

**REDEEMING VANITY FAIR:
THEOLOGICAL DEBATES OVER FUNDRAISING
WITHIN THE W.F.M.S.**

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Before it was a movie, a magazine, or even a novel, Vanity Fair was a threat. In John Bunyan's seventeenth-century allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, the year-round fair held in the town of Vanity represented a danger established by "Beelzebub, Apollyon, and Legion, with their companions" to offer worldly temptations to Christians on their way to the Celestial City. In the first part of *Pilgrim's Progress*, the male protagonist, Christian, and his companion, Faithful, were imprisoned because their refusal to patronize the fair seemed to be madness. In the second part of Bunyan's story, the female protagonist, Christiana, was warned that the fair would present a greater threat to her salvation, "For if [Christian], though a man, was so hard put to it, what canst thou being but a poor woman, do?"¹

Fundraising fairs, festivals, and bazaars selling used or craft items to support missions have become a common practice of church groups like the United Methodist Women (UMW). The initial plan of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS), a predecessor body of the UMW, however, was not to rely on fundraisers, but on individual contributions of money. Fairs emerged as a method of fundraising in the first decade of the society as some women saw their potential to tap additional resources and express solidarity with missionaries and the women they served. Other women opposed to this trend saw fairs as potential threats to the essential mission of the WFMS, and even the Christian faith, not unlike the allegorical Vanity Fair. This paper will identify key events in the emergence of fairs as a method of fundraising by the WFMS and the contours of the theological debate waged by women of the WFMS over the method. Despite theological differences, all sides of this debate embraced a rhetoric that God was able to accomplish great things from small gifts, but reframed that rhetoric depending on their theologies of salvation and holiness.

Fundraising and the Founding of the WFMS

The nineteenth century was a period of experimentation in fundraising by American churches. Methods such as pew rents, free-will offerings, voluntary subscriptions, lotteries, and book sales were tried.² Amidst such ex-

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 137, 240.

² Mark A. Noll, "Introduction," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 8-10.

perimentation, American Christians debated the theological meaning of their fundraising methods. As historian David Hempton observed, “In religious organizations money is not simply a necessary and neutral commodity for getting things done; rather, money carries with it a symbolic revelation of the values for which it was collected and appropriated.”³

The WFMS was founded in 1869 by women of the Methodist Episcopal Church concerned that women in gender-segregated societies were not being reached by male missionaries. This initiative alarmed male mission leaders who believed the WFMS would siphon money from other collections and that the women would be unable to administer the funds. Negotiations between the founders of the WFMS and secretaries of the Mission Board yielded an agreement that women would not take up collections in worship services or meetings where men were present.⁴

Within these constraints, the founders of the WFMS confidently assumed sufficient money existed to fund missions through the sacrificial benevolent patronage of donors. Women were to give of their own money to benefit others who were seen as less fortunate. Specifically, the original fundraising plan was for each member to offer “two cents a week and a prayer.”⁵ This figure was set, in part, because it was thought to be an amount affordable by even the poorest woman. As the inaugural appeal in the publication of the society, the *Heathen Woman's Friend*, noted, “[S]urely there can be but very few among us who cannot contribute two cents weekly.”⁶ Time would prove this assumption faulty.

This plan of drawing dues of \$1/year also followed an existing fundraising model known as the Cent Society. First developed in Boston in 1802, Cent Societies spread rapidly in early nineteenth-century America. The idea that individual donors giving only a small amount a week could unite their meager efforts to spread the gospel was very exciting, particularly in the democratized air of early nineteenth-century America when power was understood to flow upward from the people. Moreover, as historian R. Pierce Beaver noted, Cent Societies had the advantage of a biblical precedent of women's sacrificial giving, as seen in the story of the widow's mite (see Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4).⁷

Although envisioned and rhetorically celebrated as a sacrificial collection

³ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2005), 130.

⁴ D. P. Durbin and W. L. Harris, “Woman's Foreign Missionary Society,” *Christian Advocate*, June 17, 1869; Clementina Butler, *Mrs. William Butler: Two Empires and the Kingdom* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1929), 103-15; Mary Isham, *Valorous Ventures: A Record of Sixty and Six Years of the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church* (Boston: Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1936), 13-17.

⁵ Butler, 108.

⁶ “Appeal to the Ladies of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” *Heathen Woman's Friend* 1.1 (June, 1869): 2

⁷ R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), 13-24; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1989), 44-45.

of mites, large donations were critical to the initial success of the WFMS. In addition to modest membership dues, organizers made provisions to receive larger gifts. The first constitution of the society provided that a donation of \$20 established the giver as a “life member” of the WFMS. Revised after the first year, the next constitution allowed a donor of \$100 to become a “life manager” and a donor of \$300 to become an “honorary life patron.”⁸ In the first year of the WFMS, large donors such as these covered 59% of the society’s expenses.⁹

This early dependence on wealthy philanthropy is not surprising. The founders of the WFMS were relatively wealthy. As historian Dana Robert noted, while these founding women were organizing for mission, their husbands were founding Methodist institutions of higher education.¹⁰ Assumptions of wealth permeated early rhetoric of giving in the WFMS. One article in the *Friend* opined, “Every family that makes any attempt at style, must give, at least one or two large parties a year, costing from fifty to five hundred or a thousand dollars each.”¹¹ Readers were invited to imagine how much good that money could do if demands of fashion and society were sacrificed to the missionary cause. The society was still new and collections small when the WFMS proposed sending its first missionaries, Isabella Thoburn and Clara Swain, to India. In a speech remembered in histories of the Society, Mrs. Edward Porter persuaded the women to send Thoburn and Swain with the exhortation, “Sisters, shall we lose Miss Thoburn and Dr. Swain because we have not the means in sight to send them? No, rather let the Methodist women of Boston walk the streets in calico gowns and save the expense of more costly apparel, but let us send the missionaries.”¹² In other words, to meet the missionary need, wealthy women would sacrifice the expense of fashion and wear cheaper dresses instead.

Donors were encouraged to see themselves as patronesses of less fortunate women and girls. These objects of mission were described as having nothing, not even a history or a name, but for the loving sacrifice of generous donors. Early issues of the *Friend* documented the shocking practice of American donors renaming Indian orphans as memorials to loved ones. In this way, foreign orphan children were rhetorically included into the families of the donors and bequeathed new “Christian” identities by their patrons. For example, after a widow in Rockford, Illinois, lost her daughter to consumption, she gave money to educate an Indian girl renamed Julia Daugherty

⁸ “The Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 1.1 (June, 1869): 4; “Constitution,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 1.13 (June, 1870): 99; Butler, 108.

⁹ “Treasurer’s Report,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 1.12 (June, 1870): 108.

¹⁰ Donald B. Marti, “Rich Methodists: The Rise and Consequences of Lay Philanthropy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” in *Perspectives on American Methodism*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1993), 268-73; Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1997), 141-144.

¹¹ J. F. Willing, “A Word to Western Women,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 1.2 (July, 1869): 12.

¹² Butler, *Mrs. William Butler*, 111; Isham, 18.

in her daughter's memory.¹³ The first bequest received by the WFMS was given by a woman named Mary Webster who gave \$1,000 to the New York branch and \$300 to an Indian orphan to be named after her in hopes that "her namesake...might be working for the Master after her voice was silent in death."¹⁴ When WFMS founder and missionary Clementina Butler began an orphanage in Mexico, the practice was extended there.¹⁵

A Little Child Shall Lead Them

Fundraising fairs first emerged in early nineteenth-century England as a way for women to earn money for charity. Historian Beverly Gordon identified an 1827 fair in Baltimore as the first to be held in the U.S., and the fundraising model spread nationally leading up to and during the Civil War.¹⁶ Methodists were initially reluctant to use fundraising fairs for two reasons. First, in the separate spheres ideology of the time, there were concerns regarding the propriety of women entering into the public, commercial sphere of men. As Gordon noted, "the idea that women were selling themselves as well as their wares—that they were the real merchandise at the fair . . . was clearly implicit" in the early rhetoric surrounding fairs.¹⁷ Second, games of chance often held at early fairs were connected to the vice of gambling.¹⁸ During the war, however, fairs became increasingly accepted as a natural extension of the woman's sphere, in part because they were events where multiple elements of domesticity—food, leisured handiwork, and charity—were celebrated.¹⁹ Concerns about gambling persisted, but were easily diffused. As fairs spread, it became a standard portion of publicity announcements to assert that Methodist fairs would feature no games of chance.

The first documented fundraising fair held in support of the WFMS ran in late 1869, in Lynn, Massachusetts. Information about the Lynn fair is scarce, but it demonstrated that untapped funds could be reached by those willing to try this fundraising method. It was a juvenile fair—an event run by children and youth—and featured the sale of assorted articles, including items made by Indian orphans, and a concert of patriotic music. In total, the event raised over \$600, far eclipsing the \$129 that women in Lynn had previously sent in as individual contributions.²⁰

The Lynn fair opened a gradual expansion of rhetoric about fundraising in the *Friend*. Initially, children were encouraged to give sacrificially, like their mothers. Following the Lynn fair, other examples of children's fund-

¹³ J. F. W., "Our Orphans," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 2.9 (March, 1871): 105.

¹⁴ C. Butler, "Bequest," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 4.5 (November, 1872): 367.

¹⁵ Butler, *Mrs. William Butler*, 141-46.; C. Butler, "Our First Orphan in Mexico," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 5.6 (December, 1873): 573-574.

¹⁶ Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: U Tennessee P, 1998), 37.

¹⁷ Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 7.

¹⁸ Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 51-52.

¹⁹ Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 5.

²⁰ "Earnest Efforts," *Heathen Women's Friend* 1.9 (February, 1870): 70.

raising were celebrated as examples of humble, small gifts to accomplish great things. In Maine, a group of children contributed money earned from growing and picking potatoes.²¹ Other children made money through the sale of simple crafts, staging dramas, or killing crop-destroying pests. One notice told of a Sunday school class of children that raised money by collecting and selling eggs. It went on to admonish children, that it was not enough to give money given to them, they should “*Do something--earn your money*” (emphasis original).²² By 1874, the children’s column in the *Friend* announced that it would offer prizes to the boy and girl who could suggest the best ways of “*earning missionary money.*”²³ Few of these notices occupied much space in the *Friend*, but in this small way, the door was widened to enable women to earn their own money for missions.

Woman’s Work for Woman: Nebraska Necessity and New York Luxury

Opposition to fairs would also be worn away from diverse ends of the social scale. While the back pages of the *Friend* listing contributions made note of a few, scattered sales around the country, two dominated discussion on the matter and demonstrated that fairs were seen by their supporters as not only opportunities to raise money, but to demonstrate sisterly solidarity with both recipients of their mission and missionaries. Organizers understood fundraising fairs as extensions of the missiology that informed the WFMS. They were also engaged in “*Woman’s Work for Woman*” in support of their missionary and foreign sisters.²⁴

In late 1874, women in Nebraska organized a State Missionary Fair. It is not clear why plans for this event were launched, but economics were certainly a major factor. In 1872, America entered a depression. In the rural west, cash was scarce, especially after 1873 when the federal government removed silver coinage from circulation.²⁵ While two cents a week sounded affordable to wealthy women of the east, a contribution of one dollar a year was beyond the reach of many women in the economically depressed and cash poor west of the 1870s. For several years, women of the Northwest Branch of the WFMS, of which Nebraska was a part, struggled to meet their membership dues.²⁶

Organizers of the fair asked members and auxiliaries throughout Nebraska to make items to be sold at a fair to be held in Lincoln. Accounts of the event alluded in retrospect to concerns about holding a fair, but they were eclipsed

²¹ *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 3.8 (February, 1872): 242.

²² *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 3.4 (October, 1871): 195.

²³ “The Little Box in the Corner,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 5.10 (April, 1874): 642.

²⁴ Robert, 130-137.

²⁵ Worth Robert Miller, “Farmers and Third-Party Politics,” in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 288-290; Solomos Solomou, “Business Cycles,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History*, ed. Joel Mokyr (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 303.

²⁶ “Report of the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 6.1 (July, 1874): 678.

by an unforeseen disaster that dramatically refocused the debate. As preparations for the fair began in the summer of 1874, an estimated 12.5 trillion locusts blackened the skies of the Great Plains and Midwest, consuming crops, destroying tools, doing millions of dollars in damage, and prompting the formation of a major nationwide disaster relief effort.²⁷

The Rocky Mountain Locust Invasion and resulting famine almost derailed the fair; several auxiliaries backed out. Methodist women in five eastern Nebraska cities, however, proceeded with their plans. In their view, the fair provided an opportunity to exhibit solidarity with and charity for women in India. The locusts had caused hardship, but recalling that there was also famine in India, Nebraskan women believed that while both they and their Indian sisters were hungry, only they had “spiritual” bread to offer.²⁸ At a gathering associated with the fair, an 11-year old girl named Katie Hewitt presented a pillow she and other children made for sale and brought those present to tears with her recitation of a poem associated with the Irish famine.²⁹ The fair raised just over \$200, a small amount, but it was celebrated as a success, both as an act of solidarity and because Nebraska women believed they had remained faithful to their missionary commitments.³⁰ They raised what they could, and like the widow’s mite, small amounts were not to be despised.

If such a small sale could open the door for alternate means of fund-raising, a fair held in New York the following November blew it open. In 1875, upper class and politically connected Methodist women gathered the “fruits of [their] summer leisure in the shape of useful and fancy articles” for a bazaar.³¹ Held at the newly completed, and grandly furnished, Masonic Hall in New York, the sale raised over \$4,000. The *New York Times* covered the event featuring a display of rare antiquities with religious, patriotic, or historical value. Of particular interest to Methodists was a letter by John Wesley, a copy of the poem *Life of Christ* by Samuel Wesley, and a Bible used by Philip Embury. A high point in the six-day event was a tea party, served on antique Japanese place settings by the organizers dressed in Japanese clothing.³²

Although the New York fair operated on a different order of economic magnitude than the Nebraska fair, organizers likewise described the event in such a way as to cast the fair as an act of sacrifice and missionary solidarity.

²⁷ Alexandra M. Wagner, “Grasshoppered: America’s Response to the 1874 Rocky Mountain Locust,” *Nebraska History* 89 (2008): 155-166, accessed March 2, 2015.

²⁸ Angie F. Newman, “The Sea Shall Not Dash Waves,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 6.10 (April, 1875): 829-830.

²⁹ Angie F. Newman, “What the Grasshoppers Did in Nebraska,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 6.8 (February, 1875): 800-802; Angie F. Newman, “What the Children Did at the Fair,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 6.11 (May, 1875): 847-848.

³⁰ Newman, “The Sea Shall Not Dash Waves,” 830.

³¹ “New York Branch,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 7.3 (September, 1875): 64.

³² “New York Branch,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 7.3 (September, 1875): 64; “The Women’s Mission Fair,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1875; “Receipts of the W.F.M.Society,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 7.9 (February, 1876): 191.

As one announcement proclaimed, “Our missionary sisters are giving their lives for the cause, and we will not grudge time and labor for the support of an object so dear to the Christian heart.”³³ Thus, fair work was cast as a domestic extension of missionary work and a way of partnering of American women and the missionaries they supported.

Chicago

One fair that was planned, but cancelled, stood as an important landmark in the use of fundraising fairs and gives insight into the perspectives of those who opposed their use. In 1876, Methodist women of Chicago, like those in Nebraska, were concerned that the economy had hurt mission giving. After praying over the matter, they decided to hold a fair that December. Hoping to benefit from Christmas shoppers, the fair was to be held in Chicago, but each auxiliary near the city was asked to identify two women to coordinate the production of food and other items, such as children’s and winter clothing, for sale. As of the November, 1876, issue of the *Friend*, preparations were well underway.³⁴

While Methodist women of the Chicago area prepared, however, the evangelist Dwight L. Moody announced his intention to hold a revival in the city. Moody had begun his career as a revivalist there, and his work in England from 1873-1875 had propelled him to worldwide notoriety. In 1876, Chicago’s evangelicals were eager for his return.³⁵ Moody designed his revivals to be all-consuming events in the life of the city. He insisted on the united backing of the city’s evangelicals for his work and that all non-revival related church activity cease during the campaign. Activities such as home visits, publicity distribution, and weekly prayer meetings took their place. A choir auditioned and rehearsed, and ushers were trained to counsel those seeking salvation. A new auditorium was even built for Moody’s meetings.³⁶ As historian Bruce Evensen noted, part of Moody’s success hinged on his ability to create “a civic spectacle of unprecedented proportions.”³⁷

For Moody, fairs were not just another church activity that should stop while he preached. In early 1876, Moody explicitly denounced fairs as a leading obstacle to revival. Asked about distractions, such as politics, that could divert Christians from “higher things,” Moody said, “[T]he thing I dread more than I do politics is these miserable church fairs. That is the

³³ “New York Branch,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 7.5 (November, 1875): 110.

³⁴ “Reports of the Branches,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 8.1 (July, 1876): 6; “Reports of the Branches,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 8.2 (August, 1876): 41; “Reports of the Branches,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 8.5 (November, 1876): 114.

³⁵ Bruce J. Evensen, *God’s Man for the Gilded Age: D.L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2003), 123-124; James F. Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody, American Evangelist, 1837-1899* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1969), 195-196; Darrel M. Robertson, *The Chicago Revival, 1876: Society and Revivalism in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 47-49.

³⁶ Evensen, 138-140; Findlay, 197-205; Robertson, 49-55.

³⁷ Evensen, 161.

thing that bothers me most. More meetings have been broken up, and the interest dissipated, by these bazaars and church festivals than by your political meetings."³⁸ He once postponed a revival in Philadelphia because the YMCA had planned a fair.³⁹ Moody gave no detailed explanation why he thought fairs were such a threat to revival. Without further elaboration, historian James F. Findlay attributed Moody's opposition to fairs to "his puritanical mind."⁴⁰ It is more likely that Moody saw fairs to be an activity completely unconnected to Christian life. Unlike the women of Nebraska and New York who described fair work as an act of missionary solidarity, he probably considered fairs to be a purely worldly act.

In the face of opposition by Moody and prominent church and civic leaders, Methodist women of Chicago gave way. Their fair was cancelled. For a movement that celebrated sacrifice, however, this decision was easily cast as a victory. Cancellation was a small sacrifice, and God blessed small sacrifices. The organizers announced, "We can but believe that, so far from losing by this postponement, the Lord's blessing will be upon the little sacrifice we have made in putting aside our chance to make money for the sake of working for souls, and when we do have our Fair, it will be better patronized and more profitable."⁴¹

Indeed, cancellation yielded an unintended consequence that seemed to vindicate both cancellation and fundraising sales. Rather than hold one grand fair in Chicago, the event devolved into several smaller sales throughout the region. For several months, reports trickled into the *Friend* of sales in Chicago area communities of items produced for the canceled event. While many of these items were just listed in the treasurer's report, some poignant stories were published. Eighty-seven year old Achsah Lanford of Eureka, Wisconsin, had begun work on a quilt to sell in Chicago, but died before its completion. With the cancellation of the fair, this last work of her life seemed to have been for naught, until her local auxiliary sold the quilt blocks she made for \$10. For Methodists who valued stories of faithful dying, this kind of faithful service unto death served as a poignant testimony of a life lived in grace to the end.⁴²

Theological Debate

Even as Methodist women planned, held and canceled fairs and other fundraising events in Massachusetts, Nebraska, New York, Chicago, and elsewhere, they debated the theology of the practice in the pages of the *Friend*. While the precipitating issue was fundraising, the women involved

³⁸ L. T. Remlap, ed. "The Gospel Awakening." *Comprising the Sermons and Addresses, Prayer-Meeting Talks and Bible Readings of the Great Revival Meetings Conducted by Moody and Sankey*, 20th ed. (Chicago: Fairbanks and Palmer Publishing, 1885), 753.

³⁹ Findlay, *Dwight L. Moody*, 195-196; Robertson, *The Chicago Revival*, 47.

⁴⁰ Findlay, 196.

⁴¹ "Northwestern Branch," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 8.7 (January, 1877): 162.

⁴² Jennie F. Willing, "A Precious Gift," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 8.11 (May, 1877): 259; Hemp-ton, 65-68.

understood that deeper issues were at stake, issues as vital to Methodists as the nature of holiness and salvation.

The basic contours of the debate were summarized by an author writing under the initials M.E.C.W. She noted that many women believed the WFMS “would do wisely to abstain from all methods of raising money outside of direct personal gifts of money” and that doing so “always betokens a plain lack of that self-sacrifice without which we cannot hope for the Divine blessing upon our work.” She speculated, however, that those who believed only in the benevolence model were out of touch with the economic existence of the majority of Methodist women “whose whole life is one long self-sacrifice” and who must “beg at the hand of a miserly husband every cent they spend, at the sacrifice of self-respect and independence.” Such women had little money, but were eager to support missions. In the face of such generosity, she questioned “why some parts of the church bear down so heavily on everything in the shape of fairs, festivals, suppers, bazars, or even sociables.”⁴³

One of the first salvos in this debate was launched by Thoburn. Writing from India in 1873, Thoburn asserted that all fundraising efforts other than the original benevolence model were flawed as they lacked an essential sacrificial quality. Without this they were categorically “wrong as sources of church revenue.” People should give sacrificially and freely in response to Christ’s grace and command. Fairs and other sales assume people will only give in return for a tangible benefit. As she mockingly wrote, “Refusing twenty-five cents directly to the Head of the Church, we give it in exchange for—strawberries and cake!”⁴⁴ In an earlier letter, Thoburn stated more positively her view that money given to the missionary cause, “if linked with prayer and sacrifice, is weakening some fibre of selfishness, while it strengthens the cord binding us to humanity, and to the higher, better life.”⁴⁵

For Thoburn, an individual’s gift of money was linked to her consecration to holiness, weakening the power of sin and allowing the giver to live a more godly life. In her writing on fundraising, Thoburn drew on the theological language of the New Divinity, in particular that of Samuel Hopkins who defined sin as selfishness and holiness as disinterested benevolence. These ideas were important motives behind the American missionary movement.⁴⁶ As stated by historian Joseph A. Conforti: “The true Christian must lose himself in a cause higher than his own salvation—namely, the temporal

⁴³ M.E.C.W., “The Other Side,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 8.5 (November, 1876):110-111.

⁴⁴ Isabella Thoburn, “Motives of Benevolence,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 4.10 (April, 1873): 441.

⁴⁵ Isabella Shoburn [sic], *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 3.3 (September, 1871): 182.

⁴⁶ R. Pierce Beaver, “Missionary Motivation through Three Centuries,” in *Reinterpretation in American Church History*, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1968), 121; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 139-140; William R. Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1987), 49-51.

and eternal well-being of others.”⁴⁷ To this concept of disinterested benevolence, Thoburn tied an understanding of holiness rooted in the thought of Mary and W. E. Boardman. The Boardmans’ influential book, *The Higher Christian Life* (1858), called on believers to develop superior levels of spirituality through faith. Introduced to England in the 1860s, the concept flourished in the emerging Keswick holiness movement by making concepts of sanctification acceptable to moderate Calvinists, and it proved very popular among Methodist missionaries in India. The Keswick understanding of holiness asserted that sin was not removed from the believer, but rather that the presence of the Spirit counteracted sin and empowered the believer to live a “higher” or victorious life. This view of holiness predisposed its adherents to a more dualistic view of the world, without middle ground, and less apt to consider nuances of personal motivation, economic need, or contextual circumstances.⁴⁸

Similar theological themes were also evident in the writing of another vocal opponent of fundraising fairs, C. A. Lacroix of Delaware, Ohio. A representative of the same “higher life” brand of holiness as Thoburn, she feared that fairs betrayed the founding vision of the WFMS, demonstrated an accommodation to the world and a lack of faith, and threatened the spiritual roots of the mission.⁴⁹ For Lacroix, sacrificial giving was a mark of one’s consecration to holiness. She argued that advocates of fairs assumed that “the ‘children of light have need of the ‘children of darkness’ to *help* them do the work God has commanded them to do” (emphasis original). Rather than raising money for missions, women should follow the original plan of benevolent sacrifice. To hold fairs was a form of works righteousness; it was better to “pray and have faith in God” to provide money and to convince Christians of their need to sacrifice than to earn money from “unconvinced, unconvicted, and unconverted pockets.”⁵⁰ By doing so, the church had sacrificed spiritual progress and holiness for money, expediency, and a “half-rate faith.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Joseph A. Conforti, “Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity: Theology, Ethics, and Social Reform in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 34.4 (1977): 583.

⁴⁸ Randall Balmer, “Boardman, W. E.,” in *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, ed. Randall Balmer (Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2004), 87; David Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England: The 1998 Didsbury Lectures* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2000), 71-76; David Bundy, “Keswick and the Experience of Evangelical Piety,” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, ed. Edith L. Blumhofer (Urbana: U Illinois P, 1993), 123; Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, Second ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 49-50, 249; Kathryn T. Long, “Consecrated Respectability: Phoebe Palmer and the Refinement of American Methodism,” in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2001), 289.

⁴⁹ P., “Cincinnati Branch: Mrs. C. A. Lacroix,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 10.7 (January, 1879): 162. In addition, her husband edited and translated a book about the German Protestant, Rudolf Stier that sought to portray him as a devotee of the “higher life.” (John Power Lacroix, *The Life of Rudolf Stier* [New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874]).

⁵⁰ C. A. Lacroix, “Original Simplicity,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 9.7 (January, 1878): 156.

⁵¹ C. A. Lacroix, “March and April versus January,” *Heathen Woman’s Friend* 10.2 (August, 1878): 37.

Supporters of fundraising fairs took to the *Friend* to offer replies to both Thoburn and Lacroix. One of those, Jeanette Fowler Willing, the leader behind the organization of countless auxiliaries, responded to Thoburn. Willing's theological assumptions were less explicit, but at the core, she took issue with Thoburn's anthropology, asserting a more realistic view of human nature and a more positive view of human potential was warranted, in part, informed by a postmillennial eschatology. In many respects, Willing's theology was comparable to a traditional Wesleyan view that human faculties were corrupted by sin, but the spiritual senses of individuals could be awakened to the work of God's grace within them to shake off a sense of apathy and move one to repentance and holiness.⁵²

Fairs, she admitted, were not ideal methods of fundraising, but they relied on natural human impulses that could be reoriented and redeemed for good. Church people like to eat, what harm was there in using that impulse to raise money for missions by holding a fundraising dinner? While Christians should fulfill their commitments and give generously for missions, she noted people often struggled to be faithful in other aspects of their lives. Fairs served to refocus attention to missionary needs. In this respect, a fair operated much like a revival might, awakening the spirit of a person. While such methods may not be ideal, "the millennium is not here yet. Till it comes, we must take people as they are, and not as they ought to be."⁵³

Those themes were found in the writing of another vocal supporter of fairs, Angie F. Newman, corresponding secretary for Nebraska and the first woman to be elected to a General Conference.⁵⁴ Newman's rebuttals leaned heavily on her experiences in Nebraska. After 1874, Nebraska had continued holding fairs, so Newman asserted she was well experienced with the matter. Newman vehemently rejected any implication that Nebraskan women lacked faith, and like Willing before her, assumed a more realistic view of human nature. Ideally, she conceded, the church should be "so purified" as to freely give generously to missions, but "we fear our hands will be too tremulous with age to handle money when this sublime period in the history of the church is reached." Women were called to do what they could in the present generation, "We choose, therefore, to address ourselves to the 'is' of things, and leave to our children the golden dreams of the 'ought to be.'" Newman's response was not entirely a question of realism, however. Like Willing she also framed her understanding in a Wesleyan view of grace. Uncomfortable with the term "children of darkness," she asked, were they not were also "in a sense, God's children, as well as they of the light?" Just

⁵² Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 65-93.

⁵³ J. F. W., "Definite Work for our Auxiliaries," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 5.4 (October, 1873): 542.

⁵⁴ David Marquette, *A History of Nebraska Methodism, First Half-Century, 1854-1904* (Cincinnati: The Western Methodist Book Concern Press, 1904), 532; Mrs John A. Logan, *The Part Taken by Women in American History* (Wilmington, DE: Perry-Nalle Publishing, 1912), 521-522.

because individuals had not experienced the fullness of God's love, it did not mean they were absent all grace. Any form of giving, even buying an item sold in support of missions, may "quicken religious progress."⁵⁵

Furthermore, Newman asserted that local circumstances must be considered. Wealthy women ought not ascribe a lack of faith to those who had no money to give. To illustrate, she related that the most recent Nebraska fair sold a box containing two six-inch braids of hair, a gift of a woman who had no cash to give or even to buy a wig. It was, however, still a sacrificial gift of a woman who had become "awakened to feel *she* must bear some part" in the missionary effort.⁵⁶ In this respect, fair supporters demonstrated a more expansive understanding of missionary giving and viewed a greater scope of human action as open to God's redemptive work. Money was not the only gift that could be consecrated to God. Any form of giving could be as sacrificial as two coins put in the mite box and a way of sharing in missionary work.

Conclusion

In Lacroix's last article on the matter, she indicated that she saw the writing on the wall. Fairs, and other methods of fundraising were on the rise in auxiliaries, and majority of the letters she received in response to her writing supported their use. Lacroix judged that balance only served to prove that the church had become worldly. Churlishly referring to events in Nebraska, Lacroix offered her prayer that the state might never again be visited by plagues of "grasshopper, chinch-bug, or fair," and referring both to the story of the woman who donated her hair and the biblical story of Sampson, she argued that by relying on fairs to raise money, the church had "shorn herself of her strength."⁵⁷

Rather quickly and definitively, the WFMS moved away from the original plan of funding missions through sacrificial benevolence. In 1884, the ME General Conference sanctioned this transition and inserted an explanatory note to the *Discipline* clarifying that any disciplinary limits on fundraising by women "shall not be so interpreted as to prevent" women "from holding festivals . . . in the interests of their work."⁵⁸

The relatively quick resolution of this debate obscures the transformation that occurred and the fault lines within American Methodism this conflict reveals. While WFMS founders initially envisioned the work of the society to be sustained by women sacrificially and benevolently contributing their mites, that vision was cast by women of wealth and privilege. In the end,

⁵⁵ Angie F. Newman, "Concerning Fairs," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 9.9 (March, 1878): 205, 206.

⁵⁶ Angie F. Newman, "Concerning Fairs," *Heathen Woman's Friend* 9.10 (April, 1878): 229.

⁵⁷ Lacroix, "March and April," 38.

⁵⁸ Bp. Harris, ed. *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), 162; David S. Monroe, ed. *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Philadelphia, Pa., May 1-28, 1884* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 286.

a more expansive and pragmatic vision that could be employed by rich and poor alike carried the day. The idea took root that women without even two mites to place in the treasury might yet have something to give and sell as an offering to God. In addition, segments of the church had become influenced by holiness theologies favored by many in the Reformed traditions and willing to draw clear lines between the church and the world. In this respect too, a more expansive view of God's redemptive work won out. Women who organized fundraising fairs did so not because they had become corrupted and worldly, but because they believed that God could work through a fundraising fair as much as anything else, and that by doing so they were sharing, in their own humble way, in the work of foreign missions.