

INVENTING EDEN: ANTI-SUFFRAGE RESTORATION NARRATIVES
IN THE EARLY CHURCHES OF CHRIST

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have long noted rhetorical recurrence within conservative gender movements across time, but few studies have attempted to explain this recurrence through the historical lens of Protestant gender theology. This study considers restorationism—a form of Christian primitivism that ascribes divine intention to beginnings or origins—as a recognizable category of rhetorical appeal underlying a diverse array of conservative gender arguments, from debates about suffrage and feminism to legislative restrictions on reproductive freedom, gay marriage, and transgender rights. The flexibility of restorationism and its co-evolution with other American habits of mind make it a particularly persuasive (and often underrecognized) form of rhetorical appeal. Through context-sensitive qualitative analysis of anti-suffrage restoration arguments within the early Churches of Christ, a denomination with a distinct and enduring restorationist tradition, this study contends that anti-suffrage restoration themes of *'place'*, *civilization*, and *order* provided an important vector through which white family preservation became embedded in modern evangelical gender theology. After exploring each theme using primary source material, the paper demonstrates that vestiges of anti-suffrage restoration appeals linger in religiously inflected gender discourses in U.S. politics, particularly in rhetoric that seeks to restrict civil liberties for female and LGBTQ+ bodies under the guise of benevolent protection.

Introduction

On March 27, 1913, Church of Christ periodical the *Gospel Advocate* printed an editorial titled “Shall Women Vote?” authored by church member Fannie Scobey of Franklin, Tennessee. In the article, Scobey declared that the Bible definitively answered the question of women’s suffrage. “In the creation of all things,” Scobey admonished fellow *Advocate* readers, “the great Father knew what he created every being and everything for; and where he wanted them to remain during their existence in this world” (293). Because God directed the great arc of history, she contended, he established conditions that would allow men and women to thrive in their “beautiful home.” According to Scobey, God gave women “an exalted position in the world,” but he “circumscribed her field of labor.” Even though women caused humanity’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and they still caused thousands of men to fall in her time, Scobey claimed that when a woman embraced her “God-given mission in the home” and donned “the armor which her Creator has given her,” she emerged as “a mighty conqueror on the battlefield of life.” Women, when they fulfilled their divine duty as wives and mothers in accordance with the “last will and testament” of Jesus, became the “lever” that lifted lost mankind toward heaven. Within her proper sphere, a “pure, sweet, refined, cultivated woman” was considered, by “the civilized and enlightened of the world,” a “veritable queen.”

By grounding women’s roles in narratives of creation and the New Testament church, Scobey built her anti-suffrage argument on a distinctive theology of human history and human destiny. Like other church members who authored anti-suffrage articles for the publication during this period, Scobey embraced a form of religious primitivism called restorationism, a Christian theory of history that places “the most excellent condition of human life, or the best

state of the world in general,” at some point in the past and regards the conditions of that period “normative or jurisdictional for contemporary belief and behavior” (Hughes, “Introduction” 1; see also Lovejoy and Boas 1, 3; Solberg 50). Historian David Edwin Harrell, Jr., once claimed that the “restoration sentiment,” manifested in a variety of forms across the American religious landscape, “may be the most vital single assumption underlying the development of American Protestantism” (Hughes, “Introduction” 7; see also Hughes and Allen xiv). Although American Christians differ regarding the extent to which they believe the past governs the present and the exact historical period to be restored, many consider “first times” theologically significant (Hughes, “Introduction” 1, 7; see also Bowden 176). Because of its pervasive influence within American Protestantism—and Protestantism’s profound impact on American culture—I argue that restorationism functions as a powerful, transhistorical legitimating appeal underlying a diverse array of gender arguments, from debates about suffrage and feminism to legislative restrictions on reproductive freedom, gay marriage, and transgender rights. Public policy motivated by restoration theology has sweeping implications for civic life; yet, perhaps due to its ubiquitous influence on many aspects of American culture, restorationism remains an underexamined facet of rhetoric scholarship.

Within American Christianity, gender restoration arguments vary; there is no universal consensus on the period most worthy of reclamation, its essential conditions, nor the extent to which this period is believed to govern contemporary gender behavior (Hughes, “Introduction” 7). Rhetors appealing to the near past may imply that a nostalgic period of less-complicated gender relations more closely resembled humanity’s unblemished beginnings than the contentious and chaotic present. Others ascribe a variety of gender conditions to the Garden of

Eden before the Fall, where, they contend, men and women existed in a natural, deathless state of harmony. Gender restoration narratives overlaid on the Old Testament warn of divine judgment or seek precedent from the ancient patriarchal order; while, for Protestants concerned with regulating women's roles in church and public life, the apostolic period, posited to predate Roman Catholic 'corruption', provides a rhetorically useful legitimating blueprint. The flexibility of restorationism, and its co-evolution with other American habits of mind, makes it a particularly persuasive—and often underrecognized—category of rhetorical appeal (Hughes and Allen xiv-xv; Noll, *Scandal* 99, 159).

Restoration narratives function as extremely adaptable reform arguments because the conditions ascribed to the ancient past are determined by rhetors themselves and claim to apprehend the true intentions of God reflected in origins. This malleability allows agents to ascribe nearly any set of conditions to an idealized, pristine past, and thus to divine will; as a result, arguments from origins often support contradictory positions. For example, both anti-suffragists like Fannie Scobey and suffragists like Women's Christian Temperance Union founder Frances Willard argued that the gendered bodies of, and relationship between, men and women were healthier and more cooperative at a designated point in the past and that these once-pristine conditions, as each defined them, functioned as a blueprint for gendered behavior in the present. Scobey argued that patriarchy was intrinsic to creation and the founding of the church and that these conditions barred women from civic life, while Willard considered women essential to the public project of social reform, a reality obscured by the "denaturalizing methods of a civilization largely based on force" (Campbell 322). Because 'restoration' points to something beyond human improvement—a return to a once-vigorous state lost through neglect

or catastrophe—the specter of the ‘uncorrupted man’ haunts restoration discourses of all kinds (Hughes, “Are Restorationists” 111). Arguments from origins may guide debate to inconsistent ends, but such appeals invariably seek authority from divine intention.

Among American Protestants, restorationism owes its durability, at least in part, to its ability to obscure the extent of its narrative invention by exploiting longstanding veins of primitivism deeply embedded in the country’s Puritan and Enlightenment past (Hughes and Allen 2-3).¹ Many evangelicals remain strongly committed to a particular style of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Enlightenment rationalism—not to utter irrationality, as some would argue—and this inheritance wove restorationism deeply into the fabric of evangelical thought.² Historian Mark Noll notes the profound impact of the Scottish Enlightenment on American evangelicalism—a philosophy steeped in primitivist assumptions about humanity’s innate capacity for reason and moral judgment—and argues that such influences are inseparable from American national identity (*Scandal* 85, 92-99). Richard Hughes and C. Leonard Allen point to the primitivist tenor of the Jeffersonian Enlightenment and its emphasis on natural rights to show how central the impulse to recapture the human “primordium” became to the broader American ethos (14).

The cultural co-inheritances that obscure the restoration impulse also propound its utility in evangelical spaces. For much of the nineteenth century, natural science and Christianity constituted what Susan Harding calls “overlapping commensurate discourses,” as American

¹ Lovejoy and Boas define primitivism as a historical paradigm that values beginnings or firsts (1). They distinguish “chronological primitivism,” the belief that the past is in some way superior to the present, from “cultural primitivism,” the “discontent of the civilized with civilization” (7).

² This paper uses the term “evangelical” to describe a cross-denominational subset of Protestants who emphasize an individual conversion event, regard the Bible as the infallible, authoritative word of God, center the substitutionary atonement of Christ, and engage in missionary work (Kobes Du Mez 5; Noll, *The Scandal* 8; Sutton x).

Protestants elevated both Enlightenment philosophy and biblical authority (1288). The result was a co-constitutive worldview that came to interweave (and deeply value) both threads of this intellectual heritage (Allen 66-67; Noll, *Scandal* 97-98; Marsden 16). When sweeping scientific and cultural changes began to challenge Protestants' dual commitment to Enlightenment values and biblical infallibility after the mid-nineteenth century, restoration narratives provided an important defense strategy for biblical literalists, including Christian supporters of slavery (Carver and Novack 201; Noll, *Civil War* 34-35). Despite their claims to the contrary, restorationists do not argue from the plain text of the Bible; in other words, restoration arguments are not simply *sola scriptura* arguments. Rather, restoration rhetoric invents historical precedent for theological positions rhetors already hold and then denies that any such invention has taken place. As such, restoration appeals have enabled American Protestants to simultaneously defend natural rights and slavery, scientific empiricism and creationism, individual freedom and its overt infringement (Hughes and Allen 212). Ironically, it is the Enlightenment heritage that evangelicals share with the academy that requires such labyrinthian reasoning in the first place. Restorationism's rhetorical advantages are strategic as well as inherited. Henry Warner Bowden suggests that restoration myths supply enervating impetus for "criticism and reform" while providing a unifying "platform for cohesion" (177). Within populist, evangelical faith traditions that maintain a complicated relationship with secular education, restorationism's guise of historical credibility proves an additional asset (Løvdaal Stephens 13; Williams 250). Bowden notes that the grandiosity of restoration narratives, which allow "leaders and followers to settle for impressive-sounding generalities instead of laboring over serious questions of identity and behavior," continue to make restorationism's decontextualizing tendencies attractive (177-178).

In the American intellectual landscape, where primitivist cultural assumptions are sometimes mistaken for universal truths even outside of religious contexts, restorationism's illusion of historical objectivity lends its contentions a plausible veneer of credibility while removing the expectation of—or the responsibility for—meticulous verification.

It is vital to note that the phantasm of historical certainty so central to restoration appeals, when unrecognized, has serious consequences for democracy. Richard Hughes and C. Leonard Allen warn that, by allowing some Americans to mistake the “historic particularities of their limited experience with universal norms that should be embraced ... by all people in all cultures and times,” unreflective restorationism has serious consequences for global policy and civil liberty (xiii, 212). As this study will show, restoration theology, when joined to Christian apocalypticism and sectarian exclusivism, provides powerful justification for religiously motivated infringements on personal freedom (24; see also Stein 1341).

This study uses context-sensitive analysis to examine a corpus of anti-suffrage articles published in the *Gospel Advocate* newspaper, a publication affiliated with the early Churches of Christ, between December 1912 and December 1913, to analyze the content of contributors' gender restoration appeals and illuminate connections to later gender movements. Although I no longer belong to any faith tradition, my upbringing in the conservative Church of Christ guided my interest in this study. The denomination provides a unique opportunity for rhetoric scholars to study the form and function of restoration appeals for several important reasons. First, the Church of Christ is one of several religious groups that originated in the United States during a series of restoration movements that swept the country during the early decades of the nineteenth century (Benson 2; Harrell 261; Hughes, “Joseph Smith” 31, 35). Like the Latter-Day Saints,

many mainline and conservative Churches of Christ maintain and defend a remarkably durable restoration mythos surrounding their denominational origins.³ In many cases, adherents consider this mythos both literally true and fully regulatory for modern belief and practice (Hughes and Gorman 7; Hughes, “Introduction” 6). While the Church of Christ’s modern membership of approximately 1.1 million is modest when compared with restoration groups like the Latter-Day Saints, the movement’s influence on American Christianity is deceiving: by 1866, the Stone-Campbell Movement from which the denomination emerged constituted the fifth-largest Protestant group in the United States (Allen 69; Hughes and Gorman 305). Alongside its historical influence, the Church of Christ shares common ideological inheritance with politically active Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and non-denominational churches (see Gorman). The denomination provides a robust, ‘homegrown’ example of American restoration theology.

This study reveals that the *Advocate’s* gender restoration appeals coalesce around three distinct themes: *‘place’, civilization, and order*. As restoration theology absorbed and reinscribed these discourses, it provided an important vector through which language of white family preservation became embedded within evangelical gender theology, lending rhetorical precedent and affective urgency to later conservative gender movements. After exploring each theme using primary source material, I show that the legacy of anti-suffrage restoration appeals lingers in contemporary evangelical gender discourse, particularly in rhetoric that seeks to restrict civil liberties for female and LGBTQ+ bodies under the guise of benevolent protection.

³ Many mainline and conservative Churches of Christ do not acknowledge their American origins and actively reject the label of “denomination.” These members assert that immersed believers constitute the literally restored first-century church of the Apostles (Hughes and Allen 6-7).

Context-Sensitive Analysis and the *Gospel Advocate* Texts

This study treats text as a culturally situated artifact that yields important information about writers and their audiences (Huckin, “Context-Sensitive” 85). Thomas Huckin argues that writers belong to diverse “discourse communities” that are “formed and maintained around a body of tangible, linguistically constituted texts” (84, 86). These texts “contain observable patterns of language usage” that rhetors deploy to communicate complex meaning while minimizing mental effort for themselves and their audiences (86-87). According to Huckin, a discourse community’s “linguistic conventions” accumulate layers of meaning over time and come to function as intra-group shorthand infused with “community knowledge.” Because context-sensitive analysis requires familiarity with the sociocultural milieu in which writers and readers operate, it will be useful to provide a brief overview of the Church of Christ before detailing my process of text selection (Huckin, “Content Analysis” 15).

Historian James Gorman argues that, by the late eighteenth century, groups descended from the transatlantic evangelical missionary movement—like the Churches of Christ—had evolved a “system of symbols” that constituted a “unique and identifiable religious culture” (89). Although Gorman notes that the movement’s offspring were diverse, the Church of Christ came to center a plain, simple, or primitive Gospel that eschewed formal church governance and sought to precisely imitate the ‘ancient order’ reflected in the biblical text (Harrell 261). Scottish Common Sense philosophy, Baconian inductive reasoning, and Enlightenment reverence for the rational, orderly, and inalterable laws of nature deeply shaped the Church of Christ’s understanding of human origins (Hughes and Gorman 27). Compassion for the ‘dark’, ‘chaotic’, pagan religions of the ‘heathen’ remained a prominent missionary movement legacy throughout

the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, even as the denomination's theology absorbed ambient elements of apocalypticism (Gorman 210). During the Civil War period in the South where the denomination's precursors flourished, an embattled "civic" restoration theology framing the region as a "New Israel" used literalist biblical exegesis to justify slavery, condemn Northern "infidelity," and repudiate abolition and suffrage (Carver and Novack 201; Hughes and Allen 190-195; Noll, *Civil War* 33-36; Harrell 269-272). This context provided important guidance for my process of text selection.

I began this study by conducting keyword searches for gendered terms (*woman, women, suffrage, suffragist, suffragette*) within *Gospel Advocate* articles published between 1911 and 1916, a particularly intense period of anti-suffrage activism in the United States, to identify the period of greatest debate around 'the woman question' (Marshall 330). I discovered that 1913 was a particularly lively year for suffrage and gender commentary, including articles authored by women.⁴ I selected the height of this suffrage discourse—the period between December 1912 and December 1913—as my primary corpus of texts.

Keyword search results identified twenty-nine articles published during this period that addressed the issue of women's suffrage, women's roles in church and public life, or appropriate behavior for women. Ten of these articles featured commentary composed by women as either principal author or quoted contributor. Because restoration narratives are grounded in appeals to history, I conducted a context-sensitive qualitative analysis to identify a set of twenty-three

⁴ The *Advocate's* attention to the suffrage issue was timely: sweeping suffrage victories in the West beginning in 1910 reinvigorated the national women's suffrage movement, which began to deploy increasingly forceful persuasive strategies in the years before World War I (Mead). On March 3, 1913, just weeks before the publication of Fannie Scobey's article, more than five thousand women descended on Washington, D.C., to demand suffrage on the eve of Woodrow Wilson's inauguration.

articles that explicitly narrated historical conditions and argued that these conditions remained binding on the publication's readers (see Appendix A). Seven of these texts were authored by, or quoted material authored by, women. I then analyzed the language rhetors used to construct their restoration narratives, tracked linguistic and thematic recurrence, and noted links between gender and other concepts.

Gender Restoration Arguments in the *Gospel Advocate*

My analysis of the selected texts revealed that gender restoration arguments in the *Gospel Advocate* narrated conditions in the Garden of Eden and the apostolic church most frequently (see Appendix A). In several notable cases, contributors grounded their arguments in the recent past or stories of ancient empires. The content of contributors' restoration narratives coalesced around three major themes: '*place*', '*civilization*', and '*order*'. The strong, recurring presence of these themes in the *Gospel Advocate*'s anti-suffrage restoration narratives reveals that, by the 1910s, the denomination's gender rhetoric integrated regional emphasis on social hierarchy with white supremacist discourses of civilization. Framing white women's bodies as verdant but endangered 'places', the *Advocate*'s anti-suffrage restoration arguments fostered affective urgency by associating women's enfranchisement with empire collapse and racial devolution.

Gender as 'Place'

The *Advocate*'s editors and contributors routinely used metaphors of place to construct their gender restoration arguments. In the examined texts, women's roles were described in terms of an Edenic or benevolent place originating at the beginning of time, while expansive or public roles for women evoked imagery of a ruined, spoiled, or chaotic place. In his Burkean analysis of

evangelical rhetoric, Barry Brummett identified a recurring representative anecdote within evangelical rhetoric that envisions truth as a “good place”—a physical location from which to launch a worthy “enterprise” which is “surrounded by animate or inanimate enemies, hostile forces, or inappropriate places” (10). The *Advocate* texts routinely framed gender obedience as a ‘good place’ perpetually subject to decay or disaster.

Advocate authors described women’s ‘place’ as a site, sphere, field, structure, kingdom, or upright ship that must not be corrupted, divided, wrecked, run aground, contaminated, or undermined (see Appendix A). Readers who were undecided about the suffrage issue were said to be “halting on the border” or “fence” between truth and error (Holman, “Woman Question, Again” 339; Smith, “Woman” 1010). Women’s bodies were ‘places’ vulnerable to ruin through immodest dress or promiscuous behavior (Smith, “Gloomy Picture” 1404). For both men and women, gender restoration required stasis: staying or keeping in place rather than leaving. Importantly, this metaphor of place functions multidimensionally, implying an embodied state along with a fixed physical location, a permanent position in the social hierarchy (a station, function, or assignment), and a lateral obligation to society (a duty, mission, or arrangement) (see Appendix A). Women seeking to move outside their designated ‘places’ rebelled against an immutable hierarchical structure and shirked their essential social responsibilities. In one of multiple similar examples, *Advocate* editor E. G. Sewell wrote that God, in his omniscience, knew in what “sphere,” “station,” and “relation” women could bless the human race (“Suffragettes” 1410). According to Sewell, the wife was “placed” in the home to serve as a “builder” and custodian. Nearly every article in the corpus utilizes similar language of place.

The home represented a benevolent and protective place for women, just as Eden had for

mankind before the fall—a delimited sphere into which she was set by God through nature in the beginning for protection and flourishing. Authors linked the home to Eden as an “earthly paradise,” described in terms of a justly governed empire or “little kingdom” that women were called to build and rule over as “queens” (McQuiddy, “Music” 1093; Selley 270; Sewell, “Bible” 58; “Suffragettes” 1411; Smith, “Suffragettes” 3; “Woman” 1011). When women remained in the private sphere, contributors argued, they became more powerful than men through their impact on future male leaders and their “more delicate and refined part” in the gender binary (Smith, “Suffragettes” 3; Ray 580). Rather than agitating to leave their place, contributors argued that women should gratefully accept their power within it. According to F. W. Smith, God fitted men for leadership roles through nature, and every successful “institution” required a leader who must be obeyed (“Suffragettes and the Bible” 3). Smith argued that this arrangement elevated women because it gave them a powerful, “queenly place” in the home. Women should be grateful for their assigned place because it made them, through moral influence, “superior to man.”

Although *Advocate* editors certainly curated the content of articles they selected for publication, female contributors utilized metaphors of place as often as their male counterparts to argue that the home was a natural, beneficial place for women and that the privileges it provided should restrain suffragists’ agitation for political rights. May Selley grounded male and female gender roles in creation and then argued that suffrage threatened women’s health and fulfillment.⁵ As natural wives and mothers concerned with “sympathy and sweet words,” women would not be happy or blessed by God if they were “given the seats of the rulers,” she contended; it would be blasphemous for humans to believe that they could improve on God’s

⁵ The atypical formatting of Selley’s article suggests that it may have been syndicated or sourced from another publication. Because it was purposefully selected by *Advocate* editors, I included it in my corpus.

“Great Scheme” (268, 270). Women should be grateful, not “selfish,” Selley asserted, and they would suffer from too much independence. Women must not “fight against our own natures,” she wrote; the home was woman’s “own little kingdom,” and she was “its queen with unlimited rights ... ” (270).

Only one *Advocate* contributor framed gender restoration appeals to ‘place’ more expansively. Silena Moore Holman, then-President of the Tennessee chapter of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and a regular *Advocate* contributor from the 1880s until just before her death in 1915, echoed the restoration-oriented reform rhetoric of WCTU founder Frances Willard (Campbell 322-323). God intended that men and women should stand “side by side” to improve the world, Holman wrote, provided women still conducted themselves in a “womanly” way (“Woman Question” 199; “Woman Question No. 2” 218; Smith, “Other Side” 101). Taking umbrage at F. W. Smith’s characterization of suffragists as “mannish,” a term that implied both physical and mental deficiency, Holman argued that most suffragists were “home-loving women” who did not desire to usurp their husbands’ “natural places as the rulers” (Smith, “Other Side” 101). Smith’s reply to Holman was vehement and tinged with anti-Northern vitriol: “Every woman who despises the place and mission in which God has put her by trying to fill other missions in life, at the same time seeking to explain away scriptures that clearly point out woman’s duty is an infidel” (102).⁶ Although Holman did not openly endorse women’s suffrage, her exposure to temperance discourse allowed her to narrate the conditions of creation more expansively than other contributors.

⁶ Biblical “infidelity” was a common accusation directed at Northern abolitionists and suffragists from the Civil War period on, revealing that the restoration of a white, patriarchal social hierarchy was a central preoccupation for many Southern Christians (Hughes and Allen 190-191; Noll, *Civil War* 39).

The *Advocate's* description of womanhood and the home as an Edenic earthly paradise implicitly warns of impending disaster. Because rhetors narrated the home and women's place within it in Edenic terms, their departure from the private sphere invited death and judgment, just as the fall of man had in the Genesis creation myth. Barry Brummett found that evangelical rhetoric deploys imagery of "uncontrolled" lateral movement to describe departure from a place deemed "proper," and *Advocate* contributors described women's public work in terms of chaotic or ill-considered directional change, maritime disaster, contamination, or structural collapse (12, 17-19; see Appendix A). Such movement often carried a regionalist subtext of rebellion, insurrection, usurpation, or treason. For example, editor E. G. Sewell argued that women's enfranchisement would bring "ruin" to an already "ruined world," as suffragists' "infidel ideas" would "run the world aground" ("Suffragettes" 1410). Women who left the home to become suffragists ventured into "rebellion," and when this happened, he argued, "all hope of salvation"—one might read restoration—was "forever gone." In pathos-laden, apocalyptic terms, he warned that mothers who engaged in political activism would return to homes that were "neglected and in confusion, the children running wild and in tatters and rags ..." (1411). If suffragists had their way, Sewell warned, "darkness would cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." Editor R. H. Boll claimed that "women of old" did not assert "women's rights"; instead, they gladly "took the place God assigned woman, especially after the fall" (290). Framing disobedience in insurrectionist terms, Boll wrote that "God's people always submit to take the place God assigns to them" while "the proud and defiant children of the world rebel against God's verdicts and order."

Women's suffrage would be catastrophic for society and for women themselves,

Advocate contributors claimed, and it was vital to protect their vulnerable minds and bodies from the taint of corrupt politics. In “The Other Side,” F. W. Smith warned that, because scripture calls women the “weaker vessel,” the “first and greatest injury” threatened by women’s suffrage “comes to woman herself because of her *disobedience* to God in entering the field of politics” (102; see also Perkins 402). A woman suffered moral injury when she left her “field of operation,” and she violated God’s law of submission when she sought to “make a law for the government of man” (103). Twenty-five years earlier, Smith wrote, it would have been inconceivable for a “young, Southern woman” to make a speech before the legislature because government officials once had “more respect for God’s word than now.” Editor J. C. McQuiddy agreed that women’s entry into the public sphere was physically dangerous, writing, “A fish cannot live out of water, neither can a woman live and flourish out of a home where God has put her. ... Those who live counter to the law of God must suffer” (“Woman’s” 52). Claims about the benevolence of disenfranchisement and the importance of female protection allowed other contributors to advocate for laws regulating female clothing, even when such arguments were not advanced in restorationist terms (Kurfees, “Feminine Attire” 968).

While adherence to gender conditions at creation typically centered women’s well-being, vestiges of punishment rhetoric lingered in the *Advocate’s* gender discourse. In “The Bible the Only Source of Divine Wisdom,” E. G. Sewell created a colorful extra-biblical narrative describing Eve’s role in mankind’s expulsion from Eden, warning readers to guard against anything that would turn them away from “the plain word of the Lord” (58). Eve’s vulnerability to “human wisdom” cost mankind his “earthly paradise” and his “lovely home,” causing the earth to be “cursed with thorns and briars” (58-59). Both men and women were doomed to “an

increase of labor and suffering,” and Eve was permanently placed in subjection to the “will of her husband from that time forward ... fixing it also upon women till time shall end” (58).

Like Sewell, F. W. Smith argued that women were called to submit to ongoing divine punishment, a requirement that had not been abolished with the founding of the church. “In the beginning God founded the government of the home, placing man at its head,” Smith wrote, “but the woman assumed leadership and wrecked Eden” (“Other Side” 103). Because women’s punishment had been reinscribed at the founding of the church, women who spoke in support of suffrage before “mixed multitudes” committed a “plain and positive violation of the plain and positive command of God.” In other words, restoring humanity to its intended condition required women’s willing submission to their subordinate post-Fall condition. By shifting the jurisdictional period governing women’s ‘place’ from Eden to the New Testament, Smith deflected attention away from the internal inconsistency of his restoration narrative.

By linking the Genesis creation myth to women and their role in the private sphere through language of place, restoration appeals in the *Advocate* drew on a vibrant set of associations. The metaphor of ‘place’ worked multidimensionally, simultaneously connoting an embodied condition, physical location, hierarchical position, and social obligation. By correlating Eden with womanhood and the home—notably, a ‘place’ only available to white women of sufficient means—authors evoke images of an undefiled utopia perpetually threatened from within and without. Ecofeminist philosopher and science historian Carolyn Merchant notes that gender is “crucial” to the mainstream Western “Recovery Narrative,” which constructs the female body as a verdant ‘good place’, a correlation that implies continual endangerment by unruly or corruptive forces (20-21). Contributors used the language of monarchy to situate white

male sovereignty in creation (and thus, divine intention) while describing gender roles in terms of kingdom, empire, land, and nation—in Western thought, concepts laden with subtext of conquest, domination, and private ownership (Merchant 32). Constructing white womanhood as a sheltered but imperiled ‘place’ central to the project of human restoration justified its defense under the guise of benevolent protection.

Gender and Civilization

In *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic*, Emily Conroy-Krutz examines ties between the transatlantic missionary movement and settler colonialism at the turn of the nineteenth century, a simultaneously spiritual and imperial project motivated by concern for the ‘heathen’ and aided by global trade and westward expansion (22, 32; see also Moorhead, *World* 10). Conroy-Krutz notes that in the context of the missionary enterprise, ‘civilization’ was not a “neutral term, but one of judgment about the relative value of different cultures” (14). During the nineteenth century, most Americans believed that human societies were advancing through progressive stages of ‘savagery’ and ‘barbarism’ toward ‘civilization’, a condition they believed only Anglo-Protestants had yet achieved (Bederman 25). According to Conroy-Krutz, these discourses implied both presence and absence; in short, “civilization was the opposite of what savage and barbarous communities were like” (14). Gail Bederman notes that sex and gender were central to the concept of civilization: ‘savage’ and ‘barbarous’ races were considered immodest, undifferentiated in dress and labor, and, in some cases, perversely tolerant of expansive expressions of gender and sexuality (22-25; Markowitz 92). Many Americans believed men were more attuned to their own lineage of ‘savagery’, requiring women to remain delicate and chaste to control men’s primitive sexual urges

(Bederman 22).

Discourses of civilization propelled transatlantic evangelical missions during the nineteenth century, and many evangelicals believed America was uniquely destined to further civilizational advancement. To many American Protestants, the young United States represented a new covenantal nation—a symbolic restoration of the kingdom of Israel—and a continuation of the classical empires of Greece and Rome (Hughes and Allen 2-3; Bozeman 20). The nation’s favored status was precarious, however, as great empires were perpetually susceptible to devolution through moral degeneracy (Marsden 80). During the Civil War period in the South, the symbol of Israel took on additional implications as it evolved to represent a second restoration—this time of a biblical social order corrupted by Northern irreligiosity (Hughes and Allen 195-196). By the 1910s, gender restoration rhetoric in the *Gospel Advocate* routinely constructed cautionary tales based on historical empires and their departure from a previous condition of dominance and bounty.

In the *Advocate* texts, anti-suffrage restoration arguments incorporated rhetoric of civilization and empire to tie sexual disinhibition and gender non-differentiation to national decline. As a result, women’s dress became a particular preoccupation for *Advocate* editors during this period. In a December 26, 1912, article titled “Gloomy Picture,” F. W. Smith argued that one needed only glance at the “pages of Roman history” to trace its devolution from the “once proud mistress of the world” to a “seething mass of corruption” (1404). Rome once conquered “vast domains,” but she did not nurture the kind of moral virtue that could have prevented her demise; every nation that “forgets God,” Smith argued, “and lives for the gratification of the flesh” is destined to fall. In a sidelong indictment of wealthy Northern

suffragists, Smith argued that the “highest social circles” in America failed to value the “marriage relation,” abandoning “childbearing” and “home-keeping” for “sensual pleasure.” Their actions constituted a “stream of pollution threatening the very life and perpetuity of this republic.” Female immodesty caused the downfall of Rome; thus, women’s willingness to remain in their sphere, procreate, and regulate the unruly sexuality of men through proper attire and behavior was vital to the survival of American civilization.

Other *Advocate* contributors turned the history of Israel into a gendered cautionary tale. In an October 9, 1913, article titled “The Debauchery of Style,” E. A. Elam argued against American women’s adoption of French designs because vain and immodest dress, along with female political leadership, presaged civilizational collapse (970; see also Kurfees, “Adornment” 1282). Just before the Jews of the Old Testament fell into Babylonian captivity, Elam wrote, they were wayward and ruled over by “proud, haughty, and wicked women.” Female leadership was “one sign that destruction, like a storm cloud, was hanging over them.” Women’s vanity, as they “arrayed themselves in immodest apparel, bedecked themselves with jewelry from head to foot, and went skipping with elastic step in the ways of wickedness,” called down God’s divine judgment (see also 993). When Greek and Roman civilizations began to decay into luxury, Elam warned, such “extreme effeminacy” was adopted “even by men” (970-971). Invoking discourses of civilization around the supposedly insufficient gender differentiation and immodest dress of ‘primitive’, ‘savage’, or ‘barbarous’ races, Elam implied that Israel’s departure from an earlier condition of male leadership, binary gender expression, and female modesty invited divine judgment. Humanity’s innate depravity led to “luxury and ease,” vanity, wickedness, immodest dress, and “to the same end—destruction” (971). “God has spoken ‘out plainly’ in the Bible

throughout all ages” on gendered apparel, Elam insisted:

Women who are Christians, and gentlewomen who are not Christians, do not desire to dress as do men, or in a way which approaches that in which men dress A true woman desires to fulfill her God-ordained mission and does not aspire to become a man or to dress and act as a man. A true and manly man does not desire to dress and act as a woman or to become in any way effeminate. A true woman desires that man shall remain in his place; a true man desires that woman shall remain in her place. ... There is something wrong with the heart of all women who do not desire to dress according to God’s directions (970).

In short, binary gender was central to the project of restoration. ‘True’ men and women did not behave like undifferentiated ‘savages’, and women should not wish to leave their elevated place within a ‘civilized’ country to usurp the work of men. Unregulated sexuality, female immodesty, and male ‘effeminacy’—coded language for homosexuality—were dangerous. Elam’s extensive extra-biblical narration of Jewish, Greek, and Roman history warned readers about the perilous stakes of gender confusion.

Similar warnings about the dangers of female leadership appear elsewhere. In “Woman’s Work,” David Lipscomb argued that, because women led the human race into sin, they were universally barred from public roles, a command that extended through “the blood of Adam and Eve” and remained applicable to the “whole race of Adam” (635; see also “An Answer” 155).⁷ Citing women’s leadership in the Old Testament, Lipscomb argued that the result of women’s public speech and leadership was uniformly disastrous; the downfall of past civilizations, Lipscomb argued, ought to make readers “cautious.” Women’s participation in public life affected their ability to bear children, as evidenced by women in the “Romish church,” who were

⁷ Bederman notes that, during this period, the term “race” situated all of humanity within a system of racial stratification, in which the ‘civilized’ white race led the vanguard of progress toward human redemption (25-27). This discourse of race simultaneously carried religious, technological, and hereditarian connotations.

dangerously out-reproducing Protestants.

Advocate authors argued that biblical gender roles, as they defined them, raised women to their current, civilized status. Editor E. G. Sewell reminded female readers that women were “degraded in all countries except Bible lands” and that women were only “elevated, civilized, purified, or refined” in Christian countries (“Suffragettes” 1411). When women turned away from Christianity and the Bible, Sewell insisted, they refused the power that “raised woman to her proper sphere.” In explicitly regionalist and white supremacist terms, Sewell wrote that this “infidel” behavior induced a “terrible downgrade” that would inevitably “wreck” her for all eternity. F. W. Smith agreed, writing that the Bible “redeemed woman from a state of bondage and degradation ...” in the same way it brought nations from “darkness to light, from sin to righteousness, peace, and prosperity” (“Suffragettes” 3). Comparing civilization to a once-great edifice, Smith warned that, if suffragists rejected the Bible, humanity could “bid farewell to a Christian civilization, to Christian homes, and all that goes to lift up and ennoble the race.” Women would “become degraded” and the entire “structure of a refined civilization” would “crumble and become a heap of ruins” (3-4).

Female contributors like Mrs. P. V. Ray believed that women shaped the “destiny of the future race” (580). Suffragists were placing “heavenly mortgages on this life and the to-morrows of the future life” by rejecting their elevated position in the home. The Christian mother, Ray argued, ought to be “among the foremost ranks,” because she shaped the progress of the heavenly kingdom by molding the character of children.

The prominence of discourses of civilization in the *Advocate*’s restoration appeals reflects how tightly interconnected race, gender, and national progress had become in the Southern

Churches of Christ by this period. For church members who considered the South the last bastion of true religion and biblical social order, discourses of civilizational decline framed in restorationist terms served as potent anti-suffrage arguments. Authors implied that empires which were once as mighty and providential as the United States began to decline when they failed to preserve the patriarchal race and gender conventions of white, Christian Southerners. Susan Marshall points out that middle-class white women's anti-suffrage activities were often predicated on class interests, an argumentative stance that relied on a fictionalized vision of the family as a historically stable structure (328; see also Cloud 398-399; Solomon 114). In the *Advocate* texts, binary gender roles and expressions, tightly regulated heterosexuality, and white, Christian mothers were central to human restoration. Departure from Southern Anglo-Protestant gender norms invited catastrophic divine judgment. Gender restoration narratives in the *Advocate* linked potent white supremacist discourses of racial decline and 'degenerate' sexuality to the fate of Western civilization, a connection central to the emerging pro-family rhetoric of the twentieth century.

Gender and Order

Finally, the Church of Christ's Enlightenment emphasis on rationality and social order remains pronounced within the *Advocate's* gender restoration rhetoric during this period. Contributors treat the Bible as a spiritual constitution or set of edicts delivered by a just ruler for the peaceful and efficient governance of church and state. Although apocalyptic urgency is visible in the texts, the authors treat biblical interpretation as a largely empirical enterprise. In their original, Edenic condition, contributors argued, men and women were inherently rational creatures content to submit to the fixed and benevolent order of God observable in nature.

Women, though they naturally possessed fewer rational faculties than men, were to use their limited endowments to assent to their sphere of work through orderly compliance.

In the *Advocate* texts, women are framed as emotional and nurturing by both male and female contributors, but they are also portrayed as co-inheritors of human reason. In a lengthy extra-biblical narrative about Eden, E. G. Sewell argued that Eve's choice to eat the fruit in the garden constituted a "complete ladder of reasoning by steps" driven by her desire for wisdom ("Bible" 58). Eve was an inherently rational being, but she was deceived when prideful desire overcame thought. God's "decree" was "fixed and unchangeable," and Eve's faulty reasoning meant that mankind was "shut out from the tree of life and doomed to die and return to dust."

The same kind of logical failing led women to agitate for suffrage, and their actions posed a risk to social order. In January 1913, F. W. Smith described the home as an Edenic archetype, key to human progress and central to social stability:

These *mannish* women who bewail the fact that they were born females and who are constantly trying to take the place of men in the affairs of this world are a curse not only to religious society, but to common civilization as well. If they should realize their *insane* 'daydreams,' and were their *wild, fanciful, and foolish* imagination to materialize, pandemonium would reign through every sphere of life. The civil government would be a wreck, anarchy would dominate the church, and the home would lose every sweet and tender tie that makes it man's earthly paradise ("Suffragettes" 3).

Smith calls the impulse to leave the home the "*quintessence of lawlessness*," which, if allowed to persist, would destroy "God's order in the control of man." Women's refusal to submit to the place God assigned them would incite social chaos and halt the advance of civilization. God's "control of man" depended on women's submission to divine law.

This law was established in Eden, Smith argued elsewhere, and the hierarchy it imposed was permanently binding. The creation story, he insisted, was a "fundamental law regulating

woman's place in this world," underpinning all of God's "divine legislation through the Bible concerning woman" ("Reply" 243). No matter how radically modern life evolved, he contended, men and women did not have "license" to "*change* God's law respecting their conduct" (Holman, "Woman Question, Again" 340). If the Lord "legislated regarding women's sphere in the home, church, and society, to reject that *divine settlement* and seek to settle the question in some other way" would constitute "rebellion against God."

British suffragists' campaign of terrorism and civil disruption in the wake of Emmeline Pankhurst's 1913 arrest received predictable condemnation on the pages of the *Advocate*. J. C. McQuiddy argued that no Christian would ever resort to civil disruption, implying that rational, measured submission to authority was closest to the divine ideal. Women belonged in the home, McQuiddy reiterated, not engaged in militant activism; they had no excuse for ignoring the Bible's teaching because they had been "crowned" the "queen of the home" ("Music" 1093; see also Smith, "Riot" 198). Invoking an argument that both suffragists and anti-suffragists utilized during this period to different ends, McQuiddy argued that the "godly mother" was the "most useful and potent influence in the nation to-day."

Advocate contributors framed Southern, white womanhood as the Edenic ideal: orderly, submissive, and contented. May Selley equated gender rationalism to Southern rural culture, juxtaposing common-sense Southern women with flamboyant and indulgent Northeastern suffragists. Such radicals were disorderly, she said, "sowing seeds of discontent in the hearts of country women" by creating a "sensation," making themselves "conspicuous" and "ridiculous," and "parading in the streets ... as if they'd gone plum hog-wild" (268). The Bible was a fixed and unchangeable law, and gender's establishment in nature was obvious. "When God created

the world, he made a law to run it by,” Selley argued, “and everything from the smallest atom to the most highly organized form must do the work for which it was made.” “Good country women” did not need to resort to disruptive displays because they were simply too engaged in their own “burdens” to “look after the affairs of the nation.”

Deploying symbols of Southern pride, monarchy, war, law, civilization, and rational social order, F. W. Smith—perhaps the most colorful of all the *Advocate* editors—argued that women were naturally powerful but using this power to disastrous ends. If they would just embrace their status as “queens,” reigning “over the circle in which God has placed them,” they would become “stronger than the sword, triumphing even over death” (“Woman” 1011). Smith included an excerpt from the alarmist confession of a former suffragist, who argued that “hundreds of men and women ... advocating woman suffrage in this country alone,” “scorn the law, denounce the Bible, trample our flag, and work to tear down our Constitution.” Such “agitators” are making previously courteous men rude (1010). According to Smith, women’s desire to enter politics was “one of the darkest clouds that ever rolled across the skies of American civilization”:

Women’s dressing in a fashion to shock the moral sensibilities of men of the world and their seeking to enter the slime and filth of politics constitutes, to my mind, the greatest danger threatening American civilization. The monetary system, tariff reform, and racial questions pale into utter insignificance in comparison with the evils threatening the womanhood of our land; and unless there is a great moral reform along the lines indicated, our ship will land among reefs and rocks, to be dashed in pieces and float with the maddened current. The highest type of so-called ‘civilization’ the world over is absorbed with the material side of life, which has been the pathway to destruction followed by the great empires and governments of the past (1010-1011).

Human nature did not change with “the cycles of time,” Smith warned. To escape the “whirlpool of destruction” threatened by suffrage, America needed to heed “the lessons enstamped upon the

pages of the past, and seek to avoid those evils which undermine and destroy the very foundations of all that is best for the race” (1011). Smith’s rhetoric reveals that the stakes of gender compliance were high; unruly women had the power to halt racial progress through immodesty, moral corruption, and rebellion, just as they had spoiled Eden. Women had to be protected from “slime and filth” to preserve the purity of their bodies—a protection for which they should be grateful. Gender differences were empirically obvious, originating in fixed, natural law. Conforming to Edenic gender conditions—where sensible men and women submitted to the just limitations of God—was essential to order, peace, and stability. Importantly, such conditions were inextricably tied to race: crowning white women “queens” implied the presence of a subject class that white men and women were called to rule over by natural right. Restoration appeals deployed in the *Advocate* provided convenient justification for quashing dissent in defense of a social order framed as divinely ordained and rational.

Drawing the Boundaries of Eden

Anti-suffrage restoration arguments in the *Gospel Advocate* reflected the denomination’s nineteenth-century origins in the American South, and this cultural interaction illuminates the workings of restoration appeals more broadly. *Advocate* authors considered arguments from origins persuasive, and they compounded the resonance of their appeals by incorporating culturally compelling symbols. Because restoration arguments overlay a community’s normative values onto the pages of the past and then argue that these values originated there, restoration conditions are slippery, but not endlessly so. Much like utopian and dystopian discourses, restoration narratives function as a “history of the present,” revealing a rhetor’s cultural preoccupations and intellectual inheritances through the specific vision of ‘first times’ they create

(Gordin et al. 1; Hughes, “Introduction” 14). While historians characterize restorationism as a flexible, “protean concept” deployed to different ends by different Christian groups, the rhetorical legacy of the nineteenth century continues to lend evangelical restoration theology an identifiable flavor (Bowden 176). Notably, pro-suffrage restoration appeals often reflected similar preoccupations, even when those arguments arrived at different conclusions.

In the *Advocate* texts, anti-suffrage restoration arguments cast white, Christian women as imperiled private property, sites of pristine bounty, and divine subjects perpetually obligated to fulfill their duties to the kingdom of God—not unlike symbolic representations of the nation and the church. Preserving or reinstating once-pristine gender conditions, as the *Advocate* authors defined them, was vital to personal and national salvation. Because gender differentiation was intimately tied to white supremacy within discourses of civilization, such rhetoric inherently evoked the supposed devolutionary danger of white women’s exposure to non-white men and coarse laboring classes. Women’s disenfranchisement was rational because their departure from the private sphere threatened America’s status as the “Redeemer Nation” of the world, rendering the project of human recovery impossible (Moorhead, “Between Progress” 524). ‘Natural’ gender limitations were good for everyone, *Advocate* contributors argued, but especially for women themselves, who required protection from corruptive influences, including their own misguided desires for political equity and bodily autonomy. The texts portray strongly differentiated gender roles as timeless and empirically obvious, originating in fixed, easily determined, natural categories. Finally, the *Advocate*’s restoration rhetoric promoted a theology of political stasis in defense of a white supremacist, patriarchal order considered intrinsic to the beginning of time. While themes of ‘place’, civilizational progress, and social order lent

legitimacy to any number of arguments during this period, restoration theology endowed anti-suffrage claims with an air of divine authority. Historically, Christian rhetoric from across the American denominational landscape provided substantial reinforcement to nineteenth-century discourses of white family preservation, and white, Christian women played a pivotal role in advancing this troubling legacy. Restoration theology allowed white Christians to naturalize their culturally situated views of sex, gender, and family, and broad cultural acceptance of primitivism allowed this situatedness to virtually disappear from their conscious awareness.

Tracing the presence of restoration rhetoric within subsequent gender movements allows us to recognize its ongoing influence in our own time. Martha Solomon analyzed opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment of the 1970s and noted how strongly the theme of social order appeared in anti-ERA messaging (109). Anti-ERA activists like Phyllis Schlafly framed supporters as agitators and disruptors determined to impose societal confusion and perversion onto the stable, divinely ordained gender roles of a family unit deemed central to civilizational success (113). According to Solomon, emphasis on ‘natural’ sex characteristics allowed religion and science to serve as potent, mutually reinforcing discourses grounded in illusions of gender as immutable truth rather than cultural and historical inheritance (114). Much like the anti-suffragists who came before them, ERA opponents argued that feminists sought to collapse ‘civilized’ gender difference and upend the happiness and protection women were afforded by traditional gender roles (110). Solomon’s study reveals striking congruence between anti-suffrage and anti-ERA rhetoric, much of which is overtly restorationist in orientation.

Because homosexuality has long been described within evangelical rhetoric as a form of gender deficiency, the anti-gay marriage movement offers a particularly illuminating example of

gender restoration rhetoric tied to alarm over diminishing gender differentiation and fears of civilizational collapse. Michelle Kelsey details similarities between anti-suffrage and anti-gay marriage rhetoric, showing that marriage equality opponents drew on familiar tropes of feminine inferiority, gender failure, male ‘savagery’, pathological or trauma-induced gender confusion, and social radicalism while elevating white, heteronormative family values (103-108). Paul Apostolidis notes that themes of benevolent paternal protection underpin both evangelical discourses of gay reparative therapy and conservative antipoverty policy enacted under the auspices of saving homosexuals and the poor from their own substandard “moral-psychological” behavior (96). Dana Cloud detects similar thematic overlap in the conservative family values rhetoric of the 1990s, which sought to frame poverty as a form of familial failure ameliorated by maternal care (399-400, 411). Echoing anti-suffrage restoration rhetoric, such discourses retain a strong undercurrent of justified punishment, enacted through the systemic withholding of communal resources and social acceptance—a form of moral policing Cloud perceptively labels a “utopia of shared values rather than shared resources” (410).

Today, opponents of transgender rights adapt and redeploy anti-suffrage restoration arguments linking benevolent protection, gender differentiation, biological empiricism, and social order to American progress. Like the anti-gay rhetoric that preceded it, modern anti-transgender hysteria is fueled, in often unspoken ways, by compulsory reclamation of a mythical Edenic corporeality. Hughes and Allen note that restorationism has long provided American culture with a “transcendent norm” or “ideal to be approximated”; in the case of gendered bodies, restorationism supplies an Edenic standard against which non-normative bodies (i.e., those that are non-heterosexual, sex or gender non-conforming, differently abled, or ‘improperly’

reproductive) can be cast as departures from a fictional divine ideal (xiii). Within evangelical narratives of restoration, ‘fallen’ bodies are denaturalized in opposition to immortal, pre-Fall bodies, where they become associated with vice, affliction, and punishment (Apostolidis 86). As this study shows, restoration theology allows rhetors to draw the boundaries of Eden nearly anywhere; thus, it is striking how predictably white evangelical gender restoration arguments reinvigorate the white supremacist associations that lent their nineteenth-century forebears such rhetorical power.

V. Jo Hsu tellingly illustrates how the rhetoric of “Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria,” an invented “public health crisis” disproportionately ascribed to white, middle-class girls, reinvokes the discriminatory fellow travelers of race, gender, sexuality, and disability (62). By affectively associating trans identity with various forms of stigmatized embodiment—mental illness, autism, and non-whiteness—Hsu argues that trans bodies become a convenient target for white anxiety (66-68). Drawing on tropes of female irrationality and cultural alarm around destroying the sexual or reproductive potential of white women, authors like Abigail Shrier justify limiting trans self-determination in the name of protecting white, middle-class girls from ‘self-mutilation’ (72). Hsu notes that “the dissolution of binary gender destabilizes fictions of white superiority—a reality that may be felt by those invested in white dominance, however reluctant they may be to put it into words” (70). I argue that discourses like ROGD become most intelligible through the cultural vestige of restorationism: a worldview where every embodiment that is not white, able-bodied, heterosexual, reproductively fit, and binary-gendered is measured, even subtextually, against a historical fiction of racialized gender perfection.

Legal scholar Chan Tov McNamara shows how modern anti-transgender discourses

echo the nation's long history of legalized discrimination against minorities in the name of protecting white, cisgender women, efforts that, McNamara notes, "bear striking family resemblances to, and inherit the disfigurements of, their historical priors" (845, 851). The divergent forms of discrimination afflicting transgender women and transgender men further illuminate the longstanding interaction between misogyny, homophobia, white supremacy, and ableism. Cisgender women, especially white women, must be protected from supposedly predatory or hyper-athletic transgender women, while, if they are acknowledged at all, transgender men are treated as confused, traumatized, or suggestible young women who have fallen victim to social contagion through feminine irrationality (849-850; Hsu 65).

Catherine Palczewski labels such recurring themes "constellations" because they coalesce around an identifiable central "logic," even when separated by time (91). Argument constellations "are not merely different topoi or lines of argument," she concludes, "but, instead, seem to supercharge each other while providing a silhouette of the motive behind the arguments" (87). Restorationism provides such a motive. Like racist and ableist rhetoric, anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric are often deeply inflected with restorationism, presuming that unmodified, white, cisgender, heterosexual bodies best reflect God's original design. Moreover, when rhetors are oriented toward restoration, gender preservation adopts an air of desperation while operating under a naturalized cloak of invisibility. Such pathologization may render non-normative bodies worthy of compassion or pity but rarely of full and dignified personhood.

This study reveals that the restoration rhetoric of the women's suffrage debate provided an important vector through which themes of 'place', civilization, and order became thoroughly embedded within conservative gender theology, a rhetorical conjoiner that, today, remains

inextricable from its white supremacist roots. Case studies of gender restoration rhetoric in other denominations would further illumine how connections forged in the gender debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided rhetorical precedent for later family values movements, which sought to sanctify white marriage and reproductive fitness through a variety of pro-birth (sometimes labeled ‘positive’) eugenics measures (Ladd-Taylor 301, 322-323; Lofton 815; Løvdal Stephens 25-26, 56, 59, 135-136; see also Cloud). Family tax credits, marriage counseling, restrictions on reproductive rights, and educational gatekeeping trace their origins to this less-than-venerable legacy.

Most importantly, this analysis reveals that powerful associative complexes remain at work in conservative Christian gender politics and that these associations play a major role in accelerating efforts to deprive women and LGBTQ+ people of bodily autonomy. Implicit regard for Anglo-Protestant “primal norms”—physical, racial, and moral—operates in the background of everyday life in America, and restorationism lends urgency to legislation restricting reproductive freedom and gender affirming health care (Hughes and Allen 3). As a compelling and often invisible reform argument, restorationism insists that human recovery can (and must) unfold through gender stasis—essentially by forcing gendered bodies to stay in ‘place’.

The fact that restoration narratives are invented is, in many ways, less significant than their invisibility. In order to engage in productive civil discourse around contentious issues of gender and sexuality, we must recognize that restorationism is often implicit in conservative Christian discussions of gender and LGBTQ+ issues; thus, the argument being presented is not about sex or gender at all but about what version of humanity’s primordial past must be preserved or imposed. Because the concept of ‘progress’ itself often carries strong primitivist

undertones, restoration appeals used to divergent ends unknowingly propel meaning from many sides. To better engage with conservative gender rhetoric across faith divides and draw closer to a condition of stasis—agreement on precisely what we disagree about—requires an empathetic exploration of our underlying (and often shared) primitivist assumptions (Blankenship 85-86; Crowley 28-29).

Still, this empathy must not obscure the discriminatory ends to which gender restoration theology is still used. Within many conservative denominations, restrictions on women's speech and leadership continue to dominate. The traumatic experiences of LGBTQ+ people within evangelical spaces have been documented by scholars like Mari Ramler and Victoria Houser, and rhetoric that seeks to restore non-heterosexual and transgender bodies to a supposedly original, Edenic state provides potent justification for religiously motivated discrimination. The significant role that restoration appeals continue to wield in contemporary white Christian nationalist movements and domestic terror groups remains a vital area for further study (Edwards 352-353).

The persistent durability of restoration themes of 'place', civilization, and order becomes particularly striking when we examine gender discourse in the modern Churches of Christ. For example, the 2021 book *Male & Female: A Biblical Look at Gender* emphasizes submission to "God's order in creation" in hauntingly familiar terms, warning that the divine "order of headship is in jeopardy when men are not in the position given to Adam: guarding the boundaries" (12, 136). Echoing *Advocate* editor David Lipscomb's sentiment 109 years earlier, editor Renée Webb Sproles warns that women are forced to "assume traditionally male tasks" when men fail in their leadership (65). "Living against the grain of reality hurts everyone," she

argues, and women are called to conduct themselves in an “orderly,” satisfied way (80, 117, 234). Just as it did in the Roman Empire, the collapse of the family will lead to the eventual breakdown of “civilization,” because “post-Christian” societies always devolve into chaotic, “pre-Christian” ones (41, 57, 172).

Male and Female pointedly illustrates the common evangelical progression from restoration theology to discourses of gender failure to deliverance narratives, which provide justification for harmful and discredited practices of conversion therapy:

As with other consequences of the fall, we must work toward restoration, knowing that full restoration will only come in the new heaven and earth It should not trouble us, then, when some have attraction for those of their same sex, while others have struggles with gender dysphoria, being born one way biologically but identifying internally with a different sex But God calls us to uphold his created order where we live in step with his teachings on gender, marriage, and LGBTQ+ issues. Each of us has disordered affections and desires, sexual or not, and so each person must die to their sinful affections rather than give them special status or call them good (318).

While the text calls for Christian compassion for those experiencing homosexual attraction or gender dysphoria, the conviction that LGBTQ+ people can be restored to (or learn to thrive within) a divine state of heterosexuality or cisgender by emulating God’s intended order for the sexes consigns non-cisgender bodies and non-heterosexual relationships to a diseased and fallen state (268-269). In a chapter on gender and marriage, Sproles reprints a striking quote from controversial theologian Joe Rigney to argue that male and female sex differentiation—applied throughout the book to social and familial roles, gender expressions, sexual orientation, and biology—is “directly related to the doctrine of creation” (196). Rigney likens the doctrinal error of “egalitarianism,” defined in the text as “interchangeability of the sexes,” to creeping “gangrene” (196, 313). “The frequent move from egalitarianism to the affirmation and

celebration of homosexuality,” Rigney continues, “is not so much a slippery slope, but simply what cancer does when left untreated” (196).

Restorationism remains an enduring feature of Christian rhetoric in America, but the ubiquity of its underlying primitivist orientation provides those invested in human rights with important counter-rhetorical opportunities. To recognize the restoration impulse at the heart of conservative gender theology is, in an important sense, to exploit the structure’s underlying vulnerability. Since purging primitivism from the American landscape is impossible, discourses of original human variation and divine freedom may allow justice-oriented rhetors to co-opt restorationism’s orientation toward beginnings for more equitable ends, a strategy that has long been central to Christian traditions rooted in social justice (Apostolidis 91-92; Crowley 192-193; Geiger 88-91). Many non-Christian faith traditions hold expansive views of gender and sexuality, and if we are called to restore anything, perhaps it is the wisdom found in these rhetorics of faith. There is no pure body, no intended government, no original harmony, no earthly Eden to return to—even in a symbolic sense—thus, the true project of gender liberation is harder than that of restoration: to purposefully build what has never existed.

Given that gender restoration narratives function by naturalizing the values of a given discourse community and infusing them with divine intention, reframing narratives of restoration to reflect the conditions we *actually* observe—a world full of sex and gender diversity, biological complexity, and socially dependent and shifting gender roles and expressions—may allow us to claim the sex and gender spectrum as an expression of nature rather than an anomaly to be purged. In this way, we can reflectively preserve the values that orient us toward tolerance and personal liberty while gleefully exorcising some of the tenacious demons of our colonial past. At

the very least, we may capitalize on the restoration impulse to argue that the boundaries of Eden are wide enough for all.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

No.	Date	Article Title	Author	Restoration Reference	Place	Civilization	Order
1	12/26/1912	Gloomy Picture	F.W. Smith	pages of Roman history; creation of this world	road to ruin; vast domains; mighty empire; nation; republic; pollution; deteriorating	once proud mistress of the world; seething mass of corruption; degradation; infidels	common sense; natural elements; a true science and a true philosophy which are handmaidens to Christianity; human reason; human philosophy
2	12/26/1912	Suffragettes Against the Bible	E. G. Sewell	creation; Sewell's childhood	placed her in the home; placed both man and woman in the very places; placing man and women where they are counterparts; placing the woman in the home; raised woman to her proper sphere; queens; station; woman's sphere; station in life; Man is in the very place God put him; relation in which her Creator placed her; arranging for the highest happiness and well-being; arranged the relations; keeper; home builder; departure; dark shadows; run the world aground; ruinous; ruined world; turn away; course; direction; reverse; run her into the dark and awful meshes; dark/darkness; start wrong; wreck	human race; infidelity; infidel ideas; infidels; degraded in all countries except in Bible lands; where Christianity is embraced and practiced ... women are elevated, civilized, purified, or refined; heathen lands; terrible downgrade	God's order; God's wisdom; God's wise arrangement; at war with the facts; plain teaching; in confusion; running wild; human devices and folly; starts out into rebellion
3	1/2/1913	Suffragettes and the Bible	F.W. Smith	creation	home; sphere; man's earthly paradise; by his very nature man is better fitted for this leadership; woman's place in this world; place God assigned them in this life; take the place of men in the affairs of this world; God has assigned to them the most important place; exalts woman's work and place in religion; elevated; queenly; functions; duty of keeping the home; abandon	curse to ... common civilization; bid farewell to a Christian civilization; whole structure of a refined civilization will crumble and become a heap of ruins; history of the race; lift up and ennoble the race; women of heathen lands; transforms the nations from darkness to light; degraded/degradation	common sense; rights; usurp; pandemonium; wild; insane; civil government would become a wreck; anarchy would dominate the church; quintessence of lawlessness; away goes God's order in the control of man; grounds upon which she brings such ugly charges; brings ugly charges; indictment
4	1/16/1913	Woman's Rights	J. C. McQuiddy	a few years ago; the old way	neither can a woman live and flourish out of a home where God has put her		agitation; destruction of the respect either sex has for the other; Those who live counter to the law of God must suffer
5	1/16/1913	The Bible the Only Source of Divine Wisdom	E. G. Sewell	garden of Eden; flood; tower of Babel; Abraham; apostles of Christ; antiquity	path of truth and righteousness; divine arrangements; placed them in the garden of Eden; earthly paradise; specified and located; fatal step; sacrificed her lovely Eden home; lost to them their lovely home; caused the earth to be cursed with thorns and briars; earth ... still bears thorns and thistles; invited death; Out of Eden; shut out from the tree of life; blighting effects; harassing effects upon the people of this earth; ruinous; subjected her; fixing it also upon women; build; undermine; destroy/destroyed; displace; turn away/get people away; lose; sacrificed; gave up	destroyed the whole human race; the race had begun to increase; tendency of all the ages and nations	the penalty of disobedience was death; presented; case; plain, positive word of God; plain Gospel of Christ; God's wisdom; man's wisdom and folly; human wisdom and human inventions; Satan's proposition; a complete ladder of reasoning by steps; her reasoning was faulty; the first two steps of her reasoning; matter of choice; requirement of submission; God's decree was fixed and unchangeable; anything not authorized in the word of God; break from the leadership of Jehovah; risk; rash
6	1/30/1913	The Other Side	F.W. Smith; Silena Holman	garden of Eden; apostolic period; "twenty-five years ago"	home man's earthly paradise; nature; outside world; place/placed; natural places as the rulers; take the place of men; displace them; placing man at its head; woman's place and mission; woman's place and mission in the world; despises her place and mission; trying to fill other missions; woman's duty; discharge these duties; divinely appointed rulers; dominion over him; reign of woman's suffrage; God's kingdom; put him down; God made men and women to walk and work together; stand by them; side by side; guide to their footsteps; doors of opportunity; weaker vessel; woman's field of operation in the world; destruction; corrupt/corrupting; wrecked Eden	infidel; degrees of infidelity; refined; Roman hierarchy; devolves	In the beginning God founded the government of the home; the only correct rule for living; divine injunction; holy writ; enact a law for the control of man; prohibition; violate/violates; evidence; settlement of questions; right; control; woman's insubordination; strife; division; broadside fire; plain and positive word of God; plain statement; content; respect
7	2/13/1913	An Answer to a Query on Woman's Work	D. Lipscomb	apostolic period	general drift; public; church assembly; men did not do their duty		law of God; specific command; God must be obeyed; great commandment
8	2/27/1913	Riot to Hear Evangelist	F.W. Smith	apostolic period			mishaps; serious accidents; exciting; maddened; crazy; morbid curiosity; animal excitement; trample; frantic efforts; sensationism; hair-raising; blood-curling; claptrap; trumpery; tomfoolishness; pulled; pushed; jerked; ribs broken; shoved; danger; plain, simple Gospel of Christ/worship; New Testament way; genuine gospel conversion; sober; naked truth; humble and simple way
9	2/27/1913	The Woman Question	Silena Holman	pentecost; apostolic period	home duties; woman's position; public appearance; work before the public; Legislature	Eastern country, where customs have changed less than any country on earth	law; govern; rule; case; prove; enforcement; the Bible stands immutable and unchangeable; settled/settlement; settled right; proper settlement; scriptural injunction; command/commanding; dictate/dictatorial; usurping authority over man; humbly; respectfully; calm; plead

10	3/6/1913	The Woman Question No. 2	Silena Holman	Old Testament	home; the home will always be her real sphere; women's greater and better functions; public life/work; State; nation; do their duty by the State as well as by the home; so should women fulfill all the duties of citizenship; fill all these duties; home duties; did all her duties in the home well and found time to interest herself in outside affairs; position in the home as home keeper; work with men, and not over them	Even before the time foretold by the prophet Joel, women have really ruled over men and women with the full consent of the Lord	does her work in a quiet, womanly way, and not boisterously and in a dictatorial way; unostentatiously; subordinate men
11	3/13/1913	Reply to Sister Holman	F. W. Smith	creation; pentecost; "two thousand years ago"	home; Men will die for her in the home; where God put her at first; woman's place in this world; woman's natural functions; place she occupied; she did not go from place to place addressing the multitude in a public way; woman's place in the church; woman is out of her God-given and appointed place and work when she becomes a public speaker or teacher; nation; right side; my position; positions they occupy; public appearance is disobedience to God; obligation; shirk; home duties; no woman can discharge her duties in the home and dabble in politics; affairs of the outside world		final and infallible arbiter; clear and unmistakable terms; fact; proof text; field of investigation; plain and unambiguous passages; passages ... are so plain and simple; fundamental law regulating; law for his government; permitted to speak; plead; settling the question/remain settled; enactments of divine legislation; proof of this assertion; disprove; the rule she lays down by which to be governed; doing violence to the word of God; the way God has ordained; usurping authority over man; usurp authority over him; violating the law of God by addressing the legislature
12	3/20/1913	Is Equal Suffrage Worth the Fight? No! Think's a Business Girl	May Selley	creation	homes; mother in her own kitchen; own little kingdom; queen; seats of rulers; overstep the line; step over the line from good into evil; dangerously near it a corresponding vice; do not think he made us for the same purpose; our own way; the work for which it was made; not to fulfill the mission we were created for is to work out of harmony with the Great Scheme; cultivate; keep in our places; divides the home/divide many homes; country; circus; vaudeville; turning point; running the independence question into the ground; services rendered; servile positions; far above them, like the angels, almost; lower than themselves; nature gave them no facilities; God gave the men facilities which were left out of our make-up and for which we have no need; the work for which we were created; according to nature; something for which nature prepared her; work in accord with nature; fight against our own natures; lost; purify; contaminated	upward march; promotion; we've made quite a few steps in civilization since God made Eve for a helpmeet to Adam; Eve's feminine descendants are helpers still; everything from the smallest atom to the most highly organized form; keep their women from work so strenuous that often strong men lose their moral and physical balance in it; degraded; 'molly' man; wonderful womanhood is being voluntarily lowered	right/unlimited rights; the great fundamentals are the same; he made a law to run it by; pattern; to transgress this law is to be punished; his original plan; conform our lives to his will; experiment; fought for in a dignified, womanly way; making themselves ridiculous; parading; sowing seeds of discontent; create a sensation; window smashing; law breaking; make themselves conspicuous; wrangling; quarrel; parading the streets; gone plum hog-wild; lime light; vice; noise; confusion; discontent
13	3/27/1913	Question About Women and Jewelry	R. H. Boll	Old Testament; "days of old"	place God assigned woman, especially after the fall; God's people always take the place God assigns to them; infected with their spirit	remnant of a barbarous taste; in the days of old he made many allowances; in these last days	rebel against God's verdicts and order; stringent regulations; defiant
14	3/27/1913	Shall Women Vote?	Fannie S. Scobey	creation; garden of Eden; New Testament	course we should be pleased to pursue; from whence they came; whither they are going; way to go; build a happy home; beautiful home; builds the Christian home; veritable queen; God has given woman an exalted position in the world; betterment; made woman for a companion and helpmeet to man in all that pertains to the home; look up to him; chaste keeper at home; keep the home; content to labor in the sphere assigned to her; out of her sphere; her sphere—the home—where God placed her; what he created every being and every thing for; where he wanted them to remain; circumscribed her field of labor; discharging her duties and obligations; understands her duties and obligations and discharges them; God-given mission in the home; work and influence are not confined; improving her home, her town, and her country; cause of man's downfall; [home] is the source from which springs the schools, the church, and the government	refined; the civilized and enlightened of the world; lever that raises sinful man and woman heavenward; advance the development of our country	nature's laws; infallible guide; unerring guide; last will and testament of our Lord and Savior; liberty to choose whom they will serve; govern; control; confusion more confounded in the affairs of State must ensue

15	4/10/1913	The Woman Question, Again	Silena Holman; F. W. Smith	pentecost; apostolic period; "two thousand years ago"; grandmothers' time	home; woman's sphere; keep their place; grandmothers who kept the place in the home, church, and society that God assigned to them; public; church assembly; exempt from such duties; halting on the border; keep step; obligates; shirking; ruining	changing conditions of modern life and modern civilization; the whole civilized world is being aroused on the subject [re: "white slave traffic"]	eternal principles of truth and justice; clear example; question before the nation for settlement; settlement of the question; divine settlement; God's settlement; God's law respecting their conduct; ordinance; commanded; premises; legislated; ordinance; injunction; commanded; divine legislation applied to grandmothers applies to women in all ages and under all conditions; try the case by this rule; accept the proposition and have submitted the testimony; yielded the contest; I have put my case in the Lord's hands; overrule; usurp authority over men; seeking a law to control men; agitation; radical; license; crime; rebellion
16	4/24/1913	Who Received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost?	L. D. Perkins	pentecost	woman's work; at sea on this question; fall into error; rightly divide; go out into the world		scriptural authority; obvious fact; evident; clear understanding; contend, allege; conclusive/conclusion; perversion of the text; misconception of the design of the event; misunderstand; misuses this scripture; pervert the scriptures to support any theory
17	6/19/1913	Christians and the Bible	Mrs. P. V. Ray	creation	keepers at home; assigning; foremost ranks; duty; turning her from her duty; put her here; gave her a mission to fulfill; attending strictly to the part; more delicate and refined part; part which she is best fitted for; not given her any part; excluded woman and given her no part; God has given woman her work or part; leave woman entirely out; excluded her; God has not commanded women to go out into the world for anything; outside world; out into the world; go out into the world and begin a fight; dark and gloomy; away from the home; go beyond God; put it all not only aside, but clear out of existence; departing and swiftly losing all that God has given woman; vessel; heavenly mortgages	shape the future for God and humanity by shaping their children; destiny of the future race	[her work or part] as plain as that of the man; wild, foolish, sinful doctrine of woman suffrage; what God requires of women; commands; obedient
18	7/3/1913	Woman's Work	D. Lipscomb	garden of Eden; children of Israel; apostolic period; earthly ministry of Jesus; pentecost; "destruction of all parties"; "union of the people of God"	women were put forward as a reproach and shame to the men; God nowhere puts forward a woman; duty; duties favorable to bearing and training children; cut them off from childbearing	race of Adam; Christian dispensation; Romish church increasing; union of the people of God in one body	example; rule; command; same principle holds good now; testimony
19	10/9/1913	The Debauchery of Style	E. A. Elam	ancient Israel; Greeks; Romans; "Christians are the church"	house of God; fulfill her God-ordained mission; fulfill their mission; man shall remain in his place; woman shall remain in her place; women get out of their place; women ruled them; destruction, like a storm cloud, was hanging over them; skipping with elastic step in the ways of wickedness; Rome; Greece; lead in the same direction; captivity; death	true woman ... does not aspire to become a man or to dress and act as a man; true and manly man does not desire to act as a woman or to become in any way effeminate; mark of extreme effeminacy	God's directions; Holy writ; human nature; danger; authority; reverence
20	10/16/1913	The Debauchery of Style	E. A. Elam	apostolic period	one side; dominion over man; rule the household; workers at home; subjection; lack of subjection to husbands; other side; opposite; one side is opposed to the other; pushing oneself forward; all true women lovingly fulfilling their God-appointed mission; bustling out into the world; public places; cultivation/cultivate; outward adornment; outward man; corruptible	refined; mannish/mannishness	regulate; transgression; declarations; neat; orderly; loudness; boldness; quietness; dignified; sobriety; lack judgment; condemned
21	10/23/1913	Woman Suffrage	F. W. Smith	"great empires and governments of the past"; lessons enstamped upon the pages of the past; "cycles of time"; "previously"	queens; reigning over the circle in which God has placed them; halting between two opinions; reach down; enter into the slime and filth of politics; danger; threatening the womanhood of our land; darkest clouds; ship will land upon the reefs and rocks, to be dashed to pieces; pathway to destruction; undermine and destroy the very foundations; whirlpool of destruction; every man's door; dawning; lift this old sin-cursed world back to God	American civilization; the highest type of so-called 'civilization'; the great empires and governments of the past; prostituted; gratification of the flesh; material progress; cycles of time; years that roll into eternity; best for the race; all that is best for the race; generations yet unborn	human nature; resources of nature; declaration of the Christ
22	11/13/1913	Music and Bombshells	J. C. McQuiddy	"infant Moses" and his mother; Timothy	woman's place is in the home; not fitted; elevation of woman; crowned her queen of the home		respect; no Christian will ever resort to such methods
23	12/25/1913	The Adornment of Christian Women	M. C. Kurfrees	apostolic period; "modern times"	positive side; negative side		facts in the case; enjoin; prohibit/prohibit; violated; forbidden