



# A New Gospel for Women: Katharine Bushnell and the Challenge of Christian Feminism

By Kristin Kobes Du Mez

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*A New Gospel for Women* tells the story of Katharine Bushnell (1855-1946), author of *God's Word to Women*, one of the most innovative and comprehensive feminist theologies ever written. An internationally-known social reformer and women's rights activist, Bushnell rose to prominence through her highly publicized campaigns against prostitution and the trafficking of women in America, in colonial India, and throughout East Asia. In each of these cases, the intrepid reformer struggled to come to terms with the fact that it was Christian men who were guilty of committing acts of appalling cruelty against women. Ultimately, Bushnell concluded that Christianity itself - or rather, the patriarchal distortion of true Christianity - must be to blame.

A work of history, biography, and historical theology, Kristin Kobes DuMez's book provides a vivid account of Bushnell's life. It maps a concise introduction to her fascinating theology, revealing, for example, Bushnell's belief that gender bias tainted both the King James and the Revised Versions of the English Bible. As Du Mez demonstrates, Bushnell insisted that God created women to be strong and independent, that Adam, not Eve, bore responsibility for the Fall, and that it was through Christ, "the great emancipator of women," that women would achieve spiritual and social redemption.

*A New Gospel for Women* restores Bushnell to her rightful place in history. It illuminates the dynamic and often thorny relationship between faith and feminism in modern America by mapping Bushnell's story and her subsequent disappearance from the historical record. Most pointedly, the book reveals the challenges confronting Christian feminists today who wish to construct a sexual ethic that is both Christian and feminist, one rooted not in the Victorian era, but rather one suited to the modern world.

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## **Editorial Review**

### Review

"This is the book many of us have been waiting for, a top-notch biography of the inimitable Kate Bushnell. DuMez provides a thoroughly compelling portrait of a woman both ahead of and behind her times, whose accomplishments-and subsequent obscurity-tell us much about the long and vexed relationship between conservative religion and modern feminism." --Margaret Bendroth, Executive Director, Congregational Library

"In this dazzling hybrid of history, biography, and theology, Kristin DuMez rekindles our interest in a path-breaking woman -- Katharine Bushnell -- whose sprawling work on behalf of Christian feminism spanned decades, traversed boundaries, shattered categories, and covered the globe. With judiciousness and a lively pen, DuMez makes it perfectly clear why this crusading reformer, written off or forgotten as a product of an antiquated Victorian past, must be re-centered in our histories and current renderings of modern Christianity and of modern America itself." --Darren Dochuk, author of *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*

"Katharine Bushnell was a pioneering physician, missionary, expert in Greek and Hebrew, critic of the sexual double standard, and advocate for women's rights-all within late-Victorian culture. Kristin Kobes DuMez's historical contribution demonstrates why Bushnell deserves to be remembered as a noteworthy reformer. The book also challenges modern feminists who question Christianity and modern Christians who question feminism to ponder what each might learn from Bushnell's extraordinary career." --Mark Noll, author of *Protestantism: A Very Short Introduction*

"...[A] fascinating study... This is both an important work of scholarship and an engrossing and accessible book for those interested in the many provocative issues it covers... Highly recommended." --*CHOICE*

"Bushnell's key insights should resonate with present-day promoters of feminist consciousness."--*Christian Century*

### About the Author

**Kristin Kobes Du Mez** is an associate professor of History and Gender Studies at Calvin College. She

received a Ph.D. in American Religious History from the University of Notre Dame. Her research interests include the intersection of religion, gender, and sexuality in American history, with a particular focus on women in American Protestantism from the nineteenth century to the present.

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