Introduction: The Purpose and Theoretical Framework of this Book

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The Pentecostal/charismatic story has long celebrated numerous and surprising leadership achievements by women. A struggle for female agency¹ and voice forms one of the richest and most consequential themes of an ongoing Pentecostal/charismatic narrative tradition that has yet to be fully considered and explored, especially on its own terms. Still, as some Pentecostal and charismatic women have succeeded in leaping over barriers, many more have succumbed to overt and covert attempts to silence their voices and restrict their participation. In addition, the historical record, even respecting the contributions of women, has been largely shaped and referenced from masculine perspectives. In reflecting upon these notable achievements, considerations arise that cannot be fully understood using male-centric frames, questions such as: What were the challenges of these women? How did these women respond in ways both beneficial and detrimental to their cause? How did they understand and frame their own participation? How did so many leap over barriers that others in similar circumstances never approached? Were their opportunities greater or lesser than those encountered in other contexts, and, if so, why or why not?

This volume argues that the narrative contains significant gaps and the achievements of many Pentecostal and charismatic women have been overlooked, marginalized, or rejected. One might ask: Who were these women, and why should the world care to hear from or about them? They were women who launched and carried Pentecostalism—a religious current that continues to rise precipitously—from city to city and to the world. These women challenged the ecclesiastical and theological status quo, and their voices inspired social and religious change. In an era of endemic racism,² early Caucasian

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¹ Individuals exhibit agency when they act in unexpected ways, despite ways in which actions are shaped by social institutions and internalized customs and traditions.” See Kelsy C. Burke, “Women’s Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions: A Review of Four Approaches,” Sociology Compass 6/2 (2012): 122–133.

² The racist attitudes that paralleled the rise of the movement are demonstrated in the wide appeal of writings such as Harvard University’s Earnest Hooton (1887–1954) who advocated eugenics: “We must rid ourselves of false prophets of cultural salvation and the witless preachers of human equality. The future of our species ... is dependent on biology. We must have fewer and better men, not more morons.” Ernest Albert Hooton, Why Men Behave Like
Pentecostal women aligned themselves with African-Americans in surprisingly egalitarian ways. Theirs are the voices of a current of religious expression that worked to shape the religious and social conscience of North America, the United Kingdom, and the world. Their power, agency, and impact rose and declined dramatically. These are individuals who ought to be heard.

Method and Theory

This book is about women and Pentecostalism. It is intended to give an introduction to the way women have been influenced by, and influenced, the Pentecostal/charismatic movement from its very beginning. Most, but not all, of the contributors to this volume are in some way or another connected to the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Pentecostal and charismatic women have offered a wide variety of divergent responses to the opportunities and limitations they have experienced in their commitment to religious service. In an attempt to focalize this discussion, scholars, activists, leaders, and exemplars from a variety of disciplines reflected on the following question: How have women responded to a religious context that has depended upon their gifts while, at the same time, limited their voices and perspectives? This volume attempts to offer missing and/or silent voices and contexts of women as an important corrective to an historical record and epistemological process that has shaped gender-focused discussions. According to Janet Bauer, “Because ‘men’s studies’—and predominantly Western male points of view—have set the content, definitions, and language in studies of fundamentalism, women’s standpoint brings us something about the perspective of the other in it—the


 Fundamentalism’ is used here broadly, as many Pentecostal/charismatic Christians might reject the appellative, despite their movements’ association with it. “Russell P. Spittler, in his insightful essay entitled ‘Are Pentecostals and Charismatics Fundamentalists?’ argues that these three communities of faith (Pentecostals, Charismatics and Fundamentalists) should be kept distinct even though they adhere to similar beliefs and practices.” See Kenneth Archer, _A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community_ (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2009), 90. “Pentecostals and Fundamentalists ... are arch enemies when it comes to matters of speaking in tongues and the legitimacy of expecting physical healing in today’s world. ... If the word ‘fundamentalist’ gets defined only by biblical style, Pentecostals can be labeled fundamentalists without question.” See also, Russell P. Spittler, “Are Pentecostals and Charismatics Fundamentalists? A Review of American Uses of These Categories,” in