WOMEN IN MINISTRY: 1853-1984

by

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Introduction

The status and role of women in organized leadership positions in the Protestant church has reflected an American cultural basis for sex-typing the professions. Specifically, the ministry as an occupation has traditionally been thought of as a male occupation. Although the obstacles faced by women are usually justified or explained on doctrinal or theological grounds, it is my thesis that they are better accounted for by reference to secular conditions and status structures. This paper is concerned with the Christian ministry as a profession and the ways in which cultural attitudes and social forces have worked together to prevent women from full "professional" participation. Though women have played critical roles in the church, the status of women in the church has been a controversial issue over many centuries. Many people have accepted the barriers to women in the church as natural and just. Others are sharply critical. As Doely expresses it:

Since the first century the church has been one of the chief oppressors of women by virtue of its hand-in-hand relationships with the world. While the Gospel affirms that Christians have a responsibility to stand over against the world when it poses its values as ultimate, yet the church has continually perpetuated the very social institutions, customs, and myths which it is called to criticize. With regard to the lives of women, the church has given rise and support to the myths of dependency and emotionality, the nuclear family system, the all-male Trinity. The values implied in these and other areas have worked to reinforce the cultural
patterns which prevent women from living fulfilled lives.¹

The close interconnection of church and society cannot be over-emphasized, for change in attitudes toward women, cultural as well as religious, will reflect both secular power structure changes and a rethinking of ancient religious notions.

Current statistics indicate major shifts in the employment patterns of women in all sectors of our society. There are more women participating in the total work force now than ever before in our nation's history. Increasingly, these jobs are in the fields which have been primarily and predominantly male-dominated careers. Traditional male sex-typed professions such as medicine, law, science, engineering, dentistry and the ministry are becoming more androgynous.

The social context for change is indeed the critical element which has facilitated the emergence of women in career positions. The ministry is not the only profession profoundly affected by this changing cultural phenomenon. The following statistics indicate this increase:

### WOMEN IN SELECTED PROFESSIONS, 1930-1980 (Number and Percent of Total)²

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Clergy</th>
<th></th>
<th>Lawyers, Judges</th>
<th></th>
<th>Physicians, Surgeons Osteopaths</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>3,276</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3,385</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>6,825</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>3,148</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4,187</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>7,608</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>6,777</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>6,256</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>11,714</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>4,272</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>7,543</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>16,150</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>6,314</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>13,406</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>26,084</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>11,130</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>70,016</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>46,008</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sharp drop between 1950 and 1960 is due in part to the numbers of women who volunteered to work in the church. This is a post-war reaction, a general societal trend for women to stay home but volunteer to work in the church.

In the 1980s, 40-50% of seminary enrollments are women. Other male sex-typed careers have been similarly affected. What is different? What changes in our society now permit women to enter these previously masculine professional fields. There are many factors involved in this pattern including the Civil Rights Movements of the 1960s, the Women's Movement, increasing opportunities for women in education, changes in family size and structure and

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perhaps a general increase in social acceptance of women in careers.

"In part, changes in the status and visibility of women in churches have been in response to internal phases within the life cycle of religious movements."³ These changes have been brought about by various outstanding personalities and their own initiative in "attacking directly the theological inertia and organizational sexism of the churches in order to gain leadership within existing power structures."⁴

One important element in this thesis will be the study of three nineteenth century women who are representative of the ways in which women have attained clergy status and employment. To understand their lives and the social and religious shifts of the nineteenth century provides historical continuity that will illuminate current changes. C. Wright Mills states that "social science is basically the study of biography and history, and the intersection of the two in particular social structures."⁵ I will weave that connection.

In a classic sociological work, W. I. Thomas and F. Florian Znaniecki state that:

³The Grapevine, p. 3.


...a social institution can be fully understood only if we do not limit ourselves to the abstract study of its formal organization, but analyze the way in which it appears in the personal experiences of various members of the group and follow the influence it has upon their lives.6

"Personal life records, "says Znaniecki, "as complete as possible, constitute the perfect type of sociological material."7 Through looking at these representative cases, an historical analysis of stages of waves of the women's movement will become obvious, stages which ebb and flow with the tides of history. The social institution of the church changes with the influence of its members.

Some context is needed for understanding the unique position of women in church and society. The first section of this paper will provide the context; secondly, the biographies will be presented, and the third section will draw parallels in the contemporary situation of women in ministry.


7Ibid., p. 5.
Chapter 1

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.  

--I Timothy 2:12

The voice of a woman is an invitation to unchastity, and therefore must not be heard in the church... women do not possess the required wisdom to be preachers and teachers.

--Thomas Aquinas

The argument over the centuries that a woman must be kept in her place has undoubtedly influenced all institutions, including the church. The quotations above from the early church patriarchs reflect the attitudes that have pervaded, shaped, and reinforced the role and status of women in the church and in society. In a paper on "Female Exclusion from Religious Roles" Michael Welch proposes three theories used to test for exclusion of women in religious roles: 1) gynephobia; 2) differentiated social spheres; and 3) resource theory. Gynephobia is defined by Welch as a fear of women based upon their biological nature. Nancy Chodorow is quoted by Welch:

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81 Timothy 2:12 (RSV).


In its most extreme form, it is this battle against gynephobia we see institutionalized in a patriarchal system of male prerogatives to insure that positions conferring power and prestige are reserved for males and effectively protected from female challenges.\textsuperscript{11}

No where is this better illustrated than in the resistance women have found to their ordination into the ministry.

The theory of differentiated social spheres is defined as the public and private sectors in which men and women function. Women, Welch says, have been primarily confined to the private sphere; men are participants in the public realm.

Resource theory has to do with producing and sharing in societal resources that strengthen and control an individual's or a group's own destiny. Using these theories as a guide, one can examine the role and status of women in the church.

The Biological Argument

The biological argument has been persuasive and powerful in keeping women in her place, particularly in the church. The Biblical story of the fall of humanity has been used to justify existing social structural conditions and theological doctrine. It has come to symbolize the belief that women are inferior to men.

The biological argument is not separable from the private/public issue or what Welch calls, differentiated

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 81.
social spheres. Women are, it is argued, biologically predestined to be the weaker sex and should, therefore, be at home in a "protected" private world.

There seems to be widespread agreement that fear of female sexuality is one of the major obstacles restricting women's participation in religious liturgy.  

This biological argument continues even today through the way women and men are socialized. Fundamental stereotypes are portrayed by the media images of women. Betty Friedan, author of The Feminine Mystique, points to the exploitation of women by advertisers as one of the biases which shapes images and stereotypes of women in our society. It is in this context of the exploitation of women that the feminist writers, feminist theologians, sociologists and others examine the assumptions about women.

Elizabeth Janeway writes about woman's place in terms of the public-private spheres. In Man's World, Woman's Place she defines woman's place as:

a shorthand phrase which sums up a whole set of traits and attitudes and ways of presenting themselves which we think proper to women along with the obligations and restrictions that it implies. 

Because woman's place has traditionally been in the home,

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12 Ibid., p. 87.


the movement of women into a more public sphere has been one of redefining who women are, how women are perceived, and how women think of themselves. For women the issues of professional leadership, ordination and full participation in the policy-making offices and leadership of the church can only be understood in the context of this larger debate around issues of "biology" and "private/public." For a woman in ministry this is a double-edge problem. When, in the 1830s, Sarah and Angelina Grimké spoke on the abolitionist cause, their public appearance, made worse only by the fact that it was a mixed audience, was the major issue of controversy.

The issue of a woman's right to speak or preach publicly to a mixed congregation, not simply a group of women, is the first challenge to the male power structure. As long as women kept silent, or only talked with other women, the masculine hegemony in American church life remained unscathed. By crossing over that line from silence to speech (particularly in public, and before men, as well as women) American woman makes the first direct affront to male power in protestant church life.  

As the questions and issues centered around the professional or voluntary leadership of women in the church are examined, these attitudes as social forces become evident.

**Resource Theory**

Using Welch's third emphasis on resource theory, we can see situations in which women begin gradually to emerge

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into a more public realm. Biology and the differentiated social spheres, that is the private, domestic woman's world and the public, man's world, were the predominant forces affecting males and females. It is the utilization of various resources that begins to penetrate that very rigid and well-established system.

The emergence of women in the church seemed a paradox.

In one sense the feminization of religion strengthened the dominant social ideology and roles of women. Religion was a means of enculturating women to their domestic maternal role, to acceptance of powerlessness and dependency on men. On the other hand, religion enabled women to expand their understandings and to break out of the traditional roles society had long prescribed for them. The Bible provided the strongest justification for human liberation that nineteenth century feminists could employ. Religion becomes an infinitely variable instrument for enlarging woman's sphere through utopian movements, evangelism, ordination, missionary work and social reform.16

Resource theory seeks "any marginal group's power to resist discrimination and inferiorization depending on the share of societal resources it produces and controls."17 Given this definition the church provided justification for women to work individually and collectively on social reform issues.

Zald and McCarthy argue that "social movement organizations emerge not from a relative deprivation consciousness (as so many have argued) but from moves of


17Welch, "Female Exclusion", p. 82.
actors in the political system."\(^{18}\) (AJS 1214) Therefore, "discontent produced by some combination of structural conditions is a necessary condition to an account of the rise of any specific social movement phenomenon."\(^{19}\)

I would argue that the lack of and subsequent accumulation of a variety of resources has been one of the critical elements in the emergence of significant numbers of women in the ministry. Throughout American history women have mobilized resources, created organizations and institutions and more recently have used media visibility and communication networks to facilitate a social movement.

Viewing this with historical perspective, as I do in this thesis, I agree with Lipman-Blumen who says that "female exclusion from social institutions is less a function of conscious male antipathy toward women and more an inevitable result of the historical imbalances of social resources that militates against cross-sex patterns of social exchange.\(^{20}\)

Women's activities have been critical factors in mobilizing scattered and otherwise unused resources. Outstanding women of charisma, character and boldness dared to risk their lives on behalf of the causes for social


\(^{19}\)Ibid., p. 1214.

\(^{20}\)Welch, p. 82. (See also Lipman-Blumen in Signs 1976).
reform in which they believed. Their motivation was a moral imperative. Their cause was a religious one, motivated, initiated, energized and justified by religious zeal. To a certain degree social reform issues motivated and legitimized women moving into a more public realm. Reform based upon an interpretation of the Gospel mandated social rehabilitation. A sense of urgency based on this "social gospel" religiously justified a more public image for women. This was inconsistent with the secular world where a woman's work was becoming increasingly less valued.
Historical Background Regarding Women's Role in American Churches

In colonial America, where woman's work was essential to the preservation and economy of the family, women's work was highly valued. As America became increasingly industrialized, a shift took place for women from home production to "sustaining the values and life of a household where the husband no longer worked at home, side by side with his wife, but went out to the world." The guardianship of moral values became the responsibility of the wife. It was this duty that lead women into the public cause of moral reform issues which ironically legitimized and created a unity and power amongst women. Women found temperance and other social reform issues "the most congenial cause through which to increase their involvement in public life." Abolitionism was one of several reform issues to which women spoke. Sarah and Angelina Grimké, daughters of southern slave-owning parents, moved north to Philadelphia to become the first women to speak publicly against the "sin" of slavery.

When Sarah and Angelina Grimké began to speak out against the sin of slavery in the 1830s, they did so as devout Quakers. No one in the antebellum


south after 1830 could speak against slavery and remain there--least of all a woman. Not only was opposition to slavery suppressed, the separation between public (male) and private (female) was so sharp and so total that for a woman to express herself publicly on a controversial social issue was unthinkable...At the same time, their activity, defined entirely in religious and moral terms, exposed the weak link in the image of the Victorian southern lady. Ultimately it made no sense to place women in charge of piety and morality and then deny them access to the public sphere where immorality held sway.23

The main opposition to the Grimké's outspokenness was from the churches, in part, due to their appeal to the Christian women of the south. The famous Pastoral Letter from the Council of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts admonished women in their private duties and the dangers of doing a man's job as a reformer. An excerpt from the Appeal and the Pastoral Letter follows:

Angelina Grimké, AN APPEAL TO THE CHRISTIAN WOMEN OF THE SOUTH (1836)

But perhaps you will be ready to query, why appeal to women on this subject? We do not make the laws which perpetuate slavery. No legislative power is vested in us; we can do nothing to overthrow the system, even if we wished to do so. To this I reply, I know you do not make the laws, but I also know that you are the wives and mothers, the sisters and daughters of those who do; and if you really suppose that you can do nothing to overthrow slavery, you are greatly mistaken...You can read on this subject...you can pray on this subject...you can speak on this subject...24


The appropriate duties and influence of woman are clearly stated in the New Testament. Those duties and that influence are unobtrusive and private, but, the source of mighty power. . . . The power of woman is in her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection, and which keeps her in those departments of life that form the character of individuals and of the nation. There are social influences which females use in promoting piety and the great objects of Christian benevolence which we cannot too highly commend.

But when she assumes the place and role of man as a public reformer, our care and protection of her seem unnecessary; we put ourselves in self-defense against her; she yields the power which God has given her for protection, and her character becomes unnatural. If the vine, whose strength and beauty is to lean upon the trellis-work, and half conceal its clusters, thinks to assume the independence and overshadowing nature of the elm, it will not only cease to bear fruit, but fall to shame and dishonor into the dust. 25

It was the controversy surrounding this letter that raised many consciences. This controversy brought to the forefront, the discrepancy concerning social reform and women's involvement in change, particularly with regard to the church.

By mid-nineteenth century, women were beginning to talk together about who they were and who they could be. A corporate energy was beginning to emerge. An informal meeting of eight women friends in Waterloo planted the seed for the Seneca Falls Convention to be held in 1848. This

25 Ibid., p. 305.
was the first women's rights meeting, although Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Lucy Stone were to discuss at the end of the century the primacy of their debating "club" held at Oberlin College some years before. One writer of women's history calls the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 a milestone in Women's Rights in church and in society. For the first time, "women had leadership and a program. Its purpose was to discuss the social, civil and religious rights of women." This convention did launch an organizational movement that was to become a national movement on women's rights. Echoing the Declaration of Independence, the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments proclaimed:

Seneca Falls DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS (1848)

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impell them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain alienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to accru[e] these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . .

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The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this let facts be submitted to a candid world. 27

One of the ways for women to gain status was through educational opportunities. In the early part of the nineteenth century, only a few women had dared to write or speak about education. It was generally thought to be dangerous for women to do so. But some education for women to improve their abilities in the private, domestic sphere was generally accepted.

Because religion was a part of women's role and responsibility, religious education or training could also be justified for women. Educational institutions began to admit women to study. Oberlin College was one of the first institutions to do so; but even Oberlin's educational policies insisted on primarily educating women in domestic duties or for the purpose of becoming missionary wives. For missionary endeavors were an acceptable and essential way to do religious work. By the 1860s and 1870s "women organized local missionary societies, often saving money from their own meager budgets to finance their mission efforts. As these societies became more organized and grew, millions of dollars were raised. Orphanages, hospitals, schools and dispensaries around the world were being funded and/or

staffed by women. "American Protestants took the idealized Victorian view of women to heart, believing that female converts might wield all manner of moral and religious influence."\(^{28}\) It was discovered that male missionaries could not gain access to the domestic world of other cultures (as anthropologists also discovered.) Therefore it was often the missionary wives who accepted and fulfilled the challenge of establishing relationships in a foreign country through the domestic world. Harriet Beecher Stowe comments: "Early in the missionary movement the missionary wife was defined as important, self-denying and subordinate."\(^{29}\)

Though networks of resource mobilization had operated throughout the beginnings of the women's right's movement and mission endeavors, increased bureaucratization of the church began to undermine those networks. Bureaucratization marked yet another phase of the life cycle of religious movements, as of other movements. A recent study suggests three phases:

1) "the charismatic," in which women have usually been permitted freedom of expression and


exercise of leadership;

2) the consolidation and organization phase, in which women are absorbed into a system dominated by men and not allowed much autonomy of expression, organization or decision-making;

3) a well-established denomination, less differentiated in structure, membership and values from the general society. Hence, factors which are external to the denomination per se but are characteristic of general societal trends are also of great importance to women's position within churches generally and nine denominations studied particularly.30

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the church reflected this second characteristic of social change. The church was being increasingly bureaucratized along with the general social pattern of the time. Because of this, the mission boards which had been predominantly run by women, were now being absorbed into the super-structure of the institutional church. Women were discovering that the leadership was now becoming predominantly male and that women as leaders were not being replaced as the structures changed. Denominational organizations thus began to incorporate women into their structures as women's own independent organizations became less their own.

Changes within the church accompanied changes in the larger society. By the end of the nineteenth century many women were emerging from the confines of the domestic

30The Grapevine, p. 2.
sphere. With increased educational opportunities and missionary endeavors women were expanding their sphere through their work in the church. Education was a major factor in this process. Theological education being the necessary requirement for ministry, a review of seminary education is helpful here. In the mid-nineteenth century, educational requirements had not yet been standardized regarding requirements for ordination. "In the ordination of women, individual ministers, individual churches, local conferences, and general organizations, represent very different degrees of endorsement." Therefore, one sees a variety of patterns whereby one is trained for and accepted into the ministry. The biographies in the next chapter illustrate this well. For example, Antoinette Brown, requested licensing after completion of Oberlin School of Theology in 1850 and was refused on grounds that the college could not endorse a woman in ministry. Her education had been as thorough, if not more so, than that of her male colleagues; yet the institution could not, in good conscience grant her license. Antoinette Brown Blackwell later reflected upon that experience at Oberlin. Writing in 1891 she states:

In 1841, just fifty years ago, Oberlin College gave to three young women the first Bachelors' degrees ever conferred in this country upon female graduates. Oberlin was ready to champion the higher

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education of women; but six years later, when two women applied for admission to the theological department, Oberlin, willing to train home and foreign missionaries and ministers' wives, was seriously opposed to preparing girls to be themselves ministers. But, because the traditions of the school approved distinctions in teaching the sexes, the seminary did give the desired training, with full opportunities of all kinds; and with excellent Christian grace. But it did not recognize these students to be proper candidates for the ministry, nor did it then accept them as theological graduates. 32

To illustrate the diversity of the ways in which one could become a minister, Annis Ford Eastman's educational background did not include formal theological education. She spent only one year at Oberlin in the Preparatory Course, not in the seminary. Yet her experience of working in the field of ministry alongside her husband paved the way for her to pastor churches on her own. Her ordination came as a result, not of her education, but because of her experience. She writes:

A woman's license to preach is to be found in her preaching and its results. One brave young woman, I believe, has recently claimed recognition at the hands of a Council before proving her call by her labor; but all of the other women ministers, so far as known to me, have first gathered their flocks, tended, fed, shepherded them to their own blessing and content, and then asked men to sanction that upon which God had already set his seal. 33

By the mid 1880s, there were more schools willing to educate women for ministry and ordination was slightly

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32 Ibid.

easier to obtain. Juanita Breckenridge, a student at Oberlin in the mid 1880s is an example of the change. In correspondence with Antoinette Brown Blackwell in 1891 she describes her education at Oberlin:

In the elocution class I wrote and delivered an oration, a hymn, paraphrases, etc. I preached a sermon (as each one is required to do) before the class in Pastoral Theology. I have competed with the young men in debate. Next spring I shall graduate and receive the degree B.D.-Bachelor of Divinity. 34

To compare this to Brown's experience at Oberlin, when no woman was allowed to speak in public, nor to debate in the presence of men, significant changes had been made.

However, for most women hoping for ordination in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, there were obstacles to overcome.

Unlike women in the mission movement or the diaconates, they did not benefit from the buffer of supportive organizations. Unlike male seminarians, they could not receive scholarship aid or free room and board in those seminaries which did accept them. Moreover, the academic credentials which they painstakingly earned—and which were not considered essential for most male ministerial candidates of the day—were insufficient to assure either ordination or a parish position. 35

With an increase in resources there seemed to be more chance for women to survive their powerful denominational structures. In 1882, the founding of the interdenominational Women's Ministerial Conference reflected


the effort of women to create a supportive, if powerless, agency where none existed. In 1891, Antoinette Brown Blackwell conducted her own sociological study of theological institutions and presented a summary of seminaries' policies on women. She stated:

Schools are universally accepted in Christendom as the usual and desirable doors into the higher ranks of all successful calling. It follows that divinity schools are the natural doors through which young people should pass into the ministry. If women ministers are not suppressed by ecclesiastical authority, it must be eminent unwisdom to bar them from the highest opportunities for adequate instruction. It is important, then, to inquire what facilities and what encouragement do the existing Theological Seminaries afford to women?36

The following chart presents Blackwell's evaluatory remarks and summary of theological education.

POLICY OF SEMINARIES ON ADMISSION OF STUDENTS37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orthdox Congregational Seminaries</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hartford Theological Seminary - 1889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;All courses are open to women on the same terms as men.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangor Theological Seminary</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Open to all denominations of Christians&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago Seminary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Open to students of all denominations&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Seminary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Requires membership in some evangelical churches&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Divinity School Department of Yale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Open on equal terms to students of all Christian denominations&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

37 Ibid.
Other Denominational Seminaries

Unitarian School at Meadville, Pennsylvania - 1868
Admitted women - seven graduated, 2 undergrads, eight partial

Universalist School at Canton, New York - 1860
eight graduated, two undergrads, five partial

Theological Department at Galesburg, Illinois
Open to women

Divinity School of Tufts College
"Has not yet welcomed daughters to its more ample theological diet"

Chautauqua and Northwestern University
"Now open to women"

Theological Department of Boston University
"Now has five women taking a special course"
No Methodist Episcopal woman has been ordained

DENOMINATIONAL STATISTICS ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY 1891

Universalist: 27 women ordained and 11 licensed to preach; 23 women are married
Unitarians: 16 women ministers; 6 married; 10 unmarried
Disciples of Christ: 30 ordained women; 13 licensed; 20 married; 23 unmarried

These denominations blotted out the ecclesiastical line in 1867.38

These institutions for the most part reflect a more liberal stance on ordination where ordination is more practical than doctrinal. In a very candid explanation of this list of educational institutions. Blackwell states:

38Ibid.
All of the lesser denominations, which do not require the right hand to know exactly what the left hand has done, have in some way, conferred the usual official sanction upon their women preachers; though a very large remainder, often by their own choice, are still left outside of ecclesiastical recognition. 39

One major aspect of this educational shift was a result of the missionary movement which had become so vital in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Because women had so successfully performed the tasks of mission work, schools were started to train women in these vital essential tasks. Blackwell described some of this special religious training as "diligent practice in sacred embroidery" and further describes training of the Methodist sisters as one "intended to make them eloquent at love feasts, but dumb at general conferences." 40 Nevertheless, these schools served to facilitate women's participation in the mission course. The missionary training centers numbered about sixty by 1916. The educational requirements were not terribly demanding, most requiring only the basic literacy. Much of the learning involved practical training in skills in social work with great emphasis on piety, of course. The mission cause was one in which women could use their talents and gifts fully, and it provided an outlet for women's religious energy and vitality that was a part of that particular time in our nation's history. Missionary

39 Ibid.  
40 Ibid.
societies, the YWCA, and other volunteer organizations provided the vehicle by which women could:

learn organizational skills, gain in confidence and experiment with new patterns of behavior. Although reluctant to overtly challenge cultural definitions of either race or sex, they nonetheless began to act on their religious values in a way that drew them inexorably into social action. 41

The decades of the 1920s and 1930s were a time of increase in the numbers of women choosing the ministry as a vocation. After the turn of the century, it was

Women's success in staffing critical institutions on the home front during World War I, [which] convinced the skeptical of their [woman's] ability to take on larger responsibility outside the home. 42

One writer suggests several reasons for this increase: enhanced status for women due to denominational and organizational mergers, the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, and a general acceptance of higher criticism in many denominations. This last development made it possible to interpret the Biblical "prohibitions" against women's speaking in the churches as culturally conditioned and as having limited authority for the present. 43

Some historians have suggested that the assurance of equality with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment gave women confidence. But the social context in which it was passed requires some explanation. Woman's right to vote had

42 Brereton and Klein, p. 183
43 Ibid., p. 183.
been justified as a way of enhancing the moral reform work that women had been promoting for so long. It was thought that the vote for women would give them enhanced political status and power. Much to the contrary, the vote brought little changes in the status of women. "In the Protestant churches an upsurge of fundamentalism and the defense of prohibition pushed aside the social gospel." With regard to employment "what seems most significant in retrospect is the extent to which, both in employment and in the definition of women's sphere, the situation remained relatively unchanged in the two decades after suffrage." In 1920 approximately 12% of women workers were engaged in a professional life; by 1940 the figure was 12.3%. The number of women doctors actually declined over time, and the proportion of lawyers and architects who were women remained less than 3%. Ordination and subsequent employment for women in the church was not always what it appeared.

"Women were ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church, North in 1924 but they were not granted membership in the Annual Conference." This meant that women could only receive appointment after all the male members of a conference had received a charge. This meant that women clergy were forever relegated to serve those churches which no man wanted.

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46 Ibid., p. 30.
However, there was an increase in the number of women who were ordained during the twenties and thirties. "Congregationalists counted 100 women ministers by 1927, whereas they had listed fewer than forty in 1900."47

The Woman's Pulpit, a publication for the American Association for Women Preachers was published in 1921. The Congregational Hartford Theological Seminary declared in 1920:

In view of the changed attitude toward the ordination of women, we no longer require women to state on entering the seminary that they do not expect to enter the ministry.48

All of this would indicate an increase in participation of women in professional leadership positions in the church.

However, by the end of the decade of the 1920s, "With the Depression and war, gains women had made in many spheres were halted; indeed, a backward trend set in."49

After World War II women became increasingly home-centered, where her identity was characterized by being the primary care-giver. The subsequent articulation of the restlessness of this life-style marked the beginning of the women's liberation movement as we have come to define the shift in

48Brereton and Klein, p. 183.
roles of women in the last two decades. "The mystique was bound to lose its grip," said one writer, "as the work force of women grew from 17.3 million to 31.1 million women between 1948 and 1970."50

Professionalization in the church expanded, as indicated earlier, and therefore a new "professional" status for women was being granted in the church. This was a "Commissioned Church Worker" status and was, in fact, a job working in the teaching ministry of the church or with youth. These were often demanding jobs, but with little pay and certainly not the status of an ordained minister.

Since the decade of the 1950s, many significant changes have taken place with regard to the role of women in our society. Such factors as the feminist movement, federal legislation (1964 Civil Rights Act), shifts in attitudes about the female role, an increase of college educated women, and a sharply declining birth rate all are contributors to a broader spectrum of opportunities for women.52 These will be discussed further in the last section of this paper.

51 Ibid., p. 12

Chapter II

Women in Ministry

Graduates of Oberlin College, the three women portrayed in these biographical sketches illustrate the social and cultural forces which have restricted the role of women in the church. More importantly, the biographies illustrate the passion and motivation which have beckoned these women beyond the restrictions to become ministers, ordained by a Protestant denomination. Carol Christ has spoken of the power of this motivation and passion:

The connections between women's spiritual quest and women's social quest have been intuitively recognized by many women whose spiritual experiences have provided them with energy and vision to make changes in their lives and to work to change women's position in culture and society.

They have pointed out that women's spiritual quest provides new visions of individual and shared power that can inspire a transformation of culture and society.¹

The social and cultural forces restricting the role of women in the church as well as those opposed to restrictions are graphically shown in the lives of these three nineteenth century women.

The hardest and most polished iron surface is interpenetrated by surrounding gasses, or else how could the layer upon layer of iron rust become formed? In some such way, that innermost circle where male clergymen dwelt alone for centuries has at length been invaded by women. There has been no sudden influx of a crowd; no storming of the citadel with violence; no unseemly wrangling or pushing. Almost as quietly as the snowflakes fall, have the new, unwonted incumbents slipped peacefully into their respective places.

The massive doors have been left ajar from Luther's time onward. No one, since his day, has presumed to lock them from within. Every fresh division, bearing aloft their new creed as a banner, widened the opening yet a little more. Their march was better than they knew. Establishing the authority of individual judgment, decide that the interpretation of truth and the exercise of conscience can know no sex. Thence the woman minister is the product of an entirely logical religious evolution. The latest growth upon many widely spreading branches, she can be suppressed only by hewing down the great tree itself. She is here, and she has come to stay.

Antoinette Brown Blackwell, ordained into the Christian ministry in 1853, spoke those words in an address given for the Fortieth Anniversary of the First National Woman's Rights Convention, held in 1891. By looking at denominational yearbooks, corresponding with women students in seminary, and reviewing her own experience of nearly forty years in ministry, Blackwell had keen and sensitive insight into the phenomenon of women in ministry in the nineteenth century. This chapter will trace that religious evolution of the woman minister of which she spoke. It will

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be done by painting a portrait in words of the lives of three of those women; women who represent models for others who have chosen to follow their example of courage and strength. Their lives are illustrative of the ways in which the professional women of the 19th century pioneered in education, enduring hardships most would find defeating, in the struggle to live out their convictions in the midst of great odds. They are representative of a time in our nation's history when the church was like "no other power which could thrust its double-edged sword into the quick of conscience itself, one edge pricking it towards duty, the other cutting at the roots of the same impelling motives."\textsuperscript{3}

This is the story of Antoinette Brown Blackwell, Juanita Breckenridge, and Annis Ford Eastman. They represent different ways of entering the professions of ministry, different ways of education and employment. Yet all of them possess a faith which called forth expression through the channel of ordination into the Christian ministry. Although family backgrounds, socio-economic factors, education differed, one common fact linked these women educated in the nineteenth century. They were ministers when it was unpopular and even considered sinful for women to be so.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 58.
ANTOINETTE BROWN BLACKWELL (1825-1921)

Antoinette Brown was born in 1825 to Joseph and Abigail Brown. One of ten siblings, Brown was a curious mixture of farm girl and scholar. Her parents were progressive and prosperous farmers, her father a justice of the peace and abolitionist. Joseph Brown subscribed to many social reform journals and thus the household was influenced in some measure by this interest.

The family's religious convictions were an integral part of the home life. The Rev. Charles G. Finney's revivals had swept through the Rochester areas of New York, converting her parents and older brothers and sisters. Brown herself developed a very early "passion" for religion, often playing minister, practicing her preaching out in the barn. Influenced also by her grandmother, who "upheld orthodox standards of piety," Brown later commented that her thoroughness could be attributed to her grandmother. Perhaps it was the combination of the conversion experiences of parents and siblings and the devout Christian faith of her grandmother that lead Brown to make public confession of her faith at the very young age of nine years. This act of confession of faith brought her into membership of the local Congregational Church in Henrietta, New York.

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Brown's early education began in a small country school, before she was the age of three, even though she said later she just "tagged along" with older siblings. When she was older, she was fortunate to attend the Monroe County Academy, where, "with the exception of Greek, she studied the same subjects as the boys."\(^5\) She was an excellent student and with the encouragement of parents who believed in education for the daughters as well as their sons, this early education laid the foundation for academic pursuits which would take her beyond the realm of woman's sphere. By the age of fifteen, she turned to school teaching to save money for her higher education which was to be at Oberlin College. Her brother, William was attending the School of Theology at Oberlin and she knew the college had a policy of education of women. It was a logical choice for a person who already knew the ministry would be her profession.

In 1846 Brown was enrolled in the Ladies' Course at Oberlin from which she was awarded her diploma in 1847. Her educational endeavors at Oberlin were made difficult by the financial struggle and more clearly by the fact that she was preparing for a career in public work, namely the ministry. Brown was sustained and encouraged in her "feminist stance" at Oberlin by another student, Lucy Stone, with whom she formed a bond of friendship which was to last throughout

\(^5\)Ibid., p. 158.
their life-times. This friendship was a source of sustenance and encouragement to her own ideas about the role of women in public. Together, Stone and Brown challenged the institutional personnel and structures which seemed to be set on preventing the much-needed training for public speaking for which each of them was working. The college policy which was preserving the sanctity of the private sphere for women and the public for men was summarized as follows:

At Oberlin however, women were encouraged to effect reform through private influence channeled into the local Female Moral Reform Society and the Maternal Association; neither threatened to remove women from their properly domestic 'sphere,' despite the education Oberlin provided them.  

Stone and Brown challenged the oratory class of Professor Thome, a professor who had relied upon the "natural" division of labor, to have the men speak and the women furnish the audience. Stone and Brown pressured Professor Thome to let them debate. When he finally gave them the opportunity, they proved to be so good that news of the unprecedented event was soon heard all over campus. He was asked by college authorities to discontinue co-educational debating. Not to be discouraged by this, the women organized their own debating club which met in the home of one of the towns-people. This club provided the only

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6Soul-Mates, pp. 4-5.
setting for women to practice the art of public speaking and debating.

Soon after completion of the Ladies' Course, Brown announced her intentions to enroll in the Theological Seminary to prepare herself for her career in the ministry. With Brown's decision to study for the ministry, her father withdrew financial support for her education. Her mother and local minister urged her to become a foreign missionary, a more acceptable way of serving the church for women of that day. However, Brown was not to be deterred.

When the time came that she made up her mind to enter the ministry—a matter as remote apparently from a woman's possibilities as entering the moon—she proceeded with astonishing simplicity and an utter lack of consideration for obstacles.7

Amidst the financial adversity and the disapproval of those she loved and respected, Brown pursued her dream stating: "from first to last there never was any self-sacrifice in my chosen work—it was merely self-expression."8

When her three years of study were completed at Oberlin, in 1850, she, like many male fellow-students, requested a license to preach. The faculty would not recommend her, however, and told her, "you must speak on your own responsibility or be silent."9 As Brown states in her Reminiscences:

7Sarah Gilson ms. p. 13. (Schlesinger Library)
8Ibid., p. 144.
When the Commencement came in 1850 at the end of the three years' theological course, Lettice Smith and I had neither part nor lot in the exercises except as listeners. We were not supposed to graduate, as at that time to have regularly graduated women from theological school would have been an endorsement of their probable future career. For this reason, for many years our names did not appear in the Alumni catalogues as graduates of the theological class of 1850, although we were always recognized as graduates from the Collegiate courses. 10

Brown more simply states, "Oberlin educated me; but it will neither license, ordain, or encourage me as a public speaker." 11

Brown lectured and spoke on women's rights, anti-slavery, and temperance for about two years following her years at Oberlin. "She was sometimes invited to preach in the churches of such progressive Unitarian ministers as Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Theodore Parker." 12 She was very successful as a public speaker and was offered a job in the East by Horace Greeley (then editor of the New York Tribune, a liberal newspaper) and Charles H. Dana at one thousand dollars a year. Brown really wanted a church job and considered herself to be a minister. She was called to be the minister of an Orthodox Congregational church in

10Gilson, p. 109.
11Letter to Gerritt Smith, Gilson, p. 185.
12NAW, p. 159.
South Butler, New York, salary of three hundred dollars per year. Concerning this career decision Brown stated:

I thought the matter over very seriously but decided that I was too inexperienced at that time to take a position of so much responsibility, so I accepted the invitation to the church in South Butler. I have often wondered what would have been the result if I had accepted the New York call. It would certainly have thrown me upon my mettle, and been stimulating to a far greater degree than South Butler. I suppose the change from a limited orthodoxy to at first an absolute loss of all belief and then to a pretty determined heterodoxy would have been in either case inevitable.\(^{13}\)

Her subsequent need and desire for ordination created a new controversy for the established Congregational denomination. In 1853 South Butler's governing board, satisfied with her work, met and decided to proceed with her ordination, a public recognition of her ministry. Acquiring an Ordination Council for such a controversial occasion was not easy. Her good friends in the Unitarian Church chose not to be present because it might weaken the Congregational commitment. Rev. Luther Lee, a nearby Methodist minister, agreed to preach the sermon and in that sermon stated,

I do not believe that any special or specific form of ordination is necessary to constitute a gospel minister. We are not here to make a minister. It is not to confer on this our sister a right to preach the gospel. If she has not that right already, we have no power to communicate it to her. Nor have we met to qualify her for the work of the ministry. If God and mental and moral culture have not already qualified her, we cannot, by anything we may do by way of ordaining or setting her apart....All we are here to do, and all we expect to do, is, in due form, and by a solemn and

\(^{13}\)Gilson, p. 155.
impressive service, to subscribe our testimony to the fact that in our belief, our sister in Christ, Antoinette L. Brown, is one of the ministers of the new Covenant, authorized, qualified, and called of God to preach the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ.  

An example of the attitude of those who declined to participate is implicit in a letter written forty years later;

Consulate of the United States of America
Lyons, France, September 16, 1890
Dear Mrs. Blackwell:

I write to set myself right. You may have entirely forgotten me. But I remember that when attending Commencement at Oberlin just before your ordination, you called to see me with a friend to ask me to be one of an ordaining Council to ordain you to the ministry.

With the views I then had, I declined. Without stopping to explain fully the grounds of my change of opinion, I may say that with the views I now have I would not decline. I then thought that no person should be ordained who was not exceedingly likely to devote his life to that work. And I did not think it was likely that you would live long without becoming wife and mother, and so being obliged to give up the ministry.

With my present views I would not decline to ordain any suitable person even though I thought it unlikely that he or she would give even two years to that service. The fact of the candidate's being a woman would not at all stand in the way.

Very truly,
Your life-long friend,
Edward B. Fairfield

Antoinette Brown was ordained in 1853. Her ministry at South Butler was short-lived, however, because of her theological doubts.

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15 Gilson, p. 157.
After serving one year, she resigned her pastorate and in 1855 was a volunteer worker in the slums and prisons of New York City. This was a more acceptable way for women to use their skills. About this work she later commented:

The work among the poor and degraded in New York was so pitiful that it was almost too much for healthy sympathy, at least to one whose life had hitherto been so sheltered as mine; and coming not long after the serious religious overturning of my mind at South Butler and before the reconstruction of my positive beliefs, it made the whole world seem a place of shadows and sorrows.\(^\text{16}\)

In 1856 she married Samuel Blackwell, a brother-in-law of Lucy Stone. Sam Blackwell was totally supportive of Brown's "public" side, having come from a family where his sisters pioneered in new roles for women. Elizabeth and Ethel Blackwell were among the first women to choose medical careers. Sam and Antoinette had seven children, two of whom died in infancy. Though she appeared less on the public platform during the first years of marriage and busy life as mother, she did some public speaking and preaching.

Antoinette studied diligently and wrote a number of significant books and articles. Her ideas were radical for their time. In a paper delivered at the first congress of the Association for the Advancement of Women, in 1873, "she envisaged part-time paid employment and household assistance from husband as necessary means to the end"\(^\text{17}\) of women's

\(^{16}\)Gilson, p. 188.

\(^{17}\)Notable American Women, p. 160.
personal growth and interest outside domestic responsibility. Her writing included areas of philosophy, science, theology, epistemology and today what we call women's studies. Throughout all of her writing, she upheld the right of the individual man or woman, to think and act for oneself. Writing in 1847 she states:

Original investigation, then, is indispensable to the progress of mind in general. Why are the mass of mankind contented to receive merely the wisdom which has been developed by the labors of others? Why has so large a proportion, even of the professionally educated, failed to produce a single original idea, but seemingly fearing to act for themselves and to think and reason independently, been satisfied to become the mere collectors and retailers of other men's thoughts or discoveries?\(^{18}\)

In this same essay, she speaks on behalf of the intellectual development of women:

Let a woman devote a few years of her life in studying the great truths of Theology--the laws of Nature--or the arts and literature which men pursue, in order to get mental discipline, and the world believes she has foolishly sought to gratify her own vanity, egotism, or ambition. Even the most charitable, wonder in silence, and think her a strange and incomprehensible anomaly. Thus is wisdom degraded in the eyes of mankind, and none but the professional man is regarded as having a right to drink deep of the fountain of knowledge.\(^{19}\)

Antoinette Brown Blackwell was actively involved in the women's rights movement all of her life. It was a way of life for her. "She supported Lucy Stone's leadership at


\(^{19}\)Ibid.
the meetings of the American Woman Suffrage Association and contributed to the Woman's Journal which Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell co-edited from 1870 to Stone's death in 1893.  

Blackwell's growing discomfort with traditional Protestant theological doctrines continued to influence her toward a more radical personal theology. She, like a number of nineteenth century women reformers, found the Unitarian path more compatible with her feminist ideas. She joined the Unitarian denomination in 1878. In 1908, at the age of 73, she became pastor emeritus of All Soul's Unitarian Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey, a church which she helped to found. She preached regularly at All Souls, even into her late 80s.

Antoinette Brown Blackwell died in 1921, one year after living to cast the vote, a privilege which she had spent much of her energies securing. She had remained a prolific writer, speaker and worker on behalf of the cause of the oppressed until she was ninety-six years of age. A gentle spirit, a deep faith, compassionate yet firm in her convictions, Antoinette Brown Blackwell's life was a history of perseverance and dedication. She has been a model for women in ministry throughout the decades.

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ANNIS FORD EASTMAN (1852-1910)

Annis Ford Eastman was born in 1852 in Peoria, Illinois, one of five sisters. She had a difficult childhood, made so by an alcoholic and ill-tempered father. Her mother, however, was a "devout and disciplined lady whose intellectual influence was apparent in her daughters." After high school, Annis Ford, already a woman of feminist principles, knew that she must achieve more education so that she could earn a living in "competition with men." Her son, Max Eastman, recalled:

Her father George Ford had been a gunsmith in Peoria, Illinois, and a big boss around the house. He believed that women's place is the home, and proved it by getting drunk frequently and making the home hell. She grew up, perhaps in consequence, with a quiet but firm belief that women out to learn a trade. She decided while still in high school—that was in 1870 when such decisions were rare—that she was going to be economically independent. When Susan B. Anthony came to lecture in Peoria, this ambitious high-school girl introduced the famous suffragette, and did it with so much eloquence that, according to a clipping in my possession, her speech was "the talk of the town." What George Ford contributed to that talk on that occasion is not recorded.

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22 Ibid.

Her ambition was to become a school-teacher. She enrolled in Preparatory School at Oberlin College (1872-74) and it was during this time that she met Samuel Eastman, who was then a student in the Oberlin Theological Seminary. They were married in 1875, after Eastman's graduation and placement in a Congregational Church in Swampscott, Massachusetts.

The pastoral "team," as they were soon to become, moved from Swampscott to Newport, Kentucky in 1878, and in 1881 to Canandaigua, New York. As Max Eastman comments, "they settled in a parish in Canandaigua, near Rochester, New York, where she kept house for him, bore him three children, and helped him with his sermons--helped him almost like magic, for she could write so fluently and fast."24 The marriage and perhaps her roles of housewife, help-mate, and mother, contributed to Annis Ford Eastman's "frustrated awareness of her own intellectual gifts and she found it impossible to accept masculine dominance."25 Sam Eastman had suffered a collapsed lung as a result of the Civil War service, and his career in ministry was short-lived as a result of this health problem. As Sam's condition worsened, Mrs. Eastman assumed more responsibility, and her outlook on life also improved. In a book entitled The Minister's Wife, the author cites a footnote regarding the Eastmans.

14 Ibid.

25 NAW, p. 542.
She stepped rather naturally from her role as a minister's wife into his personal duties at a Canandaigua church when his health failed. Her first solo pastorate was in Brockton, N.Y., to which she traveled on weekends. On weekdays she raised four children and assisted her husband in Canandaigua. Ordained by the Park Church's ministerial council, which Beecher led, she was called to West Bloomfield, N.Y. and from there Beecher called her and her husband to be his assistants in Elmira.26

Though Annis Ford Eastman had only one year of Preparatory School, her experience in the parish and the need for supplementing the family income created a need for her to work. "Once Annis Ford Eastman assumed the dominant role in the direction of the family affairs, her intellectual flowering began."27 She described this time in her life and the obtaining of her first pastorate as follows:

Another woman, wife of a minister, who had worked for ten years with her husband in his parish, was forced by his failing health to become the bread winner for a family of four. She tried the woman's usual resort, teaching, which, while not unsuccessful, involved absence from home each day and all day, and was not wholly congenial. A journey throughout the state in which she lived, in the interests of Home Missions, aroused the question in her mind, 'Why should I not do the work which I can do best?' For she saw many country churches that could not command average ability in the pulpit falling into ruin for lack of preachers. Coming home, she broached the subject of her husband, and encouraged by his enthusiastic sympathy, she applied to the Superintendent of Home Missions, and in a short time was sent to meet her wandering


27 NAW, p. 543
congregation. It numbered about twenty-five at the time, for the church was at lowest ebb after a rousing revival led by an irresponsible and illiterate preacher, who had left the town in debt and disgrace. The majority of the people were ready to lock the church door and give up the effort to maintain the organization. When the proposal was made to send a woman, one good sister, who afterward became the minister's firm friend, thought, but did not say, 'If we've come to this, we may as well shut up the church.' For two years this woman has served the church, travelling to and from her parish every week, having a well-filled house in all weathers, a growing Sunday-school and a large Bible-class. The problem of restoring dignity and power in a community to a church which has lapsed into contempt is not solved in a day or a year, but it can be done by man or woman who is willing to do faithful work in obscurity and patience. This woman's work was recognized after the first year by a council called by the church, which certain newspaper critics called a 'picked council,' but which certain others declared 'picked from the best ministers in the State.'

She successfully served in this pastorate for three years, revitalizing the church in a short time. This parish was in Brockton, New York.

Although her theological knowledge was based only on assisting her husband in preparation of his sermons, she was regularly ordained a Congregational minister, one of the denomination's first women clergy.

The ministerial council was headed by Thomas K. Beecher, a member of Henry Ward Beecher's family (Henry W. Beecher, one of the best known preachers of that time) who had established an undenominational church in Elmira, New York.


29 NAW, p. 542.

30 Ibid., p. 543.
Beecher was impressed with Eastman's "rapid flight over theological education."³⁰

He said many times that she had preached the greatest sermons he ever heard. He loved her and watched her career with a father's pride. When his own strength began to fail he invited her, with the eager consent of his congregation, to join him in the pastorate of the Park Church at Elmira. She came with the understanding that her sick husband should help with the parish work. When Mr. Beecher died in 1899, she and her husband were unanimously elected joint pastors of the Park Church.³¹

Annis Ford Eastman pursued her intellectual development through such experiences as Harvard Summer School (1903), studying with such philosophers as Josiah Royce, George Santayana and George Herbert Palmer. Perhaps because of her intellectual growth, she, like Antoinette Brown Blackwell and other nineteenth century women had deepening doubts with regard to the orthodox Christian faith. "As early as 1894 Mrs. Eastman had called herself an 'undenominational Christian.'³² By 1906-07 she converted the Park Church from Congregational to Unitarian.

Acting through my father, 'because they would never take it from a woman,' she had persuaded her congregation to abandon the old creed of Trinity and Virgin Mary, and say only they believed in God and the life-example of Jesus.³³

³²NAW, p. 543.
³³Max Eastman, n.p.
Toward the end of her life, she became more interested in secular concerns and social reform. She was an active supporter of and spoke at women suffrage conventions. She died in 1910 at the age of 58.
JUANITA BRECKENRIDGE (1860-1946)

Juanita Breckenridge was born in 1860, the daughter of Hugh Breckenridge, a Methodist minister and Mary Watson Breckenridge. She was one of five children. Breckenridge grew up in Rock Island, Illinois and graduated from Rock Island High School. Her father served as a visiting preacher to various churches in the neighborhood, and often traveled to the southern part of the state to conduct church-related camp meetings. After graduation from high school, Breckenridge taught school because there was not enough money to send her to college. She soon saved enough for college and attended Wheaton, a small denominational school located at Wheaton, Illinois. She graduated in 1885 and "by then, may have decided upon a religious career, but she evidently lacked the funds to continue her studies and pressure was put on her to return home to live with her mother." While living at home with her mother she taught for three more years. It was during this time that she carried on a long and meaningful correspondence with David McIntosh, a Canadian Minister who was then serving a church in Breckenridge, Missouri. McIntosh encouraged Juanita's desire to become a minister. Especially after her father's death in 1887, Breckenridge sought his advice and support.

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At the age of twenty-nine, Breckenridge entered Oberlin Theological Seminary.

She completed the three year course in 1891, and at her commencement gave one of the major addresses. This was quite a change from the Oberlin Theological Seminary of 1850 when Antoinette Brown and Lettice Smith were not even allowed to participate in the commencement services. The Oberlin Review of May 26, 1891 noted that:

...Miss Breckenridge spoke of "Christ as a Conversationalist," and reported, "the striking feature of the oration was the adroitness with which the large number of scriptural texts were interwoven. Miss Breckenridge is the first woman to receive a diploma from our seminary. The universal attention which she received from her hearers last Thursday afternoon is sufficient proof of her powers as a writer and speaker."35

Two weeks later the Oberlin Review reported that "Miss Breckenridge has already received several calls from large churches, one from a very wealthy church in New York. No graduate, says one of the seminary professors, has found the door of success so wide open as has the first lady graduate."36 (However, none of her correspondence indicates that this is the case.) She took a Congregational Church in Brockton, New York, a small church with a small salary. After a year at the church in Brockton, the congregation voted to proceed with her ordination. The responses from those invited to serve on her ordaining council indicate a

35 Ibid., p. 284
36 Ibid., p. 285.
mixture of negative and positive feelings as illustrated in the following letters.37


My dear Miss Breckenridge.

Our church chose a delegate (Mr. Taber) & an alternate (Mrs. White) who will attend the proposed council. I pray you dismiss from your mind all thoughts of Congregational order & usage--& the questions of woman as a pastor. Entertain but one thought--am I called by the Spirit to teach the things of God--as revealed by his Christ-Son. If you answer--Yes--Then open your head & heart to your brethren of the Council. Tell the deep truths of your faith & hope & love--And so let us rejoice that we find in you neither man nor woman, but one who is manifestly taught of God.

Yours truly,
Thos. K. Beecher

Rev. J. S. Ellsworth of Newark Valley, New York, to Juanita Breckenridge, June 18, 1892.

Dear Miss Breckenridge

Mrs. Ellsworth and myself send you cordial greetings and best wishes for your success in Christian work and greatly regret that our convictions alone, prevent our being present at your ordination. Personally we entertain a very high regard for your Christian worth and scholarship. After careful study of the question I find Scriptural and rational obstacles in the way of a sincere approval of the ordination of woman to the office of the ministry--I am quite sure it is not prejudice as it has always been a pleasure for me to welcome women to my platform to speak upon various topics. I am open to correction upon the subject and welcome more light but at present my views are one with the conservative conviction and scholarship of our church. Do not let my position in this matter be a bar to that friendship and fellowship that I desire

37Ibid., p. 288-299.
more earnestly. I hope to give you such a welcome to our home and church ere long as to give you assurance of the high regard in which you are held by Mrs. Ellsworth and myself.

I remain with sincere regard,

Yours in Xn fellowship

J.S. Ellsworth

Rev. Willard B. Thorp, Binghamton, N.Y., to Mr. R. L. Denman of Brockton, June 23, 1892.

Dear Brother,

The first Congregational Church in Binghamton voted last evening to be represented by Pastor and delegate (Mr. Joseph Noyes) at the Council at Brockton on the 28th inst.

Very truly yours,
Willard B. Thorp

Rev. William F. Blackman, Ithaca, N.Y., to Juanita Breckenridge, June 12, 1892.

Dear Miss Breckenridge:

It will give me pleasure to attend the Council at Brockton, on the 28th instant, and take such part as you suggest. I will also see that my church is represented.

Cordially yours,
William F. Blackman

Rev. William F. Blackman, Ithaca, to Juanita Breckenridge, June 29, 1892

My dear Miss Breckenridge:

I was grievously disappointed in not being able to go to Brockton yesterday--for many reasons. But a sudden and heavy cold filled up my head, put needles in my lungs, robbed me of my voice--and kept me in bed all day.

I hope you passed your examination triumphantly, and that you will show us all--and the
world—that woman has a place in the ministry of our Lord.

Sincerely Yours,
W.F. Blackman

Soon after her placement at Brockton, she met Frederick Bates, a politician and businessman. They were married in September, 1892 and had two children. Breckenridge soon resigned her pastorate and did not go back into the ministry after her marriage, but used her time working with the New York State League of Women Voters.

Her involvement in the life of the community of Ithaca, New York, where her husband was mayor, kept her busy and contented. There is no indication in the historical records of her life explaining why she chose not to continue in her career. Bates died in 1922 and following his death she informed Oberlin College that she "was devoting her time to managing the large estate left by my husband."38 Juanita Breckenridge Bates died in 1946 at the age of 86. This quote from the New York history summarizes the importance of including her life-example in this paper:

Who was Juanita Breckenridge? She emerges from fragmentary sources as a woman with a sense of her own ability who sought to make her own way as a minister. Her life illustrates the tensions between a career and domesticity, and she emerges as one example of the shadowy, less-than-famous women we must learn about in order to paint a clearer picture of women in American history.39

38 Letter in Student File, Oberlin College.
39 Kammen, p. 283.
Postscript

A careful reading of the biographies indicate both implicitly and explicitly, the social and cultural forces which restricted and limited the way in which women could fill their chosen career vocation of ministry. Wrestling with appropriate roles for women, restricted by the sanctity of the private, domestic sphere for women, limited by a justification that women are biologically the weaker sex, and having few resources with which to invade a very closed system, the biographies are of women who have made it.

The biographies also indicate the strength and courage of women who have resisted the social and cultural barriers.

"In some way, the innermost circle where male clergymen dwelt alone for centuries has at length been invaded by women. There has been no sudden influx of a crowd; no storming of the citadel with violence; no unseemly wrangling or pushing.(ABB 40th)

Written in 1891, Antoinette Brown Blackwell stated appropriately how things changed in the nineteenth century. In the decades of the 1980s there is a sudden influx. How society and the church deals with the influx of women in ministry will largely be determined by a multiplicity of social factors."
Chapter III

Women have had a checkered pattern of visibility in the public sphere of American life. In the church the presence of women in professional ministry has reflected a multiplicity of social and cultural factors. A survey through history will uncover three waves of feminism in which women have made a significant impact on changing the attitudes toward women in American society. The first wave emerged as women began to become aware of their own status in the context of their work on behalf of social reform. Temperance and abolition causes could not be won or even adequately addressed without basic legal protections for women.

The second wave of feminism was "built upon the increased associational activity of middle class women and focused on gaining the right to vote."¹ The creation of women's societies and women's clubs as separate spheres of political and organizational activity was a powerful mobilization of resources for accomplishing long range goals. The missionary societies (as I have described them in the first chapter) and other women's organizations "helped mobilize women and gained political leverage in the

larger society." The vote, justified by a "natural" moral imperative became a way of providing for equal status for men and women under the law. Indeed, the social and economic status of women was enhanced to some degree, but not as expected after the vote. The Great Depression began a few years later, and it may have precipitated a backward trend. Although there was a slow, but steady increase in women's employment in the labor market, women's employment in professions did not increase significantly from 1920 to 1940. "In 1920 approximately 12 percent of women workers were engaged in a professional life; by 1940 the figure was 12.3 percent."

The war years marked a significant change in the attitude of women. Working in predominantly male occupations while the men were fighting the war, women began to think differently about their own abilities and possibilities. Women also "enjoyed the social and economic advantages of working and saw no reason why they should give up their positions." Stated more specifically:

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2Estelle Freedman "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930" in Feminist Studies 5:3 (Fall 1979) p. 513.

3See Estelle Freedman for a discussion of her theory on why women's status was not changed after the 1920s. Her argument that assimilation with male power rather than female separationist political power was the demise of the feminist movement is an enlightening argument.

4Chafe, p. 30.

5Ibid., p. 94.
women did not seem to want to stop working. They were eased out. Seventy-five percent of those interviewed during the war years and the demobilization period overwhelmingly declared their desire to continue in their jobs.6

The late 1940s and 1950s were years of contradiction as the cultural media pressed for women to return to the home but the percentage of women in the labor force steadily increased. While "propaganda and public policy"7 attempted to "restore the glory of the home"8 and woman's place in it, women continued to work outside the home.

The Civil Rights movement of the early 1960s also marked a significant time of change in the attitudes of women and in the way in which changes could occur. Reflecting an influence similar to that of earlier social reform movements, the third wave of feminism began out of this context. Women began to see their own status, abilities and roles in new ways. Through working for a cause in which they believed, a collective consciousness emerged which was in contrast to the social isolation pattern which had previously existed.

On the basis of heightened consciousness about sex discrimination in their own immediate lives, as well as participation in a movement designed to eliminate inequality wherever it existed, young women in the movement organized themselves to seek

6Kessler-Harris, p. 143.
7Kessler-Harris, p. 128.
8Ibid., p. 129.
change. Mobilized into action by personal experience, they took the organizing skills and ideological lessons which they had learned in the civil rights movement and became the initiators of the women's liberation movement.  

Bonds between women and networks among women were formed in group processes called "consciousness-raising" sessions. A common phenomenon in the late sixties and early seventies these groups were "the principle organizing tactic of the new feminism." It was out of these important gatherings that women could develop strategies and mobilize various resources needed for constructive change.

The Church

Churches were affected by these developments. By the 1950s, the expansion of the church to the suburbs and increased membership led to the need for multiple staff employment patterns. Women therefore, were being hired to fill such positions as Christian Education director, youth worker, and other traditional female roles, but in the capacity of paid professional. Not unimportant to the total picture, this phenomenon also gave women an "in" in church employment. Shortages of clergy for increasing church membership prompted seminaries to begin recruiting women into their theological training programs. Not until the 1970s, however, was there a significant surge in the numbers

9 Chafe, p. 97
10 Chafe, p. 93.
of women seeking ordination and full professional participation. Perhaps influenced by women's consciousness-raising groups and newly created political strategies, denominations were forced to look again at the question of women in the churches.

Spurred by the secular women's movement, church leaders and others marshaled a host of disappointing statistics. They found that women's participation in the church at almost all levels had declined in the decade of the sixties. 11

The sixties were a time of critical examination, a time when women were just beginning to form task forces, and to establish places where women could find and feel support for the experiences of one another both within society and within the church. These shared experiences increased confidence and raised new hopes for the place of women in ministry. Thus as the decade of the seventies arrived, an increased number of women enrolled in seminaries seeking to train for professional leadership positions in the churches. Statistics indicate that from 1972 to 1980, the number of women in the seminaries of nine leading Protestant denominations grew from 3,358 to 10,830. 12

With the increased enrollment of women in seminaries in the past few years, re-examination of ordination and placement of women in leadership positions has begun.

11 Brereton and Klein, p. 183.

Because of numbers alone, the churches, both in the hierarchy outside of the local church and in the local church, must carefully consider the role of women: "the issue goes to the heart of the church's life."\(^\text{13}\) For women, as we have seen, have long been primary movers and sustainers of the institution, although mainly in volunteer roles. But "an exploration of women's part in the history of religion soon encounters two constants; women usually outnumber men; men exercise the authority."\(^\text{14}\) Women in more numbers seeking professional status are making or seeking to make change within the professional leadership of the church, both politically and theoretically. But as this happens the authority structures are both threatened and challenged and therein lies the problem. The problem is perhaps fear of change:

The strong human need for a sense of continuity in the midst of an ever-changing stream of experience heightens the sense of alarm when change steps up its pace. When one's sense of continuity is itself derived from a perception of constancy in a religious valuation of the world, then the changes which are most difficult to handle are those which happen within basic religious structures. Here the very source of security which enables the person to order an otherwise fragmented experience into coherence and integrity comes under attack. Thus the threat which occurs when symbols of religious continuity undergo change is a threat to the very means whereby one can accept and integrate change into order. Highly visible changes, such as those involving liturgy, ritual, or church office, become

\(^{13}\)Judith L. Weidman ed., Women Ministers (San Francisco: Harper and Row) p. 3.

\(^{14}\)James, p. 1.
overtly challenging; hence they meet an intensity of resistance stemming not from the emotional center of one's need for stability and order.\textsuperscript{15}

The Episcopal church is representative of this pattern. The priest is viewed as a representative of Christ, and so a strong male image has been central.\textsuperscript{16} As concomittant changes occur in the larger society, these fears are reduced. Increased visibility of women in executive positions, women in fields of science, medicine, law and religion contribute to reduced fear.

Denominations sympathetic to the prophetic/preaching tradition most readily affirmed the rights of women to be ordained. But access to the legal system and placement and acceptance are different issues. That is, being ordained and subsequently finding employment are quite different factors. Various denominations have dealt with placement and acceptance by setting up structures to implement the hiring of women into significant leadership roles. Where these structures have been successful, the placement of women seems to be met with less resistance. The value of the unique gifts of women in ministry is appropriated and appreciated. This is clearly seen in the Methodist church where the denominational structure seems to help, not hinder, the placement of women.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} James, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{17} Explanation on page 66.
Welch refers to this in his study, has in some particular cases been extremely critical to creating an environment of acceptance of women. However, on the negative side, "no matter how powerful a woman's organization or religious order may become because of its service or dedication, it remains subject to the structural and canonical limitations of churches which are ultimately controlled by men."18 This fact seems to be evidenced in research done on the Prophet/Priestly religious roles. In a study done by Barfoot and Sheppard on religion and Pentecostal churches, the researchers examined Weber's insight "that the religion of the disprivileged classes...is characterized by a tendency to allot equality to woman."19 As a corollary Weber contended that only in rare cases does this practice extend beyond the first stage of a religious community's formation. When the symbolic function of Pentecostal leadership shifted in the 1920s from prophet (a function based on one's own charisma and call) to a priestly role (an office given authority and power through sacred tradition and therefore institutionalized) the number of women in leadership positions rapidly declined. Harvey Cox poses

18Letty Russell, "Women and Ministry" in Hageman, p. 56.

Weber's hypothesis in yet another way by asking the question: "Why do we find women leaders and female imagery so much more frequently among religions of the oppressed than we do among religions of the privileged?" In the mid thirties, the number of women in the major Pentecostal denominations was about double that of men. Weber further states that "the religion of the disprivileged classes... is characterized by a tendency to allot equality to women." Personal charisma was basic to the prophetic role and function and it was as the prophetic function moved to priestly that women seem to lose power. This follows Weber's explanation of a religious movement's evolution (which I believe helps to understand to some degree the symbolic issue of ordination of women in current history):

only in very rare cases does this practice (of religious prophecy) continue beyond the first stage of a religious community's formation, when the pneumatic manifestations of charisma are valued as hallmarks of specifically religious exaltation. Thereafter, as routinization and regimentation of community relationships set in, a reaction takes place against pneumatic manifestations among women, which come to be regarded as dishonorable...

Many rights of ordination were revoked for women, burial of the dead, rites of marriage, etc. "A Holiness preacher summed up the process this way: (Synan, 1971:188), 'When we

20 Ibid, p. 3.
21 Ibid, p. 4.
22 Ibid., p. 4.
get our eyes on churches, creedism, and slack up, we elbow the women preachers off.'"23

Equal opportunity and treatment of the sexes is an issue affecting every institution in America. "The impact of the women's liberation movement on organized religion is just beginning to receive systematic documentation."24 But to understand acceptance and rejection patterns, specific issues must be addressed. "Although greater numbers of people involved in religious communities are coming to understand that women's issues are much more profound than whether or not women are ordained, the ordination of women has served as the focal point for most of the consciousness-raising about women's issues that has occurred within these groups."25 Many Protestant denominations are ordaining women and since 1972, about two dozen are serving as rabbis for the Reform and Reconstructionist movements of Judaism.26 The Roman Catholic Church does not yet ordain women as priests.

The issue of ordination of women and the controversy surrounding women's right to ordination has received much


26Ibid., p. 245.
public attention. And the issue of ordination of women causes the institutional church, itself, to deal with the "public" versus the "private" spheres of women in a very real sense, for the ministry is a very public sphere in which to operate. The issue is not whether women have or have not "achieved" proper education, proper training, proper skills ('achieved' used in a Parsonian sense), but whether it is indeed fitting and proper or is not for a woman to be in that public realm. "For women tend to bring higher levels of academic performance and higher SES backgrounds to the job than men do, but they cannot translate these attributes into placement advantages."27 All the issues that Welch raised in his paper: gynephobia (fear of women); resource theory (power of women in a society based on politico-economic resources); and differentiated social spheres (the public/private issue), are issues debated by the church "authorities" who try to be true to the dogma which has indeed perpetuated an oppressive patriarchal religious tradition through the ages.

When the issue of ordination is resolved and equal privileges are given to women, what then? Placement as Lehman indicates, is yet another issue. For the statistics do not indicate, even in those religious structures granting

ordination privileges to women, an equal placement situation for male and female clergy. A check of ten major denominations in 1980 revealed a total population of 3200 ordained women, 850 of whom were partners in clergy couples. That equaled a three percent clergy population of women. From 1971 to 1978 there was a three-hundred percent increase in the number of ordained women in the United Presbyterian Church, but the jump in actual numbers was from 103 to 409. Looking at placement in 1978 in the Methodist Church, out of 1082 women ordained, there were 388 fully ordained and serving as pastors. In the Lutheran Church out of 30,335 Lutheran pastors, 1915 are women. 28

In examining resistance patterns to women in ministry, we find that organizational maintenance of the institution seems to be a major problem. For the church is, after all, a voluntary organization and the constituency must not be upset lest they leave the organization. Denominational executives, sensitive to the issues surrounding the controversy about women, and knowing that their denomination is in a competitive market for church attenders and supporters, may well choose to avoid placing a woman or recommending a woman for that position. Weidman has said, however, that the idea of a woman in ministry, is in fact,

28Weidman, p. 2.
less acceptable than the actual experience.\textsuperscript{29} When the lay persons experience a woman with her unique gifts of ministry, acceptance tends to happen more readily and easily. There seems to be an increased acceptance of women in denominations where resource mobilization has been used. Where groups of women formed collective power, more women were placed in more positions of greater authority. The ways in which churches at the local level are staffed by professional leadership is varied. The "call" system and the "appointment" system are two major systems. The call system simply means a local congregation has power to "call" a minister to serve after reviewing his or her credentials. The "appointment" system is a system whereby a higher denominational official, e.g. a bishop in the Methodist denomination appoints a minister to a church. "In those connectional denominations that deploy clergy through an appointment system, change has been ever more rapid."\textsuperscript{30} The Methodists, the Presbyterians and other denominations have sought to educate and raise the consciousness of those persons, both in the local church and in denominational placement positions. The United Presbyterians launched a five-year program with a $500,000 budget to educate and advocate on behalf of women in the ministry. The purpose was two-fold:

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., p. 7.

\textsuperscript{30}Zikmund "Women in Ministry Face the 80s" p. 115.
(1) creating receptivity in the denomination for ordained women and (2) developing the skills of ordained women to deal with the denominational placement system. 31

It is this kind of education and support for women which enables placement of women to happen. And it seems that the more visible able women are, the more accepted and acceptable women become in professional leadership positions in the church. "For the first time in the history of each of the major denominations, the number of ordained women is large enough for them to project a presence. 32

In the most recent publication from the United Church of Christ, in 1976 there were fewer than 500 ordained women. By 1984 there were about one-thousand or ten percent of United Church of Christ Clergy and the largest percentage of clergy women in a Protestant denomination. 33 Concerning salaries,

There's a great differential between the incomes of men and women ministers. In general, clergy women are paid 75 cents for $1 paid to clergy men. The Pension Board survey indicates that women, on average, earn 73% less than their male peers. In addition to this, and in partial explanation, one-third or 350 of UCC clergy women are serving local churches, but less than 12 are senior pastors of large churches. Many are associates or chaplains or are serving in part-time jobs. 34

31 Weidman, p. 5.
32 Brereton and Klein in James, p. 189.
34 Ibid, p. 2.
In the Lutheran church, salaries also differ. The median salary range including benefits for male clergy is $20,000 to $22,000 and for female clergy $14,000 to $16,000. The women are paid less, even though their educational level is higher, with 90.8 percent having seminary degrees compared with 72.2 percent of the men.\(^{35}\)

Thus we see that in recent years, extensive changes have occurred. However, there is still much left to be done. "There continues to be significant areas in which no such progress is being made. These range from seminaries which refuse to admit women students to the denial of ordination for women in some traditions to the insistence on traditional stances toward women and sexuality to heavy pressure against any kind of language changes in worship."\(^{36}\)

Women's experiences in traditional religious institutions have been varied. There are increased opportunities for women to share their gifts of ministry in important and "priestly" ways. This statement summarizes the feeling of many and serves to provide a focus for this paper:

The feminist accusation that the religious traditions have been the major contributory factor to the oppression of women in this culture is being ratified by increasing numbers of religious people as they grow to understand their own experience as one of oppression. Many women, deeply hurt by these experiences, are actively engaging in protest within

\(^{35}\)The Lutheran (May 2, 1984) 22:9, p. 19.

\(^{36}\)Boyd, p. 245.
their own religious organizations. Their continued participation and protest are crucial for the life and health of the traditions themselves. Perhaps more to the point, however, is the importance of this activity for the society as a whole. As the feminist theologians have indicated, the deep symbolic meaning attached to all areas of religious life have profound implications for women not only in the religious institutions themselves but in the culture. This serves to increase greatly the significance of reform within these institutions. 37

Changes within the church have run parallel with changes in secular society. But changes have also come, as we have seen, because of individual and collective efforts of women to gain employment, if not equality within the institutional church. To quote again from Thomas and Znaniecki:

A social institution can be fully understood only if we do not limit ourselves to the abstract study of its formal organization, but analyze the way in which it appears in the personal experiences of various members of the group and follow the influence it has upon their lives. 38

I would add to this that a social institution is understood also in the social and historical context. This thesis has sought to examine the ways in which the lives of a particular group of people have been affected by both the church as institution and the church as an institution changing with social structure. Women are seeking to have the opportunities for equal employment in the ordained ministry of the church but beyond this, they are insisting that the church redefine traditional ways of doing theology.

37Ibid., p. 246.

38Thomas and Znaniecki, p. 7.
Barbara Brown Zikmund, church historian writes:

The most recent chapter in this rights campaign is the insistence that women have the right to think differently about the faith and translate the tradition into non-sexist words and concepts.39

Departing from the analytic style of this paper, I would like to share my personal views. The vision of a future of equality gives hope to viewing the abilities of male and female as equally important and useful in all institutions. Women must be taken seriously in placement and in the changes their employment will create in the church. A few weeks ago someone said to me, "women ministers will turn the church upside down, and it is about time." Antoinette Brown Blackwell summarized the state of women in ministry in 1891. Her words remain prophetic for today. "She is here, and she has come to stay."40

39Zikmund, p. 10.


Breckenridge, Juanita. Letter in Student File, Oberlin College.


The Holy Bible (Revised Standard Version)


Lasser, Carol and Merrill, Marlene. editors, *Soul Mates: The Oberlin Correspondence of Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown, 1846-1850.* Oberlin College, Oberlin, Ohio, 1983.


