In a previous article entitled “Methodist Bible Women in Bulgaria and Italy,” in the October 2016/January 2017 double-issue of *Methodist History*, we explored the evangelistic work of these amazing pioneers during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth century. In that analysis of their contribution to mission in this context, we emphasized the importance of the contextual dynamic, the ecumenical nature of their endeavors, their networking with women and children, and their authentic witness through personal and incarnational evangelism. While these women laid the foundation for mission among women and girls in Bulgaria and Italy within the broader context of the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), they were soon joined by Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society (WFMS) missionaries from the United States and other countries.

These second wave pioneers—highly educated and deeply pious women—quickly moved into positions of leadership and supervision, consolidating the efforts of their sisters in the faith. As was the case with regard to the stories of the Bible Women, information concerning these WFMS missionaries “had to be teased out, pulled from below, dragged through the cracks,” since “their work was little recorded, little regarded, and little known.”


viously, the relationship between the Bible Women and the other women missionaries was critical, but it was also extremely complex. Their experience reveals a typical pattern of growing expatriate control and subsequent domination. As the scales of power shifted in the direction of the missionaries, the Bible Women fell increasingly under their shadow and eventually disappeared. The purpose of this second article, therefore, is to examine the role and influence of the WFMS missionaries, to describe their relationship with incumbent missionary wives and indigenous counterparts, and to draw some conclusions about the missiological shifts in this evolving story about mission and women.

**Women Missionaries for Bulgaria**

During the period between 1884 and 1906, the WFMS deployed six women to Bulgaria.\(^3\) Linna Schenck was the first woman appointed to service as a missionary in this context, a decade after the work of the Bible Women had begun in 1874 under the auspices of the MEC. Ella E. Fincham joined her three years later. Only two appointments were made in the 1890s, Kate B. Blackburn in 1892, the year of Schenck’s retirement, and Lydia Diem, seconded to the WFMS the following year from the Swiss Methodists. Both of these second wave pioneers served lengthy tenures in Bulgaria, thirty-four and eighteen years respectively. Dora Davis also dedicated a lengthy period of her life to Bulgaria, serving from 1900 to 1926. The average term of service for these women in this area of Europe was over eighteen years.

With the authorization of the MEC mission board, Dewitt Challis opened a school for girls in Loftcha in November, 1880, with nine students, a parallel institution to the more famous Samokov school.\(^4\) He and his wife accommodated the school in their own home. As important as they considered this work to be, it was but one facet of their whole ministry, and Dr. Challis expressed the hope in his 1881 report that “some American lady may be sent to take the place.”\(^5\) In this simple statement he expressed the primary expectation and projected the pattern related to the WFMS missionaries that would soon follow. The missionaries of the WFMS, in fact, were deployed primarily in educational ministries, both for the establishment and the supervision of schools for girls and for the training of Bible Women. In 1882, the General Executive Committee of the WFMS approved the purchase of the Loftcha Girls’ Boarding School, but difficulties with the government delayed its official recognition. Linna Schenck arrived in November, 1884, to serve as principal of the school under the support of the Northwestern

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\(^3\) See Appendix A for a full listing of the names and vital information for each of these women.

\(^4\) Barclay and Copplestone, *History of Methodist Missions* 3:1028. DeWitt C. Challis (1845-1939), studied at the University of Michigan, became a member of the Detroit Conference, and was committed to mission work in Bulgaria in 1875 (The Minutes of the Eighty-fourth and final Session of the former Detroit Annual Conference, Michigan [June 21-23, 1939], 144). His second wife, Irene L. Shepherd, could only devote limited service to this endeavor due to her many responsibilities.

\(^5\) Twelfth Annual Report of the WFMS (1881), 53.
Branch of the WFMS. Challis reported that she “entered upon her duties with enthusiasm, giving several hours per day to the study of the language, and other hours to English teaching and general management of the school.”6 Once Schenck was in place, almost all of the reporting back to the WFMS revolved around the new institutions and the progress related to their educational endeavors.7 The remark of Frances Baker provides something of a window into the attitudes and the strategic vision of the day: “Miss Schenck did not expect to make teachers of all her pupils; some, she hopes, would make good wives and mothers.”8 The American ideology of domesticity still reigned and shaped the mission.

Linna Schenck was born in Fulton, New York, on July 23, 1846, entering mission service at 38 years of age.9 Raised in the Presbyterian Church, she transferred her allegiance to the MEC as a youth. In late life, after her return to the United States, a friend asked her why she became a missionary. “There were three influences,” she wrote in response, “letters from my missionary cousin in the Sandwich Islands, the influence of a dear sister who went to an early reward, and the reading of the Missionary Herald.”10 After only six years’ service in Bulgaria, she returned to Michigan on a health leave, never to return, dying in Grand Rapids in 1898. One can only conjecture that Fincham had been deployed to assist Schenck in her efforts to consolidate the work of this educational mission, both teaching and providing administrative assistance. As Schenck’s health deteriorated it would only have been natural for Fincham to assume more responsibilities related to the school. But no clear evidence remains to document the nature of her contribution; not even the most rudimentary aspects of her life story have been recovered.

Kate Blackburn was appointed in 1892 to replace the ailing Schenck.11 The report of Blackburn’s perilous journey to Loftcha—including days snowbound in Austria, quarantine in Rustchuk; a steamer trip through cold, fog, and floating ice; and final carriage drive of fifty miles—all made for exceptional reading in the 1893 annual report.12 She was born near Jacksonville, Illinois, on January 26, 1865. Her English father and American mother trained her in the doctrine and discipline of the MEC, of which she became a member at eleven years of age. The same year she graduated from Illinois Female College in her home town (1883), she became an ardent member of the WFMS. After a lengthy inner struggle, she gave herself to God for mis-

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6 Sixteenth Annual Report of the WFMS (1885), 49.
7 By 1889 the WFMS supported schools in Loftcha, Rustchuk, Sistof, Orchania, and Hotanza, all under the supervision of Schenck, with the support of Ella Fincham.
9 Methodist Archives, Drew University, Missionary Records, #60 ID 2021, from which all biographical information is drawn.
10 The Missionary Herald was the magazine voice piece of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission, established in 1821.
11 Methodist Archives, Drew University, Missionary Records, #21 ID 424, from which all biographical information is drawn.
12 Twenty-second Annual Report of the WFMS (1893), 73.
Methodist Women Missionaries in Bulgaria and Italy

sion service, entering the Chicago Training School under the direct teaching of Lucy Rider Meyer during 1890-91. Soon after Blackburn’s arrival in Bulgaria, Fincham returned home, leaving her with the entire responsibility of the school, the pastoral care of the community (in the absence of the pastor), and the supervision of the other schools as well. She shared this responsibility with Lydia Diem for many years, from the time of Lydia’s arrival in 1893 until her untimely death in 1911, not long after her wedding.

This relationship testifies to the fact of close collaboration between American and German-speaking Methodists in the expansion of these mission enterprises. Lydia Diem was born in Kassel, Germany, on July 14, 1871, the daughter of a German Methodist pastor. She had a vivid imagination, shaped no doubt by the beautiful areas in which she was privileged to live along the Rhine River near the Falls of Schaffhausen, by Lake Zurich in Constance, and in Lausanne, St. Gallen, and Basel. She was well trained in instrumental and choral music. Her sister, although not connected with the WFMS, later joined her in her appointment as a French and music teacher at the school in Loftcha.

Another colleague in ministry, Dora Davis, joined the work from the United States in 1900. She was born in Greencastle, Indiana, on January 4, 1868 and died in Tuolumne, California, on June 15, 1951. Her parents blended a Scotch-Irish and English ancestry. She was educated at Kalamazoo College and Albion College, receiving her degree from Albion in 1889. She served at Loftcha as a teacher and finally assistant principal. Blackburn and Davis both retired from mission service in 1926. A tribute to the thirty-four year ministry of Kate Blackburn in Bulgaria, published at the time of her death, speaks of her courage and perseverance: “Miss Blackburn faced loneliness, political disturbances, riotous uprisings and her own school problems, met each as it came, used all her resources of faith, courage and consecrated commonsense, and left results with God.”

Women Missionaries for Italy

The WFMS sent seven women missionaries to Italy in the parallel period between 1885 and 1902, whose work followed the same pattern as their counterparts in Bulgaria. Emma Hall was the first missionary of the WFMS

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14 Methodist Archives, Drew University, Missionary Records, #31 ID 788, from which all biographical information is drawn.
15 Methodist Archives, Drew University, Missionary Records, #30 ID 772, from which all biographical information is drawn.
17 See Appendix B for a full listing of the names and vital information for each of these women.
to serve in Italy. Having been appointed in 1885, she retired in 1900 after fifteen years of service. She spent six years as the only woman missionary until she was joined in 1891 by Martha Ellen Vickery. The longest serving missionary in Italy during this period, Vickery retired after twenty-nine years, in 1920. The only other appointment in the nineteenth century came in 1897, following another six-year hiatus, but Ida May Bowne terminated her service in 1903 with her marriage to Manfred Perry. The Society appointed four new women in the early years of the new century (1900-1902), despite the fact that only one of the women, Emma Hall, had retired from active service during that period. The average tenure for these women was thirteen years.

These women who served in Italy under the auspices of the WFMS, like their counterparts in Bulgaria, were highly educated. Their work, however, at least at the beginning, seemed to be more evenly divided between supervising the work of the Bible Women—which was much more extensive in Italy—and developing new educational institutions. Emma Hall was born in Madison County, New York, on November 30, 1849.18 Her father, a graduate of Wesleyan University, was a strong supporter of the abolitionist movement and inculcated a deep concern for justice in his children. Emma’s mother consecrated her to mission service at her baptism. A graduate of Cazenovia Seminary,19 she entered the first class of Michigan University that admitted women in 1870. She later completed her master’s degree in 1875. During a decade of teaching in the United States she experienced recurring dreams about being a missionary, applied to the Northwestern Branch of the WFMS and was accepted. When she arrived in Italy in 1885, work among women had been pioneered for a decade by the large circle of Bible Women.

Her first task was to enlist and train Sunday school teachers for whom she prepared weekly lessons that were published in the Methodist periodical.20 In October 1888, she established a Home and Orphanage in Rome in which nine or ten girls formed the nucleus of a genuine Christian family.21 Emily F. B. Vernon and her husband Leroy M. Vernon, the first MEC missionary to Italy, served for seventeen years in the Italian mission with primary responsibility for the establishment of the MEC in Rome. Emily may have been the most instrumental force behind the development of the first Bible Women in

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18 Methodist Archives, Drew University, Missionary Records, #38 ID 1067, from which all biographical information is drawn.
19 In 1825, the MEC established this pre-collegiate school in Cazenovia, New York, from which it took its name. It had close links with the mission work of the church. In 1839, the seminary initiated a three year course of study, particularly designed for the education of women. The seminary also developed a course of study for missionaries. See J. R. Greene, Generations of Excellence: An Illustrated History of Cazenovia Seminary and Cazenovia College (Syracuse: Syracuse Litho, 2000).
20 Barclay, History of Methodist Missions, 3:1048-49.
21 This school was later named after Mrs. E. P. Crandon. Barclay, History of Methodist Missions, 3: 1049.
Italy. For years, the Vernons and Hall had requested greater support from the WFMS for the more formal training of Bible Women. In 1889, therefore, the WFMS provided funds for Hall to board candidates for this purpose and to “prepare a course of study in the Bible” as part of their curriculum.

This directive would soon be eclipsed, however, by the reappraisal of the mission during these years. Representative of a new spirit in a new generation of missionaries, William Burt, the newly-appointed supervisor of the Italy mission, severely criticized the supervision of the mission, particularly shocked by the prevalence of smoking and drinking among the indigenous clergy. He reappraised the work and inaugurated what might be properly described as a purge. Hall was caught up inevitably in these developments, which not only affected the Bible Women under her supervision, but also entailed educational reforms within the wider connection. As a consequence, she invested more and more of her energy in the developing school system and less and less on the Bible Women. A new vision of “higher education” quickly mitigated what was considered by many to be a non-productive strategy of the past. In 1891, the WFMS sent Martha Ellen Vickery to assist Hall in her work, and she came with her own vision for the future.

Vickery was born in Evansville, Indiana, on November 22, 1866. Her education at DePauw University, from which she graduated in 1887, impressed upon her the importance of higher education, and she entered her work with a strong emphasis on the need of advanced education among women. She was convinced that this would be the key to the success of “evangelical Christianity” in Italy. She immediately published her impassioned appeal in her first report to the WFMS:

The power of the Romish Church is in the faith of their women. The crowd of earnest devotees is composed largely of the peasant women and ignorant people. Very rarely do you see a man among the worshipers, or an intelligent looking woman. The government free schools in Rome are very good, and all, even the University, are open to girls. Still, owing to prejudices of co-education—much stronger than ever existed in America—they are sent to the convent schools.

On May 10, 1894, during the Italian Conference session, Bishop John P. Newman dedicated the new school and applauded the work and vision:

May 10th was “Woman’s Day in Rome,” crowning the generous efforts of the W.F.M.S. of our church . . . . Near the traditional sight of St. Peter’s crucifixion, not far from the tomb of Tasso, between the City Hospital and the Italian Academy [sic] of Fine Arts, of which the Pope is president, and within sight of the Vatican, is located this valuable property, with its spacious building and ample grounds, the Girls’ School of Methodism, so long under the fostering care of Miss Hall, and now

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23 William Burt (1852-1936), born in England, emigrated with his family to the US, studied at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, and at Drew Theological School in Madison, New Jersey. He served at churches in Brooklyn before being transferred to the Italy Annual Conference in 1886. In 1888, he became superintendent of the Italy Mission. In 1904, Burt was elected a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church and appointed resident Bishop of Europe.
24 Twenty-third Annual Report of the WFMS (1892), 81.
in her absence honored with the supervision of Miss Vickery. There forty Italian girls are educated for the Lord, from whose womanhood shall issue holy influences on their native land.25

We have found little evidence concerning the work of Ida May Bowne who arrived in 1897. When Hall returned to the United States in 1900, of the four women sent out to replace her, Alice Llewellyn, the daughter of a prominent Welsh family, born in Mt. Carmel, Pennsylvania, on June 7, 1865, became the longtime friend and collaborator with Vickery.26 They would work together for nearly twenty years in the administration of Crandon Institute in Rome, one of the centers of higher education founded by Vickery. The Italian Protestant paper paid tribute to Llewellyn at the time of her death in 1927.

The teachers, the pupils of Candon Institute, the families of the pupils, felt for her great deference, admiration, affection, because love begets love . . . . Her heart was a temple erected to the Divine Master; now it is silent, but the angels sing in heaven, and here on earth the faithful are grateful, blessing her for the work that she has accomplished in the name of God and for the uplifting of her neighbors.27

These later WFMS missionaries were singularly devoted to the education of girls and women, pouring their hearts and souls into this strategy for mission.

The context, into which these missionaries were thrust, as well as the changing theories of mission during this period, shaped their attitudes about their vocation. In addition to these external factors, however, the internal concerns of the mission and the interrelationships of the women reveal a fascinating dynamic within the missionary community.

Complex Contextual Dynamics

The women missionaries in Bulgaria and Italy, in these very early stages, faced typical contextual challenges including misunderstanding, resistance, isolation, and even persecution. Expatriate missionaries, limited in number and also poorly prepared to deal with the cultural diversity they would encounter in an alien context, were pushed to their limits. Bulgaria and Italy presented unique challenges. The first Methodist mission efforts coincided with extreme political as well as social and confessional turmoil—in every case interwoven with each other and difficult to understand at that time. As an illustration of this complex tapestry of influences and historic developments, Ueli Frei has demonstrated how the new translation of the Bible in Bulgaria became a symbol of national identity and created a common lan-

26 We have only been able to collect the most rudimentary information concerning Laurea E. Beazell, Evaline A. Odgers, and Edith T. Swift. Information for Llewellyn has been drawn from Methodist Archives, Drew University, Missionary Records, #49 ID 1508.
guage for Bulgarians in a time of national rebirth.\(^\text{28}\)

These circumstances in and of themselves would have been enough to provide the impetus for mission boards to send missionary couples in the earliest pioneering stage of the work with the intention to support renewal. But the dominant mission theory of the antebellum period also supported this strategy. So men and their spouses were sent “two by two,” as it were, into fairly complex dynamics. Italy had just faced a revolution in 1848/-1849 with the abolition of the temporal authority of the Pope, restriction of Vatican City State, and union of a highly fractured Italy under the rule of King Victor Emmanuel I. Bulgaria was embroiled in a political process leading to independence from the Ottoman Empire. This struggle for political liberation brought nearly a half millennium of foreign rule to an end but witnessed a quarter century of war during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Simultaneously, other power blocks began to play a role in the politics of the Balkan Peninsula; regardless, by 1878 a constitutional monarchy was established in Bulgaria.

In both countries, the established Churches, defending their “canonical rights” as state churches—the only churches authorized and permitted to care for the religious life of the country—were deeply involved in all these struggles. In Bulgaria, the Orthodox Church found itself defending national independence at the same time it fought for the right of its own religious domination. In Italy, a Roman Catholic Church that had lost its original power sought to reassert its primacy under Pope Leo XIII. In light of all these social and political complexities, to say nothing of the brokering for power that dominated this era, opposition to the various Protestant missions was bound to occur.

In both contexts the Methodist (Protestant) mission was viewed as a foreign “sect” and unsolicited intruder—not least suspect because of a different cultural ambiance in a time of national and ethnic resurgence. The statement of Rev. T. Constantine, a minister in Sistov, about the difficulties of Methodist work in Europe reflects the suspicion and mistrust in the minds of many:

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\text{[The] difficulty is the spirit of suspicion that the missionaries are political agents of Great Britain or America whose object is to prepare the people of the country by making them Protestants to accept the supremacy of the Protestant States, when they see their convenience to invade this territory which they consider to be the envy of the world, and which they poetically describe as being—“Bulgaria land of paradise” . . . . they think that it is patriotism to remain in the Orthodox Church and treason to become a Protestant. They cannot see why Protestant countries should have any care about the spiritual welfare of other nations unless they had some ulterior objects}\]

\(^{28}\) See Ueli Frei, *Der Methodimus in Bulgarien, 1857-1989/90* (Frankfurt am Main: Medienwerk der Evangelisch-methodistischen Kirche 2012), 68. Along these same lines, Mojzes cites a publication of Charles F. Morse, a missionary in Bulgaria of the ABCFM: “They had been bought not to read it [the Bible] but to own it as a sign of loyalty and patriotism, and as a magic thing whereby to drive away bad spirits and assure God’s goodwill” (Paul Benjamin Mojzes, *A History of the Congregational and Methodist Churches in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia*, [Ph.D.Dissertation, Boston University, 1965], 59).
This contextual dynamic made the work of the indigenous Bible Women all the more critical. Being both inside these issues by virtue of heritage and birth, but also outside them by virtue of gender, status, and role, gave these women a unique space to inhabit in the missionary movement. While the Bible Women had this advantage, with the attendant difficulties nonetheless, one can only imagine the challenges faced by American women or women from other Western contexts. The experience of missionary wives in this inaugural period of mission activity contrasted somewhat dramatically with the experience of WFMS single women missionaries who, though still pioneers, entered the drama of mission service in the 1880s.

The Shifting Missiological Terrain

In an incisive analysis of the way in which the WFMS created a sphere for single women, Rosemary Skinner Keller observed:

The W.F.M.S. was created not only to liberate women in non-Christian lands from the bondage and subordination to which custom and religion had subjected them, but to provide outlets for the energy, ability, and leadership of American women in missionary societies, since such avenues were closed to them in the existing structures of the church . . . . they were highly cultured and well-trained women, who needed a sphere in which to express their own commitment to the church and to develop leadership ability.30

The deployment of Linna Schenk to Bulgaria in 1884 and Emma Hall to Italy in 1885, and a cadre of WFMS colleagues before the turn of the century, illustrates at least three significant shifts in mission theory and practice at that time.31 The experience of women in the Methodist mission community of these two nations—case studies, as it were, in a changing missiological landscape—reflects trends that would reshape mission in the early twentieth century.

First, female mission societies began to deploy single women to augment the labor of missionary wives. This shift was dramatic and pervasive. It reflects the same change that Christ-An Bennett noted with regard to British Wesleyan Methodist mission in other spheres during this same period:

As their families and their husbands’ work expanded, these missionaries’ wives began to feel torn between their commitment to their families and their commitment to their out-of-home ministries. They found they could no longer do justice to their

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29 Minutes of the Second European Methodist Episcopal Church Congress, held in Zürich, Switzerland, from September 17th to 21st 1903 (Zürich: Christliche Vereinsbuchhandlung, 1903), 51.
31 R. Pierce Beaver, American Protestant Women in World Mission (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1969), deals with these changes in mission theory, but the most definitive study on this topic as it relates to women missionaries is Dana L. Robert, American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice (Macon: Mercer UP, 1997).
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Single women were needed to sustain and expand the ministries of missionary wives whose domestic responsibilities consumed increasing amounts of their time and energy. “By 1890,” as Dana Robert has noted, “the infusion of single women meant that women constituted sixty percent of the American mission force.” While the concept of “Woman’s Work for Woman” had guided the work of missionary wives early in the nineteenth century, new attitudes about mission established a new trajectory for this work. “For ‘heathen’ women,” Robert argues, “evangelization was intertwined with ‘civilization,’ with being elevated by Christianity into social equality with western women and into positions of respect in their own societies.” This change of goal, embraced by the new generation of single women missionaries, interfaced seamlessly with a second shift in method.

Secondly, the focus of the WFMS missionaries shifted from evangelistic to educational endeavors. In the earliest stages of their activity, the missionaries viewed these practices in a symbiotic fashion. Evangelism was distinct but not separate from education. But with the arrival of the single women in a second wave of mission activity, the energy that had been poured into the preparation of indigenous Bible Women for evangelistic ministries was diverted to the education of girls and women for other purposes. “Most importantly for the overall mission of the church,” as Dana Robert has observed with regard to the motivation of this new class of missionaries, their hope was that “the education of women would subvert the very foundations of ‘heathen’ society and would catalyze the profound social changes needed to accompany broad conversion to Christianity.” An effort to transform the culture through education began to supplant a strategy that had elevated the importance of individual conversion. Certainly, this change of method or strategy interfaced directly with changing attitudes about culture and the purpose of mission.

So thirdly, a close examination of late nineteenth-century developments reflects a growing sense of cultural imperialism and a concomitant distrust

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33 Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 130. This view was based in large measure “on the materialistic, albeit idealistic, belief that non-Christian religions trapped and degraded women, yet all women in the world were sisters and should support each other” (134).

of indigeneity. 35 “Many missionary women,” Dana Robert has also demonstrated definitively, “also shared the crusading optimism and sense of superiority of their fellow citizens during the height of western imperialism from approximately 1885 to the end of the First World War.” 36 In his well-known exploration of mission history, Rufus Anderson (1796-1880), a near contemporary to all these events, actually drew attention to the monumental change of attitude associated with this shift that some were beginning to make toward the end of this life. Earlier mission strategy stressed the establishment of native churches under indigenous control (the three-self policy) and trusted the power of the Christian faith to transform individual lives, thereby avoiding the dangers of cultural imperialism. 37 Ann White has argued further that when these new women in mission placed a philosophy of social transformation at the center of their missional vision, they “became as vulnerable as the rest of the American missionary enterprise to charges of cultural imperialism.” 38 These trends exerted a profound influence upon the vision and practice of the WFMS missionaries in Bulgaria and Italy, a consequence in large measure due to their training.

Women Prepared for Educational Ministries

Shaped by the changes in women’s education in America and schooled in the nascent training centers for mission service, the attitudes and educational practices of the women sent to serve in Bulgaria and Italy naturally reflected the values and vision inculcated by their mentors. The motivation that led women into this training and service for these European contexts also exerted its own influence on their lives, attitudes, and practices.

Female seminaries throughout the course of the nineteenth century ed-

35 Perhaps no event illustrates this watershed in mission theory during the 1880s better than the so-called Berlin conference of 1884-85. With the intent of regulating European colonization and trade in Africa, this conference ushered in the era of a new imperialism. The General Act of the Berlin Conference, the final document produced by the European participants, formalized the “scramble for Africa.” One of its primary consequences was the undoing and elimination of African autonomy and self-governance. This spirit of cultural imperialism was endemic to the age. See M. E. Chamberlain, The Scramble for Africa (Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1974).
36 Robert, American Women in Mission, 135. Robert draws upon the work of William Hutchinson and Toben Christensen to demonstrate how “the emphasis on social change toward western norms, couched in the language of helping to bring about God’s kingdom on earth, made ‘Woman’s Work for Woman’ a partner with the myths of western superiority so prominent during the late nineteenth century” (135).
ucated young women especially to teach. Many of the ideas related to women in mission, as well as the attitudes about the education of women in the global context, found initial expression in these centers of learning. The seminaries existed to prepare women for “usefulness,” defined primarily in terms of building the kingdom of God on earth. In this project, women were being given and took the initiative to assume a role equal to their male counterparts. In these seminaries women first conceived their education and that of other women as “a means of world regeneration.” While rooted, in some ways, and emanating from the “cult of domesticity,” the provision of a broad liberal education for women also helped them, in an ironic fashion, to transcend an exclusively domestic frame of reference. As Leonard Sweet has concluded: “Seminaries trained women not for public positions of authority but for private positions of influence.”

The birth of the WFMS immediately following the American Civil War coincided with another educational innovation related to women, the inauguration of the mission training school. “Intended primarily for lay people, and most of them for women,” as Virginia Brereton demonstrated, “these schools emphasized the acquisition of skills and practical experience, particularly in the areas of Bible teaching and missions.” These institutions immersed their students in the study of the Bible. Although their programs were of short duration—students typically receiving instruction in these schools for no more than two years—these schools provided an education that was intense, practical, and missional in nature. According to Brereton, “their most important objectives were to promote knowledge of the English Bible, provide a high proportion of practical subjects, and expose their students to varied forms of religious work by sending them outside the schools.”

The purpose of the study of the Bible in particular, she argued, was to guide the student in her approach to non-Christian religious practitioners and to learn, quite simply, how to teach the Bible. No school had a greater impact on the Methodist women missionaries, according to Dana Robert, among others, between 1840 and 1870. The establishment of female seminaries in the 1840s under the leadership of Mary Lyon and her five-fold vision of women’s education in the areas of basic Christian principles, benevolence, intellectual achievement, good habits of living (“physical culture”), and “social and domestic character” (American Women in Mission, 96).


Brereton, “Preparing Women,” 178, 188.
than the Chicago Training School under the direction of Lucy Rider Meyer. The concept of God’s call to mission dominated conversations within the newly-established network of WFMS branches, the primary purpose of which was the recruitment of young women.

“The call” remained the primary motivation for mission service throughout the course of the nineteenth century. According to Dana Robert, the overall bias of those who approved women for missionary service was in the direction of candidates “who could point with certainty to their conversion, calling to missions, and experience of the Holy Ghost.” Wendy Deichman has identified their sense of vocation—a critical call that propelled single women into mission—as one of eight “interrelated ministerial characteristics” that were both desired and cultivated at one of the earliest training schools. Among the other motivating factors that drew women into this new sphere were the desires to participate in the cultivation of God’s kingdom, to learn ministry by doing it, and to teach others the story of salvation. Add to these the virtues of courage, intelligence, gentleness, and a general capacity to lead, and you have a pretty clear and compelling portrait of the ideal woman missionary. According to Lydia Hoyle, on the basis of her examination of the correspondence of women seeking mission appointments, “a desire for usefulness, a sense of calling, and a concern for the souls of the heathen were the primary motivating factors mentioned by the missionary candidates.” Kate Blackburn and Ellen Vickery closely resembled this portrait.

Kate Blackburn and Ellen Vickery: The Passing of the Baton

During the earliest phase of mission work in Bulgaria and Italy, the educational program fell under the jurisdiction of the early missionary wives, Irene Challis and Emily Vernon, respectively and in particular. From the outset, these women managed this work because they were the ones who had access to women. They met women at the market place, visited them in their homes, and connected as mothers. Bible Women, having been trained at mission schools of the ABCFM initially, and then later in those under the auspices of the MEC and WFMS, supported the work of the missionaries’ wives, particularly in the arena of evangelism. An intimacy of fellowship and mutual support characterized their working relationship.

Increasingly, the Bible Women found themselves on the “front line” of

45 Deichman, “Domesticity with a Difference,” 151. Within the Methodist tradition, these women had to be single. If they married, they lost their appointment under the WFMS. If they married a minister, they became the “wife of a missionary” under the supervision of the mission board if their husband was under the appointment of the board.
mission, as it were, while the missionaries provided the necessary support systems behind the scenes. The missionary wives provided and regulated education; the Bible Women engaged directly in evangelization. So when the single women missionaries of the WFMS arrived on the scene in the 1880s, they found it necessary to navigate two primary and fairly well-established networks of women—missionary wives and Bible Women.

The arrival of the WFMS missionaries, however, coincided with fairly monumental changes in mission theory and practice, and they had been prepared through their own education to conceive their ministry with a different trajectory in mind from that of their incumbent counterparts. Even if the dialectical elements of the missional vision were never intended as bifurcations, and changes of emphasis only, these changes profoundly affected the missions in both Bulgaria and Italy. The “second wave” women came with the goals of transforming the world rather than converting individuals to the Christian faith, of liberating women from the constraints of an oppressive culture/religion rather than elevating the souls of the heathen, and of consolidating the work of newly established institutions rather than relying on the power of personal connection and appeal. While oversimplified, the shift from evangelism to education, from conversation to institution, from Christian witness to transformer of culture became increasingly apparent in these women. How would the new generation of female missionaries relate to the missionary wives and the Bible Women, or would they even really need to? Kate Blackburn and Ellen Vickery provide something of a window through which to peer with regard to these unfolding relationships in the mission field.

Both Blackburn and Vickery were highly educated women, as we have seen. Having received her initial training at a well-known female seminary in her home town, Blackburn entered the newly-established Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions in 1890 and became the immediate protégé of the founder, Lucy Rider Meyer. Upon completion of her studies there, the WFMS appointed her to the Bulgarian mission, where she served for thirty-four years. Her reports reflect the passion for education that her mentor had planted in her heart.

Ellen Vickery’s service in Italy was essentially concomitant. Having arrived at her station in 1891, she retired twenty-nine years later, the longest serving missionary in Italy during this period. In 1867, Indiana Asbury University admitted its first female students, in part due to the heavy losses of young men from Indiana in the Civil War, but also on account of the leadership of Methodists in women’s education. By the time Vickery graduated twenty years later, her alma mater had transitioned to DePauw University, one of the great flagship institutions of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The curriculum stressed the importance of higher education in the global Christian crusade and strongly encouraged its students to consider Christian vocations in ministry and mission. It was only natural for her to enter her work under the WFMS in 1891 with a strong emphasis on the need of ad-
vanced education among women.\(^{47}\) She was convinced that this would be the key to the success of genuine Christianity in Italy and that women educated in their schools would transform their world.

When Blackburn and Vickery arrived in their respective missions, the new policies that had been put in place by those superintending the Methodist work—men like William Burt, for example—had already led to the marginalization of indigenous Bible Women. After 1890, Bible Women essentially disappear from the records and reports of the WFMS in Bulgaria. In Italy, Burt’s “purge” provides dramatic evidence of their decline. Only six Bible Women were still active in 1889, three in 1891, one year after Vickery arrived, and only two in 1895. The actions of those in leadership ended their era and their influence by the turn of the century. So there was little interaction between these two long-tenured second wave missionaries and those who had done so much to lay the foundation for Methodist mission in both these contexts. Likewise, their relationship with the missionaries’ wives was really characterized by nothing more than their reaching for the baton extended by their retiring colleagues. Irene Challis returned to the United States with her husband in 1888, after about twelve years’ service in Bulgaria. As far as we can tell from the records, she never met Kate Blackburn. Emily Vernon and her husband left Italy in disgust, having dedicated their lives to a three-self vision of the church that was being undermined by his successor, William Burt. Having built a strong foundation for the church upon the indefatigable labor of indigenous Bible Women, whom Vernon held in high esteem, both she and her husband’s hopes were dashed by the policies of the new regime. They resigned under duress and with not a little heartache. By the time Vickery arrived in 1891, the new policies were firmly entrenched, and there is no evidence that she opposed them in any way.

The nature of the ministry of a Blackburn and a Vickery lies outside the parameters of this study. Much more research needs to be conducted to determine with any level of certainty how their attitudes or theory of mission was shaped by the many years they lived and worked in these difficulty contexts. We can hope that the sentiments of Barbara Welter might just be true:

> The ethnocentric attitude and national and religious absolutism of these men and women cannot be denied. In almost every case, however, if they remained in the field any length of time, there was identification with and sympathy for some aspects of the host culture. Missionaries were far more sensitive to the societies in which they worked than is generally believed.\(^{48}\)

“The lady missionary,” claimed Elaine Magalis in a similar vein, “wanted to change the world, but found the relation could only be reciprocal; the world

\(^{47}\) See her report, for example, in Twenty-third Annual Report of the WFMS (1892), 81.

Having discovered a rich legacy in the stories of Bulgarian and Italian Bible Women, of missionaries’ wives, and of the “second wave” single women missionaries of the WFMS, we are left with as many questions as answers, and know that there is much more to these stories than these initial explorations have revealed. With regard to this last group, we can say without any question that these were extremely intelligent women, deeply committed to Christ, who were also captive in many ways to the currents of culture that shaped their age. Can we say anything different about ourselves? So our admiration, respect, and esteem for these women is mingled with a sense of critical awareness only made possible by our vantage point. What is abundantly clear to us is that these are women well worth knowing—well worth knowing much better.

49 Elaine Magalis, *Conduct Becoming to a Woman: Bolted Doors and Burgeoning Missions* (New York: Women’s Division, Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1973), 75.

50 Among the many unfinished tasks associated with this research: the several topics we have identified include the role of the deaconess movement in all these developments, the actual day-to-day nature of the missionaries’ activities, the issue of self-reflection and personal transformation around the concerns of mission theory and practice, the tension between various Christian traditions in the context of mission, the “women’s sphere” or “domesticity” paradigms as helpful heuristic models to interpret developments in mission related to the female missionary, and the ongoing work of women missionaries in Europe into the twentieth century.
## Appendix A
WFMS Missionaries in Bulgaria
1884-1906

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Appointment Year</th>
<th>Resignation / Retirement Year</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schenck, Linna</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>† 1898</td>
<td>#60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fincham, Ella E.</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td></td>
<td>R 1897</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate B. Blackburn</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>retired (r) 1926</td>
<td>† 1936</td>
<td>#21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia Diem</td>
<td>1893</td>
<td>married (m) 1911 (Wenzel)</td>
<td>† 1911</td>
<td>#31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dora Davis</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>R 1926</td>
<td></td>
<td>#30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith Burt</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td></td>
<td>daughter of missionaries</td>
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</tr>
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## Appendix B
WFMS Missionaries in Italy
1885-1902

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Appointment Year</th>
<th>Resignation / Retirement Year</th>
<th>Note</th>
<th>ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Emma M. Hall</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Resigned (R) 1900</td>
<td></td>
<td>#38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Ellen Vickery</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>R 1920</td>
<td>† 1936</td>
<td>#69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida May Bowne</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>married (m) 1903 (Manfred Perry)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurea E. Beazell</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>m 1906 (Andreas)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaline A. Odgers</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>R 1908</td>
<td></td>
<td>#54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice A. Llewellyn</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>retired (r) 1919</td>
<td>† 1927</td>
<td>#49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith T. Swift</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>R 1914</td>
<td></td>
<td>#66</td>
</tr>
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