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# "Be a Missionary Every Day": Evangelical Missionary Stories and the Mission Field at Home

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“BE A MISSIONARY EVERY DAY”:  
EVANGELICAL MISSIONARY STORIES  
AND THE MISSION FIELD AT HOME

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
History

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by  
Lauren Elizabeth Hamblen  
August 2017

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Accepted by:  
Dr. Paul Anderson, Committee Chair  
Dr. Orville Vernon Burton  
Dr. Elizabeth Jemison

## ABSTRACT

In evangelical churches, missionaries were regarded as heroes, and their stories were used to evangelize, entertain, and inspire. Missionary stories have been a regular feature of Sunday School lessons and religious periodicals for children since the nineteenth century, and practically every evangelical denomination dispenses them to children in some form. This project looks specifically at stories published by the two groups who carried the flag of foreign mission work in post-WWII America, Fundamentalists and Southern Baptists, between 1950 and 1980. Although the explicit purpose of these stories was to inspire an interest in foreign missionary work, even a cursory reading of both Fundamentalist and Southern Baptist missionary stories reveals another purpose which clearly loomed large in the minds of the authors—to prepare Evangelical children to live as missionaries in an America which, to them, seemed increasingly godless and foreign.

No matter the cultural setting of the individual stories, the authors consistently emphasized certain themes, crucial and contested in American Evangelicalism: the relationship of Christianity to American culture and politics, issues of race and human difference, and traditional gender roles in church and home. For Fundamentalists, these were major fronts in the battle against secularism and against other Christians who dared to make concessions. For

Southern Baptists, these were key debates that raged within their denomination, with progressive leadership on one side and conservative congregations on the other. For both groups, then, the purpose of the stories was as much to prepare children for battles they would face at home as it was to prepare them for mission work abroad.

## DEDICATION

To my parents, Margaret and Lonnie Polson,  
the best listener and the best teacher I know.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to the members of my committee for their gracious and insightful guidance throughout this project. As committee chair and graduate advisor, Dr. Paul Anderson invested many hours in my writing and in me as a scholar. He refrained from making direct comparisons between graduate students and little league baseball players, but his coaching experience shows. Dr. Elizabeth Jemison provided extensive reading lists and thoughtful questions, as well as camaraderie, advice, and the occasional well-timed pep-talk. Dr. Vernon Burton contributed to the project through his vast knowledge of history and historians, his excitement about my topic, and his genuine compassion.

I also appreciate the help I received in locating and accessing materials. Tom Luttmann at Bible Visuals International, Mable Ruth Wray at Child Evangelism Fellowship of Eastern Pennsylvania, Donna Britt at the South Carolina Woman's Missionary Union Archives, and Dana Sharitt at the Georgia Baptist Mission Board Historical Archives, all guided me through their organizational archives and answered my many questions.

My friends and family have faithfully encouraged me and generously overlooked the inconveniences my studies often imposed on them. My parents, Lonnie and Margaret Polson, have invested a lifetime of patience and prayer which I could never hope to repay but sincerely hope to emulate. Margaret and

Frank, my joy, give me the unconditional acceptance and love which only children can give, and remind me that reading books is supposed to be fun. And Ethan Hamblen knows me best and loves me still.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“‘Calabar is the worst spot on earth!’ the missionary declared. ‘A mysterious, awful land ruled by witchcraft and secret cannibal societies. Human sacrifices, spells, poisons. And the awful practice of murdering twin babies...A land of fever, skin diseases, and malaria.’ The audience sat in stunned horror as they heard of Calabar. Mary felt something tug at her heart. Oh, if only she could do something! But she was just a young girl.”<sup>1</sup>

To those who spent the Sunday mornings of their childhood in a twentieth-century American evangelical<sup>2</sup> church, as familiar as the uncomfortable dress clothes and spirited singing was the nervous awareness that today could be the day that one would receive a call to the mission field. The nineteenth century saw the heyday of the evangelical missions movement, and in

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<sup>1</sup> Lois Hoadley Dick, “Run, Ma, Run!: Flashcard Biography of Mary Slessor, Missionary to Calabar,” ill. Sam Butcher (Warrenton, MO: CEF Press, 1978), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Although I will be dealing with two specific groups, non-denominational Fundamentalists and Southern Baptists, I will occasionally refer to them collectively using the broad term “evangelical.” Both groups would object to this designation because it obscures Southern Baptist denominationalism and Fundamentalist separatism, but I use it on the grounds that both groups maintained nineteenth-century evangelicalism’s insistence on individual conversion and missionary zeal. See George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 4-6.

mid-twentieth century mainline Protestantism, zeal to reach the heathen was on the decline. Two notable exceptions, however, were the numerous non-denominational Fundamentalist mission boards and the missionary organizations of the Southern Baptist Convention. Both groups objected to the rise of liberal theology and the social gospel on the home front, and therefore turned to missionary efforts with increased fervor.<sup>3</sup> As GIs returned home from WWII, these evangelical missionaries rushed to take advantage of new “open doors” for the gospel around the globe.<sup>4</sup>

In evangelical churches, missionaries were regarded as heroes and examples of self-sacrifice and Christian character, and their stories were used to evangelize, entertain, and inspire. Missionary stories have been a regular feature of Sunday School lessons and religious periodicals for children since the nineteenth century, and practically every evangelical denomination dispenses them to children in some form. This project looks specifically at stories published by the two groups who continued to carry the flag of foreign mission work in post-war America, Fundamentalists and Southern Baptists.

One type of missionary story was produced by a Fundamentalist organization, Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF), and its off-shoot, Bible Visuals

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<sup>3</sup> Joel A. Carpenter, “Propagating the Faith Once Delivered,” in *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880-1980*, ed. Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 96.

<sup>4</sup> Richard V. Pierard, “*Pax Americana* and the Evangelical Missionary Advance,” in Carpenter and Shenk, 163.

International (BVI).<sup>5</sup> The distinguishing feature of these stories is their format. Intended for use in CEF weekday bible clubs, the stories are divided into five chapters, each of which ends with a cliff-hanger to lure the children back to the club the next day. Usually referred to as flashcard stories, they are printed as oversized booklets which include up to forty illustration pages for the teacher to display while telling the story. Helen Odenwelder, founder of BVI, conceived the flashcard format during her extensive travels as a CEF teacher, and the stories soon came to be used more broadly in church Sunday School programs and Vacation Bible Schools.<sup>6</sup> The illustrations make these stories a particularly valuable source, as they often carry messages which the text leaves unstated.

Flashcard missionary stories follow one of two predictable formulas. Missionary biography stories, the first category, begin with the childhood experiences which prepared the future missionary for his or her life's work. Early in life, the missionary feels a call from God to minister in a specific country and prepares to go, usually overcoming poor health, insufficient finances, or criticism from friends. Once on the field, the missionary works to adapt to the new

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<sup>5</sup> See Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Carpenter explores fundamentalism in the period between the Scopes Trial and the Billy Graham Crusades, during which CEF and a multitude of nondenominational fundamentalist organizations were founded.

<sup>6</sup> Helen E. Odenwelder, *Conference – ICEF Directors, Helen E. Odenwelder, Earl Stinson, November 30, 1973*, Transcription, BVI Organizational Papers (Bible Visuals International, Akron, PA). At the time, CEF teachers used a flannelgraph system which involved transporting a flannel-covered board and easel along with multiple sets of cut-out paper figures to display on the board, a system Odenwelder found impractical during her years as a CEF teacher.

culture, while at the same time recoiling at the wickedness of the native people, aggressively confronting social ills, and sharing the gospel. By faith and persistence, the missionary survives dangerous adventures, achieves ministry success, and wins the eternal gratitude of his native converts. As is common in religiously motivated historical writing, an air of inevitability permeates the biography stories, and the authors make no apology for this approach. The introduction to the story of Hudson Taylor explicitly states that “given his early development,” his life’s work as founder of the China Inland Mission was “almost inevitable.”<sup>7</sup> Events from the missionary’s early life are carefully selected and presented to show that he or she had been chosen by divine providence to serve in a foreign land and was being prepared for that calling from an early age. In the introduction to the story of Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, the author spells out the purpose for this orientation: “To teach the children from the life of Amy Carmichael that God desires their hearts and lives while they are young, that He may guide them, answer their prayers, protect them, and prepare their lives to make them count for Him.”<sup>8</sup>

More common than the biographies are stories told from the perspective of a native child who encounters a missionary. These stories begin with a

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<sup>7</sup> James S. and Velma B. Keifer. “Hudson Taylor: A Flashcard Story of the Apostle to Inland China,” ill. Adrian Beerhorst (Warrenton, MO: CEF Press, 1964), 2.

<sup>8</sup> Lois Hoadley Dick, “I Dare: A Five-Part Missionary Series on the Life of Amy Carmichael,” ill. Lynette Lombard (Warrenton, MO: CEF Press, 1971), 3.

description of the daily life of a child in a non-Western nation: the style and construction of his hut, how she helps her family grow and prepare food, and, most vividly, details of the native religion. Typically, the child suffers an injury or illness, and the family seeks out the missionary to ask for medical care, usually after ineffective and harmful treatment by a witchdoctor. Through contact with the missionary, the child hears the gospel and converts to Christianity. After initial anger over the child's conversion, the entire family comes to believe the gospel, and the child begins attending a mission school. In most cases, the author claims that the story is based on real events and names the missionary who originally told the story. A few stories appear to be fictional, but the author does claim to have accurately represented the people and culture. Attempts at cultural accuracy and understanding can be seen throughout in explanations of the rationale behind local customs, the inclusion of a pronunciation guide for foreign terms, and the citing of popular sources such as National Geographic for further reading. An emphasis on the details of foreign cultures is in keeping with the stated purpose of the stories, to encourage children both to pray for missionaries and to consider the possibility of becoming a missionary.

A second set of missionary stories was published by the Woman's Missionary Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention (WMU). Founded in 1913, WMU's youth division, the Girls' Auxiliary, quickly grew to become the world's largest denominational organization for girls, with over

200,000 girls ages 9-16 participating in local chapters by the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> GAs, as they were called, explored foreign cultures and Southern Baptist mission work in their weekly meetings and in their monthly periodical, *Tell Magazine*.

Most issues of *Tell* focused on a particular nation or region, outlining a program of study for the clubs that month which included background information on geography, demography, history, and culture, as well as Southern Baptist missionary work in that part of the world. The issue usually featured reports from Southern Baptist missionaries, including major advances in their work, current events in the nation, or a day in the life of an elementary-aged native girl whom the missionary had encountered. In addition, *Tell* often included narrative-style stories similar to Fundamentalist flashcard stories, but which had a less sensational quality, since they were presented in the context of broader cultural exposure and since the stories were often true, written by the missionaries themselves. *Tell* also featured missionary biography stories, either as a brief bio in a single issue, or a more complete life story written as a serial with installments spanning several issues. These featured missionaries were quite often former GAs who had felt a call to the mission field when they were young and were now answering that call. These stories reinforced the explicit goal of the Girls' Auxiliary: to inspire an interest in missionary work.

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<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Weeks, *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists*, vol. 1 "Girls' Auxiliary" (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 561; "Intermediate Girls' Auxiliary Manual" (Birmingham: Woman's Missionary Union, 1964), 8.

Even a cursory reading of both Fundamentalist and Southern Baptist missionary stories, however, reveals another purpose which clearly loomed large in the minds of the authors. No matter the cultural setting of the individual stories, the authors consistently emphasized certain themes: the relationship of Christianity to American culture and politics, issues of race and human difference, and traditional gender roles in church and home. While these themes were no doubt important in the various foreign cultures represented in the stories, they were of preeminent importance in one particular culture – American evangelicalism. For Fundamentalists, these were major fronts in the battle against secularism and against other Christians who dared to make concessions. For Southern Baptists, these were key debates that raged within their denomination, with progressive leadership on one side and conservative congregations on the other. For both groups, then, the purpose of the stories was as much to prepare children for battles they would face at home as it was to prepare them for mission work abroad.

The connection between missionary effort and battles at home was by no means a twentieth-century innovation. The concept of the missionary “errand,” famously identified in Puritan thought by Perry Miller, and subsequently traced throughout the history of the American church, includes not only the conversion of the “wilderness” to which the missionary travels, but also a purifying effect on the established sending churches. The authors of evangelical missionary stories



hoped to use tales of spiritual conquest overseas to shine a light back on the homeland, exposing the spiritual needs there as well.<sup>10</sup> American evangelicals used these stories to challenge children to live as missionaries in an America which, to many evangelicals, seemed increasingly godless and foreign.

This domestic focus was often expressed in the evangelical mantra that every believer is a missionary tasked with spreading the gospel message wherever he might live.<sup>11</sup> Children were no exception. Odenwelder challenged Bible club teachers to impress on each child “the responsibility of being a missionary today to his own world.” One of the best ways to teach this responsibility, she insisted, was by telling missionary stories.<sup>12</sup> BVI’s illustrated version of the song “Be a Missionary” asks “Oh who will go? Oh will *you* go?” alongside a drawing of children sharing the gospel with their playmates.<sup>13</sup> Individual involvement in missions, articulated as “accepting the challenge of the Great Commission,” was one of the Girls’ Auxiliary’s main thrusts as well.<sup>14</sup> The GA manual explains, “As you look at the girls of other lands, you and other

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<sup>10</sup> Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 5; William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 7-8; Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011). Dochuk explains that white Southerners who migrated to California during the 1930s and 1940s also used “errand” terminology to describe their relocation and the subsequent conservative resurgence.

<sup>11</sup> Pierard, in Carpenter and Shenk, 162.

<sup>12</sup> Helen E. Odenwelder, “Don’t Rob the Children,” *Reporter: The Teacher’s Magazine*, December 1977, 3.

<sup>13</sup> J. Irvin Overholtzer, “Be a Missionary: A Visualized Gospel Song,” ill. Frances Hertzler (Landisville, PA: Bible Visuals, Inc., 1965), I-1, I-2.

<sup>14</sup> The Great Commission refers to Jesus’s final instructions to his disciples to go and tell all nations what he had taught them. See Matthew 28:18-20.

members will grow more eager to 'go and tell.' The Master did not say, 'Wait until you grow up, have finished your education and are ready to sail, then obey my commission.' He wants girls to go all the time – winning the lost about them."<sup>15</sup>

This individual missions mandate was reinforced throughout the missionary stories as well. When young Mary Slessor first hears of the horrors of Calabar, she wonders what she can do to help. "You can do something" the thought comes to her, "Look around you. Begin at home to be a missionary."<sup>16</sup> *Tell* also used the story of Mary Slessor to teach the same point, describing eleven-year-old Mary's realization that although she could not yet go to Africa, she could teach Bible stories to the other children who worked with her at the mill.<sup>17</sup> Other flashcard stories include scenes which function as demonstrations of how to conduct missionary work here at home. In one extended interchange on a school bus, a Christian girl, Susan, asks her Buddhist friend to explain her beliefs, and then answers each point with Scripture, urging her friend to believe in Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Flashcard stories also frequently include a call for personal commitment to missionary activity in daily life. The story of Hudson Taylor concludes with a pointed challenge: "All around us are people who are lost in sin...The Lord Jesus

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<sup>15</sup> "Girls' Auxiliary Manual," 14

<sup>16</sup> Dick, "Run," 4.

<sup>17</sup> Anobel Armour, "The Near Dream," *Tell Magazine*, July 1959, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Rose-Mae Carvin, "The Mountain Changes Faces," ill. Frances Hertzler (Akron, PA: Bible Visuals International, 2013), 5.

commands us, 'Go...preach the gospel to everyone.' ...Will you trust Him to help you be His missionary wherever He wants you to be, at home or in a faraway country?"<sup>19</sup> *Tell* magazine includes similar exhortations at the close of the weekly mission lessons: "The gospel does not fall on folks like sunshine and rain. It is carried by individuals. ... But we ask ourselves, what can one girl do? One girl — each girl — can realize that Christian witnessing is the responsibility of each Christian."<sup>20</sup>

But saving the soul of America would require more than the simple gospel message. Through missionary education, evangelicals hoped to enlist their children in the cultural and theological battles that divided the American church. To be an effective missionary at home, children needed to be ready to defend the truth about culture, race, and gender, and missionary stories would prepare them for the fight.

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<sup>19</sup> James S. Keifer and Velma B. Keifer, "Hudson Taylor: A Flashcard Story of the Apostle to Inland China," ill. Adrian Beerhorst (Warrenton, MO: CEF Press, 1964), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Ann Lee, "Third Intermediate Meeting: A Missionary Question," *Tell Magazine*, July 1965, 37.

## CHAPTER TWO

### FUNDAMENTALIST FLASHCARD STORIES

When Fundamentalist pastor J. Irvin Overholtzer read a passage from the sermons of Charles Haddon Spurgeon which asserted that a child as young as five years old could understand and believe the gospel, he was at first incredulous, but quickly recognized child evangelism as his life's calling.<sup>21</sup> The organization he founded in 1937, Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF), was one example of many such parachurch entities established independently in order to draw support from the faithful in a wide range of denominations. During the 1930s, Fundamentalists poured their energies into building institutions and forging networks, which positioned the movement as a leader in the post-war evangelical resurgence in the United States, and in post-war missions.<sup>22</sup>

With a slogan befitting militant fundamentalism, "Capture the Children for Christ," CEF sponsored evangelistic efforts aimed at elementary-aged children, and it operated outside the purview of church and family through a system of after-school neighborhood Bible clubs. From the California Bay Area, CEF quickly spanned the country and soon began sending representatives overseas to establish Bible club ministries. By the mid-1950s, CEF was a booming

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<sup>21</sup> Norman Rohrer, *The Indomitable Mr. O* (Warrenton, Missouri: CEF Press, 1970), 69.

<sup>22</sup> Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 4.

organization with directors in every state and over 60 foreign nations. In 1954, the two CEF districts with highest attendance records (Southern California and Eastern Pennsylvania) each boasted over 1,000 neighborhood clubs and roughly 2,000 individual conversions per month. To ground these young converts in the truths of Scripture, CEF developed a Bible study curriculum which covered all the books of the Bible in a five-year cycle.

A rising star in the CEF organization, and director of the record-breaking Eastern Pennsylvania district, Helen Odenwelder began to supplement the CEF curriculum with her own materials. Her additions included classic hymns, lessons on prayer and Bible-reading, and missionary stories, all in the flashcard format she had developed during her years of teaching. The popularity of her materials grew among CEF directors and in fundamentalist churches, and in 1962, Odenwelder resigned her position at CEF to found Bible Visuals International (BVI). BVI's flagship product, and Odenwelder's personal project throughout her career, was the Visualized Bible — a series of lessons that covered an outline and select stories from each book in the Bible, with flashcard illustrations. Less ambitious, but no less popular, was the series of missionary stories BVI published on the side. These tales of adventure were the highlight for club-goers and teachers alike. Shortly after BVI was founded, CEF also began

publishing missionary stories in the flashcard format, and both organizations continue to do so to the present day.<sup>23</sup>

Odenwelder openly expressed her hope that flashcard missionary stories would encourage children not just to consider the possibility of foreign missions in the future, but to begin now to share the gospel with those around them. Beyond the basics of conversion, however, both CEF's and BVI's missionary stories emphasized the cultural themes of America as a Christian nation, race, and gender, which were crucial battlefields for Fundamentalists throughout the movement's history. Odenwelder and club-leaders across the country hoped to "capture the children" and enlist them as Fundamentalist foot soldiers in the battle for the soul of America.

### *A Christian Nation*

At the heart of American Fundamentalism is a conflicted relationship with American culture. In order for the Fundamentalist impulse to emerge, two elements must be present: a once-dominant conservative religious community and powerful secularizing forces in the larger culture which challenge that dominance. As a result, American Fundamentalists simultaneously view

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<sup>23</sup> Dr. Mable Ruth Wray (Director Emeritus, CEF of Eastern Pennsylvania), interview with the author, July 14, 2016.

themselves as at odds with American culture, and as the only true Americans.<sup>24</sup>

Underlying this dilemma is the rhetoric of America as a Christian nation.

Fundamentalist enthusiasm for the Religious Right, a phenomenon which inspired a surge of scholarly interest in Fundamentalism, was simply the most visible demonstration of an impulse that lay dormant in the movement from the beginning. American Fundamentalists believed that government can and should promote and enforce Christian morality.<sup>25</sup>

In flashcard missionary stories, British and American colonial governments (i.e. Christian nations) are almost universally presented in a positive light and as a force for good. A story set in Fiji describes the islanders' devotion to the Queen of England, and one native Fijian assures her young friend, Leba, that she believes the Queen "may have received the Lord Jesus as her Savior."<sup>26</sup> In the story of Doming, a young boy in the Philippines, the current American occupation of the islands is contrasted with the previous oppression by the Spanish. Doming's older sister shows him a statue of Jose Rizal, "a good friend to the people," explaining that the Spanish forced Filipino soldiers to

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<sup>24</sup> George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6-7, 237. In 1980, Marsden articulated the fundamentalist "establishment-or-outsider paradox" in his groundbreaking study of fundamentalism, which has inspired over three decades of scholarship in the history of fundamentalism and evangelical thought.

<sup>25</sup> Marsden, 232.

<sup>26</sup> Rose-Mae Carvin, "Salvation on the South Seas: A Story of Fiji," ill. Frances Hertzler (Landisville, PA: Bible Visuals, Inc., 1970), 2.

shoot him.<sup>27</sup> In her battle to stop the exploitation of children she observed in Hindu temples, Amy Carmichael leveraged the power of the British Empire, eventually succeeding, the story says, in getting a law passed that forbid the selling of children into temple slavery.<sup>28</sup>

The relationship between colonial government and Christianity received its most extensive treatment in the story of Mary Slessor. Upon arriving in Nigeria she realized that “she had not really understood the heathen. These people were not without religion, they had plenty of religion. They were not without laws and rules, they had plenty of them also. But behind it all was fear. They were slaves of God’s enemy, Satan, and did not know it!”<sup>29</sup> The flashcard story, “Run, Ma! Run!” relates her aggressive struggle against the native practices of murdering twins (which were assumed to bring bad luck to the village) and killing the wives and servants of a chief when he died (so he would not have to enter the afterlife alone). She negotiated directly with tribal chiefs and with British Imperial officials, and convinced the British to outlaw the killing of twins and restrict the sale of liquor.<sup>30</sup> On one occasion, Mary cautioned a British consul against proceeding too quickly with a particular tribe. “The people

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<sup>27</sup> Rose-Mae Carvin, “Doming: The Popsicle Boy,” ill. Frances Hertzler (Landisville, PA: Bible Visuals, Inc., 1966), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Dick, “I Dare,” 22.

<sup>29</sup> Dick, “Run,” 6.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 8.



are not used to begin punished for their customs," she warned, and could stage a rebellion. Upon consideration, the official appointed Slessor Vice-Consul to the tribe in question, and for many years she served as both missionary and imperial official.<sup>31</sup> In another case, the story recounts her efforts to convince the Aros nation to submit to British rule: "These are my people. Permit them to bring law and order to this area. They will help build you roads and schools and churches. They will not take you as slaves. They want to see you prosper and grow and own many nice things to make life easier. They want to trade with you."<sup>32</sup> Throughout the stories, both British and American governments are presented as a force for good and ambassadors of Christianity.

BVI's treatment of the eighteenth-century hymn, "How Firm a Foundation," graphically depicts the Fundamentalist view of America as a Christian nation. Although the hymn text celebrates the Bible as the foundation for the Christian's faith, BVI thought it appropriate to publish a special illustrated edition of the hymn in honor of the United States Bicentennial, depicting scenes from the nation's founding. The phrase "to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled," for example, appears alongside a scene of the Pilgrims kneeling in prayer at Plymouth Rock, and the famous image of Washington crossing the Delaware is used to illustrate the divine promise "I'll strengthen

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<sup>31</sup> Dick, "Run," 12.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 15.

thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand.” Such juxtapositions imply that America’s political and religious heritage are one and the same. A few pages later, however, the dangers of American culture are presented in the strongest of terms. In the final stanza, when the text warns that the powers of hell will “endeavor to shake” the Christian, the accompanying illustration displays the Fundamentalist demons of alcohol, cigarettes, movies, and rock music.<sup>33</sup> In the same breath American culture was presented both as an expression of Christian faith and as a threat to it.



Fig. 2.1 “How Firm a Foundation.”  
(Illustrations by Sandra Jarrett. In Keith, “How Firm,” I-8, II-6, III-6. Used by permission of BVI.)

<sup>33</sup> George Keith, “How Firm a Foundation,” ill. Sandra Jarrett (Landisville, PA: Bible Visuals, Inc., 1975), I-7, I-8, II-5, II-6, III-5, III-6.

This cognitive dissonance can be seen in the missionary stories as well. In some cases American cultural trappings were presented as the natural outgrowth of Christian conversion, for example in a story of Hawaii which recounts how the first Hawaiian converts forsook their polygamous marriages and adopted American styles of dress.<sup>34</sup> Western clothing is also a marker of conversion in the story of young Ti-Fam of Haiti, when she stops to listen to a preacher in the marketplace. Although the preacher's attire is not mentioned in the text of the story, the illustration shows him wearing a suit and tie, surrounded by listeners in typical Haitian garb. Significantly, the preacher is not an American missionary, but a native Haitian who, it would seem, adopted American dress in connection with his conversion experience.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Mary Slessor rejoices in the change the gospel has brought to Calabar, the story says, when she sees former hunter-gatherers embracing a money economy by growing extra corn to sell.<sup>36</sup> Such examples give the impression that the fruit of the Spirit is American culture.

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<sup>34</sup> Carvin, "Mountain," 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ruth Harner, "Ti-Fam: Witch Doctor's Daughter" (Warrenton, MO: CEF Press, 1963), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Dick, "Run," 12.



Fig. 2.2 Native preacher in Western clothing.  
(Illustration in Harner, "Ti-Fam," 7.)

In other cases, however, the authors seem to be taking deliberate aim at the evils of America, such as alcohol. In the opening scene of Mary Slessor's story, her father comes staggering in after drinking away nearly his entire paycheck, and then in a fit of rage, locks her out of the house all night. Upon her arrival in Calabar, Mary insists that it will be impossible to improve the moral behavior of the people as long as they have access to liquor.<sup>37</sup> The story of young Doming of the Philippines contains a disturbing episode in which his grandfather attacks him with a knife and later wails that he never would have done it if he had not been drinking.<sup>38</sup> In keeping with the Fundamentalist obsession with teetotalism, the authors included these illustrations of the dangers

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<sup>37</sup> Dick, "Run," 16.

<sup>38</sup> Carvin, "Doming," 5-6.

of alcohol to encourage American children to avoid and oppose it in their own land.

Similarly, in a story set in China, the author used a young Communist boy as a mouthpiece to decry the excesses of American culture. When he is asked to give a speech at his Communist Club meeting, “Yung-an said that the children in American did not study hard in school. He said they wasted their time playing and watching television instead of learning how to protect their country like the children in their Club were doing. ‘Why they even waste food because they say they don’t like lots of things,’ he declared.” At this point the author breaks into the story to address the listeners directly: “Were these things true, boys and girls? Yes, often this is true. And if it is true in our lives, we ought to change it. We should want to be different.”<sup>39</sup> Fundamentalist children must be willing to be foreigners even at home. The dangers of American culture were clearly on the minds of the Fundamentalist adults who purchased these stories as well, as in the case of one who wrote to complain that Jesus’s hair was too long in BVI illustrations. Odenwelder asked Fundamentalist theologian Charles Ryrie for advice on the issue, and followed his suggestion to trim it up in the back.<sup>40</sup> In the

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<sup>39</sup> Ruth Harner, “Yung-an: Chinese Patriot” (Warrenton, MO: CEF Press, 1967), 8.

<sup>40</sup> Helen Odenwelder, *Helen Odenwelder to Charles Ryrie March 30, 1972*, Letter, BVI Organizational Papers (Bible Visuals International, Akron, PA), 1.

world of 1970s American Fundamentalism, even Jesus was suspect if He looked too much like a hippie.

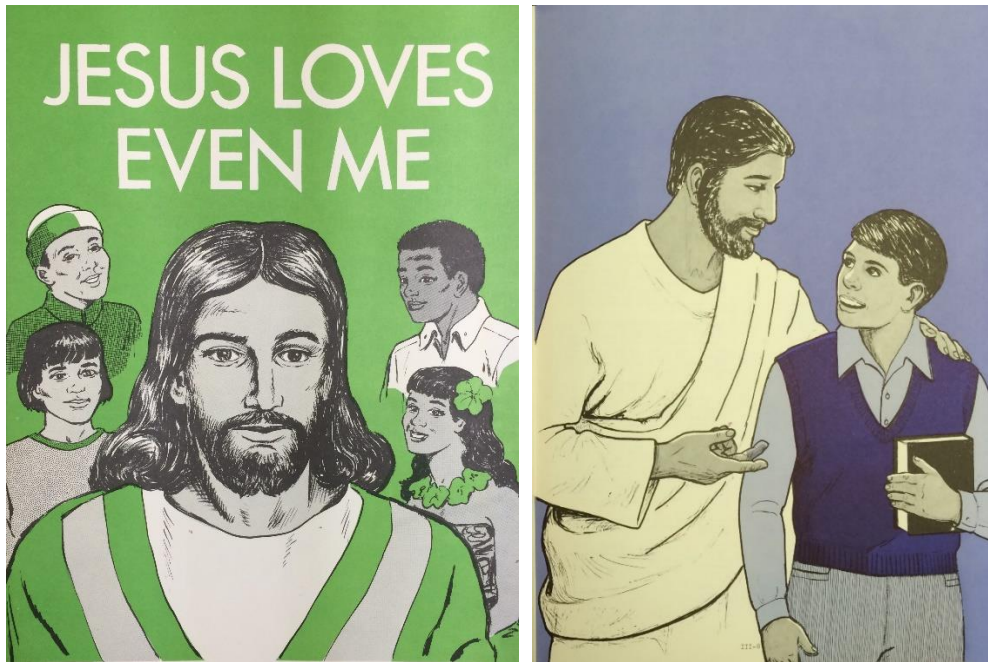


Fig. 2.3 Length of Jesus's hair, 1961 (left) and 1975 (right).  
(Illustrations in Bliss, "Jesus Loves," i, and Keith, "How Firm," III-8. Used by permission of BVI.)

The conviction that their Christian nation had been stolen from them fed directly into Fundamentalist paranoia on the issue of Communism. In Fundamentalist thinking, just as Americanism and Christianity were one and the same, political and religious enemies also overlapped.<sup>41</sup> The story of Yung-an, a nine-year-old boy whose family flees Communist China and settles in Taiwan, demonstrates how Cold War mentality was elevated in Fundamentalist thinking

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<sup>41</sup> See, for example, John R. Rice, *Dangerous Triplets: Russian Communism, New-Deal Socialism, and Bible-Denying Modernism* (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1960).

to the level of spiritual warfare. The author began with a diagram presenting Christianity and Communism as mutually exclusive, competing systems, and defining both in spiritual terms.

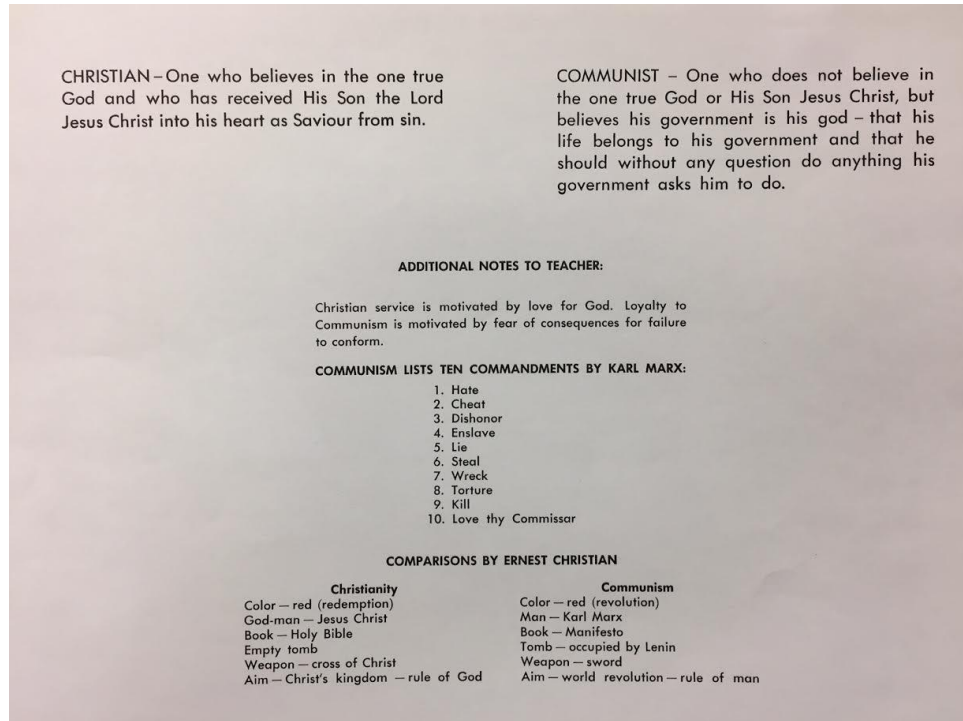


Fig. 2.4 Christianity vs. Communism.  
(In Harner, "Yung-an," 5.)

In the story, Yung-an is indoctrinated with atheism through government schooling and learns at the Young Communist Club to ridicule Americans and spy on his parents. His father decides to flee to Taiwan because he has heard that "the American government has helped the Chinese people there build new factories and businesses."<sup>42</sup> Yung-an is furious, and attempts to form his own

<sup>42</sup> Harner, "Yung-an," 8.

Communist gang in Taipei, until he begins attending church services and comes to believe the gospel message. His conversion is at once political and religious: “He knew he no longer wanted to be a Communist,” the story explains, “he wanted to be a Christian.”<sup>43</sup> One of the first evidences of his conversion is his new-found patriotism for Taiwan as he sings the national anthem and salutes the flag the following day at school. This view of Communism not just as a competing ideology but as a false religion was an important argument for American Fundamentalists during the 1950s and 1960s, as they condemned Communism overseas, but more urgently viewed secularism and the growth of big government as evidences of Communist influence at home.<sup>44</sup> Training their children to combat Communism was a crucial component of training them to be missionaries to America.

Also closely tied both to Communism and to Fundamentalist ideas of a Christian nation was the battle which thrust Fundamentalism into the public eye during the Scopes Trial and had raged ever since — the tension between science and faith. Although generations of American evangelicals had regarded scientific reasoning as “the best friend of the Christian faith,”<sup>45</sup> after 1859, insistence on a literal interpretation of the creation account in Genesis put them at odds with the

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<sup>43</sup> Harner, “Yung-an,” 16.

<sup>44</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism*, 239.

<sup>45</sup> Marsden, *Understanding*, 129.



scientific community. Modernist theologians attempted to reconcile Christianity and science by redefining such doctrines as the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ, efforts which struck Fundamentalists as neither Christian nor scientific.<sup>46</sup> As they abandoned the mainline denominations in protest, the term “Fundamentalist” became virtually synonymous with “anti-science.”

Fundamentalists never left this formative controversy behind, and a mistrust of science characterized the movement throughout the twentieth century. By the 1960s, most Americans had settled on an uneasy truce, drawing a hard line between the realms of science and religion and ordering both to stay out of each other’s territory, but Fundamentalists could not accept this compromise.<sup>47</sup> The resulting mistrust of science, however, created yet another tension for Fundamentalist missionaries — at home, science was often a tool of the enemy, but on the mission field science was one of the most powerful tools a missionary could use to reach people in underdeveloped nations. Flashcard missionary stories clearly demonstrate this tension.

In missionary stories, the religious beliefs of foreign cultures are invariably presented as unscientific. Much space is devoted to native superstition, such as when the Korku boy, Ringu, is terrified to put his sore foot

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<sup>46</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923), 7.

<sup>47</sup> James Gilbert, *Redeeming Culture: American Religion in an Age of Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 286.

in a basin of water because “the evil spirits in the water will get into the sore and make it worse!”<sup>48</sup> or when an old woman screams at Doming not to allow the missionary to take his picture with his two friends because having three in a picture is bad luck.<sup>49</sup> An enlightening dimension to the discussion of native superstition is the varied presentation of witch doctors throughout these stories. A typical description in the story of Ringu focuses on the witch doctor’s bizarre and terrifying appearance: “He was bent over like an old man. Around his neck hung wooden beads and several strings wound together and knotted. His turban was twisted tightly around his head and from the top hung a thick twist of dark, shiny hair. His face was evil and his eyes were sharp and piercing.”<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 2.5 Korku witch doctor.  
(Illustration by Marvin Espe. In Allison, “Ringu,” 5.)

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<sup>48</sup> Carol Allison, “Ringu of India’s Forest,” ill. Marvin Espe (Warrenton, MO: CEF Press, 1969), 5.

<sup>49</sup> Carvin, “Doming,” 6.

<sup>50</sup> Allison, 3.

Furthermore, the witch doctor is usually presented as uncaring, and his treatments harmful, or ineffective at best. When the witch doctor rubs black powder into Ringu's sore foot, Ringu shrieks in pain. "'That's good,' the witch doctor said gleefully, 'the yells will drive the evil spirits away.'" <sup>51</sup> In some cases, the witch doctor is presented as well-meaning. The old woman who warned Doming about having his picture taken hides him from his angry grandfather and then attempts to treat his wound by doing an "egg dance," which involves lighting candles and calling on demons. Although ineffective, the author concedes that she "had done the best she knew for the boy." <sup>52</sup>

In the story of Ti-Fam, the witch doctor is her father, Orestil, and much of the story focuses on his inner struggle leading up to his conversion. His objections to the missionary's efforts are presented in a sympathetic light: "You are talking against me," he tells a visiting preacher, "against the things I have spent my life doing." <sup>53</sup> The author highlights his desperation as he realizes that his reputation and livelihood are at stake. When the missionaries bring food after a frost has destroyed local crops, the story explains, "Orestil's mouth dropped open. Food – he was hungry – he had to have something to eat. But if he took food from the missionaries the people would turn away from him and the spirits.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>52</sup> Carvin, "Doming," 6.

<sup>53</sup> Harner, "Ti-Fam," 8.

He would never sell another charm.” So he told his neighbors that the food was poisoned but that he would remove the curse and make it safe to eat.<sup>54</sup>

In this contest, the missionaries had an obvious advantage over the witch doctors – modern medicine and technology. Missionary stories frequently describe the natives’ awe over the power of the missionary’s cures, as when little Iromo of the Sudan received treatment from a missionary nurse, and her family crowded around to watch her use a thermometer and stethoscope. Several stories set up an intentional comparison between the witch doctor and the missionary, describing their efforts in back-to-back scenes intended to highlight the contrast. For example, when the ministrations of the terrifying and sadistic witch doctor fail to heal Ringu’s sore foot, his family asks the missionary to come take a look. The missionary “sat beside Ringu. He looked closely at the sore foot, touching it gently here and there. ‘Yes, I think I can help. Bring a large pan of hot water.’” After convincing them that it was safe to submerge the injured foot, the missionary explained that he had put medicine in the water. “Then something happened that was completely new to Ringu. Mr. Grubbs said, ‘I am going to pray that Jesus will make your foot well.’”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, when the witch doctor’s cutting fails to lower Iromo’s fever, her family carries her for two days to reach the mission station. After cleaning Iromo’s cuts and giving her several

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>55</sup> Allison, 5.

medications, the nurse tells Iromo's family, "I am going to pray to my Father in Heaven to help her, because I am afraid she is beyond the help of medicine." She then prayed out loud for God, "the Great Doctor," to "touch her body and make her strong and well."<sup>56</sup>



Fig. 2.6 Missionary prays for healing.  
(Illustration by Marvin Espe. In Allison, "Ringu," 6.)

Later in the story, Iromo's parents discuss whether it was the nurse's medicine that helped Iromo or that "she talks with her head down and her eyes closed to this Jesus she told us about."<sup>57</sup> This question brings out a crucial point. The missionaries in these stories did intentionally challenge native superstition, and they saw themselves as ambassadors of science and progress in many ways. Their ultimate goal, however, was not to replace the traditional spiritual worldview of native cultures with that of modern science, but rather to replace it

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<sup>56</sup> Green, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 6.

with an alternative, yet still thoroughly spiritual worldview, teaching them to turn from their false gods to the one true God.

This distinction was important on the mission field, but it was even more important at home where, for Fundamentalists, defense of the miraculous was a key marker that separated the sheep from the goats. Scientific inquiry had to be conducted carefully and prayerfully. For example, although BVI sought to capitalize on public interest in outer space with a series of lessons on the stars, Odenwelder believed the series should help children “see the stars and planets as God sees them, not the way Satan or wicked mankind sees them.”<sup>58</sup> This philosophy is spelled out in BVI’s illustrated version of the 1965 song, “A Student’s Prayer:” In the supplemental teaching notes, the author exhorts the children, “Test all your learning by the absolute truth of the Bible. If your knowledge differs from what God says, the knowledge is wrong. Wrong knowledge is not wisdom!”<sup>59</sup>

Through these explicit statements and the careful distinctions drawn in the missionary stories, it is clear that as much as the authors attempted to disparage non-Christian religious practice, they also hoped to inspire their listeners to combat the growing secularism of American culture and to convert

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<sup>58</sup> Helen Odenwelder, *Helen Odenwelder to Frank Bauer August 16, 1974*, Letter, BVI Organizational Papers (Bible Visuals International, Akron, PA), 5.

<sup>59</sup> John W. Peterson, “A Student’s Prayer: A Visualized Gospel Song,” ill. Frances Hertzler (Landisville, PA: Bible Visuals, Inc., 1978).

the lost in America from the worship of the false god of science. Only by defeating the twin demons of Communism and scientific secularism could Fundamentalists restore America to her Christian heritage.

### *Divine Divisions*

On the most contentious conflict of the time, the issue of racial segregation, American missionaries took a great interest in policy back home. Even before State Department officials complained that segregation undercut America's Cold War identity as leader of the free world, American missionaries were pointing out the crippling effect of racism on evangelistic efforts overseas. Many evangelical leaders, even in the South, embraced, or at least made their peace with, racial integration in the wake of the civil rights battles of the 1960s.<sup>60</sup> Fundamentalist leaders, however, remained unconvinced and maintained their position that racial categories were divinely ordained divisions within the human race, and that the Civil Rights Movement was merely Communism in disguise.<sup>61</sup> This reluctance is reflected in the flashcard missionary stories written in the 1960s and 1970s.

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<sup>60</sup> Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 135-38. Worthen cites the shift in editorial tone toward race at the evangelical flagship publication *Christianity Today*, and the influence of repatriated missionaries on responses to the Civil Rights Movement among Southern Baptist leaders. See also discussion of Alan Scot Willis's work on progressive Southern Baptists in Chapter 2, and Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* 41, no. 1 (1988) for similar pleas made by the State Department.

<sup>61</sup> Dudziak, 117.

BVI did show glimmers of racial sensitivity in their efforts, for example, to ensure that biblical characters be drawn to look Middle Eastern instead of American, but in general, the stories demonstrate a near-obsession with racial difference.<sup>62</sup> Some references to racial features might be expected in setting the scene for the story by describing the appearance of the main characters and their culture, but the frequency of these references is remarkable. The authors made a point of mentioning a native child's brown skin, kinky hair, or dark eyes. In "The Mountain Changes Faces," the missionary to Hawaii imagines he can see, in the face of a nearby mountain, the faces of the different ethnic groups represented on the islands. When he thinks of Japanese Hawaiians, the story says, "the faces in the mountain were tiny and plump of cheek. The skin was smooth and tan, the eyes narrow and slanted. From the little round heads hung hair which was very black and very straight." In the same story, the author went out of her way to reiterate these features, when in the middle of a scene where a missionary shares the gospel with a Japanese child named Aiko, the author took the opportunity to comment, "Aiko's narrow eyes opened as wide as it was possible for her to open them."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Helen Odenwelder, *Helen Odenwelder to Sam Butcher February 7, 1975*, Letter, BVI Organizational Papers (Bible Visuals International, Akron, PA), 1-2.

<sup>63</sup> Carvin, "Mountain," 5.



The authors frequently highlighted racial differences in descriptions of initial encounters between native peoples and Western missionaries. In the story of Hudson Taylor, Chinese children and adults alike often crowd around him when he enters a new village, gawking at his light, curly hair.<sup>64</sup> In the story of Iromo, a little girl living in the Sudan, her family travels many miles to bring her to the mission station for medical treatment. When they arrive, the story recounts, “there, holding a light in her hand, was a woman with a white face! And with white arms! How peculiar she looked! For a moment they forgot about Iromo as they looked first at their own black skins and then at the lady’s white skin.”<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in “Run, Ma! Run!” the author describes Mary Slessor’s first encounter with “savages” (she had already been interacting with native converts for some time). “They were friendly, the guide said. They wanted to know if the white Ma had anything to say to them.” The author emphasized Mary’s fear during this encounter, but rather than explaining her fear in terms of the importance of the gospel message she hoped to share or even concerns over the natives’ intentions, the author attributed it to racial differences: “Mary’s mouth was dry and her mind went blank as she faced these people who were looking at

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<sup>64</sup> Keifer, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Winifred Green, “A New Life for Iromo,” ill. Frances Hertzler (Upper Darby, PA: BCM Publications, 1965), 5.

their first white person.”<sup>66</sup> Fear, it would seem, is a natural and even reasonable response to interracial encounters.



Fig. 2.7 Mary Slessor meets her first “savages.”  
(Illustration by Sam Butcher. In Dick, “Run,” 2-3.)

Furthermore, white features were typically presented as more beautiful, such as when a native Fijian describes a white woman as “very lovely. Her skin is white. Instead of combing her hair upward, as we Fijians comb ours, she combs it downward. Her hair is soft.”<sup>67</sup> The assumed beauty of certain physical features plays a key role in the flashcard story of Amy Carmichael. An entire chapter recounts how as a young child, Amy longed for blue eyes, yet hers were a “tragic brown.”<sup>68</sup> One night she prayed for God to make her eyes blue, and went to sleep anticipating a miracle because she had been taught that God

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<sup>66</sup> Dick, “Run,” 6.

<sup>67</sup> Rose-Mae Carvin, “Salvation in the South Seas: A Story of Fiji,” ill. Frances Hertzler (Landisville, PA: Bible Visuals, Inc., 1970), 2.

<sup>68</sup> Dick, “I Dare,” 4.

always answers prayer. When in the morning, her eyes remained brown, she learned the spiritual lesson that sometimes God answers “no” to a Christians prayers. The opportunity to teach instead that God creates each person with the features he chooses and that all people are equally beautiful in his sight either did not occur to the author or was deemed less important.



Fig. 2.8 Amy Carmichael's "tragic" brown eyes.  
(Illustration by Lynette Lombard. In Dick, "I Dare," 2.)

Later, as a missionary in India, Amy Carmichael longed to go into the temples and observe native worship, but, the story explains, as a white woman she was forbidden. She decided to disguise herself as an Indian, staining her skin brown with coffee and wearing a seelie and sari, so that she could sneak into the temple and "discover some of the secrets of India." Once inside, she encountered child exploitation and began her life's work of rescuing temple children, often

employing her disguise in the process. The spiritual point, the author emphasized, is that Amy Carmichael was able to disguise herself as an Indian woman because her eyes were brown – blue eyes would have given her away. Now Amy “understood the reason for that one small disappointment. She needed brown eyes. God **had** given the best answer.”<sup>69</sup> The author assumed that blue eyes would have been more beautiful, but because of the work God had called her to, brown eyes were Amy’s cross to bear. Furthermore, the underlying message is that physical differences are important dividers and that skin color is the key that unlocks certain doors.

Racism, of course, is more than skin-deep, and missionary stories also assume inherited abilities and traits and imply racial hierarchy. Native people in the stories invariably function as guides, assistants, manual laborers or in other subordinate roles, while Westerners are in positions of leadership or skill. Amy Carmichael hired native Indians to help with childcare, housework, and building cottages. But for her hospital project, she brought an engineer, a doctor, and nurses from England.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, Mary Slessor’s constant lament that in all her years of service, no new missionaries came to help her, and Hudson Taylor’s successful recruiting of over a thousand new missionaries for his China Inland

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<sup>69</sup> Dick, “I Dare,” 5.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

Mission, both clearly imply that their many native converts were somehow unable to shoulder the work of evangelizing and teaching their own people.<sup>71</sup>

The consistent message of flashcard missionary stories is that race is an important marker of human difference, and that racial features and assumed traits are worthy of notice and repeated mention. Furthermore, statements made by Odenwelder and others in the organization support the possibility that this emphasis was in reality an agenda. In 1972, Odenwelder wrote to missionary friends regarding their white daughter's intention to marry a black man. Odenwelder insisted that while the couple might see nothing wrong with the relationship, their children would be a "sad mixture" and not truly belong to either race. The issue, in Odenwelder's mind, was not merely practical, but theological. She wrote to Charles Ryrie to ask his opinion, and he replied with biblical support for her position.<sup>72</sup>

Ryrie was not alone in attempting to defend segregation from the Bible. In 1960, when Billy Graham reiterated his opposition to segregation in a public statement on Good Friday, fundamentalist preacher and university president, Bob Jones Sr., shot back with a sermon on Easter Sunday in which he argued that the Bible's teaching on segregation is "perfectly clear." "If you are against

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<sup>71</sup> Dick, "Run," 17; Keifer, 12.

<sup>72</sup> Helen Odenwelder, *Helen Odenwelder to Emma and Jim Turner March 7, 1972*, Letter, BVI Organizational Papers (Bible Visuals International, Akron, PA), 2-3; Mable Ruth Wray, interview with the author, July 2016. Mable Ruth Wray, a co-worker and close friend of Odenwelder, still opposes interracial marriage.

segregation,” Jones thundered, “then you are against God Almighty.” The key concern for Jones, as for Odenwelder, was intermarriage. He was adamant that no race should consider itself superior to another, but that God intended for the races to remain separate.<sup>73</sup> In light of such views, the constant mentions of race in missionary stories can be seen as an attempt to resist the newborn racial tolerance of post-civil rights America, and to teach Fundamentalist children the importance of racial divisions.

### *Obeying God Rather than Men*

Another hallmark of American Fundamentalism, from its earliest days, was its championing of masculinity and traditional gender roles. As a reaction to Victorian notions of innate female piety and the overwhelmingly female membership of nineteenth-century evangelical churches, Fundamentalists emphasized the need for manly defense of the faith. Initially, this emphasis in no way discouraged the Fundamentalist women who flocked to Bible institutes for ministry training and swelled the ranks of teachers and missionaries in parachurch ministries and mission boards. In these early days, in fact, Fundamentalist women enjoyed greater opportunities for public ministry than

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<sup>73</sup> Justin Taylor, “Is Segregation Scriptural? A Radio Address from Bob Jones on Easter of 1960,” *The Gospel Coalition Blog*, July 26, 2016, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/evangelical-history/2016/07/26/is-segregation-scriptural-a-radio-address-from-bob-jones-on-easter-of-1960/>. Bob Jones University began admitting black students in 1970, but maintained a ban on interracial dating until 2000.

their mainline counterparts.<sup>74</sup> After World War II, however, Fundamentalists began to more actively restrict the public ministry of women, relegating them to service in the home and under the leadership of their husbands.<sup>75</sup> These restrictions hardened into battle lines as Fundamentalists resisted Second Wave Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, and Odenwelder's career at BVI reflects the shift. Although she answered to an all-male board of directors and sent drafts of each publication to an all-male Committee of Reference who checked for doctrinal accuracy (insert Philadelphia college of the Bible), in the 1970s she began to express concerns that having a female director hindered the ministry of BVI and insisted that when she retire the board should choose a man to replace her.<sup>76</sup>

Missionary stories written during this era also reflect the raging battle over gender roles. The flashcard story of Amy Carmichael poignantly presents her struggle to accept what she believed to be a specific but inferior calling from God. A gifted speaker, Carmichael's ministry included public teaching, at times to audiences as large as 20,000. One night, however, she believed God was calling her to leave her public teaching ministry in order to rescue temple

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<sup>74</sup> Hamilton, Michael S., "Women, Public Ministry, and American Fundamentalism, 1920-1950," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 3 (1993): 182.

<sup>75</sup> Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 10.

<sup>76</sup> Helen Odenwelder, *Helen Odenwelder to Charles Ryrie July 20, 1973*, Letter, BVI Organizational Papers (Bible Visuals International, Akron, PA), 2-3.

children. “Leave my traveling and teaching and working with adults who are lost?” she prayed. “Turn nursemaid? and baby-sitter?”<sup>77</sup> Compounding Carmichael’s own misgivings, the author lamented, Christian friends did not encourage her in this new work, telling her that she would no longer be “a real missionary” if she were merely caring for children.<sup>78</sup>

The brief bio of author Lois Hoadley Dick, included in the back of the story booklet, hints that Carmichael’s struggle may have particularly resonated with Dick, in that she had served as a field representative for Child Evangelism Fellowship “prior to her marriage.” In addition, a section in the teacher’s introduction seems to flow from Dick’s personal experience: “Do you know what it is to have one, sick, crying baby in a house? One sick child? Imagine a houseful of crying, sick children with Amma [Carmichael]...not knowing what it was to sleep straight through the night, in hotter weather than you have ever known.” But what could she do? “Turn the babies back to the temple women?”<sup>79</sup> Like home-bound Fundamentalist women of the 1960s, Amy Carmichael “had to learn to say “No” to everything except that which she knew God wanted her to do.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Dick, “I Dare,” 3.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 14.



On the issue of gender roles, however, missionary stories did not unanimously echo the Fundamentalist party line. Several stories include subtle undermining of male headship, especially in cases where a woman converts to Christianity against her husband's wishes. In the story of the Haitian girl, Ti-Fam, her mother tells her husband, the local witch doctor, that the preaching she heard in the market has convinced her that the Christian God is more powerful than his voodoo gods and she will no longer wear her charm. The missionaries have "not only turned the neighbors against me," the witch doctor wails, "but now...you."<sup>81</sup> This was a common motif in flashcard missionary stories. The child in the story is usually the first to convert, often through forbidden contact with the missionary. Once the child professes Christianity, the mother is next to see the light, and then both mother and child disregard the father's objections and retaliation and pray for his conversion.

This tendency to paint the father as the enemy of Christianity runs counter to the well-noted Fundamentalist emphasis on male leadership in church and home, and it reveals that there were limits to the movement's obsession with gender. Husbands should lead, wives should submit, and children should obey, unless of course the gospel was at stake. Furthermore, targeting children for conversion outside the family structure was the central tactic of CEF Bible Clubs,

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<sup>81</sup> Harner, "Ti-Fam," 6.

and the authors clearly hoped young listeners from non-Christian families would imitate the disregard for family authority so often modeled in their stories.

Although radical and potentially subversive, such messages were in harmony with New Testament passages in which Jesus taught his disciples to forsake father and mother in order to follow him or in which Peter proclaimed that Christians ought to obey God rather than men.

Another example of the limits of Fundamentalist gender ideology can be seen in the story of Mary Slessor. Because of her skill in negotiations between tribal chiefs and British officials, Slessor was made a Vice-Consul to the Okoyong people and exerted significant influence over Imperial policy and expansion. But even before this appointment, she functioned as an unofficial judge in tribal negotiations. The flashcard story recounts an incident where she listened to a dispute between a chief and two of his wives, and successfully lessened the punishment meted out, placing blame on the chief for his polygamous practices.<sup>82</sup> On another occasion, she heard of a land dispute and sent a message “forbidding the chiefs to make war” until she could hear both sides. All day long she sat between the two chiefs (each with dozens of armed warriors at his side), calmly knitting and listening until everyone had had his say. Then “Mary stood up to announce her verdict.” One tribe would draw a map of the territory and

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<sup>82</sup> Dick, “Run,” 7.

divide it in half, and the other tribe would get first pick between the two halves.

“Both groups nodded their heads and praised the white Ma for being so fair and clever,” the story concludes. “They all began to laugh and parted good friends.”<sup>83</sup>

Most striking, however, is the spiritual authority that Mary Slessor wields in “Run, Ma! Run!” Upon her arrival in Calabar, she made it clear to the other missionaries that she would be doing things her own way. Mary cut off her long hair, wore the simplest clothing and no shoes, and learned to climb trees and paddle a canoe. After much pleading, she was given permission to leave the mission station in Duke Town and set out as an independent missionary.

“Mary’s ideas and her calls from God frequently went against the strict rules of the mission,” the author explained, “but the people there came to understand that she was submitting to a higher authority. Mary was obeying the voice of God.”<sup>84</sup>

On Sundays she would walk from village to village ringing a large bell to gather a crowd and teach them from the Bible.<sup>85</sup> One such service was interrupted by a riot that broke out nearby. “‘Be quiet!’ she commanded. ‘You are disturbing my church service. You will have to wait until I have finished preaching, then I will come and settle your argument.’ They all sat down next to

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<sup>83</sup> Dick, “Run,” 12.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 6.

the church, quiet and respectful, until Mary finished her sermon and came outside.”<sup>86</sup> Although it is not uncommon for a woman to fill non-traditional roles on the mission field (where such doctrinal niceties as the prohibition against women preaching can be more easily overlooked), the use of the terms “preaching” and “sermon” when telling the story to groups of children seems intended to challenge Fundamentalist views on gender, since the more palatable “teaching” and “lesson” could easily have been substituted.<sup>87</sup> No Fundamentalist listener would have missed the significance of these word choices. On the issue of gender roles, then, the authors of flashcard missionary stories at times subtly resisted Fundamentalist teaching, using incidents from foreign ministry as the vehicle for their own statements. And for the little girls who heard these stories, “be a missionary” may have carried a distinctly un-Fundamentalist layer of meaning.

The writers at BVI and CEF hoped to equip children with the truth about America’s Christian heritage, racial boundaries, and traditional gender roles, and dispatch them as missionaries to America. They were not the only group to employ the tactic. A second set of missionary stories, produced by Southern

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<sup>86</sup> Dick, “Run,” 16.

<sup>87</sup> See Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman’s Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 5-8.

Baptists, reveals a similar agenda carried out in the context of denominational conflict.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### SOUTHERN BAPTIST MISSIONS EDUCATION

The notion of sending missionaries to America is built into the organizational structure of the Southern Baptist Convention – the Foreign Mission Board sponsors missionary work overseas, and the Home Mission Board sends missionaries to various posts in the U.S. *Tell Magazine* featured the work of both foreign and home missionaries, and encouraged GAs to participate in the annual offerings for each, with the refrain that both foreign and home missions were equally important and necessary. Missions, in Southern Baptist thinking, functioned as a sort of trump card, the deciding factor in almost any debate. Throughout the turbulent 1960s and 1970s, Southern Baptists lived by the mantra “all conflicts end where the ‘Great Commission’ begins.”<sup>88</sup>

As with Fundamentalists, the insider-outsider complex can be identified in Southern Baptist thinking on a number of levels. First, as Southerners, they viewed themselves as guardians of the pure and original form of Americanism, while at the same time nursing a century-old spirit of rebellion against a federal government whose sole ambition, they thought, was to marginalize them and stamp out their way of life. As Southern Baptists, their identity was no less

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<sup>88</sup> Edward L. Queen II, *In the South the Southern Baptists Are the Center of Gravity: Southern Baptists and Social Change, 1930-1980* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 9.

contested. Southern Baptist ecclesiology reveres the autonomy of the local congregation, the authority of which cannot be delegated to any higher level of denominational rule. Actions taken or beliefs articulated by the national Convention are not binding on local congregations. The result is near-constant wrangling over the true Southern Baptist position on issues of the day. In the post-war era, the denominational leaders tended to be more progressive on theological and social issues, and attempted to use their national platform to cajole their backward brethren toward more enlightened views. Meanwhile, many local congregations felt the national leadership had abandoned the faith and hijacked the denomination. A product of the national leadership of WMU, *Tell* magazine clearly represented the more progressive view, and continually emphasized the harmony of these views with the Bible and with historic Southern Baptist belief.

Although the editors and writers rarely mentioned any specific denominational controversies, they emphasized a number of themes which were the subject of hot debate in the denomination at the time – and they did not hesitate to take a firm position. Like the authors of flashcard missionary stories, the writers at *Tell* wove into their tales of missionary work the contested themes of America as a Christian nation, race, and gender. Under the guise of missionary education, the WMU was training young girls to be missionaries to America,

teaching them to understand and share the truth about the most contentious issues of the day.

### *A Not-So-Christian Nation*

1950s America had all the trappings of a nation born-again: a new motto on its coins, a celebrity evangelist making headlines around the country, and most importantly a divine calling. Many Americans viewed their nation as “God’s chosen vessel” to bring the gospel of peace and prosperity to a world ravaged by war. Southern Baptists viewed their missionary work in this context of *Pax Americana*, and although the dream would prove elusive, the pages of *Tell* magazine demonstrate this orientation into the 1960s.<sup>89</sup> A 1963 update on mission work in Japan, for example, compared American influence in the defeated nation to “a potent vitamin pill” which had fortified Japanese education, industry, and democracy in the almost twenty years since VJ Day. Most important to Japan’s success, the article contended, was General McArthur’s call for a thousand American missionaries to come preach the one true god to a nation disillusioned by their emperor’s admission that he “was no god at all, and never had been.” Not nearly enough missionaries had responded,

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<sup>89</sup> See “*Pax Americana* and the Evangelical Missionary Advance” in Carpenter and Shenk: 155-179.



the author lamented, but now Southern Baptists were renewing their efforts with a campaign called “New Life for Japan.”<sup>90</sup>

American missionaries played a similarly crucial role in the emerging nations of Africa. A 1961 article celebrated the fact that in the past five years, twenty-one African nations had achieved independence, “just as our own country shook off the bounds that held our freedom in 1776.” The author especially praised the “quiet dignity” with which Nigeria had become a republic, explaining that the smooth transition was due in part to England’s long years of planning and educating national leaders in Western ways. Southern Baptist missionaries could have a similar influence in African nations, the author insisted. “Think of the possibilities Christian missionaries have in helping to shape the statesmen and leaders of tomorrow!”<sup>91</sup>

In addition to well-trained nationals, the article maintained, Christian missionary work in education, medicine, construction, and agriculture had played a crucial role in laying the groundwork for a peaceful and prosperous new democracy. *Tell* regularly featured exciting reports of the spiritual uses of technology, such as a duplicating machine assisting religious publishers in the Philippines, a mission hospital ambulance in Rhodesia which also doubled as

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<sup>90</sup> Eva Inlow, “A New Japan,” *Tell Magazine*, November 1963, 34-36.

<sup>91</sup> Lila Hopkins, “A Candle in the Darkness,” *Tell Magazine*, May 1961, 34-36.

public transport, and an incubator protecting newborns in Mexico.<sup>92</sup> Agricultural missionaries were sent to famine-stricken areas to teach modern farming techniques, and architectural missionaries were dispatched to design church buildings suited to the needs of each field.



## *Presenting* GAs of Panama

Fig. 3.1 GA award ceremony in Panama.  
(Photograph in "Presenting," *Tell Magazine*, February 1960, 11. Used by permission of WMU.)

Issue after issue of *Tell* displayed photos of girls around the world forming their own GA clubs and striving to "make sure they are doing everything exactly like it's done in the states" and of national pastors in Africa dressed in suit and tie while preaching to their own people.<sup>93</sup> That American

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<sup>92</sup> "Your Offering at Work," *Tell Magazine*, December 1963, 3-5.

<sup>93</sup> Saxon Rowe Carver, "Tell Presents: Marjorie Ann Steele Grober," *Tell Magazine*, June 1960, 8; "Presenting GAs of Panama," *Tell Magazine*, February 1960, 11; Marie Cheyne and Wana Ann Fort, "Coronation in Southern Rhodesia," *Tell Magazine*, May 1960, 2-3; Marjorie Olive, "Antonia – A Lovely Filipina," *Tell Magazine*, April 1963, 4-5; Jean Jones, "Prayer Calendar," *Discovery Magazine*, February 1972, 20.

culture should spread right along with American religion was deemed perfectly appropriate because “it is a proven fact that the peoples of the West have developed their ideas of justice, freedom, co-operation, and progress from the teachings of Jesus Christ.”<sup>94</sup> Such content reinforced in the minds of young readers that their nation was uniquely qualified to lead the world to the promised land of democracy and Christianity.

Progressive Southern Baptists, however, were of two minds regarding America’s status as a Christian nation and her qualifications for world leadership. The authors at *Tell* were quick to point out ways in which America fell short of Christian ideals. Articles on the dangers of alcohol and smoking (in some cases written by a current GA) clearly labeled such practices as unchristian and un-American. “The sentiment for prohibition is growing in this country” one impassioned GA declared, “and we should ever keep alert for the opportunity to push this industry back into the back streets and the woods.”<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, GAs read, America had acted unjustly toward other nations in the past, especially in dealings with Native Americans, and were now guilty of revisionism since history books often recorded Indian violence, but not “the wholesale burning of Indian villages and slaughter of Indians by white settlers.”

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<sup>94</sup> Eva Inlow, “Our Christian Faith,” *Tell Magazine*, June 1963, 37.

<sup>95</sup> Carol Rankin, “Alcohol and My Responsibility,” *Tell Magazine*, September 1957, 12-15; see also Ann Codrington, “One Drink Is Too Many,” *Tell Magazine*, April 1961, 8-13.

*Tell* attempted to set the record straight with a dramatic retelling of the Trail of Tears, “one of the darkest pages of American history.”<sup>96</sup> Even now, America was failing to provide the Christian leadership the world needed, one missionary lamented, as he told of sending “two plane loads of choice Chinese young people” from Hong Kong to the United States for higher education. He had hoped they would find a Christian atmosphere in which to study but instead they were exposed to “materialism, scientific atheism, Marxian sociology, moral relateness, cold humanism and very little evangelical Christianity.”<sup>97</sup>

The missions-minded fretted, furthermore, that America could hardly be called a Christian nation even in numeric terms. One lesson alerted readers to recent census data which showed that more than one-third of Americans had no affiliation with a church or synagogue. If America is a Christian nation, the author argued, “it would be equally true to call New York a ‘Puerto Rican city.’” This dearth of church members was the result of an influx of recent immigrants, who “have taken our flag and our way of life as their own – but they still cling to their religions.”<sup>98</sup> In addition to people of foreign descent, Native Americans, Jews, and millions of Americans in big cities, mountain regions, and “the northern part of the country” also evidenced the need for missionary

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<sup>96</sup> Kathryn Greene, “The Long, Long Trail,” *Tell Magazine*, September 1959, 29, 33.

<sup>97</sup> Jacqueline Durham, “Our Land Shall Own Thee Lord,” *Tell Magazine*, March 1965, 29-30.

<sup>98</sup> Jacqueline Durham, “Pilgrims With a Purpose,” *Tell Magazine*, March 1963, 34.

intervention, and the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board was developing special ways to minister to each of these groups and many more.<sup>99</sup>

The fact that Southern Baptists had a Home Mission Board, which sent out thousands of missionaries to evangelize their fellow Americans, itself undercut the idea of America as a Christian nation. Yet, labeling ministry to these especially needy groups as “missions” (as opposed to regular church ministry) also set them apart as somehow un-American, and therefore reinforced the idea that true Americans, if not devout believers, at least grew up in the shadow of a steeple. This mindset is perfectly depicted in a 1959 illustration celebrating Southern Baptist Home Missions. Sketches of missionary work are superimposed on a map of the United States — over California is a scene showing people of Oriental descent, a family of Latinos entering a church building covers the Southwest, the Northern plains displays the construction of new church buildings, but in the Southeast is simply a pastor preaching to an established congregation.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Jacqueline Durham, “The U.S. at Worship,” *Tell Magazine*, March 1965, 33.

<sup>100</sup> “Pray for Missionaries Who TELL the Story of Jesus,” *Tell Magazine*, March 1959, 1.

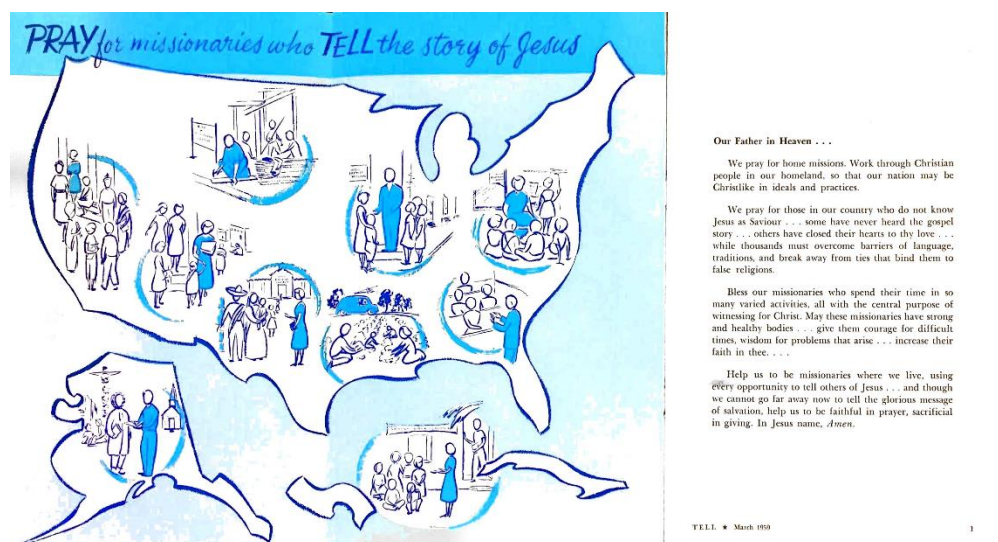


Fig. 3.2 Home missions map.  
(Illustration in *Tell Magazine*, March 1959, 1. ) Used by permission of WMU.

But whether non-Christians were true Americans or not, *Tell* magazine presented them not as a blight, but as an opportunity. The authors made a concerted effort to show the range of religions represented in the US, to summarize the beliefs of each, to demonstrate the sincerity of the adherents, and to point out common ground with the Christian faith. One lesson opens with positive descriptions of young worshipers, Muslim, Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, Jewish, Catholic, and Mormon, explaining that all of these scenes take place in the U.S. every day. “This is the task of home missions,” the author declared, “to witness for Christ, to teach Christianity in the face of almost every religion found on the globe.” She encouraged her readers to learn to give “a positive witness”

rather than arguing or belittling.<sup>101</sup> Respect for and tolerance of other faiths, WMU writers insisted, was the American way and the Christian way.

It was also, they argued, the Baptist way. In July 1964, in honor of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first organized mission efforts by Baptists in America, *Tell* dedicated an issue to the Baptist heritage of religious freedom. The lesson began with an analogy attributed to Roger Williams, founder of the first Baptist church in America in 1638, in which he compared a free state to a ship carrying Christian, Jewish, and pagan passengers. The captain of such a ship, naturally, makes no requirements or prohibitions regarding worship, Williams explained, but simply requires all passengers to pay the fare, swab the decks, and keep the peace. This notion which we now call separation of church and state, the lesson went on, had not always been practiced. Over the centuries, many people had been persecuted for their faith, and even the Puritans, who came to America to escape persecution “brought the same problem along with them.” Only Roger Williams, in his founding of Rhode Island, understood and established true religious freedom for all faiths.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the author further explained, acknowledged Baptist influence in their thinking as they composed America’s founding documents, and when alert Baptists realized the new Constitution’s

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<sup>101</sup> Durham, “U.S. at Worship,” 33-36.

protection of religious freedom was insufficient, they, “with the aid of some others,” acted quickly to warn George Washington, who immediately agreed that the first amendment be added as a necessary safeguard.<sup>102</sup> “We do not want to brag,” the author cautioned, “but Baptists should have a feeling of deep happiness that the cherished rights and privileges of religious liberty were brought about through the efforts and sacrifices of our Baptist fathers and those who worked with them.”<sup>103</sup>

This interpretation of America’s founding was not without historical basis. Baptists had indeed been leading voices in the cause of religious liberty, and when the separation of church and state faced new challenges in the 1960s, such as the Supreme Court’s consideration of funding for religious schools and prayer in public schools, Southern Baptists leaders voiced strong support for maintaining a strict separation, despite the financial and cultural consequences.<sup>104</sup> But presented in this fashion, the history reinforced two crucial, yet paradoxical components of Southern Baptist identity – their role as defenders of American diversity and their status as the truest, the original Americans.

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<sup>102</sup> Marjorie Rowden, “Ship of Freedom,” *Tell Magazine*, July 1964, 24-26.

<sup>103</sup> Eva Inlow, “It Is Mine! I Want It!” *Tell Magazine*, July 1964, 35. (This is the corresponding lesson for older elementary girls.)

<sup>104</sup> See Queen, 97-117, for a summary of Southern Baptists and religious liberty, and specifically Southern Baptist response to the Supreme Court’s prayer decision, 109-112; see also Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59-61.



The lesson of Roger Williams and the founders, furthermore, contained a warning: “we need to be on guard so we will not lose some of our religious freedom in the USA.” GA girls were encouraged to consider the unintended consequences of federal funding for hospitals and schools, to question what they might hear on the news, and to heed the warnings of such groups as the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, who maintained an office in D.C. to “keep an eye on happenings that might offset the separation of church and state.”<sup>105</sup> Such vigilance was necessary because Christian America had an adversary walking about as a roaring lion—Communism. The foil against which America defined itself as Christian, Communism was no mere political threat, but in the words of Billy Graham, “a religion that is inspired, directed, and motivated by the Devil himself.”<sup>106</sup> In the battle against Communism, the weapons were spiritual and the consequences eternal. “Where truth and right are concerned,” the lesson concluded, “there must be no compromise. Ever.”<sup>107</sup>

To equip GAs for the battle against Communism, WMU writers took opportunities to point out the ways in which it was fundamentally incompatible with their understanding of scripture and citizenship. In 1964, Marjorie Moore Armstrong, wife of Senator O.K. Armstrong of Missouri and author of several

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<sup>105</sup> Inlow, “It’s Mine!” 35.

<sup>106</sup> Qtd. in Willis, 58.

<sup>107</sup> Inlow, “It’s Mine!” 35.

books, including *Religion Can Conquer Communism*, provided readers of *Tell* with a detailed account of the recent wedding of two Soviet cosmonauts. The marriage, Armstrong explained, was coerced by the government in an effort to study the effects of space travel on offspring. “That’s communism for you!” Armstrong exclaimed, “The citizen is made for the state, not the state for the citizen.” In the absence of belief in a Creator who made each person in his image, there was nothing to stop the Soviet government from exploiting its citizens “in an effort to win the space race, and to divert world attention from its glaring blunders.” To combat this type of thinking, Armstrong instructed GAs to treat every person as one made in the image of God, to educate themselves about the dangers of Communism, and to build their future families “to the glory of God, not to the glory of science or an atheistic state.”<sup>108</sup>

Cold War thinking, moreover, infused foreign missionary work with new political significance. Nigeria’s smooth transition to democracy, was “of vital concern to the rest of the world” *Tell* insisted in 1961, “for, as Nigeria goes, so goes Africa.” The twenty-one infant nations of Africa were especially susceptible to Communist takeover, and the contributions of American missionaries to democracy and prosperity in Nigeria could prevent the first domino from falling. GA leaders were instructed to emphasize the seriousness of the situation and to

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<sup>108</sup> Marjorie Moore Armstrong, “TINA: Space Mother,” *Tell Magazine*, September 1964, 8-10.

lead their groups in prayer for African political leaders and for American missionaries.<sup>109</sup> Likewise, in South Korea, although American missionaries had laid a foundation for democracy, the people's inexperience in self-government produced continued instability, the writers at *Tell* lamented. "The best hope for the future," a 1964 article declared, "seems to be the spread of the Christian faith."<sup>110</sup> The previous year, writers at *Tell* had expressed hope that recently initiated Southern Baptist mission work in South Vietnam would reinforce UN efforts to combat Communist aggression from the North. The best efforts of American missionaries and soldiers, however, would fail to save Vietnam, and the protracted and demoralizing struggle ultimately prompted many Americans to question their national identity.<sup>111</sup>

For many, the Vietnam War gave the fight against communism, and patriotism itself, a bad name. WMU writers persisted in pride for their nation in 1972 with a story of Karen, a missionary kid in Latin America, who was thrilled to attend a 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic—complete with hot dogs, ice cream, and fireworks—hosted by the American ambassador. "We can be proud of the people who made our country great," the ambassador assures his guests. But the betrayal of Watergate, after many Southern Baptists broke with the Democratic Party to

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<sup>109</sup> Hopkins, "Candle," 35.

<sup>110</sup> Mrs. Ralph Gwin, "Life in a Divided Country," *Tell Magazine*, November 1964, 29.

<sup>111</sup> Sue Freeman, "Next to the Bamboo Curtain," *Tell Magazine*, June 1963, 19-20.

support Nixon (at the prompting of Billy Graham), and the humiliation of final defeat in Vietnam, produced a humbler and more inclusive patriotism among the WMU staff. A 1975 article entitled “Who Tipped Over the Melting Pot?” lamented that “somehow we had developed the idea that ‘alike is better’ so the first goal of every immigrant was ‘Americanization.’” Democracy, the article insisted did not require assimilation, but instead was strengthened by the variety of values inherent in American ethnic and religious diversity. American Christians should learn from their Buddhist and Muslim neighbors, even as they shared with them the gospel of Jesus.<sup>112</sup> Overseas, too, Southern Baptist missionaries began to see their work as more of a partnership with native converts. *Discovery* (the new name for *Tell* after 1970) rejoiced in 1975 that many Southern Baptist missionaries were adjusting their approach: “Instead of doing all the work themselves, they train church members and enable THEM to do the work.” GAs were instructed to discuss the many benefits of this new tactic.<sup>113</sup>

A humbler spirit pervaded *Discovery*’s observance of the American Bicentennial, as well. The writers made passing mention of Baptist defenders of religious freedom, featured a Liberty Bell replica which had sounded to open each session of the Southern Baptist Convention that summer, and honored Baptist pastor John Gano who had been privileged to baptize George

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<sup>112</sup> Lee Holloway, “Who Tipped Over the Melting Pot?” *Aware*, January-March 1975, i.

<sup>113</sup> Jane Zurflich, “Come Away With Me to Hawaii,” *Aware*, April-June 1975, 19.

Washington as an adult (his previous baptism as an infant, naturally, did not count). There was, however, none of the celebration of American or Baptist exceptionalism which had permeated *Tell's* discussion of Roger Williams a decade earlier. In addition, the writers encouraged GAs to picture the horrors of the battle of Yorktown in an extended fictional account told from the perspective of a young drummer boy – in the *British* army.<sup>114</sup> WMU writers, perhaps, were avoiding patriotic fervor in an attempt to remain neutral in the midst of a presidential election which divided Southern Baptist leaders between the GOP's Gerald Ford, who better aligned with their conservative values, and devout Southern Baptist Democrat Jimmy Carter. While many Southern Baptists were embracing the vision of a Christian America that would be championed by the Religious Right, Carter's mixture of Southern Baptist faith and progressive social values seems to have resonated with the WMU staff. In 1979, they ran photos of the president and first lady pausing during a diplomatic tour of Africa to stop on the side of the road and shake hands with a group of Southern Baptist missionary kids.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> From the July 1976 issue of *Discovery*: Roma Zeltner, "Traveling on the Fighters for Freedom Maze," 6; Roma Zeltner, "A Liberty Bell Takes a Trip," 14-16; Bobbie Sorrill, "Drummer Boy in Red," 18-19.

<sup>115</sup> "Presidents Greet MKs in Liberia," *Discovery*, May 1979, 5.

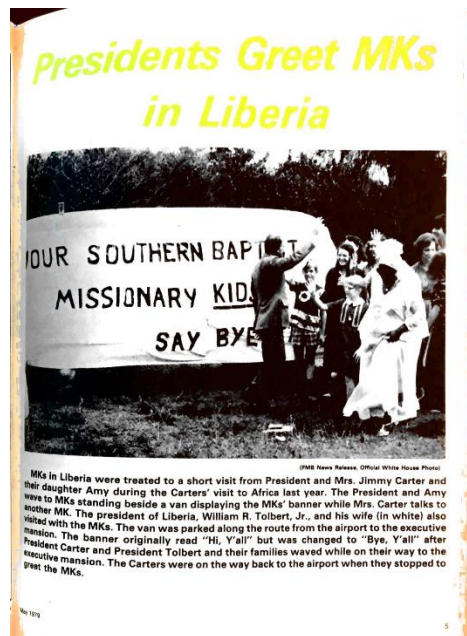


Fig. 3.3 President Jimmy Carter greets MKs in Liberia.  
(Photograph in "Presidents," *Discovery*, May 1979, 5. Used by permission of WMU.)

Later that summer, at their annual convention, Southern Baptists would elect Adrian Rogers to the presidency, a move which initially seemed a mere nod to political and theological conservatives, but which became the first step in a twenty-year campaign to oust moderate denominational leadership and seminary faculty – a shift alternatively referred to as the conservative resurgence or the fundamentalist takeover, depending on one's perspective. As conservative Southern Baptists rallied to the Reagan campaign the following year, WMU signaled its preference for Carter's platform with issues of *Discovery* dedicated to

inner city ministries which cooperated with federally funded aid programs, overseas efforts to relieve hunger, and subtle support for women's rights.<sup>116</sup>

This version of a Christian America was soundly defeated at the polls in November and on the Convention floor throughout the 1980s. In 1982, for example, Southern Baptists reversed their position from two decades earlier, voting to support Reagan's proposed amendment allowing voluntary prayer in public school settings. Although some argued that the move was not in fact a departure since prayer would be voluntary, Southern Baptist's increasing participation in the culture wars demonstrated that the denomination's new leadership prioritized the fight against cultural secularization over the denomination's historic insistence on separation of church and state.<sup>117</sup> While the convention of the 1960s and 1970s had allowed space for varied and even conflicting definitions of a Christian America, the version promoted by the SBC after 1980 was one Roger Williams would barely recognize.

### *One Human Race*

One of the best examples of the purifying effect of the missionary errand can be seen in Southern Baptist attitudes toward race and human difference

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<sup>116</sup> See Grace B. Lucas, "Christy Goes to the City," *Discovery*, September 1980, 3; Claudia Swain, "And the Children Eat Last?" *Discovery*, June 1980, 8; Barbara Massey, "Gardens, Fish, and Ducks," *Discovery*, July 1980, 12-13.

<sup>117</sup> Queen, 116.

during the 1950s and 1960s. The Southern Baptist Convention was conceived in racism on the eve of the Civil War, and many ministers at the time defended slavery on biblical grounds. A century later, the Southern Baptists would weather the storm of the Second Reconstruction, but this time with a much less united front. The official Southern Baptist response to the *Brown* decision was initially supportive. Having technically desegregated denominational seminaries in 1951-52, the convention expressed support for the *Brown* ruling at their annual meeting in June 1954, declaring the decision to be “in harmony with the constitutional guarantee of equal freedom to all citizens and with Christian principles of equal justice and love for all men.”<sup>118</sup>

Response among Southern Baptist congregations, however, was far from unanimous. Unlike a number of Fundamentalist preachers, most Southern Baptist segregationist ministers stopped short of claiming biblical support for their position. But many attacked the decision as unconstitutional: “Which is the more loyal and patriotic American Citizen? The one who says that the court was right five times and wrong once, or the one who says that our Supreme Court was wrong five times and right once?” Others insisted that the convention ought to remain neutral on an issue that was merely political – as the First Baptist Church of Farmerville, Louisiana proclaimed, “To us it is not a matter of

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<sup>118</sup> *SBC Annual*, 1954, p. 56, Qtd. in Queen, 83.



Christianity or non-Christianity, and no such issue was newly created by the Court Decision of 1954.”<sup>119</sup> Meanwhile, individual Southern Baptists filled Citizens Councils across the South, and unlike their pastors, did not hesitate to defend their segregationist views on religious grounds. One bewildered Southern Baptist spoke for many when he said he could “never understand how Baptist leaders allowed a Supreme Court unconstitutional ultimatum to suddenly change their opinion as to the Bible, Christianity, and God's intention in forcing the amalgamation of the races.”<sup>120</sup>

From its headquarters in downtown Birmingham, WMU watched the growing Civil Rights Movement and the Southern Baptist response. In 1956, under court order, the University of Alabama admitted its first African American student (although the University managed to prevent her from actually attending classes), and in December, the Montgomery bus boycott ended with a fully integrated bus system. Throughout the post-war period, and especially in the wake of *Brown*, WMU leaders frequently articulated their belief that racial attitudes were learned, and therefore that one long-term solution to the race problem was to teach a Christian view of race to the youngest members of their

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<sup>119</sup> Rev. Carey Daniel, qtd. in David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 109; First Baptist Church of Farmerville, Louisiana, Resolution, qtd. in Willis, 32.

<sup>120</sup> Alan Scot Willis, *All According to God's Plan: Southern Baptist Missions and Race, 1945-1970* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005): 19; see also Jane Dailey, “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred After Brown,” *Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (2004): 135-138.

churches. Children, they pointed out, could not be sheltered from racial tensions; many now faced them daily at school. They instead needed to be equipped to combat the racism they would encounter with the global outlook of a missionary. “We have taught our children to love the Negroes in Africa,” one writer exhorted her fellow Southern Baptist women, “Now is the time to be specific and teach them to love the Negroes around them.”<sup>121</sup>

So in early 1957, when denominational leaders, wary of disagreement among the membership, had determined to avoid the issue of Civil Rights at the convention that summer, the editors at *Tell* spoke out.<sup>122</sup> In January, they ran a three-page testimony written by an African American woman, Freddie Mae Bason, who told of her lifelong dream to join a GA club, “but there was no Girls’ Auxiliary for me to join,” she said. After years of waiting, she found a black church that sponsored a GA club and (as an adult) worked her way through the program. Hoping to start a GA club of her own, Bason enrolled in the Southern Baptist Carver School of Missions and Social work, one of only two African American students. Bason feared ostracism but found acceptance among the white students at Carver, and she concluded her story by recounting how one night while praying with a white friend, she “realized that this is the way God wants us to live. That brown, red, black, yellow, and white can live together in

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<sup>121</sup> Mrs. Chester F. Russell, “A Newly Given Freedom” *Royal Service* 49, no. 2 (1954): 7.

<sup>122</sup> Chappell, 147.

peace, that all are one in Christ.”<sup>123</sup> WMU leaders wanted to teach the young girls in their care that segregation was not only unfair, but unchristian.

This outspoken support for integration joined a growing number of voices, especially those of foreign missionaries who argued that segregation at home was a hindrance to their evangelistic efforts around the world. Global news coverage of racial discrimination in the U.S., one missionary warned, could “quickly destroy good will and understanding which the missionary has laboriously built up over the years.”<sup>124</sup> Alan Scot Willis has identified an influential and often overlooked cadre of Southern Baptists who were much more progressive on issues of race than the general membership of Southern Baptist churches. Especially numerous in the national leadership of the mission boards and the WMU, these progressives were outspoken in their belief that biblical truth, individual morality, and the effectiveness of worldwide missions all demanded that Southern Baptists must work for racial equality and unity. While hardly revolutionary, progressive Southern Baptists did effectively challenge the racism and apathy present within their denomination.<sup>125</sup>

These progressive voices convinced the leadership that they could not avoid the issue of Civil Rights, as they had planned. At the 1957 convention,

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<sup>123</sup> Freddie Mae Bason, “My Forward Step,” *Tell Magazine*, January 1957, 12.

<sup>124</sup> Willis, 45.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-7.

messengers adopted a statement which reiterated their support for *Brown*, in spite of a prolonged debate led by a small but vocal segregationist contingent. They then elected as president Brooks Hays, U.S. Congressman from Arkansas, who the following year would lose his congressional seat to a staunch segregationist, due to his own moderate stance on the Little Rock crisis.<sup>126</sup> Politicians were not the only ones to lose their jobs. A handful of Southern Baptist pastors were voted out by their congregations for voicing support for integration, and many more chose silence over conflict. WMU leaders, however, would not keep silent.

From October through December 1957, *Tell* ran an extended life story of missionary nurse, Lolete Dotson. Born just before her parents Clyde and Hattie Dotson were sent as the first Southern Baptist missionaries to Rhodesia, Lolete grew up feeling that the African people were her people. From the time she was a baby, the story declares, “she took a black finger into her little white fist and would not let go. It was love at first sight.”<sup>127</sup> The counter-cultural point becomes even clearer when the story recounts Lolete’s first visit to the United States at the age of eight. She found America frightening and confusing and she was eager to go home to Africa. One evening, she was brought to the platform during a church service and was asked to sing an African song. Lolete was terrified as she

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<sup>126</sup> Chappell, 137-38.

<sup>127</sup> Saxon Rowe Carver, “Lolete Dotson: Missionary Nurse,” *Tell Magazine*, October 1957, 3.

“looked out at all the white faces,” and quickly ran from the room.<sup>128</sup> The fact that white faces should be frightening to Lolete, who was of course white herself, reinforces the idea that race is a social construct. The author, Saxon Rowe Carver, made a similar argument elsewhere in relation to Native Americans, and in this story she clearly hoped to gently introduce the man-made nature of race to her young readers.<sup>129</sup> In the final installment, when Lolete is sent by the mission board to Nigeria instead of Rhodesia, Carver describes her determination to learn the new language: “A barrier between the white person and the black is removed if both speak the same language. Lolete wanted no barrier of any kind between her and her new people.” GAs reading this story three months after the Little Rock Crisis could hardly have missed the point.

Many Southern Baptists, however, remained unconvinced. Although the staunchest opposition was numerically small (only 75 churches out of over 31,000 passed resolutions protesting the SBC’s stance), it was vocal enough to produce some back-pedaling. In 1959, the convention elected Ramsey Pollard, known for prioritizing evangelism over issues of race, to succeed Hays as president and issued a statement on segregation which claimed that “the issue has become complicated by the radical demands for immediate and complete removal of all forms of segregation on the one hand, and by an equally radical

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>129</sup> Saxon Rowe Carver, “Program: With One Accord,” *Window* 31, no. 1 (1959): 31, qtd. in Willis 124.

insistence on the maintenance of the traditional system of segregation on the other.”<sup>130</sup> WMU’s response was to continue the fight against racism, under the radar. The organization’s publication for adult women stepped back from racial issues for a time, but *Tell* continued to carry stories with distinctly counter-cultural racial messages while using missionary education as cover for their operations.<sup>131</sup>

The same month the 1959 convention met, *Tell* carried a fictional story about a teenage girl named Trudy whose family moved to Hawaii. In the opening scene, while blonde, blue-eyed Trudy is talking to a classmate, Mildred, who has “darker coloring and slanting brown eyes,” Trudy callously mentions that she wishes she could find an American friend. “I’m an American,” the girl of Japanese descent replies, “I think you mean that you’re looking for a haole friend.” “Haole” the story explains, is the Hawaiian term for a white person. Trudy immediately feels ashamed, and later in the story, Mildred saves the day and shows Trudy genuine friendship by helping her with a sprained ankle and baking her a pineapple cake.<sup>132</sup> The explicit message is that neither citizenship nor friendship should be based on racial background. While no doubt the author hoped to encourage acceptance of Japanese Americans and other inhabitants of

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<sup>130</sup> Chappell, 136; see also n. 5 on 246; Mark Newman, *Getting Right With God: Southern Baptists and Desegregation 1945-1995* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 80-81.

<sup>131</sup> Newman, 136.

<sup>132</sup> Ella Mae Charlton, “Trudy’s Mistake,” *Tell Magazine*, May 1959, 7.

the nation's newest state, the story also had clear application to the race problem in the South. Locating the story in the multi-racial setting of Hawaii, however, allowed the author more freedom to discuss race without ruffling feathers.



*"I was born in Hawaii, right here on the island of Oahu," the girl said, "and that makes me an American."*

Fig. 3.4 Trudy and Mildred.  
(Illustration in Charlton, "Trudy's Mistake," *Tell Magazine*, May 1959, 7. Used by permission of WMU.)

The following February, *Tell* took a similar approach by running the story of Keri, a little girl of the San Blas Islands of the Caribbean. Keri's brother is singled out as a "moon child," due to his albino coloring, and according to island tradition, he is forced to stay out all night during a lunar eclipse in order to fight the dragon that is eating the moon. Influenced by the teaching she has received at a mission school, Keri stands against the traditional prejudice of her people and her parents and sneaks out to comfort her terrified brother during the

eclipse.<sup>133</sup> This fictional story undercuts Southern racism in several ways. First, it demonstrates the relative nature of racial prejudice by exposing Southern readers to a form of racism that reversed the roles they were accustomed to — on the San Blas Islands, dark skin is considered normal and therefore light-skinned people were regarded as outsiders. Second, the racial prejudice in the story is linked to superstitious native customs, therefore labeling racism as pagan rather than Christian. And most importantly, the arguments against racism in the story come from the mouth of one whose intentions could hardly be questioned, a missionary. Yet, due to the setting of the story, all of this is accomplished without any mention of Southern racial prejudice.

The editors at *Tell*, furthermore, were not afraid to specifically criticize the denominational leadership's attempts to sidestep racial controversy, while still utilizing indirect tactics. In 1959, Southern Baptist missionaries to the Choctaw, Victor and Eileen Kaneubbe, attempted to enroll their daughter in an elementary school in Philadelphia, Mississippi where they were stationed. Since Victor was Choctaw and Eileen was white, their daughter was turned away from both the white public school and the Choctaw school. In response, Victor Kaneubbe launched a campaign against racism in the Philadelphia community and sought support from his fellow Southern Baptist missionaries as well as from Congress.

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<sup>133</sup> Elizabeth Rainbow, "Keri and the Moon Dragon," *Tell Magazine*, February 1960, 2-7.



White Baptists in Philadelphia were angered and embarrassed to find themselves on the wrong side of what quickly became a national debate over Native American education, and they petitioned the Home Mission Board for Kaneubbe's removal.<sup>134</sup> In the midst of this controversy, *Tell* magazine spoke out quite pointedly in support of the Kaneubbess. The magazine carried a five-part biography story of Bea Conrad, who as a young girl (in a GA club, of course) felt a call to mission work among Native Americans. In the story, as Bea grows up and seeks ministry training, she meets none other than Victor and Eileen Kaneubbe, who take her into their home, help her adjust to Native American culture, and introduce her to her future husband, Bruce Conrad. One scene in particular highlights the Kaneubbess' supportive relationship and their commitment to each other and to their faith in spite of the hardships they face.<sup>135</sup>

Featuring these missionaries at the precise time that they were under fire is a clear expression of support for the Kaneubbess and their ongoing fight against racism. Furthermore, WMU's outspoken support was in direct opposition to the Home Mission Board's more diplomatic response to the situation: transferring the Kaneubbess to a Navajo reservation in Oklahoma. In addition, the story concludes with a scene which attempts to show the fluidity of race. While Bruce

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<sup>134</sup> Katherine M. B. Osburn, *Choctaw Resurgence in Mississippi: Race, Class, and Nation Building in the Jim Crow South, 1830-1977* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 192.

<sup>135</sup> Argye M. Briggs, "This Secret Joy," *Tell Magazine*, Jan-May 1960.

and Bea Conrad are working as missionaries to the Native Americans in Oklahoma, one young woman mistakenly assumes that Bruce Conrad is himself a Native American. Bea is stunned, but then as she looks at Bruce, she realizes that “he had, in these long months of working with the Indian people, come to look like them in some indefinable way.” Overjoyed, Bea concludes, “He loves them so much that he seems to be one of them.”<sup>136</sup>

Most striking, in the context of the Jim Crow South, is the story’s tacit endorsement of interracial marriage. Although the interracial nature of the Kaneubbes’ marriage is only hinted at (the story identifies Victor as a Choctaw, but makes no mention of Eileen’s heritage), the controversy over their daughter’s schooling made it likely that readers would be aware of the racial difference. To specifically hold up this couple as an example of Christian marriage was to take sides on an issue which even some racial progressives hesitated to address, and moreover to advocate behavior that was illegal in most Southern states. Two additional pieces in *Tell* that year presented interracial marriage in a favorable light. The February issue, which included the story of Keri and Ono, also told of a white woman, Marvel Elya, who married Alcibiades Iglesias, a native of the San Blas Islands, and returned with him as a missionary to his people. In August, *Tell* featured a Japanese-American pastor and highlighted his wife’s ministry to

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<sup>136</sup> Briggs, “Secret Joy,” May 1960, 11.

Japanese war brides who were struggling with the shameful discrimination they faced. "God has made us with distinctive skin and eyes and hair," the author chides, "but he has given us the same needs in our hearts."<sup>137</sup>

The stories of Trudy, Keri, and the Kaneubees represent WMU's efforts to nudge their fellow Southern Baptists toward more enlightened views. "We had to stay ahead of the people," WMU executive secretary, Alma Hunt, later explained, "but not be like the engine that uncoupled itself from the train cars."<sup>138</sup> In the September issue of 1961, the engine picked up speed as *Tell* explicitly addressed race relations in the South. The issue's theme that month was ministry to African Americans, and the editor's treatment of the issue demonstrates both the strengths and weaknesses of the progressive Southern Baptist mindset at the time. The issue opened with "The All-American Rocket," about a boy who wants to find an all-American friend to help him build his rocket, but isn't satisfied with neighbors who are Italian, German, Jewish, etc. His teacher explains that America's diversity is its strength and that all Americans have equal rights and freedoms "no matter what color their skin."<sup>139</sup>

Next, came the story of a young African American girl, Sally, and her Aunt Sue, who sells Bibles door-to-door as a volunteer for the American Bible

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<sup>137</sup> Kathryn Greene, "Gold Strike," *Tell Magazine*, February 1960, 37; Saxon Rowe Carver, "Tell Presents: The Reverend Toshio Sakamoto," *Tell Magazine*, August 1960, 12.

<sup>138</sup> Qtd. in Newman, 136.

<sup>139</sup> Hans Guggenheim, "All-American Rocket" *Tell Magazine*, September 1961, 4.

Society. Aunt Sue leaves early in the morning with a sack full of Bibles and returns with stories for Sally about the families she met and the ways she helped meet their needs. "I want to take her with me," Aunt Sue explains to a neighbor, "It would just break my heart if the bus was crowded and she heard them say, 'No room for niggers.'" When Sally convinces Aunt Sue to take her, and they do face discrimination on the bus, Sally asks with childlike simplicity, "Do white folks read the same Bible as black folks?" Aunt Sue answers that if everyone lived by the Bible, white and black would live in harmony, and the embarrassed white passengers who overhear the conversation buy Bibles from Aunt Sue as a gesture of goodwill.<sup>140</sup>

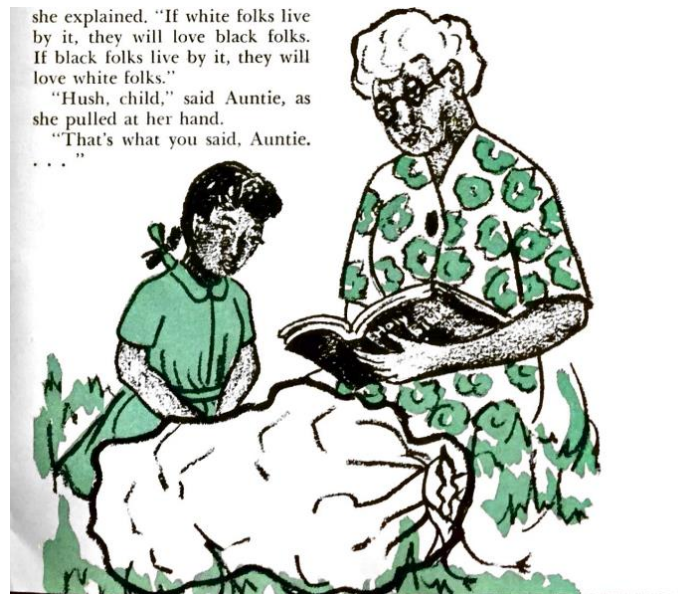


Fig. 3.5 Aunt Sue and Sally waiting for the bus.  
(Illustration in Rinden, "Aunt Sue's," *Tell Magazine*, September 1961, 9. Used by permission of WMU.)

<sup>140</sup> Gertrude Jenness Rinden, "Aunt Sue's Bible Day," *Tell Magazine*, September 1961, 5-9.

The lesson plans provided in *Tell* that month carried on the theme of ministry to African Americans. Suggestions for the meetings ranged from playing recordings of black gospel choirs and serving peanut-themed refreshments (in honor of George Washington Carver) to asking any girl who might have visited a black church to tell about her experience, or even inviting a group of girls from a local black church to attend that month's meeting as guests. The lesson introduction emphasized the joy of unity, like the different voices in a choir: "It is a wonderful feeling to know that we can join hands with people of all races and work together for God."<sup>141</sup> From the examples that follow, however, it is clear that whites and blacks were not working together as equals.

The meeting plan opens with short sketches of acclaimed African Americans in politics, medicine, education, and the arts, intended to show how much the race had achieved since the days of slavery, and the bulk of the lesson consists of examples of black Baptists in various fields of ministry. The overall thrust is a celebration of the ways white Southern Baptists were helping black Baptists to minister to their own people. A story of poorly educated Brother John, for example, emphasizes his gratitude for the night school in his neighborhood, where "he could go and study the Bible with men who understood it better than he" and "his white preacher friends would teach him how to preach better."<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Marjorie Rowden, "Laborers Together With God," *Tell Magazine*, September 1961, 19-20.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

The authors give an update on Freddie Mae Bason, whose testimony had appeared in the January 1957 issue, regarding her work in the slums of Atlanta. Bason again references her training in GA club, and rejoices that she has now fulfilled her dream of starting a club for African American girls. The lesson closes with the story of Verlene Farmer (the other black student who had attended the Carver School with Bason) who was now serving as a missionary to Liberia, the first African American missionary sent by the SBC Foreign Mission Board.<sup>143</sup>

The content and tone of these lessons must be considered in their immediate context. The Freedom Riders had crisscrossed the South that summer, challenging local ordinances that required segregation on interstate transportation in spite of federal rulings to the contrary. Horrified by beatings and bombings inflicted on the peaceful protestors by both mobs and police, the Kennedy administration struggled with an appropriate response, calling on the Riders to back down and allow for a “cooling-off period” while at the same time petitioning the ICC to enforce federal law. A key concern was international embarrassment as Russian propaganda capitalized on media coverage of the violence to undercut American rhetoric of freedom and equality. The SBC displayed similar concerns, issuing a press release which cited the pleas of foreign missionaries for Southerners to recognize the damaging effect of these

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<sup>143</sup> Lila Hopkins, “Servants of the King,” *Tell Magazine*, September 1961, 35-36.

reports on mission work abroad.<sup>144</sup> When the September issue of *Tell* went to press, the rides continued, and the ICC had yet to cooperate with the Attorney General's request for enforcement. In the current climate, speaking out on the issue of race at all was risky business, and running a story that specifically addressed bus segregation and labeled it as unbiblical was a strong statement.

It is clear, however, that the leaders at WMU intentionally stopped short of confronting their readers' views on race in the lesson material. The Counselor's Comments section at the close of the lesson demonstrates both a burden to address racism in the church and a hesitation to put controversial statements in print: "This program has not dealt with racial prejudice, but can you leave it without helping the girls to consider again their own attitudes about the Negroes in our land?"<sup>145</sup> Also significant is which African Americans they chose to recognize. If Southern Baptists hoped to fight racism by joining hands with black Baptists, they could look no further than the Baptist preacher, Martin Luther King, but his efforts were not mentioned. However well-intentioned, the lessons left room for a broad range of views. Many staunch separate-but-equal conservative Southern Baptists would have been happy to donate money to train African Americans to minister to their own people, while at the same time ensuring that their own churches remained exclusively white. At this point,

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<sup>144</sup> Chappell, 149.

<sup>145</sup> Hopkins, "Servants," 36.

WMU leaders left such views unchallenged, and advocated a form of racial harmony heavily skewed by paternalism.

Over the next three years however, this message shifted. A number of WMU leaders attended First Baptist of Birmingham, pastored by Earl Stallings, one of the eight white ministers whose calls for patience and peace were famously answered in Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail." As King sat in jail composing his letter, black protesters staged a kneel-in at First Baptist on Easter Sunday 1963. Stallings greeted the visitors warmly, to the outrage of segregationists in the congregation. Other members, however, including WMU leaders, wrote Stallings to express support for his actions.<sup>146</sup> During what must have been a disorienting and discouraging summer, these advocates of integrated worship received censure both from segregationist Southern Baptists across the country and from King himself in his widely publicized letter. As summer gave way to fall, Birmingham was further shaken by the bombing of Sixteenth Street Baptist and the violence that ensued.

These events seem to have produced a measure of soul-searching and a somewhat broader perspective on racial issues at WMU. In March of 1964, when again discussing cooperation between white Southern Baptists and black National Baptists, the writers at *Tell* insisted, "Historically, Southern Baptists

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<sup>146</sup> S. Jonathan Bass, *Blessed are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King, Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 78-79.



have worked with National Baptists on a co-operative basis. It has never been a ministry of one group *TO* another” (emphasis in original).<sup>147</sup> However revisionist the assertion may be, it at least demonstrates a new understanding of the demeaning effects of paternalism. In September, at the close of another tortured summer in which Congress passed the Civil Rights Act and the SBC hotly debated and ultimately declined to support the legislation, WMU again pushed back, taking up the theme of race relations in their publications for all ages.<sup>148</sup> Whereas in 1961 *Tell* had limited the discussion to African American culture and ministry, intentionally sidestepping the issue of prejudice, in September of 1964, the editors addressed it head-on.

The lessons for that month were prepared by Eva Inlow, WMU Secretary in New Mexico, who had previously written on racial discrimination toward Native Americans.<sup>149</sup> Inlow began by urging readers to think of these lessons in relation to all minority groups, a tactic similar to that of locating stories in other countries, in that both are attempts to help the reader gain objectivity through distance. (To that end, this issue of *Tell* also included a story of a young girl welcoming a Japanese family to her neighborhood, and the biblical story Peter overcoming his prejudice against Gentiles.) “For some of us this may be a

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<sup>147</sup> Jacqueline Durham, “Look—Care—Pray,” *Tell Magazine*, March 1964, 35.

<sup>148</sup> Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 242.

<sup>149</sup> Eva Inlow, “When the Heart is at Rest,” *Royal Service*, April 1962, 11-12.

difficult subject,” Inlow warned in the introduction, “for even though we are young some of us seem to have closed minds. Usually we are generous in conceding that there are two sides to every question. Are we that generous about race?”<sup>150</sup>

Inlow structured the lessons that follow to show the “two sides,” presenting and then refuting common misconceptions about race. She explained the science of blood types and skin pigmentation to show that racial features are not essential differences but merely cosmetic. In two of the lessons she pointed out the connection between notions of racial superiority and the atrocities of Nazism, and she insisted that it was hypocritical to decry the caste system in India while allowing prejudice to create two classes of citizens in the US.<sup>151</sup> She touched on the concept of systemic discrimination, asserting that “every honest intelligence test must take into consideration not only native intelligence, but educational, financial, and cultural advantages.”<sup>152</sup> Inlow also encouraged the GAs to consider the global context, explaining that although Caucasians are a majority in the U.S., they comprise only thirty percent of the world’s population, and by insisting that Southern race relations are not “our own business” but rather are a hindrance to international diplomacy and missionary work. “Shall

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<sup>150</sup> Eva Inlow, “Racial Understanding,” *Tell Magazine*, September 1964, 30.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 35-36.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

we give money to pay the salaries of missionaries at home and abroad” Inlow asked, “and then tie their hands?”<sup>153</sup>

This last point was the stated thesis of the lesson: “Racial understanding is necessary to an effective Christian witness throughout the world.” It is also the point that drives home the personal responsibility of the reader. If every Christian must promote missions, and prejudice hinders missions, then every Christian must fight prejudice, in her own heart and in her community. Inlow encouraged the girls to ask themselves, “Do I take it as a matter of course that certain races are the subjects of discrimination in my town?” and “Do I think all people would like to be Caucasian Americans?” Instead of hiding behind the excuse that there is nothing one individual can do, Inlow urged her readers to remember that change does not always require great courage, but rather “a great many people having just a little courage.” GAs can make a difference, she insisted, by enthusiastically including girls of other races in their schools, neighborhoods, and churches. Although most GA meetings concluded with a hymn or a prayer, in this case Inlow instructed leaders to close by having the girls recite together the Pledge of Allegiance, as an expression of their commitment to “liberty and justice for all.”

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 38.

From the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970s, WMU's message on race continued to focus mainly on personal kindness and evangelistic witness to people of all races, but also expanded efforts to work *with* African Americans instead of just ministering *to* them. By the Spring of 1975, WMU even had kind words for Martin Luther King and encouraged GA clubs to consider the value of his peaceful protest marches and to emulate his technique by staging a rally, complete with speeches, banners, and songs, to draw attention to discrimination against a minority group "in an honorable way."<sup>154</sup> In their monthly magazine (renamed *Discovery* in 1970), GAs began to read about individual National Baptist pastors and religious workers and especially about joint ministries between Southern Baptists and National Baptists. A few African Americans were appointed to positions of leadership through these cooperational ministries, such as Fleet L. Belle, director of Inter-Baptist Associational Ministries in Mobile. In a 1977 article, Belle recounted how as a child he threw rocks at the Baptist center because he objected to the fact that it was owned and run by white people, but only black people went there to receive services and to worship. Belle, now director of the same center, praised the progress he had seen in his lifetime: "I can now preach in churches that I once could not even go into...We work together now. The building where my office is is owned by the Southern

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<sup>154</sup> Grace Lucas, "They are Precious in His Sight," *Discovery*, April-June 1975, 52.

Baptists, and the furniture is supplied by National Baptists.”<sup>155</sup> Belle believed that a new day had arrived, but other African Americans felt that no true cooperation could take place until Southern Baptists apologized for their role in justifying slavery and Southern racism – this apology would not come for two more decades.

The emphasis on racial reconciliation in GA clubs tapered off throughout the 1970s, giving the impression that WMU was satisfied with the progress that had been made. But it is just as likely that the WMU staff was merely preoccupied with a new social issue, one that would threaten the organization’s very existence.

### *Roles and Callings*

In 1960, most Southern Baptist women would have agreed with missionary Emma Williams McGill when she summed up her views on a woman’s role in the church as follows: “I am not a preacher,” she would say when speaking to large groups, “but I am the wife of a Baptist preacher, the sister of a Baptist preacher, the sister-in-law of a Baptist preacher, and the mother of a Baptist preacher!”<sup>156</sup> Founded in 1888, in defiance of Southern Baptist

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<sup>155</sup> Frances Tunnell Carter, “Better Than Rocks,” *Discovery*, Aug 1977, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Ethel McConnell Herring, “Lovely Lady: Emma Williams McGill of Europe,” *Tell Magazine*, April 1960, 21.

denominational leadership who feared that a national women's organization would turn out more suffragettes than missionaries, WMU never completely lost its associations with feminism. But by the 1950s, it had become a more domesticated animal, as the leadership traded a large measure of independence for the massive growth enabled by closer ties to the SBC.<sup>157</sup> WMU publications, including *Tell* displayed this domestication with stereotypically gendered content. GAs' exploration of other cultures often focused on clothing and recipes, and each issue dispensed advice on such topics as "what boys think makes for a good personality" (which included the ability to "ask intelligent questions at football and basketball games" and did not include being bossy or possessive).<sup>158</sup> But beneath this "Leave it to Beaver" exterior lay core teachings, intrinsic to WMU, which undermined the contentment with reflected glory which McGill so cheerfully promoted.

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<sup>157</sup> Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 45.

<sup>158</sup> Helen Putnam, "GAY's Days," *Tell Magazine*, January 1957, 41; Helen Putnam, "GAY's Days," *Tell Magazine*, April 1960, cover.



Fig. 3.6 Gender-role advice.  
(Cartoon by Helen Putnam, "GAY's Days," *Tell Magazine*, January 1957, 41. Used by permission of WMU.)

The WMU organization itself nudged Southern Baptist women into the realm of spiritual leadership and vocational ministry. As a part of their training, GAs learned the names of WMU national officers and staff members, and *Tell* regularly featured brief bios of various WMU representatives around the country and overseas.<sup>159</sup> From the national leadership down to local chapters, WMU provided a platform for women to engage in administration, teaching, fundraising, public speaking, writing, and event planning, and it infused these activities with religious meaning. As the resident missions experts in each local

<sup>159</sup> Betty Brewer, "Madame President," *Tell Magazine*, June 1963, 10-13.

church, WMU leaders offered missions education in various forms to all church members, not just to women, and especially for Southern Baptist children, WMU ladies loomed much larger in their church life than did the pastor and deacons.<sup>160</sup>



*Mrs. Dan Kong, President of Hawaii WMU, was a GA during her "growing up days" in Mississippi. Now she is guiding her four young daughters in missionary education*

Fig. 3.7 Mrs. Dan Kong presides over a meeting of Hawaii WMU. (Photograph in Brewer, "Madame President," *Tell Magazine*, June 1963, 11. Used by permission of WMU. )

In keeping with longstanding evangelical practice, furthermore, the women featured in *Tell* often slipped through what could be called the missionary loophole, which allowed women ministering overseas to fill positions of spiritual leadership that would not have been open to them in U.S. churches. For example, in an article relating her experiences as a missionary nurse at the

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<sup>160</sup> Flowers, 47.



Baptist hospital in Kyoto, Japan, Bertha Jane Marshall mentioned that everyone on staff, male and female, took turns leading the morning worship service. Overseas, women taught classrooms full of aspiring ministers in Baptist seminaries, and those who went out as pioneer missionaries planted churches.<sup>161</sup> Even at home, ministries that operated under the Home Mission Board (and were therefore considered mission works rather than regular churches) were frequently founded and directed by women. Miss Edna Woofert, for example, started a children's bible club ministry out of the back of her station wagon in a poverty-stricken neighborhood in Washington, D. C. In the space of three years, her ministry grew into a Good Will Center, with dozens of staff members offering social services and religious education classes for all ages, housed in a large new facility paid for by the Home Mission Board.<sup>162</sup> By providing a steady stream of such examples, *Tell* encouraged GAs to envision themselves in leadership roles. Additionally, no justification is given for women filling these roles, which shows how entrenched the missionary loophole was in Southern Baptist thinking.<sup>163</sup>

WMU writers also encouraged spiritual independence in their readers by instilling in them a sense of divine calling. The story of missionary nurse, Lolete

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<sup>161</sup> Bertha Jane Marshall, "Dreams Do Come True," *Tell Magazine*, August 1960, 1; Lila Hopkins, "Gem Gathering in Java," *Tell Magazine*, August 1961, 39.

<sup>162</sup> "Three to Make Ready," *Tell Magazine*, September 1960, 2-3.

<sup>163</sup> See Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997).

Dotson, describes her experience of being called to return to Africa. "One night as she prayed," the story recounts, "she saw clearly what God had been trying to show her for a long time. The struggle against the questioning voice was over. She offered God her life completely, and dedicated herself to foreign missions. She would go back to her people."<sup>164</sup> The author then walked readers through Lolete's years of study, earning first her RN and then a Masters of Religious Education from New Orleans Baptist Seminary, and the screening process required of all applicants to the Foreign Mission Board. Readers who found themselves inspired by Lolete's story were instructed to write to the Foreign Mission Board for the free pamphlets, "You a Missionary?" and "If You Want to be a Missionary Nurse."<sup>165</sup> Many of the missionary reports and bios in *Tell* began with a brief description of the missionary's call to her particular field of service. In the story of Bea McKown, author Argye Briggs paused to describe at length the experience of a divine call:

"Here in the GA meeting of an April Tuesday afternoon, Bea McKown found the answer to a question that had been in her heart for a long time... what does God want me to do for him, what does he want me to do with my life? ... Bea had often wondered how it would feel to be called of the Lord to some special work. Would there be a great rush of emotion, with tears and pain? Or would a person want to sing and shout with joy? Now she knew. For a call had come to her own heart, and for her it was a quiet sureness that seemed to have been there all the time."<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Saxon Rowe Carver, "Lolete Dotson: Missionary Nurse," *Tell Magazine*, November 1957, 11.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>166</sup> Argye M. Briggs, "This Secret Joy," *Tell Magazine*, January 1960, 9.

Years later, when Bea is offered a position through the Home Mission Board, she is overjoyed at this confirmation that her experience was in fact a divine call, “not just something that happened to the emotions of a teen-age girl.”<sup>167</sup>

The language of calling and vocation would take on a new layer of meaning for women after 1963 when Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* articulate a key tenet of Second Wave Feminism, that women ought to seek personal fulfillment through a career outside the home. WMU publications refrained from any specific mention of the women’s movement throughout the 1960s, but as women’s rights activists battled workplace discrimination in court and in the streets, the writers at *Tell* cautiously entered the discussion regarding women and vocation. Drawing on a broader understanding of calling, they encouraged girls to perform any work they might do as service to God. In one of her advice columns, Betty Jane West listed various careers which her readers might feel called to and stressed the importance of education and the necessity of being able to provide for oneself if necessary. As for her readers’ vocational decisions, she admonished, “God has given each of you a mind and a heart of your own. He wants you to walk with him one day and one year at a time.”<sup>168</sup>

Three years later, the editors dedicated an entire issue of *Tell* to the theme of vocation. “What an exciting and challenging privilege it is to be able to make

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>168</sup> Betty Jane West, “Tell Betty Jane,” *Tell Magazine*, April 1965, 10-11.

your own vocational choices!" one article begins. The author commended those who dreamed instead of homemaking, but assured them that any vocational training they received would only make them better wives and mothers, and warned that it was likely they would need to earn an income at some point during their lives.<sup>169</sup> Another author sought to discredit "the notion that God calls people only to be ministers or missionaries," explaining that any occupation becomes a vocation when it is undertaken in response to divine calling.<sup>170</sup> In August of the same year, in preparation for the new school year, *Tell* ran an article entitled "Schoolgirl or Student," which encouraged readers to take their education and vocational choices seriously. The author acknowledged input from parents, teachers, and school counselors, but concluded that "under God's guidance you must learn to be the final decision-maker about what you can do with your life and your abilities."<sup>171</sup>

The idea of listening for God's call and following him in spite of obstacles or the objections of others would have direct application to the imminent battle over women's ordination, and at times *Tell* subtly anticipated this shift. One lesson built an extended challenge from a phrase in Romans 10:15 – "How shall they hear without a preacher?" – which the lesson terms "the missionary

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<sup>169</sup> Betty Farrell Youngs, "Vocational Choices and You," *Tell Magazine*, April 1968, 3.

<sup>170</sup> Ann Lee, "My Mission...Missions," *Tell Magazine*, April 1968, 39-40.

<sup>171</sup> Josephine Pile, "Schoolgirl or Student?" *Tell Magazine*, August 1968, 7.

question." The experience of salvation, the author explained, naturally results in a desire to share that faith with others. "In a sense we become 'the preacher' with a commission to share the gospel," she writes, "But we ask ourselves, what can one girl do?" The author brought her point to a climax: "One girl can develop a strong inner spiritual life....One girl can study to know what she believes....One girl can make her influence felt...In this way one girl can answer the missionary question!"<sup>172</sup>

And in 1964, one girl did. At Watts Street Baptist Church in Durham, NC, Addie Davis was ordained as the first female Southern Baptist minister. The milestone received remarkably little attention, but when six more women followed in 1971, denominational leaders took note.<sup>173</sup> The issue of women's ordination began to appear in various denominational publications, including WMU magazines for adult women.<sup>174</sup> Women seeking ordination defended their desire on the basis of divine calling, a calling they had been taught to listen for and respond to in GA club. Speaking to a group of Southern Baptist leaders, one ordained woman pointed out that after training her in this way throughout her childhood, they were now withholding their support from her because she had answered the call in a way they did not expect. "You will have to decide what to

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<sup>172</sup> Ann Lee, "A Missionary Question," *Tell Magazine*, July 1965, 37.

<sup>173</sup> Flowers, 48-49.

<sup>174</sup> Susan M. Shaw, "Of Words and Women: Southern Baptist Publications and the Progress of Women in the 1970s" *Baptist History and Heritage*, Spring 2007, 69-84.

do about it," she insisted, "because God's call is as much to you to accept women as ministers as it is to me to be a minister."<sup>175</sup>

As these first few women sought ordination, WMU refrained from directly addressing the issue with their young readers. Stories of women missionaries pushing the boundaries of gender norms, however, continued and became more pointed. When Alma Hunt, Executive Secretary of WMU, wrote a feature on Dr. Kathleen Jones, pioneer medical missionary to Indonesia, she began, "Heroes are usually men — or at least we think so. While I like men, I decided to write about a woman hero." Hunt related how Jones was told that Indonesians would never come to a white woman for treatment, but 20,000 patients came in the first year the clinic was open. Later, when a large mob of protesters marched to the hospital, determined to destroy the facility, Jones met them at the door, greeted them warmly, and averted disaster.<sup>176</sup>

Another article seems intended to highlight the public speaking roles that Southern Baptist women had filled in the past, including Miss Minnie Berry, who served as "specially appointed missionary of the Home Mission Board, speaking in world missions conferences and assemblies," and Miss Irene Chambers, who spoke "at camps, state assemblies, and churches as a specially assigned

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<sup>175</sup> Weaver-Williams, "My Call," in *Findings of the Consultation on Women*, Consultation on Women Collection, SBHLA, 24, qtd. in Flowers, 64.

<sup>176</sup> Alma Hunt, "Portrait of a Hero," *Discovery*, January 1972, 1.

missionary.”<sup>177</sup> A brief bio of Gladys Keith, the recently deceased director of a large mission in New Orleans, mentions that “at one time she thought God wanted her to preach, but since there were no women preachers at that time, Gladys decided to teach.”<sup>178</sup> Cleverly worded, the statement manages to paint objections to women’s ordination as outdated, without actually expressing support for the denomination’s newly minted female ministers.

While they were willing to gently push for women’s ordination, WMU leaders could not wholeheartedly join Freidan and others in their dismissal of homemaking and mothering. In Southern Baptist thinking, the Christian home and especially Christian motherhood were the key to passing on religious belief and shaping the moral character of the next generation. Over the past decade, WMU had leveraged this maternal influence in their efforts to instill healthier racial views in Southern Baptist children, specifically challenging mothers that it was their duty to teach Christian views of race in order to help their children adjust to integrated schools.<sup>179</sup> Furthermore, the missionary loophole which made it possible for Southern Baptist women to take on unusual positions of leadership all over the world, was itself based on women’s role as society’s moral guardians – a notion grounded in the cult of domesticity.<sup>180</sup> Like women across

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<sup>177</sup> Frances Tunnell Carter, “Missionary Heroes of the Past,” *Discovery*, April 1973, 4.

<sup>178</sup> Elizabeth Painter, “Heroes of the Faith,” *Discovery*, Feb 1972, 9.

<sup>179</sup> Mrs. Chester F. Russell, “A Newly Given Freedom” *Royal Service* 49 no. 2 (1954): 7, qtd. in Willis, 109.

<sup>180</sup> See Patricia R. Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman’s Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), 5-8.

the country, WMU leaders could not embrace a new source of power without abandoning the old. But they tried to hold on to both.

The curriculum for GA meetings in the Spring of 1973 demonstrates the resulting cognitive dissonance. The authors took up a theme closely related to that of calling: spiritual gifts – special talents given to every Christian by the Holy Spirit for use in ministry, as outlined in several New Testament passages. In one lesson, GAs were instructed to read through a pamphlet put out by the Foreign Mission Board, “Needed Now,” which lists missionary positions currently unfilled. The lesson encouraged the girls to notice the variety of positions available (preacher, teacher, doctor, etc.) and to think through the special skills that each position requires. “Who gives people these special skills?” the lesson asked. The girls were then to consider whether they thought they could fill any of those positions when they were older, and what skills they would need to develop to do so.<sup>181</sup>

Another lesson outlined a similar exercise, this time instructing girls to interview people serving in various roles in their local church (including traditionally male roles) and to ask interviewees what abilities they needed to fulfill their roles. Then each girl was to “write her own secret thoughts on ways she would like to help others when she becomes an adult” and “list the abilities

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<sup>181</sup> Barbara Hintze, “Brushes, Books, and Buildings,” *Aware*, April 1973, 37.



she needs to develop if she is to carry out these goals.”<sup>182</sup> Like divine calling, the idea of spiritual gifts could be used to justify women taking on non-traditional roles, and advocates of women’s ordination at WMU explicitly made this case elsewhere.<sup>183</sup>

In discussing the variety of jobs on the mission field, however, the same set of lessons asserted that “if a missionary couple on the foreign field has children, the principle duty of the wife is to be a good mother and homemaker, while the husband carries most of the missions work outside the home.”<sup>184</sup> The author explained that usually this was because there was no English-speaking school for the children to attend, so the mother would have to carry the work of home education, but she might do some ministry work on the side. This statement about missionary mothering is closely followed by an extended discussion of “supporting roles,” in which girls attempt to list all the people who work behind the scenes to make possible the ministry of a missionary doctor. The author employed the metaphor from I Corinthians 12, in which the Apostle Paul exhorts the members of a church to function as a physical body with each one fulfilling his role according to his or her abilities and not envying the role of another member. The author then included a story about a young girl, Carol,

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<sup>182</sup> Harriett H. Maffett, “Help Wanted,” *Aware*, April 1973, 50.

<sup>183</sup> Marjorie Rowden Kelly, *The Gifted Woman I Am* (Birmingham: Woman’s Missionary Union, 1981), 80.

<sup>184</sup> Frances Tunnell Carter, “Different Days, Different Ways,” *Aware*, April 1973, 28.

who complains to her mother that she is not important to her church because, she says, “all I ever get to do is just sit there during the whole thing!” Her mother explains that her role of being a listener is important, but Carol remains unconvinced until that night she has a dream in which her feet go on strike and refuse to walk because they would rather be eyes.<sup>185</sup>

On the other hand, yet another section of the series of lessons on spiritual gifts highlighted situations in which a missionary may be called on to perform tasks outside his or her area of particular giftedness, such as when a homemaker may need to write an article or draw a poster, or when a missionary nurse is asked to help with a construction project. The author then told a story of a missionary wife who had dropped out of college when she got married, but had continued her studies for 18 years, one or two classes at time, whenever she could find a school near where they lived, and finally finished her degree.<sup>186</sup>

Taken together, these lessons teach that, first, girls should consider which gifts and abilities they might possess and use them as God directs (possibly even in the role of pastor). Second, once a girl recognizes her role, she should be content to serve in that way, even if it is a less glamorous “supporting role” (such as homemaking). And third, believers should also be willing to serve in areas outside their main role when necessary. The writers at WMU were clearly

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<sup>185</sup> Maffett, “Help Wanted,” 52, 58.

<sup>186</sup> Hintze, “Brushes,” 42-43.

attempting to outline a nuanced position that could allow for women in ministry while not abandoning women's influence as homemakers. But the month after this issue was published, the debate over a woman's role would escalate to a point that left little room for nuance.

In January of that year, the Supreme Court had ruled in favor of a woman's constitutional right to abortion, and the year before, the Equal Rights Amendment had been approved by both houses of Congress. 1973 also saw a major fault line emerge within Evangelicalism with the birth of two competing movements: Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Womanhood.<sup>187</sup> At the Southern Baptist Convention that summer, a resolution submitted by a Houston pastor's wife, Jessie Tillison Sappington, drew a line in the sand between "the Christian woman" and "women's lib" and pushed the denomination to pick a side. After the resolutions committee attempted to soften her language, Sappington took the floor, defending traditional gender roles on the basis of biblical inerrancy and the created order. Her resolution passed easily.<sup>188</sup>

The following year, the progressive Christian Life Commission pushed back with a report entitled "Freedom for Women," which urged Southern Baptist ministries to eliminate discrimination toward women with regard to leadership opportunities and compensation, and even recommended the establishment of

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<sup>187</sup> Flowers, 52-58.

<sup>188</sup> Flowers, 50-52.

quotas for women serving on SBC boards and committees. Undaunted, Sappington successfully led the effort to table the report and reject the recommendation concerning quotas, and the majority of the messengers then reiterated their support of “biblical womanhood” – and demonstrated their understanding of the missionary loophole – with a vote to amend the constitution to require that all Southern Baptist missionaries who function as pastors must be male.<sup>189</sup>

The biblical womanhood movement was picking up steam, not only on the convention floor, but also in the pews. Conservative Southern Baptist women, who saw WMU as outdated in its approach to women’s needs and dangerous in its associations with Evangelical Feminism, began to establish separate women’s ministries programs focused on biblical womanhood rather than missions. WMU’s new executive secretary, Carolyn Weatherford, attempted to maintain a moderate position for the organization, simultaneously distancing WMU from the radical, so-called anti-family elements of the women’s movement, while also supporting women active in ministry. This attempt to be all things to all women is reflected in *Discovery* throughout the 1970s.

Although WMU had been showcasing women in non-traditional roles for decades, in the climate of the 1970s, continuing to do so could open them to

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<sup>189</sup> Flowers, 59.

accusations of radicalism. One way the writers hedged against this accusation was by explicitly defending the high calling of homemaking. In WMU publications before the 1970s, homemaking was assumed, but rarely mentioned and never defended, presumably because it needed no defense, and neither did WMU. But starting in 1973, the writers began to praise homemaking as an integral part of mission work. "A missionary homemaker has an important job," one article insisted, "She makes a happy home for her family. She talks and prays with her husband about his work. They help each other in many ways."<sup>190</sup> In an interview with Janell Hogue, missionary homemaker in Taiwan, a GA asked her if she did anything besides housework. "Oh yes!" Hogue replied, "I play the piano for the studio choir rehearsal at our radio-TV studio twice weekly. I teach a class of ladies in an English-speaking Sunday School each Sunday. I spend at least one afternoon a week teaching English to friends who want to learn. I witness to these people in a personal way. I conduct tours for people who are visiting Taiwan. And always I try to be a good wife and mother." Later in the lesson, the girls were encouraged to consider whether Hogue was a "real missionary," and the discussion led them to the conclusion that "no one way of witnessing is better than another."<sup>191</sup> Homemaking was presented not as a requirement, but a personal choice. In the words of missionary to Sri Lanka, Joy

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<sup>190</sup> Elizabeth W. Grizzard, "Prayer Calendar," *Discovery*, December 1976, 20-21.

<sup>191</sup> Barbara Hintze, "Taiwan Today," *Aware*, October 1973, 50, 53-54.

Cullen, "I am a missionary homemaker. Each missionary's job is different – all missionaries have to decide what we can do and what is best for our family. Three of our four children are still at home with us, so I try to be at home a lot."<sup>192</sup>

But while insisting on their pro-family credentials, the writers at *Discovery* also found ways to provide their readers with examples of women in roles outside the home, and to avoid criticism, they employed a device that had served them well on issues of race: examples from overseas. A 1977 article entitled "Modern Singapore" begins with a description of the island's climate, history, economy, and government, but then quickly brings up the 1961 Women's Charter, which granted the women of Singapore equal rights. "Many older people find this hard to accept," the author lamented, "They tend to cling to old customs." The young people of Singapore, however, were accepting of people like Mrs. Patsy Lum, a working mother of two, who was also active in her Baptist church, and was chosen to represent Singapore twice at the Baptist World Congress. Lum has been called Singapore's "Mrs. Baptist," but the author added, she could also rightly be called "Mrs. Liberated Woman of Singapore" because "she not only is liberated from male domination...but as a Christian she is also liberated from false religious superstitions."<sup>193</sup> Another report featured Helen

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<sup>192</sup> Sylvia Jones DeLoach, "Notes from Far Away," *Discovery*, April 1979, 10.

<sup>193</sup> Grace Barnette Lucas, "Modern Singapore," *Discovery*, April 1977, 6-7.

Ruchti, missionary in Rome, who was elected president of the European Baptist Convention in 1976-77. Ruchti is pictured with three other women, who were identified as “Baptist Presidents” from other European nations. A second photo shows Ruchti with her husband and assures readers that she is a “good wife for her missionary husband.”<sup>194</sup>

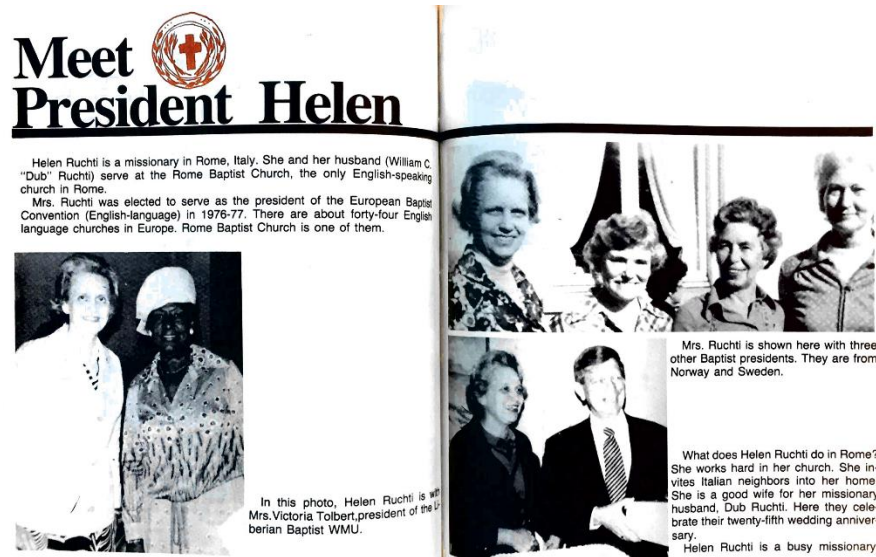


Fig. 3.8 Helen Ruchti, President of the European Baptist Convention, 1976. (Photographs in “Meet President Helen,” *Discovery*, November 1979, 8-9. Used by permission of WMU.)

Another story which allowed *Discovery* to address women’s roles in the church while maintaining a safe distance, was the life of Freddie Mae Bason. Bason’s testimony had appeared in *Tell* in 1957 and again in 1961, emphasizing her struggle against discrimination as an African American. In 1977, her testimony appeared again, but the focus had shifted to the barriers she overcame

<sup>194</sup> “Meet President Helen,” *Discovery*, November 1979, 8-9.

as a woman. Bason said that when she told her mother and her teachers she wanted to work in a church, she was told, "If you were a man, you could be a preacher. But you won't find any jobs for a woman in our black churches." Bason found her place in home missions as director of a Baptist Center in Atlanta where she "spends her time helping others; and she gets paid for it because that is her job."<sup>195</sup> Although in Bason's case the issue was limited finances in black churches, the story also had clear application to Southern Baptist churches where armies of women carried much of the work load on a volunteer basis.

One final example of appropriating stories from other settings draws from WMU's history. WMU collected two major annual offerings, the Lottie Moon Offering for foreign missions (named in honor of a pioneer missionary to China) and the Annie Armstrong Offering for home missions (named for WMU's first executive secretary, who had pushed forward the effort to found the national organization). Each year when the offerings were collected, *Tell* and *Discovery* featured short bios of these women and encouraged GAs to carry on the same missionary spirit by giving to the offering. In 1978, *Discovery* included a longer account of Armstrong's role in the founding of WMU. In the story, as women from the various states gathered to consider whether to found a national organization, a friend warns Armstrong that "several of the women are not sure

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<sup>195</sup> Nell Carter, "Freddie Finds a Friendly Future," *Discovery*, August 1977, 12-13.



they want to vote in favor of organizing. They want to make sure the men in their states approve of such a move.” Armstrong answers, “We are not forming an organization to compete with the men, but to work with them and with one another.” When the issue comes to a vote, the story mentions that the women from Virginia abstained because they did not have the men’s approval, and the author concludes, “Without dedicated women such as Annie Armstrong and the others present at this meeting, WMU would never have been born.”<sup>196</sup>

*Discovery* also continued to expose girls to the many ways women could serve on the mission field, even if they could not function as pastors. In the Fall of 1975, successive issues featured Dr. Frances Greenway in Rhodesia, Dr. Jean Dickman in Gaza, and Dr. Kathleen Jones in Indonesia, pointing out the ways each woman had pioneered medical missions in her region. *Discovery* regularly included “A Day in the Life” articles about women who served as the director of a Baptist Center or head of Social Ministries for all Southern Baptist Churches in a region. GAs read of female seminary professors who took pride in the many pastors and missionaries they could claim as former students, and of field representatives who traveled the world as Baptist celebrities.<sup>197</sup> WMU also continued to teach the themes of divine calling and spiritual gifts, which had

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<sup>196</sup> Nell Carter, “The Start of Something Big,” *Discovery*, May 1978, 2-3.

<sup>197</sup> Nancy Jo Pettis, “Prayer Calendar: Viola Campbell,” *Discovery*, February 1979, 21; Nancy Nell Stanley, “Prayer Calendar: Catharine Walker,” *Discovery*, May 1979, 21; Roma Zeltner, “Hung in the Sand,” *Discovery*, October 1975, 5.

inspired GAs for decades. Articles entitled “Does ‘Go Ye’ Mean Me?” and “Why Do Missionaries Go?” walked readers through the process of recognizing and responding to a divine call. One author assured her readers, “When a person believes in Christ and talks to God about plans for his life work, God lets him know what he is to do. God knows the best way for each believer to serve him.”<sup>198</sup>



Fig. 3.9 Dr. Kathleen Jones speaks at a hospital chapel service.  
(Photograph by Gerald S. Harvey. In Ernestine Lee “Bukittinggi,” *Discovery*, December 1975, 5.)

And as they had always done, WMU writers showcased women who were pushing the boundaries of acceptable ministry. An article on mission work

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<sup>198</sup> “Why Do Missionaries Go?” *Discovery*, January 1978, back cover; Elizabeth Swadley, “Does ‘Go Ye’ Mean Me?” *Discovery*, September 1977, 8-10.

among Cuban refugees in Miami featured Miss Lucille Kerrigan, former missionary to Cuba and now leader of the Spanish work at Central Baptist Church. "I do everything a pastor does except baptize people," Miss Kerrigan reported, "I do perform marriage ceremonies."<sup>199</sup> And a bio of Miss Gladys Farmer praised her vast influence as Director of Christian Social Ministries for the Montgomery Baptist Association. She oversaw more than 300 missionaries and volunteers and traveled to twenty-six areas, speaking to large groups. "Her life touches the lives of more than 25,000 persons each year," the author boasted. On a recent trip to Hawaii, moreover, she filled in for the preacher who was away. "I love my calling!" Miss Farmer exclaimed.<sup>200</sup>

On the whole, however, WMU's efforts to enlist girls in the battle against gender discrimination remained hesitant and subtle. Unlike *Tell's* clear teaching on a Christian view of race, *Discovery* never specifically addressed a Christian view of gender. WMU writers had insisted that a backward view of race was a hindrance to missions in the 1960s, and they could have made a similar case regarding gender in the 1970s, but they refrained. This hesitancy is even more puzzling in light of the outspoken debate over women's roles that raged in the articles and letters to the editor of other Southern Baptist publications, including WMU publications for adults. Articles such as "Women's Changing Role," "Call

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<sup>199</sup> Grace B. Lucas, "Service – In His Name," *Discovery*, March 1979, 11.

<sup>200</sup> Mary Posey Thomas, "A Busy Farmer," *Discovery*, August 1979, 10-11.

Me Ms.," and "Working Married Mothering" tackled the issues head-on, and articulated a bold progressive position.<sup>201</sup> It is possible that WMU's hesitancy was related to falling enrollment numbers – they could no longer risk angering parents as they had a decade earlier.<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, on the question of race, although members in the pew may have objected, the denominational leadership was fairly united in a more progressive position. Not so with women's ordination.

In September 1978, the SBC Inter-Agency Council held a Consultation on Women in Church-Related Vocations, attended by over 300 denominational leaders. The sessions were led by women (many of them from WMU), and women's ordination was the foremost topic of discussion. The consultation ended a bit flat with calls for patience from SBC president Jimmy Allen, but many women were hopeful that productive discussion would continue.<sup>203</sup> The following summer, however, the Convention elected Adrian Rogers to succeed Allen as president, and in a new era of biblical literalism and culture-war politics, WMU's moderately progressive positions and emphasis on unity for the cause of evangelism would seem hopelessly outdated and dangerously irenic. The year after Rogers was elected, his wife Joyce hosted a national women's conference

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<sup>201</sup> "Women's Changing Role" *Royal Service*, September 1975, 30; "Call Me Ms." *Contempo*, November 1973, 10-11; Catharine Allen "Working Married Mothering" *Contempo*, May 1976, 6 – all cited in Shaw "Words and Women."

<sup>202</sup> Flowers, 58.

<sup>203</sup> Flowers, 61-67.

which pushed for new energetic women's networks, dedicated to the conservative principles of Biblical Womanhood. In a nod to WMU's historic role in the lives of Southern Baptist women, executive director Carolyn Weatherford was invited to speak and reluctantly accepted. But the tension between the old guard and the new conservative leadership, as well as declining WMU membership, signaled that the organization could no longer serve the cause of Southern Baptist unity and progress as it once had.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Flowers, 80-81.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

Since 1980, Southern Baptists and Fundamentalists have steadily shifted to occupy much closer quarters on the evangelical map, but examining the missionary stories each group produced between 1950 and 1980 helps clarify that in this earlier period, the two were not so similar. During these years, the Southern Baptist Convention intentionally tolerated a variety of views on social issues and even key doctrines in order to preserve the unity of the denomination and to channel their resources toward evangelism. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, prioritized purity of doctrine and practice, and prided themselves on breaking fellowship with anyone who disagreed. The authors of both sets of stories explicitly encouraged a missionary mindset in the children they influenced – a compulsion to share the gospel of Christ with everyone they might meet. And they had the same troubling social issues in mind as they prepared these young missionaries to go forth with the truth. But there was often disagreement between and within the two groups on just what the truth was.

Both Fundamentalist and Southern Baptist stories demonstrate their tendency to think of America as a secular space and themselves as religious outsiders in their nation. The Fundamentalist mindset was that of an Old Testament prophet standing outside the city walls and calling down judgment,

while Southern Baptists more often took the part of one of many religious subgroups in a gloriously diverse and free state, but both agreed that America was not a Christian nation. Yet, both also simultaneously held that America, or at least the “real” America, was in essence Christian. God himself had acted in America’s founding, Fundamentalists held, and he would protect America from the forces of evil attempting to shake her firm foundation. Southern Baptists viewed themselves as the faithful guardians of American religious liberty as well as key players in America’s role as world leader in democracy and Christianity. Both groups, then, also believed themselves to be insiders, spokesmen for the true America. These differences in mindset became obscured as the interests of many religious groups aligned in the rise of the Christian Right, and one factor that helped bring together Christians of various stripes was agreement on a common enemy – communism. As Mary Dudziak has observed in her work on race and the Cold War, Americans on all sides of the segregation issue believed that their position was crucial to the fight against Communism.<sup>205</sup> Similarly, Fundamentalists and Southern Baptists may not have been able to articulate whether America was truly Christian or not, but they agreed that Communism was the enemy, and leaders of the Christian Right played on that unifying belief.

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<sup>205</sup> Dudziak, 75.

The contrast in messages on race is stark. Although Southern Baptists ran the gamut of views on segregation, the writers of *Tell* strove to teach their readers that whatever their Southern culture might claim, in God's eyes there was only one race, the human race. Fundamentalist flashcard stories, however, while making no explicit statements about race, reinforced the view that racial differences were God-given and should be maintained. Both groups insisted that they derived their views from Scripture, and remarkably, from the same verse, Acts 17:26 – “[God] hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined... the bounds of their habitation” (KJV). Progressives in the SBC used the first half of the verse (“of one blood all nations”) to argue for racial unity, while Fundamentalists took the latter phrase (“determined...the bounds of their habitation”) to mean that man should maintain divine racial divisions. Here too, members of both groups would find common ground in the “colorblind” rhetoric of the 1980s Religious Right, since it assumed equality of the races, yet refrained from further attempts at forced mingling.

On the issue of gender roles, the authors from both religious groups are notably aligned. Both groups fought to hold onto the idea of mothering as a significant calling and ministry – even women missionaries primarily engaged in childcare were still “real” missionaries, the authors argued. But they both also pushed the boundaries of acceptability by subtly suggesting situations where



women might serve in non-traditional ways and even preach, and they justified these exceptions on the ground that no one can override a divine calling. Given the fact that Fundamentalism was more overtly restrictive of gender roles, while the SBC allowed for a bit more latitude, it is surprising that their responses to the upheaval of the feminist movement would be so similar. Ultimately, the latitude Southern Baptist women had enjoyed would disappear as conservatives pushed the SBC to advocate biblical womanhood ideology in attempts to save American family values.

In these ways, Fundamentalist and Southern Baptist missionary stories reinforce the often-told narrative of the rise of the Religious Right and the ways it shaped and was shaped by various evangelical groups. But these stories also raise questions that have been less thoroughly explored by historians of American religion. One is the relationship between evangelicals' tendency to see capitalism as an expression of biblical principles and their relentless pleas for sacrificial offerings. The missionary stories' call to children was threefold: be a missionary, pray for missionaries, and give to missionary offerings. An exploration of the various ways these appeals for money were framed – when religion was allowed to impact one's wallet and when it was not – could add a helpful dimension to our understanding of evangelical objections to government welfare. Another avenue, much more difficult to explore, but vitally important to this study, would be an attempt to determine the actual impact of these stories

on the children who heard and read them. This analysis looks at the often subtle messages the authors were trying to communicate, but it cannot speak to whether the children got the message. Oral histories, while anecdotal, could be helpful on this point. Additionally, the use of images in both sets of stories needs to be set in the context of visual history and the use of images in propaganda and advertising in post-war America. Finally, the “shotgun” approach of this project of necessity leaves many stones unturned. Any one of the themes covered could, and probably should, be expanded into a much more thorough discussion of the ways evangelical children were taught to be missionaries to America.

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