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Liberating Domesticity

Women and the Home in Orthodox Judaism and Latin American Pentecostalism

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Abstract

Mainstream feminism has for decades asserted that women's empowerment requires a radical readjustment of society. Not surprisingly, this view largely disregards empowerment claims made by women in traditional religious systems. In the case of North American Orthodox Judaism, women's empowerment tends to be spiritual, finding in traditional gender roles a psycho-spiritual antidote to the drudgery of everyday life. In Latin American Pentecostalism, on the other hand, empowerment is more practical, as a woman's (and thus her family's) embrace of the religion often leads to increased familial and economic stability. As such, these "liberating traditions" present the private sphere as a legitimate location for women's emancipation, a reality often lost in the public-centered focus of the contemporary West.

Introduction

[1] Many scholars and activists insist that women's liberation – in the United States and abroad – requires radical reassessment of established social norms and a progressive restructuring of society based on choice, autonomy, and "de-genderization." In this framework, challenging the historically dominating male demands aggressive, comprehensive change. Without it, "little advances," such as access to employment and education, are often considered illusory distractions from the larger issue. If improvements come without thoroughgoing reevaluation of gender roles and societal expectations, what emerges is false – or at least incomplete – improvement of women's status.

[2] Traditional religion is chief among the barriers to this feminist dream of social reformulation. Seemingly preoccupied with order, structure, and boundaries, traditional

religious systems view social divisions and hierarchies as predetermined realities. In the area of gender, specific roles – familial, ritual, communal, and otherwise – are believed natural to men and women; rigid separation derives from divine decree. As Marcus J. Borg states regarding the religious origin of social power in the West, "Not only is God the lawgiver from whom the society's structures of order come (its laws, practices, and institutions), as well as the judge who enforces them, God is also legitimator of the king's position at the top of the hierarchical social order centered in Jerusalem" (62). From this ancient justification of kingship emerged centuries of similarly ordained social gradations, typically with male elites at the top, and a chain of society extending downward toward the lowermost classes.

[3] This legitimating function of religion is evident across borders and cultures. Just as religion is an indelible part of human society, religion's organizational impulse is pronounced throughout the globe. Even in the increasingly secular West, the legacy of socio-religious order is felt in all facets of life (Christiano, Kivisto, and Swatos: 64). For better or worse, then, the outcome of the West's religious roots is a dualistic understanding of the universe– good and evil, light and darkness – and of human society – ruler and subject, male and female.

[4] As these dichotomous categories permeate human society, the enculturation of males and females into specific roles is, by and large, an inevitable process. To many critics, the gendered division of human society – however extreme or subdued its incarnation – is a negative reality inspired by religious notions and carried out by male authorities, both macro (e.g., heads of state) and micro (e.g., husband). Power imbalance between the sexes appears deeply woven into the social fabric. In the famous words of Mary Daly, "When God is male, the male is God" (19).

[5] Stemming from this broad critique of religion is a clear distrust (and oftentimes fear) of religious ideologies that support gender stratification. To be sure, feminism is far from monolithic (Ahmed; McGrory and Basu; Bulbeck), though most feminists assume gender division is synonymous with the elevation of men and subjugation of women. Division implies inequality; "separate but equal" is ruled impossible. Social scientists declare that both "men and women are constrained by their cultural training, stereotypes, and expectations" (Kottak: 333). Others maintain that gender itself is merely a social construct – an "accomplishment" rather than a "disposition" (Butler: 134)

[6] Within some feminist circles, a consequence of this negative analysis has been overt opposition to traditionalism. Traditional systems – those that uphold strict social boundaries, both in the public and private spheres – are believed the natural enemy of radical individualism; tradition blocks the desired emancipation from the "old fashioned" confines of gender. In this sweeping appraisal of society, there is little room for women who find empowerment within the limits of gender division.

[7] This is particularly true of women in so-called fundamentalist religious systems – women who may embrace their given roles or find happiness in domesticity. Even those women who have found ways to bolster their status within home or community are widely seen as misguided. Their liberation – however sincerely felt – is generally ignored, belittled, or dismissed (Coppock, Haydon, and Richter; Afshar and Barrientos). It is here, then, that we

see mainstream feminism's own dualistic understanding of the world: traditional is bad, progressive is good.

[8] Typical of this perspective is the feminist support of subversive religious movements – those that challenge the status quo and act as radical modes of social resistance. These politically liberal religious bodies are praised as beacons of hope amidst the darkness of intolerant religion. To the extent that they comply with the feminist agenda of social change, these organizations are supported – not because they are religious, *per se*, but because they are deemed progressive. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for instance, links women's empowerment, environmentalism, and socio-economic advancement to these emerging religious movements:

> Religious inspiration motivates women to resist and to create alternatives. Generally this does not flow from the dominant institutional expressions of the religion, but from small alternative networks that are often critical of the dominant tradition, yet also envision a liberating rereading of it. Thus, in the examples of movements in South America, members of religious orders inspired by liberation theology helped create cooperatives. Women inspired by feminist rereading of Catholicism created the CFD-CDD networks. In India popular spirituality that venerates the river as divine mother strengthens the resolve of women not to sell their land and water (159).

[9] It should follow, then, that women's empowerment within traditional religion is impossible. Women entrenched in such "backward" movements are seemingly doomed to a life of dreadful domesticity and secondary status. Traditional religion and resistance are believed incompatible. Only those religions outside of normative constraints are capable of inspiring true improvement.

[10] In this uncompromising outlook, exceptions to the rule are generally ignored. As such, even the most adamant spokeswomen for the liberating potential of traditional religion are sometimes criticized as supporters of patriarchy. Nevertheless, two contemporary examples challenge the anti-traditionalist assertion of western feminism: Latin American Pentecostalism and North American Orthodox Judaism. These traditions – one third world and the other post-industrial – illustrate the potential for empowerment within so-called fundamentalist worldviews, providing pathways – both social and interpersonal – for the improvement of women's lot.

[11] In the analysis that follows, women's activity within these traditions will be compared. As alternatives to the notion that women's improved status is only possible within a progressive framework, the non-liberal systems of Pentecostalism and Orthodox Judaism suggest a sobering reality: the movement toward women's equality is not monolithic. Within these traditions, strategic conversion and the self-motivated embrace of traditional gender roles suggest the feasibility of women's liberation within rigid and high-demand religious systems. Likewise, these "liberating traditions" present the private sphere as a legitimate location for women's emancipation, a reality often lost in the public-centered focus of the contemporary West. In short, the rational choices of traditional women express an unlikely option: liberating domesticity.

The Importance of Context

[12] Western feminism offers a universal prescription for improving women's status (Mahmood: 10). Having diagnosed women worldwide as subordinate, marginal, and oppressed, feminism operates upon a necessary construct: the universal woman. Such a monolithic category, while acknowledging rightfully the global imbalance between women and men, tends to overlook important social subcategories, such as ethnicity, race, and class. Without full appreciation of these crucial details, there is a tendency to seek a blanket solution – namely, the construction of a society based on secular-individual human rights and autonomous choice.

[13] Not surprisingly, such a utopian ideal – however appealing – has been criticized as western-specific – better suited for the cultural heritage of the West than for non-western (or non-liberal) locales. Those who wish to improve the status of women without sacrificing the uniqueness of their own culture view this sweeping feminist remedy with skepticism. Women in a variety of geographic settings look upon western feminism with suspicion, uneasy about its perceived elitism and anti-traditionalism (Basu; Mikell). Those who advocate women's empowerment within the boundaries of age-old social norms object to the radical individualism of mainstream feminism. To them, family-centeredness, gender roles, religiosity, etc., are not necessarily barriers to equality, but can, if purified of patriarchy, be avenues of emancipation. Some individuals seeking the empowerment of women are not anxious to appropriate the ideals and expectations of the progressive West.

[14] Yet even as these activists wish to define the terms of their own improvement, their struggle is pushed under the umbrella of "feminism," a term many believe implies western values and objectives. Intentionally broad, "feminism" is applied to any and all movements that work toward gender equality. Scholars Myra Marx Ferre and Barbara Risman, for example, have defined feminist action as "that in which the participants explicitly place value on challenging gender hierarchy and changing women's status, whether they adopt or reject the feminist label" (1155). As such, even those uneasy with the term are sometimes dubbed "de facto feminists" (Misciagno).

[15] While on its surface this appears a matter of semantics, the "feminist" label does have built-in assumptions, most importantly a preference for individualism. As an ideology developed and defined in the West, feminism – while meant to include the wide spectrum of women's movements – is indelibly linked to a specific agenda. At the same time, however, the all-encompassing nature of mainstream feminism allows for both western and non-western women's movements to be grouped together, regardless of divergent ideologies or agendas. Thus, as much as these groups try to define themselves against the westernness of feminism, their mission to better the lives of women is often viewed as implicitly feminist, whether they agree with the term or not (Misciagno; Moghadam).

[16] Still, mainstream feminists are not always eager to accept divergent empowerment claims. Indeed, many consider naïve or uniformed those women who are skeptical of feminist prescriptions (Aguilar). Modes of empowerment that fall short of radical social change are often understood as incomplete. Anything less than a re-configuration of society is seen as an ineffective band-aid – a temporary and superficial solution for a deep social wound.

[17] To many scholars, improved status for women achieved without challenge to the status quo is not legitimate empowerment. Delia Aguilar, for instance, is critical of "academicians who are inclined to depict women as empowered agents posing resistance in multiple sites within the globe" (407). Aguilar and others doubt the veracity of such empowerment claims. Particularly in the developing world, moments of self-described resistance or liberation are seen as fleeting or even delusional. The limited independence of Asian domestic workers and the exterior toughness of African militia women, for example, are widely dismissed as false emancipation (Aguilar; Hale). Instead, "true liberation" of women can only come with pre-determined feminist macro-solutions, such as "proposals for an alternative to capitalist globalization that is grounded in human rights" (Mohgadam: 19).

[18] One result of this understanding is that the plight of women in myriad (and even contradictory) social locations – poor and wealthy, disenfranchised and elite, majority and minority – is conflated into a master-narrative. The "big picture" approach to women's issues is often at odds with micro-strategies for combating oppressions – solutions suited for women in specific social situations. The universal feminist mantra of "down with patriarchy," so popular in the West, has led to the inevitable blurring of social contexts, and the assumption that women form a coherent group suffering collectively the global burden of gender inequality. Ironically, this presumption has produced inequities of its own, as condescension has been leveled toward women skeptical of (or unimpressed by) the feminist cure. Nowhere is this internal feminist debate more visible than with the issue of so-called third world women.

[19] Chandra Mohanty suggests that a central problem within contemporary feminism is its binary understanding of the world: women of the Third World are oppressed and exploited, while the women of the West are liberated and progressive (1997). Coinciding with this perception is the image of the universally dominating man, and his counterpart, the dominated woman. Mohanty and others argue that, in such a framework, the unique concerns within specific world communities are secondary to the grand western feminist agenda. Many social scientists claim transparent universalism, while the self-understanding of "ordinary people" is deemed "a poor approximation of their reality" (Mahmood: 16). There is disagreement regarding the notion that the West can dictate what is good for the Third World (Mohanty, Russo, and Torres).

[20] To be sure, the blurring of cultural specifics – race, ethnicity, class – has fueled the conception of monolithic global patriarchy and its ineradicable subjugation of women. Binary archetypes have influenced generations of activists: men with power, women without prestige; free-ranging males, silently suffering females; dominant men, submissive women. As Mohanty observes, many western progressives perceive "women as an already constructed group, one which has been labeled 'powerless', 'exploited', 'sexually harassed', etc., by feminist, scientific, economic, legal and socioeconomic discourses" (81). She and others are critical of this simplistic formulation, seeing such an all-encompassing understanding of women's plight as a barrier to practical, contextualized solutions.

[21] In recent years, a growing number of feminists have pursued a more nuanced evaluation, insisting that the cross-cultural analysis of women must carefully consider culture and context. The issue, then, is not whether women's oppression is a pressing concern – a

fact widely established in the social sciences – but whether the only solution to such oppression is the radical rearrangement of the world.

Scholar-Practitioner Discord

[22] Jay M. Harris bemoans the hostility with which post-enlightenment scholars view traditional Judaism:

> By treating the opponents of modernity as know-nothing bigots, we justify ourselves, a priori, in rejecting their fundamental critique of modern life. In particular, we ignore their criticism of the modern movement away from communitarian identities that is at the heart of many so-called Jewish fundamentalisms. We remember well the oppression that can result from such communitarian identities – the loss of individual freedom, the mindless violence – and yet we ignore the fact that we have replaced it with the tensions of individualist and statist identities, whose realization has hardly been free of oppression and violence. What seem particularly disturbing to us about "fundamentalist" movements is their total rejection of pluralism, their absence of respect for cultural or religious difference, and their denial of an individual's right to flee from his or her cultural heritage (139-40).

[23] This preference for individualism dominates contemporary understandings of gender and women's rights. In the modern (and post-modern) world, individual women and men are viewed against each other; individuals are measured in terms of their economic, political, and social standing. In rabbinic Judaism and fundamentalist Christianity, however, the communal quality of life and moral authority of tradition are held above individual preferences or concerns (Falk: 130). In contrast to the radical individualism of the modern West, community and family expectations – including social hierarchies, gender stratification, and divisions of the public and private spheres – characterize traditionalist systems.

[24] For the scholar standing outside such a rigid system, it is easy to level *ad hominem* attacks. Non-liberal religious ideologies are viewed as out-dated, brash, insensitive, and sexist. The societal expectations of the past are seen by the de-traditionalized West as outmoded roadblocks to autonomy. Traditional-preservationist religions conflict with the rational-secular predilection of modern times. As these religious systems accept patriarchal assumptions – or, "cultural constructs and structural relations that privilege the initiative of males and elders in directing the lives of others" (Joseph: 12) – they are deemed a threat to modern conceptions of self-determination. Individualism and the separate selfhood of men and women are not paramount within these fundamentalist systems, where "family or community is valued more highly than the person" (Joseph: 13).

[25] Harris suggests that the very label "fundamentalist" – often a derogatory designation – stems from the West's understanding of proper and improper modes of living: "all such categories depend on the normative judgment of the scholar or journalist about how well-informed people ought to live; that is, the fundamentalist is very much the demonized creation of the modernist, and of his or her normative judgments" (142). As such, most scholars find little value in viewing fundamentalist groups in their unique cultural-historical

contexts. Instead, they focus on the common feature of so-called fundamentalisms: "they do not conform to our views of how life should be lived" (142).

[26] What is largely lacking, then, is an emic approach to fundamentalist religions – an ethnographic understanding of the local viewpoint of these groups. Too often, the scholarly (or etic) appraisal fails to consider fully the claims made by those within the tradition. Focusing instead on outside observations and theoretical analyses, many scholars – particularly those with unwavering ideological agendas – make value judgments based on their own preferences and expectations rather than on the practitioner's testimony or experience. As such, preconceived notions and personal tastes often shape the understanding of fundamentalist groups.

[27] North American Orthodox Judaism and Latin American Pentecostalism suffer similarly from this widespread lack of sensitivity. In the case of Orthodox Judaism, the "scholar-practitioner discord" (Frankiel: 55) is most apparent in the facile conclusion that traditional Judaism is thoroughly patriarchal. Likewise, the colonial origins of Pentecostalism have led to the belief that practitioners operate within a perpetually oppressive system.

[28] In her book, *The Voice of Sarah: Feminine Spirituality in Traditional Judaism*, Tamar Frankiel defends the highly structured nature of traditional Judaism as a system of harmonious balance, rather than a framework of oppression. A disenchanted Christian feminist who converted to Orthodox Judaism, Frankiel writes from the unique perspective of an outsider-turned-insider. Regarding allegations of patriarchy, Frankiel suggests,

> [Jewish women] have largely accepted the Christian and post-Christian condemnation of Judaism as a "patriarchal" religion, indeed as the origin of Western "patriarchal consciousness" which is the source of male-dominated culture, oppressive to women . . . it often seems that the stories of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, Leah and others are so embedded in the stories of men or in events relevant to the whole Jewish people that the women seem to be simply helpmates, accessories to history (2).

[29] Over the centuries, the West has become increasingly public-oriented. Social visibility and personal success have emerged as areas that define an individual's status and worth. The disengagement of an individual – male or female – from the competitive public sphere leads to social invisibility, and thus the appearance of inequality. By and large, one without elevated status in the external world is labeled a victim of the social system – subjugated, oppressed, etc. Such an understanding neglects the importance of family and home, central aspects of traditional Jewish life. There is no room for dignified domesticity in this contemporary perspective.

[30] However, as unsettling as it may seem, the functional division of tasks – male and female, public and private – is embraced by Jewish traditionalists. Adin Steinsaltz wrote:

> Talmudic sages did not regard women as inferior creatures but, as one sage succinctly put it, "as a nation apart." They assumed that there was a separate feminine network of ideas, rules, and guidelines for conduct differing from that of men. And although women were exempted from many of the important precepts that men were obliged to observe, they were not regarded

> as less important from the purely religious point of view. It was even said that, "the Holy One, blessed be He, made a greater promise for the future of women than for men." The distinction between the sexes is based on a functional division of tasks, which are seen as separate but equal (144).

[31] In this system, men settle matters in the public sphere, while women ensure the "protection, nourishment, and challenge necessary to the spiritual health of the family" (Frankiel: 14). The accepted realm of women's influence is the home, where she directs the inner life of the family. This crucial function of the woman is explored in the Talmud, which presents various examples of women's powerful influence. For instance, one Talmudic tale describes a pious man who ends his marriage to a pious woman. After the divorce, she remarries and guides her new husband into the paths of righteousness. Meanwhile, her first husband remarries an evil woman who corrupts him. This parable illustrates the dominance of women in the private sphere, and the reciprocity of conjugal relations. While in the rabbinic period there were few avenues for women's public expression, their practical influence was considerable, and "was neither frowned upon nor camouflaged" (Steinsaltz: 143).

[32] Robert Wuthnow has reflected on the central role of women in traditional religion, both Jewish and Christian: "Despite the dominance of male clergy in most religious traditions, women outnumbered men at religious services by a substantial margin, did most of the teaching of children in Sunday schools, prayed more visibly and regularly at home, and took charge of their offspring's religious education" (34).

[33] Specific to Orthodox Judaism are exemptions of women from certain time-bound rituals – most notably the thrice-daily prayer. From the western-rational perspective, such alienation from central rituals is evidence of the patriarchal domination of Jewish religiosity. This argument has some weight, especially as much of the separation of women and men in public prayer stems from concerns about lustful thoughts that might consume men if they prayed alongside women. In the *aggadic* (rabbinic story) tradition, righteous men are led astray by women's seductive power, and in the *Pirke Avot* ("Ethics of the Fathers") men are warned against conversing with women. Furthermore, *halakhah* (Jewish law) requires modesty in dress for both men and women, but instructions concerning women's appearance are much more elaborate and restrictive (Frankiel: 21).

[34] On the other hand, the Talmud states that women are endowed with greater *binah* (understanding of the divine) than men, a primary reason cited for their exemption from certain ritual acts (Steinsaltz: 138). Jewish tradition maintains that, in addition to being overtly sexual, women are also more spiritual than men. Women need not participate in the full gamut of Jewish ritual because they have an inborn spiritual superiority – a natural connection with the holy. Frankiel addresses the uniqueness of this coupling of hyper-sexuality and hyper-spirituality: "Other major religious traditions, more influenced by asceticism, have held that the sexuality of women implied her spiritual inferiority – for example, the idea in some forms of Buddhism that a woman must be reborn as a man in order to reach enlightenment" (22). Christian monks of the medieval period even debated whether women had souls (Frankiel: 22).

[35] Though some have declared this Jewish perspective apologetic, it is clear that "women who accept the presuppositions of the system see themselves as living within a world defined by God's will, not by male power" (Harris: 164). To be sure, many western scholars and liberal Jews are critical of this traditionalist claim, citing that one could defend the perceived social inequities of men and women in most traditions. Nevertheless, their unease highlights the dissonance between experience and observation, and the general belief that progressive outsiders know what is best for traditional women. Some have trouble accepting women who find comfort in traditional roles, and criticize the sincerity of their happiness claims.

[36] The primary impetus for this feminist-driven critique of Orthodox Judaism – and of fundamentalism more broadly – is the blurring of the private and public realms in modern and post-modern thought. As Frankiel writes: "In the past most of the life of women remained private. In modern times, as traditional communities disintegrated, Jewish women's occupations – as with other women – were denigrated and in addition were subject to the general Enlightenment criticism of obsolete ritual" (114). Sociologist John Meyer notes similarly that "individualism is a western ideological construct that has become worldwide only in recent decades," and entails a public rather than a private view of the person (208, 209). With such a guiding worldview, it is difficult to account for the recent influx of once-secular Jews to Orthodox Judaism, especially young adults. Men and women are trading in their independent – and ultimately disappointing – lifestyles for traditional community-centered life, replete with gender stratification and the dichotomy of public and private spheres (Cimino and Lattin: 69).

[37] The continued growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America similarly frustrates secular scholars. Here, the scholar-practitioner discord stems from critiques of Christianity's assumed propensity for the oppression of women. Elizabeth Cady Staton (1815-1902), for instance, said famously, "the Bible and Church have been the biggest stumbling blocks in the way of women's emancipation" (Brusco: 135). Years later, Mary Daly heightened the rhetoric with her insistence that "a woman's asking for equality in the church would be comparable to a black person's demanding equality in the Kun Klux Klan" (6). A clearly hyperbolic analogy, Daly's quote nevertheless illustrates the consuming animosity many have for Christianity's alleged patriarchy.

[38] Not surprisingly, heightened antipathy is leveled at so-called fundamentalist Christianity. As with Orthodox Judaism, strict divisions of gender and of the public and private spheres have led to Christianity's alleged subjugation of women – however valid. Christianity's fundamentalist branches appear far removed from even mainstream liberal denominations.

[39] Specific to Latin American Pentecostalism is a missionary commitment and an emphasis on the literalness of the Bible. Of paramount importance is the experience of the Holy Spirit in one's life; the tangibility of the sacred is evident in "personal conversion encounters with Jesus Christ, strong, identifiable experiences of the Lord in one's life, physical and spiritual healings, [and] speaking in tongues" (Smith: 3). Organizationally, Pentecostal churches tend to be more decentralized than mainline Protestant denominations. There is little or no institutional hierarchy, and local pastors typically do not require academic training for the ministry. Furthermore, unlike the middle-class appeal of mainline Protestant denominations,

Pentecostalism's rapid growth in Latin America has occurred among urban and rural workers (Smith: 3).

[40] The rise of Pentecostalism in Latin America accentuates the ideological and ritual divide between moderate and fundamentalist Christianity. In Chile, for instance, there has been "a clash between Methodist discourse and ritual and experiential religiosity of the lower-middle-class Chileans who had slowly started to dominate church membership" (Kamsteeg: 190). As elsewhere in Latin America, many poor Chilean Christians have embraced the grassroots, locally operated, and aggressively proselytizing Pentecostal movements. As Brian H. Smith suggests, "what makes Pentecostalism most attractive are the face-to-face testimonies of friends, neighbors, and relatives and the witness of personal, moral, and spiritual transformations that have occurred in their lives after conversion" (25).

[41] Improved economic conditions for low-income families typically accompany Pentecostal conversion. This is not because of new economic opportunities, but is due instead to changed patterns of consumption – namely, the husband's abandonment of "drinking, gambling, smoking and frequenting prostitutes that are part of machismo culture in Latin America" (Smith: 28). To be sure, his changed behavior benefits the entire family, and has become central to improving the lot of Latin American women. Frugal living – saving one's earnings and avoiding unnecessary consumption – is a primary emphasis in Pentecostal life. Thus, contrary to pervasive anti-fundamentalist critiques, Pentecostal movements, while demanding, family-oriented, and gender-stratified, seem to present women with greater possibilities for self-determination, social improvement, and individual empowerment than Latin America's Catholic and mainline Protestant churches.

[42] Against the dominant assumption, then, Latin American Pentecostalism seems to have outgrown its foreign roots to become a transformative system for socio-economic betterment. As Smith suggests, "There is much evidence that the primary benefits offered by Pentecostalism are not promises sustained by foreign powers but rather a vision for a better life and the moral resources necessary to persevere in it" (26). Still, the widely condemned beginnings of Latin American Pentecostalism have distracted many outsiders from its positive results.

[43] During the Cold War era, the CIA used missionaries as informants in Latin America. American Protestants in countries such as Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil became sources of information about developing Marxist movements. Likewise, the United States Agency for International Development channeled U.S. foreign aid to church-sponsored projects in various Latin American countries as "bulwarks to stop communism" (Smith: 22).

[44] For critics of U.S. foreign policy, these subversive origins have tarnished the legacy of Latin American Pentecostalism. The very fact that Protestantism – and thus Pentecostalism – was introduced and spread by American missionary operatives has largely hidden its liberating potential. Indeed, while Protestantism came to Latin America by way of a foreign missionary initiative, its Pentecostal offshoots can be viewed as indigenous, even national movements (Kamsteeg: 190). Pentecostalism has grown rapidly. By the 1990s, of the 50 million Protestants in Latin America, nearly three quarters were Pentecostal. Currently, Pentecostals account for 70 to 90 percent of Protestant growth in Latin America (Smith: 2).

Astonishingly, "8,000 to 10,000 people are converting to these new churches every day throughout Latin America" (Smith: 2).

[45] Thus, just as Orthodox Jewish women challenge the progressive leanings of post-industrial North America, the benefits of Latin American Pentecostalism challenge the prevailing liberal disdain for both fundamentalism and foreign influence in the developing world. Both movements can be placed within Elizabeth Brusco's analysis of Columbian Pentecostalism: "Unlike Western feminism, it is not attempting to gain access for women to the male world; rather, it elevates domesticity, for both men and women, from the devalued position it occupies as the result of the process of proletarianization. It does serve to transform gender roles, primarily by reattaching males to the family" (3).

Types of Empowerment

Spiritual Empowerment

[46] One of the inevitable results of modern and postmodern critiques of religion has been the removal of spirituality from scholarly discourse. For most rational-secularists, religious experience is rendered irrelevant by virtue of its ineffability. Material matters – economics, politics, social justice, etc – remain the sole concern. Many "enlightened" individuals view spiritual aspirations as merely temporary, comforting distractions from material woes. However, such an appraisal of religion – and particularly so-called fundamentalism – neglects a persistent reality: the myriad demands of contemporary life have left many disenchanted with the progressive world. This issue is of primary interest for many Orthodox Jewish women in North America.

[47] For the most part, Jews in North America are well to do. And, as sociologist of Judaism Marshall Sklare observed, "the rise of many Jews to the middle and the upper class has had the effect of speeding acculturation. The rise brought with it new relationships with Gentiles, it depleted neighborhoods and areas of the city where a distinctive Jewish life-style had established itself and it gave the Jews new aspirations" (Sklare: 26). Upward mobility and its accompanying secularizing thrust has left many Jews unfulfilled, particularly women. As Tamar Frankiel writes:

> The path is not always clear for [women] today. We face more difficulties and complexities than most of the generations who came before us. We have in our communities more single women and divorced women than ever before. Many of us have careers and advanced educations that have enriched our experience of the world. All these make the traditional path look simplistic, obsolete, and presumably unsatisfying for sophisticated women. Yet I have found that the depths of history and experience that constitute what we know as Judaism are a reservoir of spiritual strength, which is exactly what I most need (xiv).

[48] For Frankiel and others, Orthodox Judaism provides a psycho-spiritual antidote to the drudgery of everyday life. The career and consumer oriented West has convinced the bulk of North American women that happiness and enrichment lie outside the traditional confines of the home. For many, this is true. Yet others, like Frankiel, are not as fast to reject outright the simplicity of traditional life. Viewing the domestic realm as their natural environment,

and the roles of men and women as "separate but equal," many Orthodox women have come to embrace those *mitzvot* (commandments) required of them: Sabbath observance, keeping kosher, and preserving the family.

[49] Importantly, Frankiel notes that these commitments are the foundation of Judaism, a reality that "turn[s] on its head the accusation that Judaism is a 'patriarchal' religion" (73). Others have stressed that the lighting of Sabbath candles, the preparation of *challah* (Sabbath bread), and the woman's potential for bringing new life in the world are symbols of creation (Rosenfeld: 24). Such claims are, of course, open to criticism. However, these criticisms serve to illuminate the discord between practitioners and outside observers, and essentially boil down to debates over sincerity and personal empowerment – two concepts that fall outside of the public – and thus scholarly – realms. And for Orthodox Judaism's appearance of patriarchy – which stems from the dominance of men in the public sphere – rabbis have for centuries advised husbands to be like Abraham, to whom God said, "All that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice" (Genesis 21:12).

Practical Empowerment

[50] Like Orthodox Judaism, empowerment within Latin American Pentecostalism is highly spiritual. Both movements are committed rigidly to scriptural demands and expectations. Pentecostalism is defined by the centrality of the Bible and constant awareness of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals view the Bible as a manual for proper living; scripture dictates worship, belief, and conduct (Brusco: 20). Nevertheless, women's emancipation within Pentecostalism is predominantly practical.

[51] In contrast to the comfortable socio-economic disposition of most North American Orthodox Jews, Latin American Pentecostals are largely impoverished. As such, their religiosity is not merely a spiritual escape from the drudgery of the material world; it is also a means of survival. Many women recognize the taming influence Pentecostalism has on machismo males. The "exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships" (Stevens: 4) are largely abrogated by the refined Pentecostal lifestyle. Realizing this, women often convert to Pentecostalism and then bring their husbands into the faith, thereby redirecting into the home resources typically spent on machismo staples – alcohol, prostitutes, cigarettes, etc. (Brusco: 5). Thus, while the perceived docility of these third-world women is often viewed as an "abandonment of agency" (Mahmood: 29), Pentecostal women tend to exploit to their advantage the Latin American stereotype of women as "semi-divine" and "morally stronger than men" (Stevens: 4).

[52] Pentecostalism is, then, an avenue for the elevation of the private sphere and the improvement of family life. In place of the public and aggressive nature of the machismo man, Latin American Pentecostalism advocates a family-centered worldview, where a husband's responsibility to his wife and children and marital fidelity are paramount (Brusco: 125). Pentecostalism's strict aesthetic code forbids machismo vices, and thus draws men back to their families. The thoroughly non-domestic role of Latin American males – defined by the statement, "woman is of the house and man is of the street" (Brusco: 82) – is reevaluated. Put succinctly,

> This is why the evangelical response is so powerful and successful: instead of trying to revolutionize the public realm, which is what would be necessary for women to be allowed greater direct access to regular public sector jobs and "male" income, it reorders the relative participation of men and women in the private realm, enhancing the value of family and household so that they are in the ascendance (Brusco: 123).

Conclusion

[53] At the very least, this analysis presents a challenge to a dominant view within western feminism. The public-oriented and anti-fundamentalist position of the rational-secular West has inevitably led to disdain for non-liberal movements. As so-called fundamentalist religions emphasize separation – between genders and between the private and public realms – they are out-of-sink with the feminist desire for social deconstruction. As a result, many view with skepticism any claim of women's empowerment emanating from within the home. Such a blanket dismissal is a clear example of scholar-practitioner discord. The dichotomous worldviews of fundamentalist practitioners and secular scholars has largely obscured the activities of women within traditional settings. However sincerely felt, the empowerment of women within the confines of the home is often dismissed.

[54] As the predominant feminist agenda of radical social change has become global, women in as disparate locales as affluent North America and impoverished Latin America have been grouped together under the umbrella of patriarchy. The dominance of men over women is an image applied throughout the world, regardless of cultural contexts. Yet, as we have seen, this understanding is largely the result of a public-oriented and individualistic view of the world, and tends not to consider the possibility of "separate but equal" roles of women and men. Thus, like the patriarchy it criticizes, feminism has denigrated the nobility of the private sphere.

[55] Still, many fundamentalist women have embraced domesticity, using it as a source of both spiritual and practical improvement. In the self-understanding of North American Orthodox Judaism and Latin American Pentecostalism, women's empowerment is not necessarily at odds with the home.

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