

## L. E. Maxwell (PBI) and Biblical Equality

### Mimi Haddad

*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20, TNIV).*

How many times have you heard the oft-repeated claim that Christians, who advance the shared authority and leadership of men and women in the church and home, ignore the authority of Scripture? The charge of “liberal” has been used to suggest that egalitarians place their so-called feminist ideals—their quest for equality with men—ahead of a commitment to the authority of Scripture. Egalitarians are accused of giving secular culture greater authority than the Bible. The fact is, however, many prominent evangelicals **with the highest view of Scripture** have always found their support of women’s leadership on the pages of the Bible. Here are a few examples.

J. Barton Payne, a past president of the Evangelical Theological Society, who taught Old Testament at Princeton, Bob Jones, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Wheaton College, and Covenant Seminary (Creve Coeur/St. Louis), was a vocal advocate of women in ministry. According to his son, Dr. Phil Payne, a noted New Testament scholar:

My father argued that women were not excluded from any form of Old Testament ministry with the possible exception of priest. He argued that in that instance, it was the standard association of priestesses with temple prostitutes combined with the OT principle that God’s people should avoid the appearance of evil practices that would reflect poorly on God that explains why there is no mention of priestesses approved by God in the OT. He saw no solid basis in the account of creation in Genesis for a second class status for women. Not long before he died climbing Mt. Fuji, he gave an annual lecture at Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun, UP, India in which he argued that women should not be excluded from any form of ministry in the church.

Consider Prairie Bible School, a leading Bible school founded in 1922 in Alberta, Canada. Prairie’s Core Value and Doctrinal Statements state that they view “all of life through the absolute truth of the Word of God.” For this premiere evangelical institution, the Old and New Testaments, as “originally given by God” were “divinely inspired, inerrant, trustworthy, and constitute the only supreme authority in all matters of doctrine and conduct.” This school honored the primacy of Scripture to guide all life and faith. And, the founder and president of Prairie for 58 years, L.E. Maxwell, placed women in positions of leadership beside men. Ruth Dearing is perhaps the most prominent example. During her 59 year tenure at Prairie, Dearing worked as principal of Prairie’s High School for 18 years, as a teacher of Bible and Bible Doctrines at the Bible School, and as a member of Prairie’s Board of Directors. Maxwell gave Dearing opportunities to preach and teach not only during summer conferences but also in their chapel—the Tabernacle—the largest evangelical auditorium in all of Canada. Maxwell was known to say that there are more than 300 Bible passages that support women’s leadership. Together with Dearing, Maxwell published his support of women in 1987, in *Women in Ministry*.

And, Prairie's female graduates courageously ventured to distant and dangerous places around the world, a fact touted in Prairian yearbooks—which prominently featured mission organizations and missionary opportunities for graduates. The 1958 Prairian gave a realistic view not only of opportunities offered women, but also the plight women suffered on mission fields far from home. Under the caption, "Opportunities for Young Women!" we read:

There are still some areas where refrigerators and washing machines are scarce, where the food becomes monotonous, where rough trekking through mosquito-infested jungles and bridgeless rivers is common, where people do not want the Gospel and think they do God a service if they kill you.

It is still possible to endure loneliness and apparent frustration amid heat, filth, and stench. Probably you will not marry, as the percent of men going to the mission fields is very small.

But if you have given your life to Jesus and can trust Him to supply your needs (or give you grace to die joyfully), we will be glad to consider your application as one of the four hundred urgently needed on the [World Evangelization Crusade] W.E.C. fields.

This is an opportunity to prove the omnipotent God!

If there are still some old-fashioned young men who feel called to serve the Lord in hard places, with no earthly security, they too may apply.

Prairie Bible School was unabashedly evangelical with its high view of Scripture. Its goal was to prepare students for service as missionaries and evangelists, ministers, Bible expositors, Bible educators, and as Christians ready to give away their lives for the gospel. Gender was not a deterrent but an integral to the great commission, and it was to this biblical ideal that Prairie, under the leadership of L.E. Maxwell, devoted itself. Serving in more than 114 countries, Prairie graduates, both men and women, recognized that much of the world was unacquainted with Christ. What did it matter if a woman carried the good news to these souls for whom Christ died? Roused by Maxwell's "Great was the company of women who brought the glad tidings" (Psalm 68:11), a theme frequently heard from chapel services, women and men set their sights on leading the world to Christ. Gender was no deterrent, for the task was great, the harvest was ripe, and the workers were few.

The biblical literature published by egalitarians is substantial, as is the witness of women's gifts in serving our hurting world. Egalitarians are not capitulating to secular values, but responding to the biblical call of the gospel in all of its forms of service around the world. Will you join us?

Published in *Arise*, the weekly e-newsletter of Christians for Biblical Equality, December 5, 2008

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