
IT TAKES SO MUCH ENERGY: FEMALE TEMPERED RADICALS IN CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS

DIANE ZEMKE

Abstract: “Tempered radicals” are those whose personal values differ in some significant way from those of their organization, in this case their congregation. Tempered radicals can be assets to their congregations since they often function as change agents. However, they are also prone to psychological dissonance and burnout, which can thwart their efforts. In this paper I explore how women tempered radicals can continue to work faithfully for change in contexts where they do not fit well. Based on interviews I conducted I offer sustaining practices for women tempered radicals and suggest ways leaders and congregations can support them.¹

As a practicing Protestant for nearly forty years, I have come to understand that I have often functioned as a tempered radical in the various congregations I have attended. Within a congregation I often have a dual identity: one of being welcomed for the many gifts I bring and one of being viewed warily because I may use those gifts to cultivate alternatives to the cherished status quo. Thus, I am often insider and outsider simultaneously, both welcomed and distrusted. Like others with my experience, I have found it difficult to

*Diane Zemke is an independent scholar and consultant in
Spokane, Washington*

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walk away from church but often painful to stay.² I have chosen to participate in a Christian congregation out of obedience to God and in the belief that good fruit is possible.

As I have reflected on my own experience, I have wondered how other tempered radicals continue to work faithfully for change in congregations where they do not fit. How do they manage the inevitable tension of dual identities, of being both welcomed and seen as a threat? What practices sustain them? And, perhaps just as important, what can congregations do to welcome the tempered radicals in their midst? These questions led me to explore the lives of tempered radicals in Christian congregations. In my research I was privileged to hear the stories of five experienced tempered radicals, both women and men, Protestant and Catholic.³ This article shares the experiences of the female tempered radicals.

The Nature of Tempered Radicals

The personal values of tempered radicals differ in some significant way from those of their organization.⁴ Typical examples include women within traditionally male professions or minorities within traditionally white institutions. In these examples, tempered radicals attempt to honor their gender and/or ethnic values simultaneously with their organizational or professional values. Tempered radicals often appear as loyal company

² For examples, see Nora Gallagher, *Things Seen and Unseen* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1998), 9; and Letty Russell, "Searching for a Church in the Round," in *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, ed. Miriam Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 253.

³ This study formed the basis for my Ph.D. dissertation in leadership studies: "Now and Not Yet: The Experience of Tempered Radicals in Christian Congregations" (Ph.D. diss., Gonzaga University, 2010).

⁴ The description of the characteristics of tempered radicals is based on Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully, "Tempered Radicals and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change," in *Organization Science* 6 (5) (1995): 585–600.

employees on the outside, yet harbor a decidedly different internal reality, based on their conflicting values. These conflicting values form the foundation for conflicting identities, since value commitments help construct identity. It is the struggle to enact these dual identities that is at the heart of tempered radicals' experience. Tempered radicals are not chameleons, exhibiting one identity here and another there. Rather, they work to honor both identities simultaneously.

The struggle to manage these conflicting identities authentically makes life as a tempered radical difficult. Few people actively choose it but instead find that this life is thrust upon them as they begin to participate in organizations. Psychological dissonance builds as they wrestle with conflicting identities. The typical strategies for resolving dissonance, such as leaving the organization or devaluing their group, do not work for them since they have chosen to remain organizationally committed. Thus, tempered radicals are prone to burnout due to the ongoing tension and misalignment. They may also suffer feelings of self-doubt, guilt, fraudulence, passion, and rage, since they are unable to live up to their ideals of either identity.

In spite of the challenges, tempered radicals can function as successful change agents. They can “behave as committed and productive members and act as vital sources of resistance, alternative ideas, and transformation within their organizations.”⁵ Thus, within organizations desiring to change or grow into new areas, tempered radicals can be a valuable resource. Since tempered radicals do not fit well within the dominant culture, they often challenge the status quo, functioning as change agents from within. They work, often quietly and slowly, to create space for themselves and others like them. They live a “now and not yet” life, seeing what could be, but living in what is. They function as outsiders within, having insider language and knowledge with the

⁵ Meyerson and Scully, 586.

outsider's ability to critique. They can also critique both the status quo and radical change since they are part of neither. Alternately, they can advocate for the status quo or radical change when it seems useful to their goal.

Tempered radicals exist in business, medicine, education, and also in denominations and congregations. As with tempered radicals in other contexts, those in congregations are very aware that fitting in with congregational or denominational norms violates who they are. They struggle with managing the officially sanctioned identity of "good Christian" or "good member" that conflicts with their own values on how to live out their faith. Their issues vary with person and context. Some may focus on actually "walking the talk" in social justice issues or living with integrity. Others may long for expanded participation and roles for women and/or laity. Still others may long for truly authentic practices of faith rather than the sometimes shallow busyness of congregational life.

As in other contexts, tempered radicals in denominations and congregations create a useful resource for needed change and transformation. Tempered radicals can create a foundation for change or renewal in groups that welcome their different viewpoints and their struggles to be authentic. They can offer a prophetic witness to complacency and the inwardness of congregational life. Tempered radicals can challenge members to deepen and expand their walks of faith. They provide bridges to other groups who wish to belong, but cannot or will not until something changes. Tempered radicals can make difficult congregational/denominational changes easier since they may embody the direction the group needs to move. Yet, these persons are often isolated, devalued or ineffective, thus thwarting change. Welcoming and supporting tempered radicals is vital if congregations/denominations are to grow and remain healthy.

Portraits of Female Tempered Radicals

Jean and Monica⁶ were participants in my study who graciously shared their experiences of living as tempered radicals. They exemplify many of the challenges female tempered radicals face as well as demonstrating sustaining practices that enable them to persist. I have included portions of their narratives below to more fully illumine the paths female tempered radicals tread. I will open with short descriptions of Monica and Jean and move to exploring their experiences in more depth in the following sections.

Jean

Jean⁷ is a Roman Catholic nun in her seventies, having entered religious life before Vatican II. She was transformed by the changes of Vatican II, strongly identifying with the vision for expanded roles for women and laity. She also strongly identifies with her order's charism, to care for women, young children, and the poor. For a decade she served as the pastor (not priest), at St. Catherine's, a congregation in an economically depressed area, a service that she relished. In that role she was completely responsible for the parish, but was not allowed to offer the sacraments. She has also served significant leadership roles in her order since she has strong gifts in facilitating, visioning, organizing, and listening. Today she is the executive director of a small social services agency in St. Catherine's neighborhood.

Jean has numerous strong and long-standing value conflicts with Catholicism. She noted that women are treated poorly: "Women are called to serve in the church...[but] they're not listened to." She experienced open discrimination when she was pastor at St. Catherine's from local priests, although the bishop

⁶ Pseudonyms have been used for the names of the women and their congregations.

⁷ Jean was interviewed the afternoon of September 29, 2009 at her home.

supported her in her position. “When you go to the meetings and you’re the only woman, you feel really isolated because you have the priests in little circles talking. And they’re not really interested in what you have to say.” Further, she claimed, “Men laity are listened to more and treated differently than the women.” Jean also felt tension with serving the poor: “Sometimes we have double standards in the church. Sometimes we say we are called to minister to the poor, but then our actions do not fit that calling.” As could be expected, Jean is an ardent advocate for the ordination of women and expanded participation for laity. Yet in spite of these conflicts, Jean strongly resonates with Catholicism and is actively practicing her faith.

Monica

Monica⁸ is a Roman Catholic laywoman in her forties, married, with five children. She converted to Catholicism twenty years ago, soon after her marriage. Shortly after her conversion she had a mystical experience with God that transformed her life. While her husband served in the military, Monica served in volunteer and paid positions with military chaplains at various duty stations. Monica is deeply invested in living out her faith in her family and parish. She is a very active leader at St. Teresa’s, a small, rural congregation, serving with the youth, on parish council, and in ecumenical events in her small town. She has also been active in her diocese as it works through the clergy sexual abuse scandal.

Like Jean, Monica has numerous strong value conflicts. Some center on the role of women and laity. She stated, “I would like the bigger church to include married priests and women deacons. I really do. I think that’s hurting us...because it’s keeping out people...” Monica is also caught in the midst of a generational change in her parish with its ensuing conflicts as leadership passes to younger women with different ideas.

⁸ Monica was interviewed the afternoon of November 16, 2009 at her home.

Her extensive ecumenical experience is also a source of conflict. Youth events such as Vacation Bible School in rural towns are ecumenical in order to draw enough participants. Yet Monica has experienced strong anti-Catholic behavior from some Protestant pastors. She finds this behavior discouraging since “we’re all there for one reason, to introduce these kids to a fun, Christ-centered week.” Yet in spite of the value conflicts, Monica claims a strong identification with Catholicism.

Transformation, Commitment, and Vision

Jean and Monica experience the dual identities of faithful Roman Catholics and feminist change agents. They also exemplify characteristics common to many tempered radicals in congregations. These characteristics include a deeply authentic spiritual life, a strong sense of commitment, and vision.

Jean and Monica had transformative experiences with God that continue to percolate through their lives decades later. Monica noted her mystical experience with God had changed her forever. Jean was galvanized by Vatican II. These women also experience their faith relationally, talking about God as one would talk about a close friend. God is a living actor in their lives rather than a dogmatic statement or ethereal concept. This ongoing relational approach supports and reinforces their transformative experiences. It also fosters an intrinsic religious orientation where they work to live congruently with their beliefs.⁹ Yet this vibrant faith serves as a source of dissonance as they live with people and institutions that do not share or perhaps even value their experiences or orientation.

When asked why they remain in situations where they experience such dissonance, both women strongly responded that they were committed. Jean stated, “If I

⁹ H. Zondag, “Involved, Loyal, Alienated, and Detached: The Commitment of Pastors,” in *Pastoral Psychology* 49 (4) (2001): 315.

weren't committed I would have said a long time ago... I'm done. I'm not going to try anymore. It's ridiculous." Monica echoed her. "I would just never give in." They have deeply considered their commitment since both recounted stories of others, even some close friends, who have left their congregations or Catholicism altogether. Jean reflected, "I feel so sad about [her leaving]. But I understand how she feels. She said, 'I can't do it...' It's the institution and that hierarchy they can't handle." Monica was frustrated that some seemed to take the easy way out by leaving, yet claimed "I do know people of God who just could not be in the church any more. I know for them it wasn't a cop-out. They're exhausted from the struggle."

Although Jean and Monica appear to draw strength from their committed stance, the nature of their commitment is complicated. Congregations are normative organizations where people belong because they embrace the values.¹⁰ Organizational commitment to any group is based on value congruence, organizational support, and investment.¹¹ Monica and Jean are organizationally committed to the normative organizations of their religious order (Jean), and parish (Monica). Both of these smaller groups are embedded within Catholicism, another normative organization. Thus, value congruence is a major issue in sustaining their commitment. These women strongly resonate with some Catholic values or they would be unable to remain. However, when one experiences value conflicts within an organizational commitment and in a normative organization, it would seem that the dissonance would be doubly difficult. The very processes supporting the commitment are the processes in conflict.

¹⁰ Zondag, 320.

¹¹ C. Vandenberghe, "Organizational Commitments," in *Commitment in Organizations: Accumulated Wisdom and New Directions*, ed. J. Meyer (New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2009): 111–112.

Further, the strength of Jean's and Monica's commitment suggests that they are both affectively and normatively committed to their contexts. Affective commitment is based on emotional attachment to one's organization whereas normative commitment is based on loyalty and/or obligation.¹² However, these women also experience action commitment since they are deeply focused on change.¹³ For example, Monica asserted, "We have a responsibility to fix the manmade problems [in Catholicism]." Although they have a strong emotional attachment and a sense of loyalty, they are also working to change that to which they are attached, which is another source of conflict. Thus, their commitment at all its many levels is a source of conflict. They strongly embrace Catholic values and practices, which enables them to remain within the fold. Yet they ardently pursue substantial change to address the areas where they do not fit.

Jean and Monica are also deeply oriented to ministry arising out of calling and gifting rather than denominational requirements of position, education, and gender. This focus on calling sustains them. Yet they acutely feel the discrepancy between a call to serve God with their gifts and practices that exclude or discourage their participation because of what they are not rather than who they are. Jean felt this orientation most keenly when she was forbidden to participate in the rite of reconciliation. "I would have to sit in the pew because I didn't have the capacity to forgive sins" even though people confessed to her when she served as pastor. Similarly, she could not anoint the sick or dying, even though the people were her parishioners and requested her services.

¹² C. Vandenberghe, 100.

¹³ M. Neubert and C. Wu, "Action Commitments," in *Commitment in Organizations: Accumulated Wisdom and New Directions*, ed. J. Meyer (New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2009): 181.

Jean and Monica, like many tempered radicals in other contexts, are visionaries. Yet their visions are not aligned with the congregation/denomination, but instead with their relationship with God. They work to enact their visions within their contexts, hoping to create a new future that makes room for others like them. These visions are at the heart of their now-and-not-yet existence. They are realistic about the pace of change. As Jean reflected on the possibility of women's ordination, she noted, "It won't happen in my lifetime, but I think it will happen." Monica claimed, "We're in a journey and process towards fuller communion with what God intends for us. I think we're working towards that just as we have a faith journey in our lives individually."

Jean and Monica portray female tempered radicals' lives within congregations. Their transformative experiences, intrinsic religious orientations, commitments to change, and nonaligned visions of the future can combine to create a difficult life for them. Yet they are able to persist. Several practices serve them well.

Sustaining Practices

Tempered radicals' sustaining practices can be highly individualized, because each tempered radical and each context is different. However, these women's practices fall into several distinct categories, including acquiring role models, maintaining strong relationships, and moderating one's change efforts.

Jean and Monica have numerous strong women role models and heroes that align with their values. Role models embody aspects one wishes to emulate, whereas heroes serve as personifications of one's values and ideals.¹⁴ Jean's role models and heroes include Miriam,

¹⁴ M. Pleiss and J. Felhausen, "Mentors, Role Models, and Heroes in the Lives of Gifted Children," in *Educational Psychology* 30 (3) (1995): 163; D. Porpora, "Personal Heroes, Religion and Transcendental Metanarratives," in *Sociological Forum* 11(2) (1996): 209.

(Ex. 15:20), Lydia (Acts 16), Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. The foundress of Jean's order is an especially strong hero since "she went through such terrible turmoil with the priests . . . [yet] she was always able to keep her cool, be strong about it. She was tenacious." Jean did note one man: Oscar Romero, because of his work with the poor. Monica had two military wives she reflected on as well as Ruth and Deborah (Judges 4–5). These role models and heroes form a cloud of witnesses that inform and strengthen these women in their walk. Jean, in particular, was adept at selecting role models that portrayed attributes for which she needed support.

Although Jean and Monica draw strength from their role models and heroes, they also depend on living relationships to sustain them. Tempered radicals can be lonely and isolated since they do not fit completely within their organization nor within groups that oppose it; they are people of both worlds.¹⁵ Since it is difficult to feel truly at home in one place, creating a web of relationships that sustain different aspects of one's conflicting identities is important. Jean has found those relationships within her religious order. "I feel very respected by our [religious] community and the gifts I have to offer." Her order gives her a place to share her ideals. "I share it with my friends, with my sister friends mostly. I share it but nothing happens [she laughs]. We talk a lot about the church and what it should be like." Monica also has strong relationships but they are embedded in her parish. "I think it's just a grace you really feel in our parish. . . . Here it's very close-knit." Yet, these relationships are a source of conflict for her as well since her congregational dynamics can be difficult.

Successful tempered radicals embody moderation in their change efforts. Because of the dissonance they experience, they experience more demands on their

¹⁵ Meyerson and Scully, 598.

emotional energy.¹⁶ The possibility of burnout always looms and the pace of change is often slow. One cannot always be fighting large battles. Further, tempered radicals often live in their organization for the long-term and realize they must manage the effects of their vision on those around them. If they create too much furor too often, they may lose their voice as well as the part of their community that sustains them. Thus, they must pick their battles carefully. Monica was particularly thoughtful on this point. She claimed that in contrast to various military parishes she had attended, in her rural congregation she was working more quietly and carefully because of “the dynamics of the people that I work with and the dynamics of the priest.”

While these practices of reflecting on role models and heroes, seeking supportive relationships, and picking battles are sustaining, women tempered radicals face some special challenges within congregations. Learning to navigate gender is one of them.

Navigating Gender

Jean and Monica were interviewed as part of a larger study exploring the lives of tempered radicals in congregations generally. Although gender was not an explicit area of inquiry, gender effects were obvious in how these women navigated their identities. Both endured the marginalizing effects of being a female leader in a male hierarchy within Catholicism. Jean, in particular, transgressed norms in her pastoral role. She recalled that she would not be given the agenda for the deanery meetings until after the fact and she knew she was purposefully being excluded. This targeted exclusion ceased when the bishop intervened. Like many women, Jean worked overtime to prove herself. She worked hard at improving St. Catherine’s and at being adept at her role, offering several examples of her success. Yet she

¹⁶ Meyerson and Scully, 586.

noted, “I think people started to respect what I had to offer. I really do, but it takes a long [time] and takes so much energy out of you.” This extra loss of energy is important since tempered radicals already have higher demands on their emotional energy due to enduring persistent dissonance.

Monica argued that Catholicism is indeed misogynistic, but it does not affect her faith in God. “I think for me it’s always easy to focus, to draw a distinction between God’s work and the work of men on earth. It does not hurt my faith as a Catholic woman to say that the church has certain policies that are very misogynistic and exclusive. It does not hurt because my faith is in God.” Yet, Monica must explicitly and frequently make this distinction, living in resistance to the dominant frame. She must consistently lay aside the devaluing of women’s voice and experience. This stance requires emotional energy she can ill-afford.

Jean and Monica are Roman Catholic, so the difficulties with gender should be expected. However, I would argue that gender effects are present for many Protestant women as well. Many Protestant denominations also have male hierarchies and women’s voices are not allowed in leadership. Women’s areas of service are commonly more limited. Thus, women’s voices overall seem harder to hear. While all tempered radicals tend to be quieter than frank dissidents, being less visible and less heard because one is a woman tempered radical is a double burden when enacting change.

Other studies have noted that female dissidents, of which tempered radicals are a subtype, are treated differently than male dissidents. Dissenting women are more apt to be called marginal members than men. Since they are “marginal,” leaders can ignore their voices. In reality, many female change agents are highly committed, attending regularly and serving on committees.¹⁷ Women

¹⁷ Russell, 197.

dissidents are also more likely to have their work labeled as obstructive, faithless, or as special-interest politics. In contrast, similar efforts by men will be described as Spirit-led and following God's commands.¹⁸ It appears that within congregations, female tempered radicals are likely to be doubly devalued: first for pushing for change and second for being a woman pushing for change.

For female tempered radicals in congregations, gender is always on the plate, which is not the case for men. If women wish to be active with other change initiatives, they must decide whether and how to add gender issues to the mix. Since the dominant frame is usually male, male tempered radicals rarely feel any pressure to address gender. Their choices are simpler and it is easier to pick battles and moderate emotional energy. If women decline to pursue gender issues in favor of other change as a way to manage emotional energy, other women may take offense, because gender is such an important topic. A woman's choices on pursuing gender issues can also make it more difficult for her to find supportive relationships. For example, feminist women may view Catholicism or conservative Protestantism as openly misogynistic. Women who remain in these contexts can be seen by feminists outside as not honoring their own gender. A feminist Catholic or conservative Protestant may be marginalized inside the congregation and within secular feminist groups as well. Thus, gender provides another challenge for female tempered radicals in their already dissonant existence.

Clearly communicating one's values in a context where women are actively ignored, devalued, or invisible is a challenge at any time. Trying to do so when one is attempting to enact change from below makes a difficult reality even more so. Yet there are steps congregations can take to support tempered radicals.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Bettenhausen, "Feminist Movement" in *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, ed. Miriam Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 206.

Welcoming Tempered Radicals in Congregations

Tempered radicals are a valuable resource for change yet can lead difficult lives within congregations. They have high demands on their emotional energy but can effectively foster needed change within the group. Female tempered radicals face added burdens due to gender, especially within male-dominated denominations. There are several specific actions that congregations can take to welcome the women tempered radicals among them.

To begin welcoming tempered radicals, leaders need to understand the difference between task conflict and relational conflict. *Task conflict* focuses on what the group should do and how it should do it. Task conflict, unless it becomes very heated, is correlated with improved decision making.¹⁹ It actually benefits a congregation since it causes people to think more deeply about issues, own what they believe, creatively solve problems, and avoid groupthink.²⁰ *Relational (affective) conflict* attacks the person, not the issue, and uses techniques such as blaming, character assassination, and questioning motives.²¹ Relational conflict, even at very mild levels, is correlated with poor outcomes and is to be actively avoided.

¹⁹ Charlan Nemeth, "Dissent as Driving Cognition, Attitudes and Judgments," in *Social Cognition* 13 (3) (1995): 279; Dean Tjosvold, "Conflict with Interdependence: Its Value for Productivity and Individuality," in *Using Conflict in Organizations*, ed. Carsten De Dreu and Evert Van De Vliet (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 23–37.

²⁰ Michael West, "Dissent in Teams and Organizations: Lessons for Team Innovation and Empowerment," in *Bridging Social Psychology: Benefits of Transdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. P. Van Lange, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum): 354–358; Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos* (2nd ed.), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

²¹ Karen Jehn, "Affective and Cognitive Conflict in Work Groups: Increasing Performance through Value-Based Intragroup Conflict" in *Using Conflict in Organizations*, ed. Carsten De Dreu and Evert Van De Vliet (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 87–100.

Tempered radicals will be involved in conflict since they are attempting to change the status quo. Creating a safe and productive space for that conflict protects tempered radicals, especially women, from personal attack. Wise leaders will make a practice of supporting task-based conflict and quickly shutting down relational conflict. One way to enact this practice is to create and maintain standards for respectful dialogue about issues and teach the congregation about benefits of task conflict and the dangers of relational conflict.

Unfortunately, many leaders are uninformed about conflict and want to avoid any conflict at all costs. A point where leaders stumble is in understanding the difference between dissent and obstruction. Most dissent is prosocial, which means that dissidents, including tempered radicals, are focused on improving the situation, at least from their viewpoint.²² Dissent, when practiced well, generates task conflict. Alternately, obstruction focuses on resisting change, especially static resistance and will often use relational conflict.²³ As I was conducting my study, I found that a number of congregational leaders referred to dissent of any kind as obstruction and viewed any dissent as a threat. Wise leaders will learn to differentiate between prosocial dissent and obstruction. Supporting task-based dissent will create room for tempered radicals and benefit the congregation.

Another way to support tempered radicals is to create a welcoming open door policy for dissent and to actively encourage differing perspectives. Leaders need to welcome tempered radicals to the leadership table, rather than selecting lay leaders solely from the dominant frame. This practice can also create a broader support system for

²² Kim Cameron, "Organizational Virtuousness and Performance" in *Positive Organizational Scholarship*, ed. Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, and Robert Quinn (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003): 76.

²³ D.J. Markham, *Spiritlinking Leadership: Working Through Resistance to Organizational Change* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

tempered radicals since others who silently agree with their ideas may seek them out as they bring forward initiatives that support others' experiences.

Leaders also need to specifically create a discipline of deeply listening to dissenting and marginalized voices within the congregation. Dissenting views should be assessed as at least partially valid, since the majority of dissent highlights organizational deficits.²⁴ The leader's job is to understand the impact of those deficits, moving past proposed solutions that may only be partial. Keeping positive and open lines of communication with tempered radicals as their needs are explored helps as does speaking respectfully about their views to others.

Supporting tempered radicals also involves learning to be honest about dissent in the Bible. In the Hebrew scriptures, the prophets functioned as dissidents. The Christian scriptures portray several instances of faithful believers with diverging views. It is easy to understand at least portions of Jesus' ministry as a form of dissent. However, leaders often find it easy to honor biblical examples of dissent directed outward toward social reform, while ignoring or distancing themselves from the many examples directed inward toward religious reform. While social activism may be encouraged, tempered radicals asking their leaders and congregations to honor their charism, biblical injunctions, or statements of faith may be marginalized, sometimes from the pulpit. Thus, leaders should be attentive to how they publically portray dissent, which dissidents they honor, which they ignore, and why they make those choices. Being honest about dissent in the Bible and Christian history has two benefits for tempered radicals. First, it can introduce them to role models in the Bible and history they may find helpful. While tempered radicals often feel alone, they are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, both in Scripture and

²⁴ P. Nystrom and W. Starbuck, "To Avoid Organizational Crises, Unlearn," in *Readings in Organizational Decline*, ed. Kim Cameron, Robert Sutton, and D. Whetten (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger): 328.

in Christian history. Second, being honest about dissent can create a more welcoming culture within the congregation for tempered radicals.

Closely related to being honest about dissent in the Bible is being more discerning about how leaders portray the concept of unity. The need for unity is a repetitive theme within Christianity.²⁵ It is not uncommon, however, for leaders and congregational members to shortchange the hard work of unity and replace it with the easier counterfeit of uniformity. This strategy is particularly common in congregations in decline since they perceive uniformity as safer. In uniformity there is little potential for internal conflict and it feels easier for leaders to manage the congregation.²⁶ Uniform situations are particularly difficult for tempered radicals, because they already struggle with fit even in a more diverse context. There are fewer places to build relationships and fewer events that support some part of their identities. Further, congregants in a uniform situation will often informally shun those who do not fit well. Shunning negatively affects tempered radicals ability to foster change and enlarge their context. It also hinders them from finding supportive relationships.

Female tempered radicals in congregations can often have a difficult time. Leaders can be inept at managing conflict, actively devalue dissent, misrepresent dissent in the Bible, and emphasize uniformity. Further, leaders, as well as congregational members, can particularly target female tempered radicals to silence their voices, especially regarding gender equity. Given this reality there are some specific practices that can help women. Many of these practices aim at lessening dissonance, which will lessen the potential for burnout.

²⁵ See for example Eph. 4:3, 1 Pet. 3:8, Rom. 14:10, and Gal. 5:22.

²⁶ B. Staw, L. Sandelands, and Jane Dutton, "Threat-rigidity Effects in Organizational Behavior: A Multilevel Analysis," in *Readings in Organizational Decline*, ed. Kim Cameron, Robert Sutton, and D. Whetten (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1998): 328.

Recommendations for Female Tempered Radicals

As I noted at the beginning of this article, I too am a tempered radical, but unlike my female study participants I am Protestant. Based on my own experience and research as well as the wisdom gleaned from Jean and Monica, I will offer some strategies that may be particularly helpful for female tempered radicals.

Part of persisting as a tempered radical actually is owning that one is living within that reality. Although near the beginning of this article I argued that most tempered radicals find this life thrust upon them rather than chosen, in reality there are other options. One may choose to leave to find a congregation or denomination that is a better fit. This option is especially open within Protestantism, where congregational and denominational switching is common. If one chooses to remain a tempered radical, pushing for change and enduring the dissonance, it does help to recognize that one has made a conscious choice to do so.

Second, since gender is such a large issue for women, it is well worth one's time to thoroughly understand the role it plays in one's own dissent. Women cannot escape gender in their dissent, and clearly understanding one's stance and why one holds it will lessen some of the dissonance. Further, if a woman is not pursuing gender equity, she can develop a specific script explaining why that is not the case since it will be questioned by possible supporters.

Third, I cannot overemphasize the importance of finding supportive relationships. Realistically, the congregation may not be able to provide the types of sustaining relationships female tempered radicals need, because the congregation only supports one part of one's identity at best and is the location of value conflict. Ironically, in a context where one should feel most at home, women in particular can instead feel strongly

alienated.²⁷ Successful tempered radicals cultivate relationships that explicitly support their different identities and look broadly for them. There are several options for finding supportive relationships while remaining in one's context. In a larger congregation one may find a few other tempered radicals interested in the same issues. Choosing to align along the issue rather than along gender may give women male allies. Male allies can prove important within conservative contexts and women do well to remember that many men would welcome gender equity as well. Meeting with kindred spirits regularly outside of church to honestly discuss challenges can help. Alternately, many denominations have dissident groups on certain issues that one can join. Dissident groups should be treated with caution, however. Dissident groups may become one's true congregation, using resources that are then not available for change in the original context.

Fourth, as I have mentioned earlier, tempered radicals need to choose their battles and strategies wisely. Emotional energy is at a premium and the strain of dealing constantly with gender issues lessens it further. One strategy is to specifically limit the number of issues, or the manifestation of those issues, upon which one will focus. This strategy is why some female tempered radicals do not add addressing gender issues to their slate. A second strategy is to work for a series of small, incremental wins. The energy needed is low but consistent and impacts of failure are lessened, so it becomes easier to recover. Small wins allow one to manage more effectively both identities and to be more agile in which wins one pursues. Small wins also generate less resistance in the larger group and can build on each other. But the pace of change with a small wins strategy is slow, which can prove frustrating.

²⁷ Miriam Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes, *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 32–198; Bettenhausen, 207.

Women, in particular, can benefit from learning to enact dissent effectively. Effective dissidents have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and they work to articulate clearly this vision to others. They learn to be flexible in responding to others' views because inflexibility is viewed as extreme. They also work to create coalitions, knowing that the more people involved in the change process, the less the organizational resistance.²⁸ Women should be especially vigilant about keeping their dissent as task conflict. Women's dissent is routinely assessed negatively and the double bind is always functioning. Entering into relational conflict will only fuel these negative assessments. Women need to become skilled at moving relational conflict back into task conflict or walking away when unable to do so.

Finally, women can benefit from spiritual direction. Tempered radicals struggle with picking their battles, creatively managing low emotional energy, burning out over time, and managing ongoing dissonance. Spiritual directors who understand tempered radicals can work with women to help constructively navigate their choices, thus improving their effectiveness and persistence.

Conclusion

Female tempered radicals bring a wealth of perspectives, skills, and passion to their congregations. Their experience of being in the margins, of not fitting in, and remaining committed creates opportunities for congregational growth and change. However, women need the support of leaders and their congregations if they are to be positive forces for change and continue to live faithful lives.

²⁸ West, 356.