



This is a lightly edited transcript of Letha Dawson Scanzoni's Saturday, June 28, 2014, afternoon plenary presentation during the 2014 CFT Gathering, "Let Justice Roll on Like a River," held in St. Louis, Missouri.

It Just Keeps Rollin' Along: Christian Feminism, Equality, and Justice—Our Part in the Ongoing Story

Dr. Alena Amato Ruggerio's Introduction

Letha Dawson Scanzoni needs no introduction.

You already know the details of her astonishing career as an author, a theologian, an editor, an internet content manager, a magazine layout designer, an archival documents keeper (on every bookshelf and file in her house), a social justice movement founder, a council wise woman, a conference planner, a cancer survivor, and a mother and a grandmother.

She is my dearest friend. And I am on her list of her 500 dearest friends.

She is the communication hub of this organization. And she is the kind of soul that draws everyone to her. I will forever count among the best days of my life the day Letha called and invited me to participate in a weekly Bible study with her and with Linda Bieze. We connect via conference call across our three states and our three generations, and we have kept that standing date for three hours every Friday night for more than 10 years.

We are currently working our way through [Reta Finger's Bible study on the book of John](#), from the blog [Reta's Reflections](#).

So rather than telling you about Letha's groundbreaking work and her many achievements, which would take up all her speaking time, instead, I thought I would give you just a really quick five fun facts about Letha that I've learned over the years in my privileged position as one of the people who gets to talk to her every single week.

Fun fact number one:

In addition to playing her trombone, which was an instrument that earned her a spot in the prestigious Eastman School of Music, Letha also plays this gorgeous little dulcimer that she keeps in her coat closet.

Fun fact number two:

Despite multiple joint replacements, she does not own a car and she walks to the grocery store, to the post office, to all her doctor's appointments. And she believes that Norfolk, Virginia, is the only place in the country where all these amenities are located within walking distance for her hoofing pleasure. However, I would like to point out that all these amenities are also within walking distance of my guest room in Medford, Oregon.

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Fun fact number three:

On special occasions, if you go to Letha's house, she will serve you dinner on a red plate that says around the edge, "You are special to me."

Fun fact number four:

She conducts a secret ministry of service to her neighbors in her apartment building who are Orthodox Jews. During the Sabbath and religious holidays, when they're not able to do any work – they're not allowed to do any work, even to turn off the lights – Letha anticipates those needs and helps them.

Fun fact number five:

This one is well-known. She officially retired from her contract with Christian Feminism Today this year. Not to slow down – don't you dare intimate she is going to slow down! – but to follow her next calling. And part of that calling is to make sure we know about the history and the legacy of Christian feminism, a movement she had an integral part in forging, so we all can carry it forward into the future. And that's part of the message she has for us today.

So please welcome Letha Dawson Scanzoni.

Letha's Presentation

Getting Started

It's just so great to be with you after forty years. I can't believe it!

You know, when we were planning this last year, we were saying how St. Louis is on the Mississippi River, and we started talking about "river" Bible verses and so on, and we talked about the verse in Amos about justice rolling like a river.

Well, I just heard on the news that the Mississippi is at flood stage right now. So, while the *river of justice* can overflow, it's unfortunate, an unfortunate metaphor, on the actual day of a flood.

The title that I gave my talk is, "It Just Keeps Rolling Along." Can you guess where that's from?

Yes, the song "Old Man River."

It's a song by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, written for *Showboat* in 1927.

The song describes the feelings of a hard-working, bone-tired African American dock worker burdened by racial injustice and economic inequality. Sound familiar? He longed for a life in which he wouldn't

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have to sweat and strain, body all weary and wracked in pain, obeying the unceasing demands of his bosses.

So, he looks out on the great Mississippi and sees how it just keeps rolling along. This softens his worry about the hardships and the heartbreaking labor in his life.

Social movements, just like a river, start small. The Mississippi River begins in Northern Minnesota with a very tiny stream flowing into Lake Itasca, and from there it becomes what the Native Americans call the Great River, the Mississippi.

I'm going to tell a story today from the same standpoint of a little stream, because I was one of the little streams that helped flow into this one.

And during that story we'll hear about our history.

The Headwaters

It all began at a time when many, many streams of justice were all bubbling up, in the 1960s and 1970s. Long before some of you were born, the women's movement began, and EEWC began also. But one didn't follow the other; they all just started flowing gradually. You'll see how it all worked together.

Our particular movement became known as the biblical feminist movement because those of us who formed the movement believed that the foundations of justice — equal worth, dignity of all people — were not found by rejecting the Bible but by examining the Bible's principles and finding there the roots of justice, compassion, and equality.

Those of us who originated the biblical feminism movement came mainly from the evangelicalism of the time. This was before the word *evangelical* became associated with right wing politics. If anything, at the time, evangelicals stayed away from politics. That was the Social Gospel. We preached individual salvation and discipleship if we were in an evangelical church, and we stayed away from those liberals who were speaking about politics.

I, myself, had not grown up in evangelicalism, but I chose it during my teenage years when I had my personal experience with Christ in my own private bedroom (not in church and not through anybody's influence). I had read a book, *In His Steps*, which was something evangelicals would call a liberal book — a Social Gospel book. What would Jesus do?

That was the theme of the book: a homeless person was looking for a church, and someone turned him away.

I wasn't going to tell all this, but I'll mention it. I was bent on a career in music. I had my own dance band. Tommy Dorsey was my hero, if any of you remember Tommy Dorsey. When I read that book, it talked about a musician, an opera singer, who had dedicated her life to Christ. It said if only there were more musicians who used their musical gifts for God, it would hasten the coming of the Kingdom.

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With that, I changed my mind entirely. I mean, there's a bit more to the story, but I decided to find a way to use my talents for God. I didn't know how, I certainly wasn't thinking about writing, but I would find a way.

A Woman's Place?

Before I entered evangelicalism, I always thought that anything a boy could do, I could do. I was determined to play the trombone. I loved going to the state contest and winning over the guys.
[applause]

When I ran into these church teachings about a woman's place and found out that place did not fit me very well, I was distressed about it. It all came to a head in 1963 through an article I read in an evangelical magazine called *Eternity*.

You know, the world had *Time* magazine, and we had *Eternity*.

In this particular issue, there was an article on women's place in the church by Dr. Charles Riley from the Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas.

He started his article by saying, "We approach this question of what women's place is in the church, through two essential questions. One is, what has Christianity done for women? And number two is, what are women permitted to do in Christianity?" *Permitted to do!*

And then he proceeded to recite a litany of the restrictions on women's service in the church, including many of the things we'll talk about here. The list included not permitting women to teach when men were present, although they were allowed to teach women and children.

He said that [Galatians 3:28](#), which dissolves all hierarchies based on ethnicity, economic status, and gender, where Paul says, in Christ "there is neither male nor female," wasn't talking about women being equal in earthly spiritual matters. Never mind we prayed "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" every week in church!

And then the day of Pentecost, when Peter said, "This day has fulfilled what the prophet Job says, 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.'"

Well, Dr. Riley said, *Oh, that's not what it means.* (You know the saying, we get from scripture what we want it to say?) He explained that, first of all, at Pentecost, a woman wasn't preaching; it was Peter, it's a man. And second, the passage of Job goes on to say that when all these things happen, the heavens will have signs such as a darkened sun and a blood moon. And so that didn't happen. So, Peter couldn't have meant that the prophecy was fulfilled and that the time had come for women to now prophesy.

And then, further, he said, Paul didn't list women in the list of resurrection witnesses. Even though the Gospels talk about the spirit that appeared to Mary Magdalene, and all the other women who were told to go to the disciples.

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On and on the article went, telling readers what women were allowed to do or be.

There was a pull-out quote (those things in dark print you can look at to know what the article is about) that said, "A woman may not do a man's job in the church, any more than a man can do a woman's job in the home."

My feelings were, "This is not the God I love."

I thought about it for a couple months and made a plan to write a letter to the editor about the article. I began my letter by saying, "Surely God isn't the woman-hater that the article seems to imply." A little strong.

I wrote about some of the theological and biblical issues raised, including the idea that the first woman was the last created and she was then considered to be the first person in sin, and, therefore, because of that, forever after, the female sex could not be trusted to impart doctrine to others without leading people astray. Therefore, women could not be teachers and preachers.

I thought that was the weirdest kind of reasoning; you know, last in creation, first to sin.

When I was at Moody Bible Institute, I didn't have the courage to ask questions. But there was an older woman, a missionary out on furlough taking some extra courses, who had the courage to ask why being the last created had anything to do with women teaching doctrine. She said it didn't make sense.

The professor said he'd think about it for a day or two and then come back and explain it to her. He did come back a couple days later and said he had an answer.

A woman was like a crystal goblet. She was the outstanding glory of creation. But, just like you have to be very careful with a crystal goblet because it might break, you can't trust a woman to be a repository of doctrine because this wonderful material she was made of might break. Get it? I think that was in the back of my mind as I was writing the letter.

My letter to the editor explained that no one brought out the practical implications of the requirement that women be silent in church. Isn't Sunday school technically a part of the church? If a woman is not permitted to teach an adult Sunday school class with men but a woman is permitted to teach children, how would someone know when a boy was considered a man and had to leave the class?

I asked, can a woman lead youth groups or direct a choir? Can she sing a solo in church? What about writing? Could a woman write Sunday School materials but not teach them? (I was writing Sunday School materials.) Could she write hymns but not sing them? A lot of these people loved the old Fanny Crosby gospel songs.

What if a female certified public accountant were in the congregation. Was she permitted to hold the office of treasurer? What if a female college professor offered to teach a Sunday School class?

Why would the Holy Spirit skip over women when bestowing abilities and talents? Weren't women given gifts by God in the Bible?

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The questions were pouring out.

(By the way, I still get some of those same questions and have written about them on my blogs. Melanie [Springer Mock] and Kendra [Weddle] and I wrote [a FemFaith post](#) about how there were questions raised about women writing blogs. Could a man read them?)

My letter to the editor was getting very long! So, as the questions poured out, I realized the letter was so long they would never publish it. I decided not to send it. I put it aside and thought someday I would write a book about it all.

From all outside appearances, I was the most unlikely person to be thinking things like this. I wasn't the kind of person who would speak out to boldly challenge theological professors and traditional translations. I was 28 years old, married to a graduate student, and the mother of two young children, a six-year-old and a three-year-old. I was living my days caring for children and doing freelance writing. My first book was already in press, coauthored with a man (my then-husband). From the outside, most people thought of me as a homemaker, a stay-at-home mom. I had even written an article for a national Christian publication called "Homemaking: Prison or Privilege?" I seemed anything but a rabble-rouser.

It would be two years before I finally wrote my letter to the editor and unleashed questions and disagreements about the *Eternity* article on women's place. By then, I'd moved from Oregon to Indiana and other things were vying for my attention.

Women's Liberation

Although I didn't know it, in 1963, at the same time I was distressed about that magazine article on women's restricted role in the church, a woman named Betty Friedan was publishing *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that became the "ah-ha!" moment for its intended audience of married, white, heterosexual women. This was the audience Friedan knew best because of her prior writing for women's magazines. The book helped women who didn't know why they felt so restless when they supposedly had everything they could desire, as far as society was telling them.

I had not read Friedan's book at the time, but I soon began hearing about it because it was very controversial and polarizing, even in secular society.

This questioning and restlessness gave rise to what became known as Women's Liberation. And this movement was beginning to spread. It was one of several justice movements of the sixties and seventies.

Now, how do movements begin? They begin with questions. They begin with the sense that the thing you're being told isn't really what is happening. Then other people start asking the same questions, and these people get together. A movement starts.

Of course, at the time, the churches, for the most part, were not dealing with this, except to condemn it. Even mainline churches were avoiding the issue when they could. I remember reading a book by John

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Robinson, the Anglican bishop, and he wrote something like, "This is one of the next questions we've got to explore because the female sex are not even permitted to usher in the churches."

On the same note, the religious people were waving their Bibles and insisting that the women should stay in their place. And businesses were promoting that thinking. Newspaper ads were divided into "Help Wanted: Male" and "Help Wanted: Female."

Husbands were to be the heads of the home; all the women's magazines said that. If a woman wanted to do any work outside the home, she certainly didn't think in terms of a career. Maybe a teacher or a nurse, but even there you had to be careful. If women worked outside the home, they had to call it "pin-money" for the little extras.

Of course, if you were a flight attendant or schoolteacher, once you were married you couldn't work. If you were pregnant, you couldn't work. That's just how it was during that whole period of time.

Alice Rossi, one of the well-known sociologists at the time – I guess she was even president of the American Sociological Society for a period – she wrote an article in *Daedalus* in 1964 titled, "Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal." She wrote that, for the first time in known history, motherhood had become a full-time occupation for adult women. She said that, for the sake of physical and psychological health of both women and children and for the progress of society, equality between men and women was essential and inevitable. For writing that article, she was ridiculed and considered an *unnatural* woman, even in university settings! Her husband was also harassed. He got a condolence card in the mail from someone, anonymously, expressing sympathy because his wife was "dead" as far as the sender was concerned.

That was how it was then.

And Now, Back to *Eternity*

It was in this climate that, two years after writing that letter to the editor I never mailed, I decided it was time to turn it into an article and submit it to *Eternity* magazine. I called it "[Women's Place: Silence or Service?](#)"

It caused somewhat of a stir.

They published it, and the first letter to the publisher in the following issue said, "Mrs. Scanzoni's article is a perfect example of why a woman is advised to be silent in the church. Most women seem to be incapable of consistent logic when their emotions are involved."

I knew I didn't want to stop with that article.

I knew I wanted to write a book for Christians challenging the traditional constructs about women in the church and in the home and in the world in general. I wrote again to the *Eternity* editor, Bill Petersen. He was very patient with me. I told him my plan, and I asked if he would be interested in another article on women and, if so, what would he like next? Would he like one about women in the home, or women out in the world, you know with the workplace and education and politics and so on?

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He wrote back and said that probably women in the church and the home were the most volatile areas to write about. And he added this: "Most evangelicals will permit a woman to have a place in leadership in the world. They might even vote for Margaret Chase Smith for senator." She was a Republican senator at the time and a House member before that. "But if Senator Margaret Chase Smith were to join their church, she would be put in charge of the nursery."

I wrote another article for *Eternity* magazine on egalitarian marriage called "[Christian Marriage: Patriarchy or Partnership?](#)" They changed the title slightly and then published it. In response to the article, there were mean comments.

Miss, Mrs., Ms.

But before that article on egalitarian marriage went to press, I was surprised to receive a letter from a new assistant editor on the magazine staff. Her name was Nancy Hardesty, and she was requesting a photo. Now that seemed strange. *Eternity* had never published a picture of an author with any of their articles in all the years I'd read them. And then she wrote this: "To run alongside with your article, some members of the staff here thought it would be a good idea to have a picture of you and your husband. Well, I guess to show that he approves of your writing such radical stuff. They would also like to know what particular activities besides writing you and your husband enjoy doing together. That's not meant to be a loaded question. Incidentally, do you have any children? Do you have a dog?" She went on: "I've just finished editing your article, and I'm really impressed with it. And I don't think it's radical or provocative at all. It's just right and true and like it should be. But then, I'm only a woman."

Then she signed her name "(Miss) Nancy Hardesty."

Nancy carefully wrote that "Miss" as we were supposed to do if we ever wrote a business letter back then. You had to show the world whether you were attached to a man or not, Miss or Mrs. When they addressed you back, they wanted to know what to say.

Ms. was just out of the question. There was a lot of opposition, as some of you remember.

You know, at that time, the *New York Times* had a rule that you could never use Ms. in a name. They didn't publish just somebody's last name, they printed *Mr. So-and-So*. If you read their articles, you noticed they always said Mr. or Miss or Mrs.

Well, many women had started using Ms., and then a magazine came out called *Ms.* I was reading the *New York Times* one day and found this article; it was just a little thing, announcing a new magazine. The article said a new women's magazine had just come out and it was called *Mrs.* You see, they weren't allowed to print *Ms.* I sent that little article in to *Ms.* magazine to show them. They published the letter.

Nancy Hardesty and *All We're Meant To Be*

The more I thought of it, after reading what Nancy wrote in her letter, I just liked her. She was brand new at *Eternity*. I was thinking I would love to meet her and talk to her. A sister feminist!

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I felt so alone. The church people were all saying, "Why are you scaring people off? Why are you making them discontent? The women are happy the way they are."

I wrote to Nancy and said, what would you think of coauthoring a book with me? Now, I knew nothing about Nancy except her letter. She knew nothing about me. And I was inviting her to write a book, which is quite a project. It's sort of like getting married. You know, it really is. When you write a book with a coauthor, you have to decide things and talk it over.

Nancy was as surprised as I was, knowing there was no way I could have learned anything about her (I couldn't do a Google search!).

But we got in touch, and we got together. By the time I wrote to her, she had taken a job at Trinity College and Seminary in Illinois. Since I was living in Indiana, it was drivable. She came down.

I had a whole list of books. There weren't that many, but I did get some basic feminist books that I found. They were all secular, of course. We put together a good chapter outline and decided what we were going to write on. She was going to write on singleness, I was going to write on marriage. And we were going to explore more things, like scripture, all the way through the book.

Which is what we did.

It took us a while to write the book. We started it in 1969 and finished it by late 1971. It was not published until 1974 because Christian publishers kept turning it down, saying it didn't fit the market's idea of what a Christian woman's book was supposed to be. They also told us that Christian women weren't interested in feminism and they weren't interested in scholarly writing. They suggested we could just cut out all the biblical and theological parts and publish the practical parts in the second half of the book. That's where we discussed marriage and singleness, decisions about having children, decisions about careers outside the home, and whether women should be ordained as pastors.

The secular publishers – we tried several of those – for their part, said feminists are no more interested in the Bible and Christianity than Christians are interested in feminism. And they, too, thought the practical, personal part might be interesting but not the other part.

Nancy and I were determined to keep trying in spite of the rejection letters piling up. We believed these publishers were selling women short. They were selling Christian women short by not believing they were interested in or capable of understanding biblical scholarship. And they were selling feminists in general short by not helping them become aware of how the Bible was going to be used to keep women in their place, as society defined it. And, in fact, that is how the Bible was used.

The ERA

At first, when the ERA was brought up and was being decided, everybody was for it, Republicans, Democrats, old and young, everybody was for it. There was no question. It came so close to passing.

Everybody was for it except a woman named Phyllis Schlafly. And she was having trouble rounding up enough people to oppose it, but then she had this brilliant idea. She says that one day she got this idea

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that she could go to churches and get Roman Catholic women and evangelical women together and bus them in to protest at the statehouses. If they came by the busloads, they could get enough women going to oppose it. And sure enough, it was defeated.

It was a time when many ideas were converging. The writer Victor Hugo long ago said, "No army, no power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come." During the sixties and seventies, when Nancy and I were writing, the idea of working for justice and equality was breaking out in many different movements.

Justice was, indeed, rolling on like a river.

Besides the women's movement, there were those in that decade (the sixties) who were in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement. Racial equality was in the news, the lunch counter sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, Martin Luther King, who died in 1968, and Martin Luther King's speech.

There was the anti-Vietnam War movement and student protests over free speech.

Rachel Carson had written *Silent Spring* in 1962, and the environmental movement was getting underway.

The Stonewall Riots had occurred in New York and the gay rights movement was taking root.

Justice kept rolling along.

Biblical Feminism

These were times of great dedication and passion. It was during these times that this organization, first called the Evangelical Women's Caucus, EWC, now Christian Feminism Today, was born. Nancy and I would never have guessed that would happen!

We didn't intend to start a movement.

In 1974, our book was finally published. It was first called *All We're Meant to Be: A Christian Approach to Women's Liberation*. The publisher decided on that subtitle, but it was sort of neat because a lot of people thought, "Oh, the Christian approach to women's liberation." So, a lot of people bought it not knowing what they were getting into. And, of course, there was a revision many years later that changed the subtitle to *Biblical Feminism for Today*.

On one of the first pages of the book, in the introduction, we wrote:

In speaking of liberation for the Christian woman, we are not thinking of an organization or a movement, but rather a *state of mind* in which a woman comes to view herself as Jesus Christ sees her—as a person created in God's image free to be whole, to grow, to learn, free to utilize fully the talents and gifts God has given her as a unique individual. It is a realization that men and women alike may be freed from sex role stereotypes and traditions that hinder development into the true humanness that God intended....

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News of our book started spreading, mostly by word of mouth at first, but also through book reviews and media appearances, and something was beginning to happen.

In 1973, while we were writing the book, Nancy was working on her PhD under Martin E. Marty at the University of Chicago. At this time, a group of progressive men from different areas of evangelicalism—yes, there were progressive evangelicals!—were talking about how something was wrong because conservative Christian evangelicals were not speaking out on social justice issues. (This was before the “Moral Majority.”) These men were speaking out of some very deep concerns that they wanted to work out together, and they were drafting a paper.

They wanted to bring some other people to Chicago to discuss the work. Nancy was one of just a handful of women who went to the meeting, and once there, they began drafting a resolution. There was just this handful of people—fifty or so, if there were that many—and they began drafting a paper about what they believed.

They hadn't even thought of women's equality as a social justice issue. But they wrote things like this:

We deplore the historic involvement of the church in America with racism and the conspicuous responsibility of the evangelical community for perpetuating the personal attitudes and institutional structures that have divided the body of Christ along color lines.

We must attack the materialism of our culture and the maldistribution of the nation's wealth and services. We recognize that as a nation we play a crucial role in the imbalance and injustice of international trade and development ... we must rethink our values regarding our present standard of living and promote a more just acquisition and distribution of the world's resources.

Now this is coming from evangelicals.

... we must challenge the misplaced trust of the nation in economic and military might – a proud trust that promotes a national pathology of war and violence....

Those were some of the concerns of the 1973 evangelicals.

That is where we were rooted.

In the first draft of this, as I said, no thought was given to gender equality as a social justice issue. Women just weren't on the agenda, so Nancy Hardesty insisted they add something. It was a social justice issue! One of the men asked her, “Write something on this little slip [of paper] and I'll try to get it in.” And she did. She wrote just two brilliant, incisive, insightful sentences:

We acknowledge that we have encouraged men to prideful domination and women to irresponsible passivity. So we call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.

Nancy wrote to me while she was at that meeting. She wrote a letter to me and said, “I don't want to sound messianic about our book, but I really think the problem with almost every one of my sincere

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friends here is that they want to be for women's liberation, but they simply don't see how they can get around the Bible on these issues. Hopefully, we'll offer them a way out of that dilemma."

The group decided to meet again the next year. This time, it was going to be called "Evangelicals for Social Action," which is the group we emerged from. They remain active in the work today [now rebranded as Christians for Social Action].

Nancy volunteered to be the secretary, so she was the one to send the invitations out. By then, people were hearing about the book we were writing. We hadn't finished it; we were working on it, but we were in the final revising stage. We had a lot of new names. We found out we weren't the only Christian feminists in the world; they were all over the place! We just had to find them.

Nancy sent out invitation letters to more and more women as we found them.

At the same time, we found out about a group of women in a Bible study, a feminist Bible study, at North Park College near Chicago in the Midwest. They had begun producing a little magazine, mimeographed. They called themselves the Daughters of Sarah. They met in Lucille Dayton's house and started talking about what it must have been like for the early feminists, how they printed papers, and it was sort of exciting. That's what was happening. And we found each other.

It was the beginning of a lot of things.

In August of 1974, a year after that first meeting of the progressive evangelicals and not long after our book was published, we had a much bigger gathering. Word was getting out to a lot of women.

The Evangelical Women's Caucus

Some of the first readers of *All We're Meant to Be* had just found it, and we had their names now.

One of the main women was Anne Eggebroten [now Anne Linstatter], who wrote us the first letter about the book. I wish she would tell you about it sometime. It was so heartwarming for us because it started out, "Dear Letha and Nancy, I love you!" We were so unknown, even to the publisher, that the envelope had on it, "Unknown. Return to sender." Well, she kept sending it to different departments [at Word Books], and finally someone knew who we were and, finally, the letter was forwarded to us. Anne's letter goes on to tell us how our book changed her life. She said she found it on a library shelf. She had been rebelling against God because of the way women were being treated based on what the Bible said about them. She was angry at God. She ended her letter saying, "I'm back in touch with God again. I feel like God loved me. And I feel like God had this book written especially for me." It was a beautiful letter. Of course, she went on the list to come to the 1974 evangelical conference.

Oh, by the way, we'd found Virginia [Ramey Mollenkott] by then. That's a whole other story, how Virginia and I met. I probably won't get to that. We write quite a bit about it in the book, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* But Virginia started writing letters to us, saying, "I found another feminist!" usually at some college. And other times, she would write, "I found another Christian feminist!" and that one would go on Nancy's list. That's how we were building up the mailing list.

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At the 1974 meeting, the men and women who could attend separated into six task forces, or caucuses. We called them caucuses. That's where the "C" in the name EWC comes from. And we were going to discuss some of the social justice areas. One of the caucuses was going to talk about poverty, another about racism, another about war and militarism, and so on. And, of course, one of them was going to talk about women's issues.

We all separated into the caucuses, and there were 30 or so women comprising the Women's Caucus. We drew up a list of action items. One of the issues was working toward inclusive or nonsexist language in speaking and writing, including Sunday School materials. Another was consciousness raising in churches, including opening up women's ordination in all forms of ministry. We had a statement urging Christian colleges to encourage women's activities and institute women's studies programs. We talked about working toward nondiscrimination in Christian employment in all the ways people were being discriminated against, including race, age, or sex. And working for egalitarian marriages.

You'll notice something's missing here. We'll wait for it.

There was talk of expanding definitions of family. We recognized singleness as a positive lifestyle for all those who were single. We talked about forming kinship networks and a sense of community for elderly persons, and so on.

We were clearly focused on justice issues in 1974. Weren't we thinking about modern matters? That's why I wanted to read some of the statements, because they sound pretty contemporary, don't they?

As I said, you probably noticed that, of all of the social justice concerns discussed in the Chicago workshop, the rights of LGBT Christians were not mentioned at all. But don't worry, that will come later.

We decided that the 30 women comprising the Women's Caucus enjoyed each other so much we didn't want to stop there. We decided to go off on our own and meet again by having our own caucus meeting, so more Christian feminists could get together. We'd find more, and we'd advertise it. And we knew by now there were more of us out there somewhere.

Cheryl Forbes, who was one of the editors of *Christianity Today*, was part of the 1974 workshop. She is the one woman who volunteered to manage our conference, to be held in Washington, DC, over the 1975 Thanksgiving weekend.

Virginia Mollenkott, Nancy Hardesty, Lucille and Don Dayton, and I were among the speakers at the 1975 conference. Three hundred and sixty people came from all across the U.S. and Canada. Posters of huge, colorful hot air balloons were posted all over the platform. We retained the name from the caucus in the Chicago workshop and called ourselves the Evangelical Women's Caucus, or EWC. We had only one E in our name then.

The theme of the first national conference was "We're on our way, Lord!" And we clearly were. It was such a feeling of excitement. Jeanne Hanson was there. Reta [Halteman Finger] was there, as was Anne [Linstatter].

It was a very exciting time. The air was just charged. The balloons were ready to soar.

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So the Evangelical Women's Caucus was born. The media covered us. Religious publishers were there looking for authors to write on this topic, after all we went through! There was one publisher who asked Virginia Ramey Mollenkott to write what became her outstanding book on evangelical feminism, *Women, Men, and the Bible*. Other Christian feminist books were being published over the next few years, such as Pat Gundry's *Woman Be Free* and Ginny Hearn's book about women who wanted to serve God but, after being prevented, were doing so underground, titled *Our Struggle to Serve*.

The Backlash

Well, of course, every time progressive things happened—all the backlash! So, while books were being published showing the Bible with Christian feminist views, there were also other books coming out saying, "Oh no, here's what the Bible really teaches!"

I want to mention two of them.

One is called *Total Woman* and one is called *Fascinating Womanhood*. Some of you remember them. Both books had grown out of their authors' dissatisfaction with their own marriages, and a desire to find some simple formula to improve the marriage, to "put some sizzle into the marriage," as one of them put it.

These two authors said they had discovered these principles and they would train others to go out and teach them to women's groups all over the place. They both emphasized pampering one's husband and submitting to him, but they emphasized different things.

The first one came out in 1963, the same year I was reading that article that upset me so much, the same year Betty Freidan was writing her book.

Fascinating Womanhood was by Helen Andelin. She just died recently, and some of her books are available and still being used. I wanted to see if she was still alive, and I noticed that Pixar now has an effort to try to raise money for a documentary about her and the whole *Fascinating Womanhood* movement. They have all her daughters and grandchildren, and it might be very interesting. I don't think they're trying to promote her anymore; it's just trying to show the phenomenon she was.

For her, her way to show what the Bible taught and to improve your marriage was to have submission as the basic way of operating, with childlikeness as a way to deal with anger or disagreement, any disagreement a wife might ever feel. Here's what she wrote:

A man wants a woman who will place him at the top of her priority list—not second, but FIRST. He wants to be the kingpin around which all other activities of her life revolve. He does not want to be the background music for her other interests and dreams.

She then quoted long scripture verses to encourage women to be submissive to their husbands as head of their marriage and family and the wife to be a domestic goddess, and she emphasizes dressing and acting feminine at all times.

She talks about being in touch with her "inner girl" from childhood days. She writes:

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If a wife feels upset with her husband, why not try some childlike mannerisms. Stomp your foot, lift your chin high, and square your shoulders. Then, if the situation merits it, turn and walk briskly to the door, pause and look back over your shoulder. Or you can put both hands on your hips and open your eyes wide, or beat your fists on your husband's chest. Men love this.

She says pouting is another technique. These are only a few of the childlike mannerisms you can adopt.

It was a way of infantilizing women to act like a pouty little four-year-old, which she says men would find endearing and irresistible. She trained instructors to teach these principles.

Then we come to *The Total Woman*, which was published in 1973, a year before Nancy's and my book came out. Whereas Andelin mixed submissiveness with childlikeness, Marabel Morgan mixed submissiveness with sexiness. And her book skyrocketed to the bestseller list, sold over three and a half million copies in the first two years, and resulted in TV talk shows and a *Time* magazine cover story about Marabel in 1977. I saw the cover of that, too. She was also widely caricatured as using sexual seduction to persuade her husband to reward her with material rewards. Sounds like something else, but....

Marabel Morgan was mostly quoted because of her advice on costumes, such as greeting her husband in sheer pink "baby doll" pajamas and white boots when he arrived home. While this is what people often say she wrote, Morgan claimed she would never have written this part, that one of her fans had this idea.

This is what was expected at the time. The husband was the breadwinner. In fact, when Schlafly was trying to defeat the ERA, she claimed that "your husband won't be required to support you anymore," and that's what she was worried about.

These women were doing what they thought they were supposed to do. The husband was the head; he provided the food and had control of the family, and the wife kept the house.

One woman wrote that when her husband was coming home, she wrapped herself in Saran Wrap with a big red bow and nothing else on under the Saran Wrap. This is bringing back memories for a lot of us.

The Total Woman had such suggestions as this: "Tonight after the children are in bed, place a lighted candle on the floor and seduce him under the dining room table." What? Martin Marty wrote in the *Christian Century* in his *Sightings* column about the "fundies in their undies."

This was all happening at the same time as *Daughters of Sarah* and *All We're Meant to Be* were being published.

Feminists Have Fun

There were also funny things. If people think feminists don't have any sense of humor...

I got a phone call one day, I think it was around 1975, and it was from *The Wittenburg Door*. As some of you know, *The Wittenburg Door* was a Christian satire magazine that called itself "the *Mad Magazine* of

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Christianity.” Like some other satire magazines from that time, like the *National Lampoon*, it isn't published anymore.

But, anyway, they called and said they were going to do a special issue on women's issues, and they wanted to do interviews with both me and Marabel Morgan. They wondered if I would be willing to pose to be their first centerfold.

[An audience member shouts out, “Did you bring it?” and Letha answers “Yes, I did.” Much raucous laughter and applause follows.]

What do you do with a phone call like that? I had spoken to them out on the West Coast previously at a youth conference, so at least I knew who they were. Otherwise, it would have been a little weird. But they assured me I would be fully clothed, and it wouldn't be a bathing suit. I said, “I think I'm selling my soul. What do I get out of this?” They said they would give me a lifetime subscription to *The Wittenburg Door*.

And, so, sure enough, the subscription started coming, and the subscription showed it ended in 1999, and that's because that's as far as their computer would go.

As it turned out, my then-husband and I were going out to San Francisco for an American Sociological convention, and that's when they decided they would fly up from San Diego. They actually rented a hotel room, cleared all the furniture out, and a professional photographer had me do all these different poses. It's in an issue called “The Toted Woman.” The cover is a picture of an older woman with her hair in curlers, soaking her feet in a washtub, with her stockings rolled down, and she's reading *The Total Woman*.

What were they going to do about Marabel Morgan? She has an interview in there, too. They put a picture of her dining room table.

Obviously, we did have a sense of humor.

Here's another. There was a restaurant near the Fuller Theological Seminary that featured a menu with every food item named after a theologian or other religious figure of the time. Their menu was shaped like the tablets of the ten commandments. It was called the “Tablet of Sandwiches.” You could order a Reinhold Neibuhr or a John Calvin or a C.S. Lewis or a John Wesley. They decided to name one of the sandwiches the “Letha Scanzoni All We're Meant to Eat” sandwich. I was one of three women on this menu. One was Marabel Morgan, which was peanut butter and honey. Dorothy Sayers was a mystery sandwich; you could put anything you wanted on it. Mine was beef, cheddar, and cucumber on sourdough.

The Second EWC Conference

Well, that's a good segue into our second national conference, which was at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, on June 14, 1978. It was at this conference that the issue of homosexuality came

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up for the first time. That is except for a question that had come up in 1975 at Washington, DC. Everybody got pretty nervous when it came up, and it was just a question within a workshop.

EWC had grown tremendously in the three years since the Washington, DC, conference. This was a very large gathering; more than 1000 people showed up from all over the country, representing more than 30 denominations and para-church organizations.

Even the Holiday Inn had a big sign, "Welcome Evangelical Women's Caucus," and Virginia and I said we had never seen that.

At the opening session, a Fuller Theology psychology professor, Phyllis Hart, used the names of women in the Bible when she issued a warm welcome to the daughters of Abigail, Pricilla, and Sarah. And to reassure the men who had come that they were included, she told them she was using the word "Goddess" generically.

It was a marvelous conference in every way. We had great speakers and workshop leaders on an enormous list of topics about biblical feminism, 95 workshops total. It was a great way to introduce biblical feminism to the evangelical world and have it legitimated by one of the most prestigious evangelical theological seminaries in the country. Many women who attended that conference still remember it as being the first time they ever took communion from a woman's hand. There were a lot of tears. It was quite a service. It was just very, very moving.

The Controversy over "Homosexuality" Begins

Well, it so happened that Virginia [Ramey Mollenkott] and I were both on the program as plenary speakers, and it also just so happened—we didn't have this planned, it just happened—that Harper and Rowe, our publisher, Harper Collins, had just published a new book that Virginia Ramey Mollenkott and I had coauthored. Its title was *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View*. That was what it was called first, and later, in the revised edition, the tag was changed to *A Positive Christian Response*.

But, anyway, our book came out just before that conference. And the coordinators were very, very nervous. This was not the topic they wanted to come up right then. It was a really hot-topic issue that they just sort of wanted to avoid. Not only had two of EEW's founding members, and scheduled conference speakers, written a book about Christians and homosexuality, but they had already been attacked in the Christian press as being un-biblical. In other words, a great controversy had already bitten them.

The book came out in April and the conference was in June, but before the book was even out, word had leaked that it was coming out, and some evangelical newsletter published a critical letter to the editor. This hurt a lot because, even though the people who were upset were our friends, people I had written with, some of them started writing very harsh attacks warning people to avoid the book before the book was even published.

An "ex-gay evangelical" had called me, very upset with the book, and he said, "You are invalidating my whole life." He was crying at the time, and this was very hard to hear. I can't remember if that was the

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phone call in the middle of the night, one of them was in the middle of the night. It woke the whole family up. And he called another time after that and said, "I just wanted you to know, *Trinity* magazine is going to publish an article attacking the book, and we're primed and will be looking for that."

This was all happening at the same time as the conference. The conference leaders obviously wanted a spirit of unity. This was not something they expected to happen. And here is this beautiful service with the women serving communion and Virginia doing this powerful speech on how God has not given us the spirit of fear but of love and of power and a sound mind. And people remembered that.

I was the one at the organizational meeting, because we were formally organizing then, at that Fuller conference in 1978, as an incorporated organization. And I was the one who gave the keynote speech, "Marching On." The conference organizers had to deal with the controversy. But what were they going to do with the two of us having such prominent roles and yet having written this book that was stirring up the whole evangelical world? It was a very tricky time for them.

It's also important to realize what else was happening at that time.

The Briggs Initiative was up for a vote in California that year. The Briggs Initiative [California Prop 6] said that anyone who was gay or lesbian (it was before the acronym LGBTQ was used) and taught school or wanted to teach school, or even anyone who supported someone who taught school who was gay or lesbian, would be forbidden to teach. They would be fired or not allowed to apply to get a license. All the people from California were going to be voting on Briggs.

In Dade County, Florida, Anita Bryant had emerged as an anti-gay crusader. In 1977, a law was passed that said nobody could discriminate against gays in housing, recreation, jobs, and so on. Anita Bryant, who advertised orange juice for Florida on national TV and was very well known as this "wholesome" woman, family person, and Christian, decided she would try to get this nondiscrimination law overturned. Her husband was involved in it, too. And, somehow, she also wound up with Jerry Falwell, who was not known then. He was just starting out as an evangelist. They decide to do everything they could to scare people into thinking the "horrible homosexual people" were coming after their children. They founded an organization called Save Our Children, and they had just taken their anti-gay work to California and got involved in dealing with the Briggs amendment.

And there was one other thing happening. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) had recently met in San Diego, and they were responding to a task force report that people had been working on from way back. They had just voted to allow individual pastors to perform marriages. But then the question was, could gay people be ordained? That question was just starting to be debated.

Here's why our book, at this evangelical conference, was so controversial at that time. Our publisher said, "I learned last evening that some 16 different titles are currently being published on the topic of evangelical Christianity and homosexuality. But the Scanzoni and Mollenkott volume being the only one which takes a positive stand."

People were nervous. And all this is going on around the city.

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Some of the task force wanted to see our book. Somehow, they learned it was coming out. The Harper people shared some of the manuscript with them. I think that's where the leak occurred. Some kind of leak came out that our book was being published ahead of time to get all these negative things reported at the other conference.

Evangelicals were expected to take a traditional view, condemning homosexuality as a sin, and we had broken that mold and shocked the Christian world by asking what it really meant to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to respect the worth, dignity, and personhood of every human being as created in God's image. Didn't that mean including loving, respecting, accepting, and celebrating the love of our homosexual neighbor and her or his same-sex partner?

The conference planners were nervous, but they did handle it graciously.

They decided to have workshops on two sides of the issue, and they had a special dinner for us to meet the other presenter, a man who had written a lot and had been saying a lot of this. They cancelled a debate; they thought that would really spoil the unity.

As far as I know, I don't think any of our LGBT members were out at that time. So, nobody knew that there were any lesbians among the attendees. Even Virginia had not come out yet.

After the conference, a business meeting was held to incorporate as a formal organization. My "Marching On" speech was really heralded very well, but some women were nervous because someone had nominated me to be on the council. They were afraid they'd lose their jobs if they were associating with an organization that had a council member who had written *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* There was quite a discussion about that, but eventually I was on the first council. Some people who worked at Christian colleges or were ministers did leave the organization because they were too nervous about their jobs.

The Controversy Comes to a Head

The next time the topic of homosexuality came up was at the 1986 Fresno conference. That's the famous one that most of you think of when you think of our dealings with this issue. There were three resolutions brought up:

One was: "Recognizing the profound oneness of all women in Christ, we put ourselves to work for justice and equality for all racial minorities."

Number two: "Because we believe that every human being is made in God's image, we deplore violence against women and children and misuse of power within the family."

Three: "Whereas homosexual people are children of God and because of the biblical mandate of Jesus Christ that we are all created in God's sight and in recognition of the lesbian minority in the Evangelical Women's Caucus, International, EWC takes a firm stand in favor of civil rights protection for homosexual persons."

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That third resolution really upset some people in the group, and the affirmative vote on it resulted in great pain, struggle, and division.

My mother was dying; she was very ill at the time. I didn't go to Fresno, so I can't comment firsthand, but ask Anne [Linstatter], Jeanne Hanson, or Catherine Bailey. They were there if you want to know what it was really like, the atmosphere.

Well, the big thing that happened, the whole group that was going to have the next conference, supposed to be in Minnesota, they backed out. They could not participate because of their dissent. And a whole group left with them, and that was when, after two years, they tried to organize into something else, and they formed Christians for Biblical Equality. They took a stance of supporting only traditional heterosexual marriage and avoided this topic. It's been a problem for them and us ever since.

We lost a lot of people.

The Aftermath of the Decision

The question is, where do we go from here? How do we keep justice rolling?

There's no lack of challenges today. I think our voices need to be heard as never before. And now we have social media and all the things the internet offers. We have YouTube, blogging, special interest websites, support groups. Many of the young people today are finding their tribe this way, having community online. All these things are going on, and it's wonderful because when I think of what we had to go through to find other Christian feminists, what's happening now is just so great. We're finding them all over.

We need to work individually and together. There are all these new challenges. I mean the schoolgirls kidnapped in Nigeria, the gang-rapes and hangings in India, the fact that words like "rape culture" and "sexual entitlement" are in our vocabulary, economic inequality, fair wages, equal pay, sexual harassment, child marriages, sex trafficking.... I could go on and on.

I just want to close with these statements, and I'll abbreviate them.

A lot is being written today about how women underestimate their competence and, therefore, lack confidence. At the Wellesley conference in 1984, I suggested four three-word sentences that we might need to remember to bolster our confidence. I'll share two of them with you here.

1. Trust your perceptions.

Because of socialization, we women have grown up with a kind of tentativeness about our perceptions. If somebody asks, "Are you sure about that?" or if someone says we're wrong, we're so apt to take their word for it rather than to trust our own ears and eyes.

It's like in the *Gaslight* movie where the abuser keeps saying, "Nope, the lights aren't lower..." This kind of thing can drive people crazy. It's a favorite technique of abusers.

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In Luke 24, after the woman came and told the apostles that Jesus had risen from the dead, it says, "But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense." The women kept saying, "We saw this. We know it's true!"

Remember Rhoda, the young woman in Acts, who comes to the door? They're praying for Peter, who's in prison; they want Peter to be free. Peter's free. He opens the door. An angel had let him out. He pops through the door and Rhoda says that it's Peter at the door. She goes and tells the people without letting him in. They don't believe her. They say, "You're hallucinating, it can't be" while they're praying for it. She says she knows it's Peter. And they say, oh it's his ghost; it must be his spirit.

Rhoda trusted her own perception. We need to do that. We need to value our experiences, our own uniqueness, because no one else has what we have. Remember the old Margaret Hillert poem for children:

Nobody sees what I can see
For back of my eyes there is only me.
And nobody knows how my thoughts begin,
For there's only myself inside my skin.

Over the centuries, while establishing church liturgies and doctrines and forming theology and setting up religious organizations, the church has not recognized women's experiences. And the church is all the poorer for it.

So, let's value our experiences and share our experiences.

2. Affirm your strengths.

A study of psychological abuse showed that the hottest strategy of abusers is to attack a person's strengths. This is also true of abusive systems. We see this so often.

This weekend, one of our workshop presenters, Esther Emery, talked about having a voice. If we have a voice, what do people say? Women talk too much! And all the studies show that men talk more and interrupt far more often than women ever do! So, affirm your strengths! Don't let anyone talk you into not doing so. And I'm talking to myself here as well.

We've all had this thing about humility. Yesterday's speakers even talked about it. Women have heard plenty about how we need to learn about humbleness, gentleness. But self-silencing is dangerous.

If you have a chance, get hold of Rebecca Solnit's book *Men Explain Things to Me*. You know the term "mansplaining?" You know, the idea that things aren't clear until a man's explained it? Solnit was at a party once, and this man came up her and her friend who were talking. Now, she's written several books, so this man says, "Huh. I hear you write books. What do you write about?" So Solnit told him the title of her book. And he didn't even let her finish before saying, "You must have read it in *Publisher's Weekly*; no, it wasn't *Publisher's Weekly*, anyway it was the *New York Review of Books* or something. It's this new book that came out. It's this great new one, you should know about it." And her friend is saying, "She wrote that book. She wrote that book!" And he didn't hear it at all! Finally, they got through

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to him, and he just turned white. But then he started back up, all over again. That's where that expression came from.

So, affirm your own strengths.

In Conclusion

We're all these little streams flowing together into this movement.

I'm going to change the metaphor slightly here.

Pete Seeger, who died at 94 last year [2014], talked about the tipping point that would surely come someday. While I'm using these little stream metaphors, Seeger used the metaphor of a teeter-totter or a seesaw.

Here's what he said:

I honestly believe that the future is going to be millions of little things saving us.

I imagine a big seesaw, and one end of this seesaw is on the ground with a basket half-full of big rocks in it. The other end is up in the air. It's got a basket one-quarter full of sand. And some of us got teaspoons, and we're trying to fill it up. A lot of people are laughing at us and saying, "Oh people like you have been trying to do that for thousands of years, it's leaking out as fast as you are putting it in." But we're saying, "We're getting more people with teaspoons all the time."

One of these years, you'll see that whole seesaw go zoop in the other direction. And people will say, "Gee, how did it happen so suddenly?" Us and all our little teaspoons.

Now, granted, we gotta keep putting it into something we got, but let's keep doing that.

In Luke 4, we're told that Jesus came into the world to proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, and to set the oppressed to freedom.

That is nothing less than a call to justice. That is nothing that each of us can't have a part of, and each of us can be a little stream feeding into a great river.

Let's all work together to make sure the river of justice keeps rolling along.