in its proper (original) context” (p. 272). While encouraging rhetorical critics to acknowledge the challenge polysemy presents, Gaonkar does not spell out how rhetorical critics should respond to the increased hermeneutic burden presented by the potentially polysemous text. The analysis of the *Woman's Bible* offered here picks up where Gaonkar left off. It begins with the premise that the text may be fundamentally polysemous, and turns to the interpretive community responses to the text to define locally-stable meanings for the text. This argument, then, offers one solution in response to the hermeneutic burden imposed by the potentially-polysemous text: to use a text's

discursive interactions with particular interpretive communities in order to explicate the contextually-contingent meaning of that text. I have drawn specifically on the concepts of relevancy and terministic screens to show how interpretive communities give a text its locally-stable meaning by fitting it into their already-established and continually-reestablishing frameworks of meaning.

If the polysemy of a text is nearly self-evident in rhetorical studies by now, then the central questions for rhetorical critics revolve around how/if meanings are embedded in texts, and then how particular meanings gain salience. Peters's explanation of dissemination in terms of seeds sown far and wide provides a particularly useful model for polysemy-sensitive criticism. While Peters distinguishes between dissemination and dialogic as analogies for meaning transmission, criticism of the case of the *Woman's Bible* shows that the dissemination model is useful for understanding the influence of the text largely, and the dialogic model highlights the potential for local-stability of the text.<sup>4</sup> Upon publication of the book, Stanton did relinquish control of the meaning of the text, and as she sowed the seed far and wide, the meaning of the book grew as dictated by its context. However, in each of its unique interpretive communities, the book took on a specific meaning, more akin to the dialogic model. While the meaning of the text was not controlled by the author as in Socrates/Plato's dialogic, it was still a stable meaning within the bounds of each of the given interpretive communities.

My analysis of the *Woman's Bible* has also taken on the unique task of looking at these issues of dissemination and polysemy in a historical text. Unlike the popular media texts that have received critical audience attention—such as Morley's analysis of *The Cosby Show* or Cooper's analysis of the movies *Thelma and Louise* and *Do the Right*



*Thing*—this analysis has adhered more closely to Ceccarelli’s (1998) model in her abbreviated analysis of Lincoln’s second inaugural. The audience critics who have studied popular media texts have relied heavily on survey and ethnographic research, research methods which cannot provide access to an audience that no longer exists physically. However, as was the case with Ceccarelli’s short analysis of Lincoln’s speech, historical remnants of discursive responses to the *Woman’s Bible* provide access to the reception issues, thus demonstrating the utility of audience-centered criticism, even for historical texts. These discursive responses allow the critic to situate the text in its various contexts, historical though they may be.

Grounding the meaning of the text in its context also responds to calls within rhetorical studies for increased attention to context. Noting that rhetorical criticism is constituted as a “distinct discipline in the humanities” by its “exacting reading of texts as they are situated in history” (p. 332), Celeste Condit (1990) argues that “the most difficult problematic of rhetorical studies” is “to target the situated character of discourse while not losing sight of the details of the discourse itself” (p. 330). Jasinski (1997) traces the tradition of rhetorical scholarship through Wichelns, Wrage, Hochmuth Nichols, Black and other critics, arguing that critics since Wichelns have lost site of one of the two poles of Wichelns’s sense of contextualization. According to Jasinski, Wichelns’s mode of contextualization is bifurcated; Wichelns talks about contextualization in terms of the temporal emplotment to which a rhetor and text are bound, but he also considers a broader sense of context, in which a text grows organically out of the context. Jasinski argues that the intentionalist and instrumentalist models that have guided rhetorical criticism rely too heavily on Wichelns’s first sense of contextualism, using context to

highlight how a text responded to the particulars of its narrow situation. He goes on to argue that rhetorical criticism must move away from the intentionalist/instrumentalist model in order to develop a broader sense of context. Jasinski argues that one way to make this shift away from intentionalism/instrumentalism toward broader contextualization is through the analysis of performative traditions. I add reception studies as another form of criticism useful for making this shift. Relying on interpretive communities' interactions with a text rather than on the rhetor's relationship with that text, I have been able to escape the logic of instrumentalism and intentionalism.<sup>5</sup> This analysis of the *Woman's Bible* has been able to provide the broad sort of contextualization that Jasinski says rhetorical criticism often lacks. Rather than focusing on the particulars of Stanton's rhetorical situation, or even on the narrow particulars of the rhetorical situations of its subsequent publications, this argument has situated the *Woman's Bible* in the broad contexts of the social movements out of which it organically grew.

My argument about the *Woman's Bible* complicates the notions of text and context that both Jasinski's (1997) and Condit's (1990) challenges rely on. Specifically, in this analysis of the *Woman's Bible*, the discourse around the book and audience members' responses to the *Woman's Bible* function as both text and context. If I maintain that my criticism does not lose "sight of the details of the discourse itself," I have to consider as my text the discourse around the *Woman's Bible*. After all, my analysis only pays cursory attention to the texture of the *Woman's Bible* itself. Besides, my argument makes clear that the *Woman's Bible* does not stand alone, as a discrete text fit for interpretation. Rather, following McGee's (1990) fragmentation thesis, the

*Woman's Bible* and the discourse around it—which came in the form of newspaper articles, an “Editor’s Preface,” and a convention resolution, among other things—all together form the text that is the basis for my analysis. At the same time, however, the discourse around the *Woman's Bible* provides cues to the relevant contextual details. For instance, when Carrie Chapman Catt repeatedly cited the *Woman's Bible*’s harm to suffrage organizing, she suggested the importance of field organizing to the movement in the 1890s; or when Coalition members argued that the *Woman's Bible* could help the church, they provided information about their own situation, specifically their charge to ameliorate problems within the church. These texts, then, functioned indicators of, and a part of, the context for the *Woman's Bible*. That the same discourse could function as both text and context complicates our notion of these things as discrete entities.

Admitting the possibility of a polysemous text, does, as Gaonkar suggests, increase the hermeneutic burden for the critic. However, it also opens up the text as a site of ideological struggle, which both draws upon and reflects its own discursive and non-discursive context. Opening up the possibility that the *Woman's Bible* may have been ascribed numerous meanings throughout its history allows the critic to put the text in conversation with its various contexts, which illuminates not only the text itself, but also the features of its context. Thus, recognizing a text’s capacity as a site of struggle allows the critic to exploit the text to answer questions about its context, and the context to answer questions about the text, recognizing, of course, that neither the “text” nor its “context” is a discrete entity, but both are overlapping entities.

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NOTES

## Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> When Stanton and the revising committee published the book in the 1890s, they called it the *Woman's Bible*, and all contemporary discourse refers to it accordingly. However, when Arno Press and the Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion (and subsequent publishers) re-published the book in the 1970s, they called it *The Woman's Bible*, and most contemporary discourse follows suit. While the subtle shift in title may signal an important rhetorical shift, for simplicity's sake, I will use the title *Woman's Bible*.

## Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Of course, Stanton and her supporters alternately argued that the Bible was liberatory, and the church had warped its true meaning. Even though their statements were inconsistent on this matter, that they introduced the possibility that the Bible was inherently patriarchal, was itself radical.

## Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> Of course, some suffragists may have admitted to the same split within the suffrage movement. After all, even while Stanton was explicitly advocating that women seek self-fulfillment over self-denial, some of her expediency colleagues maintained that self-denial was still woman's greatest virtue, and that the franchise was not incompatible with self-denial.

## Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> This argument that the *Woman's Bible* redeemed Scriptures for Christian feminists may have been easier to sustain in the 1970s than it was during the controversy in the 1890s, because upon the book's second publication, both volumes were issued at once, whereas the initial controversy around the book had centered around Volume One alone. Volume Two added treatment of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament, as well as an appendix of letters containing diverse ideology. Coalition members relied on Volume Two's treatment of the New Testament, as well as passages from the New Testament itself, to argue that the Bible contained a redeeming message for women. Eleanor Bilimoria stated it most directly when she wrote, "Jesus was truly a feminist, that is, one who believes in the equality of women and men (1974, p. vii). None of the Coalition members explicitly discussed any differences between the first and second volumes, but it is possible that their reading of the *Woman's Bible* differed from a nineteenth century reading simply because they had access to twice as much material as had their nineteenth century foremothers. Other twentieth century readers also took note of the second volume's message of liberation. The Great Minds Series edition of the book promoted that "this profound rebuttal to the male-dominated church hierarchy explores, among other things, documentation that Jesus believed in equal rights," and, of course, discussion of Jesus only happened in the second volume. Finally, Lisa Strange (1999) affirms this difference between the volumes, arguing "in the second volume of the *Woman's Bible*, published three years after the first, Stanton seemed less concerned with debunking traditional views than with recovering positive female role models from the biblical stories."

<sup>2</sup> Its first volume was dedicated to Anna Julia Cooper's *A Voice from the South*, which was published in 1892. The editors and collaborators of *Searching* chose to dedicate that volume to her in an effort to recognize the diverse history and tradition of feminist Biblical studies.

<sup>3</sup> In some ways, as American Christianity has grown more conservative and more puritanistic in the twentieth century, the reverse may actually be true.

## Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> This quote, which comes from Phebe Hanaford's contribution to the 1896, "Is the *Woman's Bible* a success?," speaks to the visionary nature of Stanton's work, as well as of the feminists, and Christian feminists, who followed.

<sup>2</sup> This quote comes from Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza who speaks to the conflicted historical legacy of Stanton's work, which becomes clear in this analysis of how the *Woman's Bible* fits into the tradition of feminist biblical hermeneutics.

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<sup>3</sup> I used this statement from Kathi Kern (2001) in Chapter One to justify this project

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Kenneth Rufo for pointing out the utility of *both* of Peters's models for my criticism.

<sup>5</sup> When my argument has explicated Stanton's intentions for producing the *Woman's Bible*, it has been through the reactions of the book's interpretive communities. Thus, the questions have not centered around why and how Stanton created the book, but rather how its interpretive communities understood why and how she created the book.