

"Your Daughters Shall Prophecy"

*"And in the last days it shall be, God
declares,
that I will pour out my spirit upon
all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters
shall prophecy.
Joel 2:23*

IN 1936, AS THE thirtieth anniversary of the beginning of the Azusa Street revival approached, some of the wrinkled old black veterans of that outpouring of pentecostal fire paid a visit to the forty-six-year-old woman who, in the meantime, had become the most famous pentecostal preacher in America. Her name was Aimee Semple McPherson.

Thirteen years before, in 1923, after a decade of leading revivals in rented halls and canvas tents from New York to Florida to Colorado, Sister Aimee, as everyone called her, had built her own church—Angelus Temple in the Echo Park section of Los Angeles. It seated 5,300, accommodated two large choirs and a full orchestra, and its floors were softened by red carpets. Crowds of would-be worshippers and visitors often lined up for hours to get seats for services.

Sister Aimee was a talented thespian as well as a legendarily eloquent preacher. She had made the Angelus Temple famous (some would have said infamous) for the elaborately dramatized sermons she staged. With professional lighting, imaginative

costuming, and entertaining scripts typed out by the Sister herself, she had attracted hundreds of thousands of people to the Temple with production values that rivaled Florenz Ziegfeld. It was rumored that Charlie Chaplin sneaked into the back row to enjoy Aimee's compelling stage presence. The actor Anthony Quinn has reminisced about his playing trumpet in the pit band. Lawsuits and rumors about McPherson's love life, conflicts with her temperamental mother Minnie Kennedy, and the mysterious finances of the Temple frequently put her handsome face with its knowing smile on the front pages of the newspapers. She was a genuine celebrity, one of the best-known women in America, and as far as the rest of the country was concerned, she had definitely put pentecostalism on the map.

Sister Aimee's unprecedented success was due in large measure to her own vast God-given talent and tireless dedication. But it was also because she was a pentecostal. She belonged to a church which, despite many inner contradictions, provided a space where gifted women could play dramatically important roles. The scroll of honor is impressive. The same black woman, Lucy Farrow, who had once enkindled William Seymour with her spiritual gifts, later carried the message to Norfolk, Virginia, on her way to Africa. Marie Burgess, together with some coworkers, started a flourishing pentecostal organization called Glad Tidings Hall-Apostolic Faith Mission on West 42nd Street in New York City. Florence Crawford, who had earlier quarreled with Seymour, nevertheless went on to bring the movement to Oakland, Portland, and Seattle. A woman of fabled eloquence, Maria Woodworth-Etter, led massively attended revivals in Dallas, Chicago, and on various Indian reservations.

There is a clear basis, both in the Bible and in pentecostal belief, for this remarkable display of feminine leadership. In the story of the first Pentecost in the Acts of the Apostles, the Old Testament text from the prophet Joel that Peter quotes to explain the strange goings-on in Jerusalem says that in "the last days" God would "pour out his Spirit on *all* flesh" and that both "your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy." Also, since in a pentecostal worship service literally anyone can suddenly be filled with

the Spirit, pray in an unknown tongue, testify, or prophesy, there is a strong egalitarian momentum.

But pentecostalism has not always adhered to this momentum. Ever since the beginning of the modern movement, both men and women have tried to undercut the Spirit's gender impartiality. And they have met with considerable success, especially where pentecostals have drifted into theological alliances with fundamentalists who insist on enforcing the dictum from 1 Corinthians, 14:34 which says that women should be silent in church. But wherever the original pentecostal fire breaks through the flame-extinguishing literalist theology, women shine. When I began to visit pentecostal churches in Latin America, Asia, Europe, and the United States, I immediately noticed that-despite Paul's strictures-women almost always seemed to play some leading role. It was obvious that they participate fully, even in churches where the pastor is a man. They sing and testify, prophesy and heal, counsel and teach. In fact, it often appeared that the part men play in some pentecostal churches is more shadow than substance. It also became evident to me that women, far more than men, have been the principal bearers of the pentecostal gospel to the four corners of the earth. As I thought about this, two questions kept coming to mind. *How* do women justify the leadership roles they play in a church which seems to be controlled by men at the top and in which the "official" theology (at least where a literalist interpretation of the Bible obtains) seems to forbid them? *Why* are women drawn to pentecostalism in such disproportionate numbers in the first place, and why do they feel it is so urgent to carry the word to others?

My purpose in this chapter is to try to answer these two questions, starting with Aimee Semple McPherson herself, surely by far the most widely known of all the pentecostal women preachers, and then applying our questions to the lives of some lesser known female ministers.

In the case of Aimee Semple McPherson, the answers to both these questions are straightforward. As for the official theology of pentecostalism, she just never paid much attention to it. She was always serenely sure of her call from God to preach, and when

both men and women questioned her ministry, she simply organized her own church and then formed her own denomination. As to why she was drawn to the movement in the first place, the story of her life shows McPherson's deep convictions about the radical core of the pentecostal message, especially its racial and gender inclusiveness.

Aimee Semple McPherson's commitment to transcending the color line was no doubt one, of the main reasons why the Azusa Street pioneers had sought her out for the anniversary. From the earliest days of her barnstorming, Sister Aimee had always insisted that the coming together of the races was one of the surest signs of the presence of the Spirit. Twenty years earlier while preaching at the Pleasant Grove Camp grounds in Durant, Florida, near Tampa, she had written in her diary, "Glory! ... All walls of prejudice are breaking down, white arid' colored joined hands and prayed . . . people so hungry after God that color is forgotten, even here in the Southland."

Angelus Temple in 1936 may have seemed a long way from the ramshackle Azusa Street warehouse with its white-washed walls and shoebox pulpit of 1906. But the black survivors of the revival from which the new pentecost had spread around the world knew a kindred spirit when they saw one, and they had come to ask Sister Aimee a big favor: could they work together to plan a week-long celebration marking that historic descent of the Spirit?

She immediately agreed. Not only had the Azusa Street revival long since run its course but attendance at Angelus Temple was also beginning to flag, especially when Sister Aimee herself was on one of her many road trips. Maybe an anniversary jubilee would bring some new life. It did. A revival-cum-birthday party that was originally planned for one week roared on for months. It was almost as though the Spirit had decided to honor the occasion by making a return appearance. As McPherson described it:

Hundreds rushed to the altar in ever-recurrent waves, crying "God be merciful . . . No less than three altar calls marked

some of the services, especially the divine healing services. . . . Moreover hundreds of people at a time were sometimes slain under the power of God, many receiving the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

Furthermore, the revived spirit of Azusa also seemed to revive Sister Aimee. Some fund-raising projects, such as a campground near Lake Tahoe and a church-sponsored cemetery scheme (promoted by her managers with the slogan "Go up with Aimee") had gone sour. Normally bubbly and animated, she had seemed tired and overworked. There had been lawsuits, staff problems, snide editorials. But as the celebration rolled on she seemed to regain some of her characteristic vigor. And, for the first time in eighteen years, she spoke in tongues. Those who interpreted her utterances said she was warning of a terrible battle that was soon to come, a war so bitter and destructive it would make people forget the one that had ended only two decades before.

After the United States entered World War II, in December 1941, Sister Aimee led rallies to sell Victory Bonds. But mainly she continued to preach, to teach the adoring students in her Bible school, and to present her spectacular stagings of biblical plots, morality tales, and spiritual-but often intentionally comical-adaptations of stories like "The Lone Ranger," "The Trojan Horse," and "The Wizard of Oz." Sister Aimee herself-in fetching costume-always played the lead character. She was the first of what would later develop into a series of full-fledged pentecostal media stars. But she was also often a lonely person, sneered at by many male ministers, ridiculed by gossip columnists, and never able to find a husband who could give her the emotional support her mercurial nature seemed to require.

Sister Aimee died in 1944, from an accidental overdose of sleeping tablets. But she had lived long enough to found one of the major pentecostal denominations, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel. When she died, the denomination had 410 churches, all in North America, and about 29,000 members. Now it has 25,577 affiliated churches and 1,700,000 members in 74 countries all around the world. Sister Aimee, who at this

moment is probably producing showy musicals with an all-star angelic cast, must have been doing something right.

The term "foursquare" in the name of the denomination Aimee Semple McPherson founded has a double reference. It recalls the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:16: "The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width." This allusion recalls again the persistent hope for a new city, another and more just society, which has always animated pentecostal faith. But "foursquare" also symbolizes the basic teaching of the church, the four truths: that Jesus is Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King. This "fourfold" message, which Sister Aimee had picked up from the New York revivalist A. B. Simpson, has continued to serve as the core of doctrine for millions of pentecostals in several different denominations. The little lady from Salford, Ontario, who was the object of ceaseless gossip, mocked by sophisticates because she appeared in the pulpit dressed as Little Bo Peep, may be having the last laugh.

Aimee Semple McPherson was the principal pioneer in what has become one of the most characteristic-and most problematical-qualities of pentecostalism, its uncanny ability to utilize the prevailing popular culture for its own message, while at the same time raising questions about that culture. I am convinced that Sister Aimee's own spectacular success in this lover's quarrel with Tin Pan Alley was due in some measure to the fact that as a woman she did not have to conform to the role expectations set down for male ministers. She could innovate and experiment, which she did, with real panache and obvious enjoyment. As a woman and a pentecostal, McPherson's very success probably helped other women in the struggle for equality within the movement. But what about those other, lesser known pentecostal women preachers? How do they justify their calling in biblical terms?

My best clue to an answer to this question came when I visited what everyone in Kanawha County always referred to as "Bill Carter's church." The church stands on a hill at the end of a long winding road through deep valleys and steep gorges about twenty miles south of Charleston, West Virginia. This is coal mining country. It has a radical political history. It gave a larger

majority to Eugene Debs's Socialist candidacy for president in 1924 than any other county in the nation. And it is religiously conservative. This is where the famous school boycott broke out in 1974 when parents refused to allow their children to use textbooks that mentioned evolution. The church is called Bill Carter's church not just because he is the preacher, but because he owns the property and building, a common practice among rural, independent pentecostals. This is also a church where, up until a few years before my visit, the worshippers sometimes handled snakes.

At this evening's service Betty Lou, Bill's twenty-four-year-old daughter, is in the pulpit. There are perhaps thirty people in the congregation. Unpressed trousers and shapeless dresses suggest that they are continuing to endure hard times. We have just sung a chorus accompanied by two amplified guitars. Betty Lou has her long brown hair tied with a single white ribbon. She wears a long, off-white dress with simple embroidery around a neckline that plunges a bit deeper than some pentecostals would countenance. In an excited voice that rushes on almost without a pause, she is giving a testimony about the healing she experienced after a serious car crash about a year earlier.

"There I was," she cries, "lyin' on that hospital bed in Charleston, *wracked* with pain. The doctors couldn't do nothin' for me. No matter what medicine they give me, I just felt worse 'n' worse. I couldn't eat, couldn't hardly drink. I thought I was gonna die and-I hate to admit it-sometimes I wished I would. I felt that bad. I really did. I tried to pray, real hard I tried. But somehow the words wouldn't come and I'd just see these giant big red flashes. And sometimes I'd see that there truck come swoopin' over to our side of the road, and I'd hear that awful bang. I just couldn't get it out of my head. And my back and neck and arm hurt so."

She pauses briefly to catch her breath, swallows, then goes on. "But then I saw this bright light at the window. It was so bright I could hardly look at it. It scared me at first. Then I seen in the light, like inside it, with the light all around, a person. I looked. It sure enough was *somebody*. First I thought it was an

angel, an angel ... of... light. But then my eyes got used to it a little and I looked again. It was *him*. It was Jesus Christ. I knew it was him 'cause I could see his beard, and he held up his hands and I could see ... [here she paused and swallowed] ... I could see the cruel nail marks where they nailed him to the cross."

"Well, he come to my bedside," she continues, "and he took my hand in his hand. He held it for a while and I could feel my pain just slippin' away. And he, spoke to me ever so soft, and just kept holdin' my hand. Well then, after a while, he stooped over and he picked me up. Just like a momma or a daddy picks up a little baby. He just scooped me up and held me close. Then he turned and flew with me right out of that window, holdin' on to me real tight. At first I was scared but he told me not to fear. So I just trusted in him.

"Well, he carried me way up till when I looked down, all the cars and houses looked like little bitty ones, like dolls' houses. Then he carried me over the bridge and up the valley, and when I looked down I could see Crayton's store and the old lumber mill and everybody's houses, only from way up, so they looked so tiny. Even them big trucks looked so tiny.

"Then Jesus says to me, he says, 'See all these people. Many of them are lost and lonely, many are living in sin, many are sick and lots of them don't know where the next meal is comin' from. Lots of 'em had no work for months, welfare's runnin' out. What they need most though, what they need is me, my Gospel and my Holy Spirit to comfort them.'

"Then he says, 'Betty Lou, you listen to me. I want you to bring my word to them. I want you to tell them about how I died for their sins and how I sent the Holy Ghost to comfort them. I'm gonna take you back to that hospital now, and you're gonna be alright. But I want you to become a bearer of my word.'

"Well,' I says to him, 'I think you got the wrong party. My papa's the preacher in my family. I got my hands full with a husband and two kids. I didn't even finish high school. I thank you for the healin,' I really do, but you got the wrong addressee for this letter, especially me bein' a woman and all, and what the Bible says about women preachers and all that.'

"Well, by this time we was headin' back for the hospital. And he says to me, 'Betty Lou, I don't *make* mistakes. *I know* who I am talkin' to. I am healin' you for *a purpose*. Now let's not hear any more complaints.'

"So I says, 'Well, Lord, I guess you're right. You don't make no mistakes. I know that. So if you're really healin' me and this is not just a dream, then I'll do what you say. I'll preach your word, in season and out. I do promise. But I got to make sure.'

"Well, he took me back to the hospital and laid me ever so gently back on that bed. Then he smiled, and then he was gone. Well, next day the doctor came by, and he took one look at me and he said, 'What's gotten into you, Betty Lou? You look 100 percent better.' [Here Betty Lou mugged the astonished look on the doctor's face and the congregation laughed.] Well, at first I was embarrassed to tell him what had happened, but then I did. I said it was the Lord himself who healed me. He smiled like he didn't quite believe it. But then he examined me and he told me that he had a hard time believing it but it looked now like I'd be out of there in a few days. Well, three days later I was out. And here I am standin' here, not because some man told me to, not because I just took a mind to, but because Jesus Christ *himself* told me to. And [here the congregation joined in the refrain] he ... don't ... make ... no ... mistakes."

I have often thought about Betty Lou's testimony. It went a long way in answering my question about how so many women win the right to preach in a church which, at least technically, forbids it. It clearly demonstrated why pentecostals, who take the authority of the Bible very seriously but also believe in direct revelation through visions, have opened a wider space for women than most other Christian denominations have. What the Bible says is one thing, but when God speaks to you directly, that supersedes everything else.

But I continued to think about Betty Lou's sermon-testimony for another reason. It was also a kind of Chartres Cathedral, a perfect embodiment of its genre. It had all the elements one finds in several different testimonies all artfully rolled into one. It included a mystical vision, an almost shamanic flight, a miraculous healing,

a glimpse of human need, a divine "call" to preach, resistance to the call, and then an acceptance. It was delivered with warmth, eloquence, passion, and a touch of humor.

Betty Lou's testimony also illustrated a more general element in the appeal of pentecostalism, one I have called the recovery of primal spirituality. In this case we find a classic call-refusal motif. It appears frequently in the Bible. Most people are familiar with the reluctance-at least at first-of Moses to accept God's charge that he lead the Israelites out of their Egyptian captivity, or of the initial unwillingness of Amos to become a prophet. The same theme is given a comic twist in the story of Jonah who tries to run away from God's directive to him to preach to Ninevah; Jonah starts off in the opposite direction, but is swallowed by a great fish who delivers him to Ninevah anyway. This summons-refusal theme is not just a biblical one. It is far more widespread. Joseph Campbell in his *Hero with a Thousand Faces* claims that the pattern of a divine call and an initial refusal to obey appears in the myths of almost every culture. For pentecostal women, of course, it is especially important since they have to demonstrate that they are aware of the religious and cultural strictures against becoming preachers ("You got the wrong addressee ... what with what the Bible says about women preachers and all"). They have to make it clear that this was a matter over which they had little choice.

Elaine J. Lawless, a student of American folklore, has listened to the testimonies of dozens of pentecostal women preachers and has written about them with a great deal of discernment and sympathy. She sees testimonies as a form of folklore, a kind of art form in which individuals weave and reweave a narrative using not only their own life histories but a set of commonly held anecdotes and plots. In such stories a certain amount of embellishment is expected and some elements, especially the dialogues, follow a familiar pattern. Lawless describes them in the following terms:

It is ... a story delivered to make a certain point. . . . It will therefore have a focus. History will be modified, melded, pushed and molded to create a story that is based on truth, but is, in fact,

a created story; there is a pact between the narrator and the listener that disallows scrutiny and allows a measure of fantasy, within mutually agreed bounds.

I am not sure that Betty Lou Carter would agree with this description of her testimony. I think that she truly believed she was telling God's own truth, and the fact is that within a religious context, the possibility of visions and dreams and voices is more allowable than it is in others. But not always. Andrew Greeley is a widely respected sociologist of religion. His continuing research on the mystical experiences of ordinary Americans has shown that a much larger number of people has had them than anyone had supposed. The problem is that in a culture in which both the scientific climate and the teachings of the established religions tend to disallow such experiences, the people who have them are reluctant to talk about them, even to ministers and priests. They understandably feel that they may be referred to a psychotherapist. What the pentecostal meeting provides, among other things, is a setting in which people are encouraged to talk about such out-of-the-ordinary events in their lives without embarrassment.

For women preachers in particular, these testimony stories fulfill a dual function. They not only give them access to a leadership role that is normally reserved for men, but they also provide the occasion to reassure themselves about who they are. Feminist scholars have written a lot about how important "telling my story" is to all women, especially to those who have been deprived of a voice. Hearing oneself tell the story and seeing that it is confirmed by those who hear it gives the narrative a firmer place in one's own identity. Also, since one tells these stories again and again, new elements and additional nuances can always be added. The story is an open-ended one. Both women and men can redefine who they are as life unfolds in a process that Lawless calls "rescripting."

What needs to be added to this folkloristic view of the value of the testimony for pentecostal women-and for men too-is that the reweaving includes not only key incidents from one's

own life, and appropriate nuggets from the store of common folk stories. In addition it also incorporates elements from what the literary critic Northrop Frye calls "the great code," the biblical narrative that forms the basic plotline for the whole culture. The result is a complex tapestry of larger and smaller threads, a tapestry that is woven and rewoven for as long as a person lives and needs to assimilate new installments of his or her ongoing life story.

Even after hearing Betty Lou's dramatic testimony at her father's church, my second question still continued to nag me, and I know it has bothered many other people too. Why would these women *want* to be pentecostals, let alone pentecostal preachers? Why would they want to become part of a religious movement which still, at least formally, insists that the man must be "the head of the woman" at home, and also in the church (unless God makes exceptions)? Why are women drawn in such lopsided numbers to pentecostalism? The question especially puzzles those who have observed that the headlong expansion of the pentecostal movement in Latin America can be traced in many instances to women who first join a church and then bring their families, including their husbands, along later.

I had the chance to ask this question very directly to a number of women who had gathered for a prayer and Bible study session in a pentecostal church a few miles outside San Jose, Costa Rica, in a small community devoted largely to the production of coffee. At first they seemed reluctant to answer but then Caterina, an outgoing married woman of about twenty-five with two children, broke the ice.

"When I first came to this church," she said, "I came with my sister-in-law who told me what they teach here could help me with the problems I was having in my family. I didn't believe her, but she insisted, and I was getting pretty desperate, so eventually I came. What I heard, from the other members and from the preacher too, was that the Bible tells wives to obey their husbands, but it also tells *husbands* to love and respect their wives, and to be good fathers. Well, at that time-I don't mind telling you this-my husband was drinking and staying away from home,

and I didn't know what to do. I was afraid I might lose him. I don't know if he was fooling around with other women or not, and I was afraid to ask, but sometimes when he went in to San Jose to do a plastering job, he'd be gone for days.

"I started coming more regularly, and I saw men here, the same age as my husband, who were not drinking or fooling around. And they didn't flirt with me either. Something had happened to them. I tried to get Lorenzo to come but he just laughed at me. But eventually I asked God to help me and I felt He was speaking to me, right here in church. He was telling me that everything would turn out okay. I accepted Christ and got baptized. When I told Lorenzo, he didn't laugh, he just looked at me. It seemed to me that he could just *tell* that something had happened to me. I was different. It took me a long time and a lot of prayer. But finally, three months ago, he came along. He just sat there and listened, didn't miss a word. Now he comes with me a lot. He has not joined the church yet, but two weeks ago he helped the men here paint the walls, and I have only smelled tequila on his breath once. I am still praying for him. I know he'll come around. It's wonderful what God can do, like a miracle."

Her words started the ball rolling. Elsa, a somewhat younger woman who is not married, and the only one wearing slacks, said that as soon as she joined the church she bought one of the Bibles they sell and carried it whenever she had to go downtown and walk past the men who had always whistled at her and sometimes tried to touch or pinch her. She laughed. "Last time," she said, "as I walked by, one of the guys looked me over and said to his buddies so I could hear it, 'Man, look at that pair of well you know what he said-and one of the other guys said, 'Hey man, don't do that with her. She's one of the alleluias.' That's the nickname they have for us in this town-alleluias-because that's what we say sometimes when we pray, especially when we're happy. In fact, sometimes when I get off the bus and have to walk by those guys, one of them might say, 'eh, alleluia, alleluia!' But I don't mind that. I just pray for them, like they tell us to do here at church, and sometimes I say 'alleluia' right back to them."

Now, Irena, a somewhat older woman, spoke. "I believe the husband *should* be the head of the house," she said, "what's the matter with that? But being the head means he has to take some responsibility. He has to earn some money and bring that money *home*. He has to stop playing the lottery or playing cards and losing it. My own husband died five years ago. And he was not saved, and I cried and cried about that. But he did come to church with me sometimes, and he did -stop playing poker, though he still bought a lottery ticket now and then. When I sat next to him in church sometimes I saw him cry, and I think he was remembering our son-our only child-who left home when he was sixteen and lives in San Jose. I think he regretted that he was not a better father. I think he was getting ready to join. I think the Holy Spirit was working on him. But when he got sick, the priest came, and warned him to stay away from our church. I think my husband did not feel he wanted to leave the Catholic Church although he hardly ever went. When he died I was so sad, not just because he died but because he never accepted the Lord. But the pastor here told me not to cry about that. He said Enrique was in God's hands now, was with God, and that God is merciful. Still, I miss him."

Our conversation went on; later when I added what these women had told me to what I heard on other occasions, the pattern was becoming clear. For decades pentecostals were persecuted in many parts of Latin America. So, since they could not gain access to the public arena, they worked mainly through family networks. This happened just as the old family structure was being weakened by new forms of production that made cooperative family work less economically viable and often took the man out of the home for long periods of time. But, the importance still attached to traditional familial connections provided a readymade network for recruitment. The pentecostal conviction that everyone has the responsibility to spread the word did the rest. Wives brought husbands, children brought parents, in-laws and cousins and aunts testified to each other. For women, the pentecostal message provided the best way they could see to effect a genuine change in their family relations, to get their men to forgo

some of the macho posturing the popular culture encourages, and to reorder the priorities on how the limited family income was spent. As Elizabeth Brusco, who has studied pentecostals and other evangelicals in Colombia, puts it, this kind of religion "literally restores the breadwinner to the home and restores the primacy of bread *in* the home."

There can be no doubt that, for whatever reason, women have, become the principal carriers of the fastest growing religious movement in the world. Eventually this is bound to have enormous cultural, political, and economic implications. There is considerable evidence that once women join pentecostal churches they learn skills they can utilize elsewhere. They read and travel more. In what could be most important of all her discoveries, Brusco found that the women pentecostals she interviewed in Colombia were planning to have fewer children so they could give them a better education, and I have noticed in the many pentecostal bookstores I have visited in both Latin America and the United States that family planning is considered to be an important Christian responsibility. This suggests that the rapid spread of pentecostalism in third world countries where the Catholic Church opposes birth control could make a tremendous difference. It could be a major factor is reversing the deadly momentum of the population explosion.

Dr. Edith Blumhofer, one of the most outstanding historians of women in pentecostalism, does not believe there was ever a golden age in the early days of the movement when women were treated equally. After all, the first pentecostals all came into pentecostalism from other denominations, bringing along their established biases. Maybe the daughters could prophesy, men conceded, since prophets were conduits of God's word and you did not need any brains to be a mouthpiece. But they should not be allowed to preach. Adding to insult, some pentecostal men saw the eloquent testimonies of women as proof of God's power to use even the weakest and most inept creatures to make His word known. The main advantage that Aimee Semple McPherson had was that her pentecostal faith kept her going

against all the opposition, and even she eventually had to found her own denomination.

Yet either because of or despite their pentecostal faith, women continued to lead. Barred from the pulpit, they preached in the streets. Refused ordination, they became missionaries and went to places where men were afraid to go. They became healers and teachers, writers and editors. Without them, pentecostalism would probably have died out long ago: Blumhofer likes to recall that in the early days when no women were ordained and the railways gave half-fare privileges to clergy, an announcement appeared in a pentecostal newspaper about a forthcoming pentecostal camp meeting. It urged everyone to come and reminded the ministers they were eligible for half-fare tickets. Then it added: "Sisters, trust the Lord for the full fare!" For nearly a century the sisters have been trusting the Lord for full 'fare, but there is a strong conviction abroad in the movement today that the era of male dominance is fading.

Toward the end of his splendid biography of Sister Aimee, Daniel Mark Epstein describes some of the intricate sets her talented designer contrived for those elaborate "illustrated sermons" she produced at Angelus Temple. These included a Gold Rush town, a giant radio set with a movable dial, a twenty-foot-tall Easter lily from which Aimee preached in a gown the color of a golden stamen. But my favorite is the "fully operational Trojan horse." I can imagine Sister Aimee, emerging from a door in the side of the horse, sword in hand, to subdue the startled Trojans. And I think of the verse in the Acts of the Apostles that anoints both sons and daughters as prophets as a kind of theological Trojan horse. Having been dragged into the center of the stronghold of male-dominated Christianity, the door has now opened. And even Homer could never have foreseen what the result will be.