

The Ministerial Reformation: A History of Women and Ministry in the Mainline, 1920-1980

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Introduction

Between women ministers, there is a story retold so often that it has become something of a parable. It goes like this: Someone overhears a conversation between a few young parishioners. A boy expresses his desire to become a minister when he grows up. Another child, usually a girl, quickly corrects him. Their minister is a woman, so doesn't he get it? Only girls can be ministers!¹ Of course, the joke is on the kids. For most of American history, the prevailing assumption was quite the opposite. The office of Christian ministry was historically limited, rather strictly, to men, and the majority of American congregations continue in this tradition. But, during the twentieth century, some American Protestant churches underwent a transformation in their clergy that made innocent misconceptions about the natural gender of ministers possible. At the beginning of the twentieth century, women made up less than 1 percent of the nation's clergy. By the end of the century, they were 16 percent.² And within the group of liberal, ecumenical churches we call the Protestant mainline, the change was more dramatic.³ In the 2010s, women averaged between 20 and 40 percent of the ministers in mainline denominations.⁴

¹Versions of this tale appear in Susan Andrews, "Thanks Be to God", in *Celebrating Our Call: Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women* ed. Patricia Lloyd-Sidle (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2006): 145-157; Harriet Morley, *The Bribery of a Minister* (USA: American Association of Women Ministers and College Press, 1969). Anna Howard Shaw recounted a similar incident in which, upon announcing her resignation from her parish in 1885, she assured a distraught young girl that she would now have a nice male minister. The girl replied that she did not want a male minister and that she did not like to see men in the pulpit. As cited in Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 148.

²Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin, *She Preached the Word: Women's Ordination in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10. Kevin Quealy, "Your Rabbi? Probably a Democrat. Your Baptist Pastor? Probably a Republican. Your Priest? Who knows." *New York Times*, June 12, 2017.

³In 1994, women ministers accounted for 10% of the mainline's clergy. Barbara Brown Zikmund, Adair Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

⁴Presbyterian clergywomen, for instance, made up 39% of the total PCUSA clergy in 2016. United Methodist clergywomen were 29% of the total clergy in 2008. 27% of United Church of Christ's clergy were female in 2003.

This transformation begs for a language to describe it. In 1992, *Time* magazine observed that the entrance of women into the ministry of Christendom was a change of such magnitude the authors dubbed it “The Second Reformation.”⁵ In this text, I call the movement of women into the ordained ministry of mainline America the *ministerial reformation*.⁶ By this I mean the effort to change rules and practices, both de jure and de facto, prohibiting or discouraging women from the ministry. The loose historical network of women and men who participated in this endeavor I call *ministerial reformers*. Though this project focuses on the mainline, the term could easily apply to coterminous movements in American Judaism and Roman Catholicism, with whom reformers in the mainline shared many friendships, organizations, and ideas. Calling this movement the *ministerial reformation* has implications beyond indexing it to the paradigmatic narrative of religious change. A “reformation” implies an internal, institutional change—a long process, not a coup. In almost the exact years that this project covers, between 1930 and 1970, the percentage of women in the overall clergy of America increased by less than 1 percent.⁷ It is all too easy to look at such stagnant numbers and think that women made no progress in ministry during these forty years. But to do so would be to miss what was not a forest fire but a slow burn. The rush of women entering the ministry came in the 1980s, a decade barely chronicled by this work. Here, I am less interested in that dramatic numerical increase than in the history that

In the African Methodist Episcopal Church, women were 26% of congregational pastors in 2016. Since 1998, women have been about half of all the students in mainline theological schools. Quealy, “Your Rabbi.”; Presbyterian Church USA Research Services, “Year at a Glance: Elders 2016,” Church Trends, October 15, 2019, <https://church-trends.pcusa.org/minister/elders/gender/pcusa/0/>; Hee An Choi and Jacqueline Blue, United Methodist Clergywoman Retention Study II in the US Context; Barbara Brown Zikmund, “UCC Celebrates an anniversary: 150 years of women clergy,” United Church of Christ, ucc.org, <https://www.ucc.org/ucc-celebrates-an>; Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, “State of Clergywomen in the US: A Statistical Update” (Nashville, TN, October 2018); “Report Details Trends for US Women Clergy,” *Christian Century*, October 30, 2018.

⁵Richard Ostling and Jordan Bonafante, “The Second Reformation,” *Time* 140, no. 21 (November 23, 1992).

⁶My deep gratitude to my colleague Isaac May for suggesting the term.

⁷Carl J. Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1997), 127.

precipitated and gave permission to it, though I hope scholars in the future can do later decades justice. In these pages, we are not talking about women bursting into a new profession, taking it over *en masse*, and remodeling it from the inside. We are talking about the subtle reshaping of the idea of a minister, the idea of a woman, and the idea of a woman minister over sixty years. We are talking about how these ideas become palatable enough to some Americans that today, in 2019, about a third of theological school students are women, and about a fifth of Jewish and Christian American clergy, writ large, are women. This is a change that deserves a language and a historical literature of its own.⁸

Calling this movement the ministerial reformation also serves to envision a larger pool of activism than the more common term “women’s ordination.” In different religious communities, ordination per se was not always the hurdle ministerial reformers had to jump. Sometimes, lower ministerial positions entailed “ordinations” quite similar to those that men received at a full ministerial level. In some communities, ordination was not prohibited to women by any federal church policy. Yet even women in these denominations—communities which had, in some cases, permitted women’s ordination since the early nineteenth century—had to fight larger cultural battles to convince parishes to hire them, divinity schools to accept them, parishioners to respect them, and fellow ministers to embrace them as peers. These struggles, too, are considered by this project. My use of the term “ministerial reformation” throughout the project, instead of “women’s ordination”, is intended to encompass such conflicts as they played out beyond the borders of ordination alone.

⁸Association of Theological Schools, “2018-2019 Annual Data Tables,” Annual Data Tables, October 15, 2019, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2018-2019-annual-data-tables.pdf>; Knoll and Bolin, *She Preached the Word*, 10.

This dissertation argues that surprising forces played critical roles in this reformation in mainline Protestantism in the United States—forces that we do not tend to associate with increased leadership opportunities for women in religious organizations. The professionalization of ministry, the proliferation of alternative ministerial careers such as religious education and college chaplaincy, the cultural power of mid-century lay-women’s groups, and the liturgical renewal movement formed the conditions of possibility for women to enter, slowly, the ministerial force. Second-wave feminism, on the other hand, emerges in this account less of a salvific heroine on the white horse of the 1970s than as a complex character in the story. The bulk of the action of the ministerial reformation, I argue, happened well before second-wave feminism rose to the top of national consciousness in the 1970s. Furthermore, when the second-wave did break on the reformation’s shores, its impact was far more ambiguous than it may initially seem.⁹

This dissertation is often (though, as noted, not always) about women’s access to a particular rite—ordination. Thus, ritual has an importance place in this work. Ironically, given that the history of “women’s ordination” is nominally about women’s participation in this rite of passage, the ritual act itself has received scant attention in the scholarly literature, perhaps a symptom of a larger disinclination towards ritual among American religious historians. This dissertation considers ordinations to be essential historical texts, windows into the cultural and religious values being worked out within them and through them.¹⁰ To do this, I often draw on scholars

⁹This thesis is consistent with some recent scholarship on Roman Catholic feminism in the 1960s. Mary Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹⁰Scholars such as Robert Orsi and Kathleen Flake have pushed to incorporate ritual studies into American religious history. Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2018); Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

who have studied rites of passage. Following Ronald Grimes, I understand a rite of passage to be distinguished from other ritual behavior by its focus on transformation. Ritual action recurs with our recurring needs, but effective rites of passage “carry us from here to there in such a way that we are unable to return to square one.”¹¹ These transformations, and the rites that attend them, happen only once, and make their mark permanently. In this work, I focus far more on the recollections and experiences of ordination participants than on the *ür*-texts, myths, or conventions of ordination ceremonies. Grimes calls these accounts “passage narratives.” They are, he writes, “extensions of the rite itself, stretching it from the original performance in the past until it touches and transforms the present.”¹² For ministerial reformers, who were forced to defend their participation in such ceremonies or argue for the inclusion of women in the future, passage narratives were valuable tools. The stories they told about what their ordinations meant—or what their ordinations *would* mean—varied with time and circumstance. Some reformers downplayed their ordinations, to make them less threatening. Others analogized their ordinations to other rites of passage, usually marriage, sometimes birth. Some emphasized the change their ordinations portended. Because passage narratives are shaped by time and circumstance, they grant historians access to cultural assumptions about who a minister, a woman, and a woman minister were expected to be at various points in American history.

Similarly, thinking along with the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, Catherine Bell, and Nancy Jay, I also attend to the way women undergoing ordination ceremonies structured and located those ritual actions to draw attention to certain elements of the rite over others.¹³ This included

¹¹Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone : Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2007). 7.

¹²Grimes, *Deeply Into the Bone*, 9-10.

¹³Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

strategies such as choosing the liturgies of those rites, the participants, their own appearance and dress during the ceremonies, and the physical locations of the rites. As Bell has argued, ritual participants are never merely indiscriminating consumers, but bring to ritual a “patchwork of compliance, resistance, misunderstanding, and a redemptive personal appropriation of the hegemonic order.”¹⁴ For ministerial reformers, that is, the ordination rites themselves were opportunities for power negotiations between themselves and the ecclesiastical structures ordaining them. Women ordinands exercised what control they could over the conditions and post hoc interpretations of their ordinations. Their choices in this regard are a recurring theme in this dissertation.

In Arnold van Gennep’s classic account, rites of passage such as ordination have three distinct stages.¹⁵ First, an initiate is separated from the community. She then enters into a liminal, formative time and space. Finally, she is reincorporated into the community, newly transformed. The story of the ministerial reformation, as I tell it here, has a certain similitude to these ritual stages. In chapters 1 and 2, ministerial reformers are set apart from the community. They are deeply unusual creatures in their time. From the 1920s through the 1950s, reformers embraced their differences—their separation—so as to appear unthreatening to existing church authorities. Chapter 1 asks how women’s religious leadership migrated from mystical and holiness groups to the mainline, from the idea of women *preachers* to the idea of women *ministers*, between World War I and World War II. To carve out their own cultural terrain, ministerial reformers of this era had to maintain their borders carefully, keep themselves separate from the rest of women’s

¹⁴ Bell writes, in full: “A person’s involvement in ritual activities... is never an indiscriminate openness to what is going on. A participant, as a ritualized agent and social body, naturally brings to such activities a self-constituting history that is a patchwork of compliance, resistance, misunderstanding, and a redemptive personal appropriation of the hegemonic order.” Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 207-208.

¹⁵ Arnold van Gennep et al., *The Rites of Passage*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

church life—in particular, from lay-women church workers on one hand, and holiness women preachers on the other. Chapter 2 details the ministerial reformation of the 1950s, structured around marriage and the idea of the “churchwoman.” The woman minister’s relative rarity, her standing in relation to social norms such as marriage, and her presence in rural places enabled her existence in this decade.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 describe ministerial reformers in a liminal phase. Between the 1930s and 1960s, more para-ministerial roles opened to women, putting them—as ritual theorists would describe it, “betwixt and between”—in the doorway between the ordained ministry and lay labor. These roles kept them in physical spaces (the Sunday school, the missionary training school, the campus chapel), ancillary to the parish church, seminary, and pulpit. Yet in these liminal positions, women experienced a transformation—a realization that they were, in essence, becoming ministers, whether or not they were recognized formally as such. Chapter 3 explores the entrance of women into theological schools, mostly through programs of religious education. Chapter 4 expands the story to graduates of those early religious education programs. As theological education opened up to women under the guise of degrees in religious education, Sunday school teachers came to realize that their professional credentials rivaled those of ordained ministers, and that they were doing nearly identical work. By the early 1960s this generation of women began abandoning Sunday school for a chance at the pulpit. Chapter 5 recounts a similar tale of women campus ministers. Women who could not yet be easily employed or ordained by their churches in the 1950s and 1960s went to campuses instead, where the social movements that shook universities in those decades transformed ministerial reformers into modern activists.

Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 track the reformation's entrance into mainstream American life in the 1970s. As reformers were in the process of transformation, so was American culture. Chapter 6 makes the case that, when women ministers began emerging from liminal church roles and entering ordained parish ministry in larger numbers, they had to reckon with a culture of renewed skepticism towards institutions, professionalism, and religion generally. The gains of 1970s feminism, were, for them, generative of deep conflict and only ever partial. Chapter 7 is a case study of the Episcopal debate over women's ordination to the priesthood in the 1970s. Again, feminism played an ambiguous role in this conflict. Contrary to common interpretation, this chapter argues that the sacraments, and Episcopal articulations about their meaning and authority, were the starring players in the drama. Episcopal women priests' ability to re-enter their communities, after their rites of passage, was predicated not on the success of feminism in American culture but on sacramental theology and renewed liturgical investment among Episcopalians. Though sacramentalism has often been read as an antagonist to women's ministry, this chapter reads it, in the Episcopal context, as an essential piece of the puzzle.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, there was a small bubble of interest among scholars, particularly sociologists, in women's ordination. Texts from this period focus on demographics and professional issues—employment numbers, salaries, the kinds of pastorates women received, the number of parishioners they had, the relationship between those results and the structures of denominations as institutions.¹⁶ There is also a more anthropological body of literature on

¹⁶Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983); Frederick Schmidt, *A Still Small Voice: Women, Ordination and the Church* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, MI: Cary Oxford University Press, 1997); Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*; Edward C. Lehman, *Gender and Work: The Case of the Clergy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Edward C. Lehman, *Women Clergy: Breaking through Gender Barriers* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1985).

women's experiences in clerical roles—their daily lives, struggles, successes, pastoral styles, theological inclinations, and their impact on congregations.¹⁷ Yet the sociological and anthropological scholarship leaves underdeveloped the historical question: How did women enter the clergy in the first place?¹⁸

Curvatures in the historiography of American religion have resulted in the neglect of this question. When the field of Religious Studies discovered women's history in the 1990s, it tended to focus on women who lived and experienced their religious lives far from positions of institutional power. At the same time, an emergent “lived religion” approach to religious history shifted the discipline away from interest in “great clerics” and focused attention instead on the experience of those in the pews.¹⁹ Somewhere between the decline of great-man-history and great-minister-history, the history of women ministers slipped through the cracks. Compounding the problem was a concurrent fervor in the discipline during the last few decades to explain the rise of the religious right in the late twentieth-century. “When the history of American Protestantism during the 1970s is written, surely one of the important developments to be chronicled will be the entry of large numbers of women into the ranks of the ordained clergy,”

¹⁷Elaine Lawless, *Handmaidens of the Lord: Pentecostal Woman Preachers and Traditional Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Elaine Lawless, *Women Preaching Revolution: Calling for Connection in a Disconnected Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005); Elizabeth Ursic, *Women, Ritual, and Power: Placing Female Imagery of God in Christian Worship* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014).

¹⁸Very little has been written about women's ordination since the 1990s, though there is just now beginning a second wave of scholarly interest in the phenomenon. Books published on the topic in recent years include Knoll and Bolin, *She Preached the Word: Women's Ordination in Modern America*; Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, *Anatomy of a Schism: How Clergywomen's Narratives Reinterpret the Fracturing of the Southern Baptist Convention*, 2016; Jennifer Anne Wiley Legath, *Sanctified Sisters: A History of Protestant Deaconesses* (New York: NYU Press) 2019.

¹⁹Important works in this regard included Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990); Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); David Hall, ed. *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

three sociologists stated confidently in 1983.²⁰ Nothing could be further from the case. The entry of women into the ordained clergy has remained, at best, an ancillary event in American religious history.²¹ In a particularly symbolic incident in 1976, the Episcopal General Convention voted, after prolonged conflict, to ordain women to their priesthood. At the same convention, George Gallup Jr., an Episcopalian and president of a large American polling institute, announced to the General Convention that 1976 was “the year of the evangelical.”²² Women ministers, in our historical memory, simply never got a year. In the 1990s and 2000s, scholars thus produced wonderful historical work on conservative and evangelical Christian women, but very little on mainline or liberal Christian women.²³ In recent years, however,

²⁰Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 1.

²¹ Recent textbooks in American religious history illustrate this marginality. John Corrigan and Winthrop Hudson’s *Religion in America* (8th ed., 2010) makes no mention of women’s ordination in the twentieth century. Catherine Albanese’s *America: Religions and Religion* (2nd ed., 1992) situates a brief discussion of women’s ordination entirely within second-wave feminism. David Hall’s concluding chapter to Sydney E. Ahlstrom’s *A Religious History of the American People* (second ed., 2004), gives a paragraph to women’s ordination, similarly framed by the rise of the feminist movement. Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Eric Schmidt’s *The Religious History of America* (2002) is the only exception I encountered, giving women’s ordination considerable historical attention in comparison. See John Corrigan and Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 8th ed. (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010).; Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992).; Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).; Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*, Revised (New York: HarperOne, 2002).

²²“Divided Over Women,” *Time*, Oct 4, 1976.

²³R. Marie Griffith, *God’s Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2000); Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1986); Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1999); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge (Mass.); London: Harvard University Press, 1993). Notable exceptions are Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

scholarship on liberal religion and the mainline in the United States has experienced a renaissance.²⁴ My work seeks to be a contribution to this literature.

Existing historical narratives of women's entrance into the ministry tend to skip most of the twentieth century, moving quickly from nineteenth-century missionary activity to second-wave feminism. Nineteenth-century missionary organizations, led mostly by laywomen, gave women a source of church power and nurtured the idea that women could be religious leaders, even liturgical ones. The story goes that when missionary organizations were dismantled in the 1910s and 1920s and missions began fade from the mainline, women turned their pent-up energy to clergy rights.²⁵ In my research, I have found the transition between missionary power and clerical power not nearly so clean nor so evident. Following missionary work, mainline women did not immediately become advocates for women's ministry. Instead, most turned their energy to churchwomen's organizations, like Church Women United, which championed lay women's contributions to the church and rarely raised a stir over women in ministry. The persona and power of the churchwoman critically structured the shape that the ministerial reformation took in the mid-century. The same is true of changes in the ministry as a profession during these years,

²⁴ Important works in this regard include Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Elesha J. Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Likewise, histories of feminism have increasingly appreciated the contributions of women who worked to reform institutions from within them. Ministerial reformers certainly fall into this category, and I stand in these scholars' debt. Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006). Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²⁵ See, for instance, Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998); Kate Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 35-38. Robert makes this case quite bluntly: "The loss of the women's missionary organizations shocked mainline women into fighting for the laity rights and the clergy frights of women. With women's missionary organizations losing their autonomy, women turned their attention to women's rights issues within the church itself. Not surprisingly, some of the first mainline women to seek elder's orders in the twentieth century were women missionaries." (304).

which included new educational requirements for ordination, standardization of theological education, and changing models of parish ministry. Finally, in the mid-century women occupied many para-ministerial roles. They were Sunday school teachers, church administrators, leaders of women's church groups, theologians, deaconesses, local elders, choir directors, campus chaplains, and long-term pastoral substitutes. In these roles many ministerial reformers discovered they were effectively in ministry, without the title or imprint. We simply cannot skip or downplay the importance of the mid-century in our accounts of women in ministry.

Where the mid-century has been, in general, neglected, feminism has been over-valorized. Most scholars argue that women attained clerical rights because of historical pressures external to the churches. Principally, increasing formal gender equality in American culture across the board is credited as the impetus for women's entrance into ministry.²⁶ This explanation, I argue, is not mistaken, but it is imprecise and insufficient.²⁷ The ministerial reformation had ties to women's movements throughout American history, but the relationship between these movements was always deeply uneasy.²⁸ Ministerial reformers often experienced as much tension as harmony with feminism, whose insistence that women's ministry was a matter of

²⁶ Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 33.; Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 144-145; Ahlstrom and Hall, *A Religious History of the American People*, 1116-1117.; Carroll, Hargrave and Lummis, *Women of the Cloth*, 7-9.

²⁷ Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 3; Schmidt, *A Still Small Voice*. The external-pressure narrative has been popular among sociologists interested in new institutionalism, an approach to the study of institutions that focuses on how organizations respond to cultural forces. More recently, some scholars have begun to find the new institutionalist approach to the women's ordination story lacking. Sociologist Paul Sullins notes that churches and congregations do not consider themselves institutions in the same way as a university, for instance, does. Sullins argues that churches operate more like families, tolerant of less rational behavior than a university would be, for the sake of collegiality and cohesion. Applying institutional theory to churches can efface these complex internal dynamics. Paul Sullins, "The Stained Glass Ceiling: Career Attainment for Women Clergy," *Sociology of Religion* 61, no. 3 (2000): 243-66.

²⁸ I take the language of un-ease from Suzanne Hiatt, one of the first woman Episcopal priests, who wrote in 1996, "The various 'movements for the ordination of women' with which I am familiar have always had an uneasy relationship with feminism." Suzanne Hiatt, "Women's Ordination in the Anglican Communion: Can This Church Be Saved?," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership*, ed. Catherine Wessinger, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 211. Catherine Brekus's classic *Strangers and Pilgrims* points to a similarly fraught relationship between women's rights movements of the mid-nineteenth century and the preaching women that she profiles. Preaching women, Brekus observes with some surprise, were not necessarily intimately involved with women's reformers and exhibited a "biblical" not a "secular" feminism. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 7-8.

gender politics could clash with reformer's articulation of their apolitical, spiritual calling to the vocation. Likewise, feminism's critique of the ministry as immobile, insular, and patriarchal forced ministerial reformers to defend their participation in it. In similar form, the ministerial reformation was in many ways an irritant to laywomen's movements in the mainline. When church institutions were in vogue—missions, churchwomen's organizations—ministerial reformers had to navigate around powerful laywomen with conflicting visions of women's church roles. When church institutions lost their cachet during the social unrest of the late twentieth century, ministerial reformers had to pirouette in defense of their pursuit of so evidently hierarchical, institutional roles.

Put simply, the relationship between women's movements and women's ministry is much muddier than is often supposed. An implicit claim in this dissertation, then, is that it is time to move beyond the narratives of reconciliation that have recently dominated scholarship on feminism and religion. In general, historians have sought to reunite one to the other—uncovering religious influences and actors within feminist movements (or feminist actors within religious institutions) and positing more congruence than conflict.²⁹ The history of the ministerial reformation, in contrast, should help us tune our historical antennae to the static between some religious women's movements and secular feminism and help us move beyond a default posture of reconciliation.³⁰

²⁹Ann Braude, "A Religious Feminist—Who Can Find Her? Historiographical Challenges from the National Organization for Women," *The Journal of Religion* 84, no.4 (October 2004): 555-572; Ann Braude, "Faith, Feminism, and History," in *Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Lillian Calles Barger, "'Pray to God, She Will Hear Us': Women Reimagining Religion and Politics in the 1970s," in *The Religious Left in Modern America: Doorkeepers of a Radical Faith*, ed. Leilah Danielson, Maria Mollin, and Doug Rossinow (London: Palgrave, 2018); Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Gale L. Kenny, "The World Day of Prayer: Ecumenical Churchwomen and Christian Cosmopolitanism, 1920-1946," *Religion in American Culture* 27:2 (2017), 129-158.

³⁰Historian Mary Henold provides a good model of how this may be done. She argues that Catholic feminism grew organically within American Catholicism, even pre-dating secular second-wave feminism. Instead of a mere subset

As part of this effort, I also seek to historicize the *presumed* synchrony of second-wave feminism and women's ordination. A popular interpretation of the ministerial reformation has been that women's ordination is symbolic for churches. Churches that ordain women signal, through that choice, that they are modern, and mostly embrace contemporary roles for women. Churches that do not ordain women signal, in contrast, that they are traditional, and embrace more conservative gender roles. Church policy about women's ordination should be understood, as one scholar puts it, "in large part as a symbolic marker" for the gender politics of churches.³¹ Women's ordination is tied so closely to feminism, in this account, that one effectively stands in for the other. In its final chapters, this dissertation seeks the genealogy of the idea that women's ordination is *the* symbol of a church's feminist, progressive credentials. I argue that this symbolic function only emerged clearly after 1970 and it arrived at its preeminence at the direct expense of other possible symbols—including thriving laywomen's associations and gender-progressive liturgical language.

By focusing on the mainline, this project attempts a scope somewhere between the two common poles of women's ministerial history: surveys of women in leadership throughout Christian history on one hand, and denominational studies of particular communions on the other.³² The idea of "the mainline" is important for this approach to the history. Recent

or byproduct of the second-wave, Henold encourages us to see the differing origins and cracks between Catholic feminism and its larger feminist context. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement*, 3-6.

³¹Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 36.; Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 41.

³²For surveys, see Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker, eds., *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Karen Armstrong, *The End of Silence: Women and the Priesthood* (London: Fourth Estate, 1993); Ruth A. Tucker and W.L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1987). For denominational histories, see Darlene O'Dell, *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven* (New York: Seabury Books, 2014); Lois Boyd and R Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983); Gloria Bengston, ed., *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995); Mary Todd, "Not in God's Lifetime: The Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod" (Ph.D. diss, University of Illinois Chicago, 1996). The work that comes closest

scholarship has historicized the idea of the mainline as a creation of white Protestants in the 1940s and 1950s. The denotation “mainline”, this scholarship points out, was normative by those that would claim the label, an argument for their own importance, centrality, and Americanness.³³ I am interested in these churches that we call the mainline because, due to the success of these arguments, they were the most culturally influential and politically powerful churches in the United States for most of the decades chronicled here.³⁴ I have tended to define the mainline as a particular collection of denominational families. Though any attempt to categorize them is a bit amorphous, the “Seven Sisters” definition, which has been popular among historians, holds together here.³⁵ Most Episcopalians, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Christians (Disciples of Christ), Lutherans, and northern Baptists are envisioned in my definition. These groups share a certain creedal similarity. Unlike those to the theological left such as Quakers, Unitarians, and Universalists, my mainliners are Trinitarian. Unlike groups to the theological right, such as evangelicals, fundamentalists, or Pentecostals, my mainliners tend to have reconciling attitudes towards modern American life and do not think about the Bible through a framework of inerrancy. They also share what Peter Thuesen has called the “logic” of the mainline: tolerance of ethical difference, ecumenical cooperation, and embrace of a public

in scale to my own is Schneider and Schneider, *In Their Own Right*, though this history does not focus exclusively on the twentieth century and also considers American women in holiness, Pentecostal, and Catholic ministries.

³³Coffman, *The Christian Century*, 5-10.

³⁴William Hutchison, ed., *Between The Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Mark Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: American Religion in the Age of Counterculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History*.

³⁵Jason Lantzer, *The Protestant Mainline: The Past and Future Shape of Christianity in America* (New York: University Press, 2012). I prefer the term “mainline” to David Hollinger’s “ecumenical” in this context. Ecumenism is an essential theme in this work, and its rise and fall has ramifications for the ministerial reformation. To call the churches “ecumenical”, while accurate, might foster confusion.

role for churches in American life. This definition of the mainline contains an overwhelmingly white and middle-to-upper class swath of America.³⁶

Despite my attempt to give a more thoroughgoing account of the ministerial reformation, the limitations of my narrative are many. The continental United States sets the geographical boundaries, and I touch on international developments only infrequently. Another monograph could be devoted to a trans-Atlantic history of women's ordination, but it is out of the scope of my project here. As implicit in my focus on the mainline, my subjects are mostly white, female, cis-gendered, and middle-class. Black and Latina women ministers have historically passed through evangelical and holiness churches more frequently than through the mainline. Yet several black women ministerial reformers do enter into this story, especially from Methodist and Baptist communities. I attempt to describe the similarities and differences of their experiences with white women reformers when I can. In addition, though I do not orient my account around race, I do attend to racialization—to arguments that reify racial boundaries—when white women's attempts to enter clerical roles implicate their racial privilege.

Also neglected in my account are the “firsts.” The first women in each denomination, at each level of orders and of every identity and background, have often been the subjects of historical interest.³⁷ While surveying the firsts can make for an encyclopedic account of women's

³⁶Peter J. Theusen, “The Logic of Mainline Churchliness” in Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans, eds., *The Quiet Hand of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). According to a Pew survey in 2016, the only denomination in my definition of the mainline whose average household income falls below the national average is the American Baptist Churches, USA. David Masci, “How income varies among U.S. religious groups”, Pew Research Center, October 11, 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/11/how-income-varies-among-u-s-religious-groups/>

³⁷“Firsts” have also been subject to dispute. While most scholars recognize Antoinette Blackwell Brown as the “first” woman ordained in the United States by a Christian community (1853), others insist it must be Olympia Brown (1863) because Blackwell Brown never received a certificate of ordination and her credentials were disputed within Congregationalism. Still others claim Clarissa Danforth of the Free Will Baptist Church should have the honor (1815). In addition, the many Quaker women who arrived in the colonies as recorded ministers must also be considered. Susan Hill Lindley, *“You Have Stept out of Your Place”: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 125); Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife*, 38.

ordination, I have found it to make little narrative or analytical sense for the twentieth century. Instead of mandatory touchstones in the history of the movement, when I do consider women ordained first in their communities, I draw attention to their selection. Churches that began ordaining women or gave them full clergy rights during the twentieth century often made conscious decisions about *who should be first*, and therefore, who should be remembered and stand as a figurehead to future women entering ministry. These decisions are a through-line in the following pages.

The reader may also wonder at the absence of biblical arguments from this account. Though the Bible was certainly a minor battleground in the ministerial reformation, exegesis on the question of women's ministry underwent very little development over the course of the twentieth century, and indeed for hundreds of years prior.³⁸ In 1666, a British Quaker woman, Margaret Fell, defended the ministry of women in an essay, "Women's Speaking: Justified, Proved, and Allowed of by the Scriptures." Fell began her pamphlet by citing I Corinthians 14:34-35 ("Let your women keep silence in the churches"), and I Timothy 2:11-12 ("I suffer not a woman to teach") and set about recontextualizing these Pauline dictates with other biblical sources. Women and men were both created in the image of God, Fell pointed out. Jesus treated women as equals, often raising the ire of his disciples in doing so. Women surrounded Christ in his ministry, and were the first witnesses to his resurrection. Further, Paul's prohibitions in Corinthians and Timothy were applicable specifically in the context of the churches at Corinth, not to every woman in every age.³⁹ Since Fell articulated them in the seventeenth century, these basic

³⁸As Chaves points out, Bible-based arguments pro-and-con in 1990 were "nearly identical to the Bible-based pro and con arguments of 1890 and before." Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 92.

³⁹Margaret Fell, "Women's Speaking: Justified, Proved, and Allowed of by the Scriptures, All such as speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus" (ca.1666), Quaker Heritage Press Online, qhpress.org. Future interpreters of Paul would use an even more historical-critical approach than Fell, though her general thesis that Paul's injunctions were for specific, not general, application has been re-articulated for four centuries.

arguments have remained mostly unchanged for Protestants.⁴⁰ The result, for the mainline in the twentieth century, was usually a biblical stalemate. No biblical authority or argument decided the issue conclusively either way. Opponents to the ministerial reformation paired I Corinthians and I Timothy with Genesis 2. Proponents paired Galatians 3:28 (“there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”) with Genesis 1. Small changes in translation over the course of the twentieth century, such as those in the Revised Standard Version of 1946, did help swing the needle of the mainline towards women’s ordination.⁴¹ I will leave to future scholars, though, the task of uncovering the nuanced shifts in biblical debate during the years of the reformation.

The rise of the American clergywoman, like all changes, came with some compromise and some loss. In making their case, ministerial reformers, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, did not hesitate to use their racial and class advantages in ways that often reified those advantages. In later years, reformers worked delicately to extricate their issues from those of gay rights in the church. Theirs is not a history devoid of lapses. More generally, the ministerial reformation has also changed, fundamentally, what it means to be a woman in the mainline. In churches with ordained women, lay women’s groups no longer hold the organizational power they once did. What some historians call women’s “parallel church”—the national and local organizations that contributed so much to church life for several centuries—has mostly

⁴⁰Other passages making frequent appearance in these debates include 1 Corinthians 11:1-16, Ephesians 5:21-24, Colossians 3:18, Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28. Galatians 3:28 is discussed below.

⁴¹In 1946, the Revised Standard Version of the Bible landed in pews, quickly replacing the American Standard Version for mainline Protestants. In the new RSV, Romans 16:1 described Phoebe as a “deaconess” instead of a “servant of the church.” The RSV also adapted what would become a central text for the ministerial reformation, Galatians 3:28. Where the American Standard Version read, “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female, for ye all are one *man* in Christ Jesus”, the RSV finished instead: “...you are all *one* in Christ Jesus.” During their work on the RSV, the editorial committee, chaired by Luther Weigle, received in the mail several copies of *The Bible Status of Women* (1926) by Lee Anna Starr, a Congregational woman minister. According to Weigle, the committee took Starr’s observations into account. In addition, according to Mossie Wyker, where the King James Version used “any man”, the RSV in general used “any one.” Mossie Wyker, *Church Women in the Scheme of Things* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1953), 113.

disintegrated.⁴² The churchwoman, an aspirational identity for mainline women for decades, was also lost to the clergywoman's rise. Quite simply, the clergywoman replaced other ways of being a woman of the church. This is not to say that these changes were for the worse. The tension between organizing as women while insisting on formal equality with men is, Joan Wallach Scott has argued, the driving tension of feminist history.⁴³ Yet it is a drama replayed here as well.

From my perspective, however, this is mostly a history of triumph, albeit not of an uncomplicated sort. Ministerial reformers broke barriers for women in the workforce—the “stained glass ceiling”, as some have dubbed it—and for the belonging of women in the American mainline community. All the more impressively, they did so while challenging a patriarchal vice-grip on the divine—on who gets to approach it, image it, mediate it, invoke it, and dispense of its power. Some note with alarm that today women ministers have plateaued in their percentage growth in the clerical workforce.⁴⁴ Indeed it is incredible the amount of scholarship concerned with the relative absence or struggles of women ministers. Texts that inquire as to why there are not more women ministers—and why they are not more readily accepted, and why there seems to be disparity between their acceptance *de jure* and their struggles *de facto*—proliferate.⁴⁵ The result has been an ellipsis of the woman minister's mere, incredible existence, and the historical conditions and actors that enabled it. Thus, I chose to attend, instead, to the presence of them, to the remarkable clergywomen that we do have.

⁴²See Catherine Prelinger, ed., *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) ; R. Marie Griffith, “The Generous Side of Christian Faith,” in *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Press, 2002), 88.

⁴³Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminism and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3-5.

⁴⁴Knoll and Bolin, *She Preached the Word*, 10; Schmidt, *A Still Small Voice: Women, Ordination and the Church*.

⁴⁵Virtually every sociological work on women in ministry is structured around a negative as such. Chaves, *Ordaining Women.*; Schmidt, *A Still Small Voice: Women, Ordination and the Church.*; Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches.*; Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling.*

Chapter I. *From Preachers to Ministers:*

M. Madeline Southard and the Mainlining of Women's Religious Leadership, 1919-1945

In November of 1919, a 42-year old woman from Winfield, Kansas, boarded a train to St. Louis. Mabel Madeline Southard had always scorned “Mabel”, her mother’s name, in favor of “Madeline.” She was headed to the venue of the national convention of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). In many ways, it was quite natural that Southard was traveling towards the conference. She had converted to Methodism at a camp meeting at age 15. She was white and highly educated. Never-married, she had devoted her life since college to social purity evangelism. She made a living by preaching at churches and schools about prostitution, pornography, and venereal disease. She was an antagonist to alcohol, bar-life, and dancing. She had attended prior temperance conventions, and even worked for WCTU in her early adulthood. She was a perfect fit for WCTU—a woman, a Christian, a teetotaler.

Yet Southard did not plan to attend the national conference. She traveled to St. Louis on other premises. As the women of WCTU gathered, Southard was busy advertising in the St. Louis papers for a different kind of meeting. A few months prior, Southard wrote to the president of the WCTU, Dr. Anna Adams Gordon, with an idea. Gordon referred her to WCTU’s Director of Evangelism, a woman named Mary E. Kuhl. Mrs. Kuhl was a minister in the Methodist Protestant Church, a relatively small Methodist branch that had ordained women, albeit infrequently, since 1892. Intrigued by Southard, Kuhl rented a room at a local Young Women’s Christian Association building for the night after the temperance conference. Twenty women showed up. They had gathered to create an organization for women preachers. They drafted a constitution, elected officers, prayed together, and named themselves the International

Association of Women-Preachers. (Here, I call them Women-Preachers, or IAWM).¹

Southard's organization of women preachers was far from the first time in American history that women had shown interest in clerical roles, but it was the first time in thirty years that they had organized interdenominationally in numbers large enough to fill a room. More novel still was that, though Southard called herself a preacher and organized her society around "preachers"—a title that did not connote the ecclesiastical authority of, say, "reverend", "elder" or "minister"—the organization was intensely committed to ecclesiastical recognition of women's clerical roles. Their list of organizing purposes put fellowship first, activism for ecclesiastical rights second, and cultivation of young women preachers third. Many of the women present, including Southard, had no recognition from their denominations for their pulpit work, but they aspired to some.²

Organized in the shadow of WCTU, something about Southard's Women-Preachers must have felt radical, even confrontational. WCTU was the largest women's organization in the United States. By the turn of the twentieth century it had almost two hundred thousand members.³ By 1918, it was angling for one million members by 1923.⁴ WCTU organized lay Protestant women, the majority of church members in America, in grassroots and national activism. Women's church organizations like WCTU and the Young Women's Christian Association were giants of the Progressive Era. They were operated solely by women, and intended to leverage what they considered women's particular qualities—morality, purity, spirituality, domesticity—into labor for the good of the world. The WCTU and YWCA were

¹Madeline Southard, "The American Association of Women Ministers: Beginnings," *Woman's Pulpit* (May-June 1945).

²Madeline Southard, journal entry, November 21, 1919, Box 5, Folder 16, M. Madeline Southard Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Hereafter "Southard Papers."

³Edward Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Religion, Race, and American Nationalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 19.

⁴"Golden Jubilee of National WCTU in 1923," *Union Signal*, April 18, 1918.

inter-denominational. Many other woman's organizations had denominational affiliations yet operated independently, such as the Women's Home Mission Society and the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society in Southard's own Methodist Episcopal Church. Missionary and reform work of the kind that these groups sponsored, had, since the Civil War, dominated woman's work in the church. Southard was suggesting, respectfully and somewhat subtly, that women might be interested in other kinds of church work as well.⁵

Since the Civil War, missionary boards and church groups like the WCTU had offered women opportunities for public speaking, administrative labor, and financial independence. They had sent women on daring mission assignments in foreign lands, deployed them to the streets to agitate for prohibition and suffrage, sent them into social work against poverty and disease. Women's church organizations helped develop Sunday schools in the nineteenth century and many women served in church capacities teaching Bible study to other women and children. A deaconess movement in several large churches had also produced opportunities for women to be educated in nursing fields, serve the church in deaconess hospitals, or assist their ministers in basic worship duties and church administration. For most women, these avenues offered an ample life of spiritual service. But for some women—throughout the eras of American history—women's church roles never quite satisfied. These dissatisfied souls usually wanted to preach. Before the twentieth century, American Protestant women underwhelmed with their church options had generally wanted to stand in the pulpit, or near it, and speak God's word publicly to the world. They did not tend to want ordinations or initiations into a ministerial order. They did

⁵The literature on women's nineteenth century movements is vast. See, Blum, *Reforging*; Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998); Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, "The Social Dimensions of 'Woman's Sphere': The Rise of Women's Organizations in Late Nineteenth-Century American Protestantism" (Ph.D. diss, Johns Hopkins University, 1985); Barbara Welter, *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio U.P., 1976; .

not exhibit much concern over their ability (or lack thereof) to baptize, administer communion, or perform other rites. They rarely sought permanent installation in parishes. They infrequently raised a fuss about institutional sanctioning of their preaching, only objecting when the refusal of such sanctioning got in the way of their evangelism. And they rarely showed alarm at their inability to participate in the structures that governed their denominations.⁶ This chapter addresses the resultant question: How did American women, in significant numbers, come to want ecclesiastical, clerical recognition of their spiritual gifts in the first place?

This chapter tells this story through the life of M. Madeline Southard and her Women-Preachers Association between 1919 and 1943. Southard was, I argue, a transitional figure between the holiness and mystical branches of Protestantism that had championed preaching women in the first few centuries of American history, and the appearance of a movement on behalf of women clergy in the twentieth century. Southard's life, thought, and organization are a window into how the idea of women's religious leadership *mainlined* and took on the constituent curvatures of that mainline: respectability, institutionalism, and whiteness. By founding an interdenominational association of women preachers, Southard brought together two factions of women preachers that had rarely met: congregational, parish ministers, and evangelistic, reform-oriented traveling preachers like herself. As historian Priscilla Pope-Levison has argued, the Progressive era marked a period of transition for women evangelists—from itinerancy to institution-building.⁷ Southard herself personified this change. She roped together her fellow itinerant evangelists and the few existing women parish ministers into a professional organization. Together, as Women-Preachers, they tried to cut out a piece of cultural terrain for

⁶Catherine A Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 7.

⁷Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Building the Old-Time Religion: Women Evangelists in the Progressive Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

themselves. They had to find space for distinguished, educated women preachers somewhere between the uneducated, populist, racially-suspect holiness and Pentecostal women preachers on one hand, and lay women's service societies like the WCTU on the other. In doing so, Women-Preachers and Southard found that focusing their efforts on ecclesiastical recognition of their roles—on ordination, licensing, and professional credentials—could serve as a line between themselves and women's organizations. They paired this focus on ecclesiastical recognition with a classed respectability politics that distinguished them from Pentecostal and holiness women preachers. In 1943, Women-Preachers renamed themselves the International Association of Woman *Ministers*. This transition—from preachers to ministers—is the essential subject of this chapter.

We should not assume that the ministerial reformation began because the ministry was self-evidently desirable for women. Many other ways of understanding church authority were operative when Women-Preachers was formed. Women of powerful church organizations like WCTU argued that their work, “woman's work”, was the real heart of the church. Why would any woman want the limited authority of a countryside pastor when they could have influence at a national, even international level through a missionary society? Revivalists likewise offered a vision of church power tied to the pulpit and evangelism, not to a parish and ministerial orders. There was work for women as itinerant preachers, independent of or only loosely connected to denominational structures. Southard herself favored this vision of itinerant pulpit power, modeled on the woman preachers who had come before her. But many of Southard's friends in Women-Preachers did not, and they convinced Southard to work on behalf of ecclesiastical rights and status for women. Women-Preachers, despite its founding by a sanctified Methodist preacher who would never herself be ordained, increasingly focused on ecclesiastical rights as it

aged. They chose the right emphasis at the right time. Women's work—the labor of missions, temperance, social uplift—began to be absorbed into denominations in the 1920s, lost much of its authority with the end of Prohibition, and most of its resources in the Depression. At the same time, the Protestant ministry was undergoing a renaissance in professionalism and status. Women-Preachers, in building their community around ministerial titles and professional credentials, were able to ride a tide that was coming to see ordination as the essential door to authority in liberal Protestantism.⁸

Blocked By A Few Women

Southard never felt comfortable among national women's organizations. Her hometown in Kansas was small enough to have no church nearby. By the age of 16 she had taken the role of town preacher upon herself. Lacking a church building, as a teenager Southard led evangelistic services in her own home and at the county school house. In between driving cows from field to field twice a day, she practiced her sermons at her "praying tree" on her family's farm, one hundred acres bordered by a stone fence.⁹ Southard's religious influences were populist, holiness, and revivalist. She considered herself sanctified—born again and blessed by grace to pursue an ever-holier life. Yet she was powerfully moved by a social holiness movement within

⁸Very little scholarship on Women-Preachers exists. See Mark Chaves, "Women That Publish the Tidings: The International Association of Women Ministers," in *Women and Twentieth Century Protestantism*, ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Brereton (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002). More work exists on Madeline Southard. See Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "The Forgotten Woman's Bible: Katherine Bushnell, Lee Anna Starr, Madeline Southard, and the Construction of a Woman-Centered Protestantism in America, 1870-1930" (Ph.D. diss, University of Notre Dame, 2005); Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *A New Gospel For Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).; William T. Noll, "A Welcome in the Ministry: The 1920 and 1924 General Conferences Debate Clergy Rights for Women," *Methodist History* 30, no. 2 (January 1992): 91–99.; Kristin Kobes Du Mez, "Selfishness One Degree Removed: Madeline Southard's Desacralization of Motherhood and a Tradition of Progressive Methodism," *Priscilla Papers* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 17–22.; Kendra Weddle Irons, "M. Madeline Southard (1877-1967) on 'Ecclesial Suffrage,'" *Methodist History* 45, no. 1 (October 2006): 16–30.

⁹Madeline Southard, journal entry, October 20, 1919, Box 5, Folder 16, Southard Papers.

Methodism that suggested the grace of God might help communities live more Christ-like, sanctified lives, as well as individuals. “I think I have the balance of social and individual religion”, Southard once wrote, “—it is all the gospel, I can preach it all.”¹⁰ Though Southard had ties to women’s organizations she was always reluctant to become too closely associated with them. She worked for the WCTU in her youth, but she preferred a traveling evangelistic life, and the WCTU members who oversaw her work worried about her.¹¹ Southard considered herself a plain, farm-born Kansan and was usually alarmed by the wealth of the women running the large reform and missionary operations. She found Evanston, Illinois, where she received a master’s degree at Northwestern, “aristocratic.”¹² As one of Southard’s biographers notes, Southard saw sophistication and sanctification as mutually exclusive.¹³ In college, Southard dallied with pursuing one or the other, but she ultimately concluded she needed to leave behind the “world of culture” and embrace “the demonstrative religion folk”.¹⁴ Thus committed, Southard channeled her activism into preaching. Billing herself as an itinerant preacher and traveling incessantly, she spoke to church communities and high schools about social purity and women’s issues. She organized prayer meetings and led evangelistic campaigns in small towns. She managed to eke out a living in the Midwest, mostly in Kansas.

In 1901, Southard met Carrie Nation at a WCTU member’s home in Topeka, where Southard and Nation were both lodging. Nation was already an infamous, ax-wielding bar raider, a violent crusader for temperance. Southard likely saw in Nation a fellow-traveler—too populist to be comfortable with the refinement of WCTU, but reliant upon its support and connections

¹⁰Madeline Southard, journal entry, April 27, 1919, Box 5, Folder 14, Southard Papers. On the importance of revivalism and holiness to the social gospel of the Progressive Era, see Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957).

¹¹Clara Parrish to Elizabeth Hutchinson, August 9, 1901, Box 9, Folder 2, Southard Papers.

¹²Madeline Southard, journal entry, Box 5, Folder 14, June 16, 1919, Southard Papers.

¹³Kristin Kobes Du Mez, “The Forgotten Woman’s Bible,” 93.

¹⁴Madeline Southard, journal entry, June 1st, 1919, as quoted in 85.

nonetheless. Southard joined Nation on a few bar-smashing raids and spent a couple days in jail with her in the aftermath. Nation left Kansas afterward, but Southard stayed. Both in upbringing and in style, Southard hardly fit the well-heeled WCTU mold. She wrote in 1922, “How strange it seems that I could not have fit into something like [the WFMS] or the WCTU or YWCA, something already organized and at work, instead of this lonely job of being a woman preacher.”¹⁵ Southard, whose parents both died young, visited her sister often in Kansas City, but it was otherwise a lonely job indeed. During the Great War, Southard served at Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois, preaching and giving Bible classes to the soldiers-in-training. Southard was alarmed that women on the naval station were overwhelmingly entertainers who would dance and sing for the troops, and “do almost everything except speak to them of Christ.”¹⁶ After the war, in her early 40s, Southard felt compelled to start an organization of women like her: women who preached. If there ever was a war again, she reasoned, we would need more women preachers.

Women like Southard had preached in fits and starts throughout American history. Before the beginnings of Pentecostalism, prior to World War I, the vast majority of preaching women in America were Quaker women.¹⁷ If a pre-war American had heard the term “woman preacher” or “woman minister” her assumption would likely be that such a woman was a Quaker such as Lucretia Mott, prominent abolitionist and suffragist. Quakers had recorded women ministers—Quakers “record” ministers instead of “ordaining” them—since their earliest beginnings in England and the colonies. An unpaid, non-professional, often part-time class of leaders, Quaker ministers were recognized by their local (congregational) meetings as called to ministry, and any

¹⁵Madeline Southard, journal entry, October 10, 1922, as quoted in Du Metz, “The Forgotten Woman’s Bible”, 95.

¹⁶“The American Association of Women Preachers” *Woman’s Pulpit* 21, no. 3 (May-June 1943): 1, 4.

¹⁷Susan Hill Lindley, *“You Have Stept out of Your Place”: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 124.

given meeting could contain several such souls or none at all. Quaker ministers were tasked with speaking at meeting, and often traveled with the purpose of maintaining networks between meetings. In 1891, a small group of women in New England counted the number of women they knew of in ministry. Quakers led the way by a margin of ten to one, at 350 women ministers. In comparison, these women counted, the Universalists had thirty-five, the Unitarians sixteen, the Congregationalists six, and the Methodists three.¹⁸ Yet, despite their relative numerical strength, in moderate and conservative branches of Quakerism women's ministry was on the wane by 1880. The adoption of a paid, professional ministry in Orthodox Quakerism—more than half of American Quakers—resulted in declining opportunities for women's ministerial leadership. By the time Southard founded Women-Preachers in 1919, Quaker women ministers paled in notoriety in comparison to the women preachers emerging from Pentecostal groups, holiness Methodism, and the nascent Salvation Army.¹⁹ Though the early Pentecostal and holiness movements had significant overlap with Quakerism, public perception of the woman minister was coming to orient around women in holiness movements. Catherine and Evangeline Booth of the Salvation Army, Maria Woodworth-Edder and Ida B. Robinson of Pentecostal persuasions, Ellen G. White of the Seventh-Day Adventists, and Alma White of holiness Methodism all claimed significant public stature between 1880 and 1920.

Other Protestant preaching women in American history—evangelical rather than Quaker—clustered around the Great Awakenings. These outbursts of populist piety resulted in widespread revivals, emotive worship, theological focus on the transcendence of God, personal holiness, and

¹⁸“Evangels in Skirts” *Boston Daily Globe*, Jun 2, 1891.; Ada C. Bowles, “Women in the Ministry” *Woman's Journal* (Boston), October 26, 1895.

¹⁹On Quaker women's ministry, see Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).; Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Friends General Conference, 1995); Isaac May, “Opening the Shutters: Gurneyite Quakerism and the Struggle for Women's Equality in the Meeting for Business, 1859-1930,” *Quaker Studies* 18, no. 2 (2014): 170-190.

baptisms in the holy spirit. The spirit of the revivals suggested that the church was living in the time of Pentecost, a new era in which women were given the ability to preach and exhort. Verses in Joel 2:28 and Acts 2:17-18 indicated that women would prophesize in just such a time.

Between 1740 and 1760, evangelical women preachers were fairly widespread, preaching, as historian Catherine Brekus has argued, despite their gender. Their connection with God was a way of overcoming the limitations of their female bodies, which were understood, in the eighteenth century, as fleshly and corrupting. The nineteenth century brought a new theory of womanhood, however. Though never a monolithic ideal, most nineteenth-century Americans began to perceive white women as naturally pious, virginal, domestic, and moral.²⁰ Women's preaching, which had declined in the unstable years of the Revolution, emerged with new life in the early nineteenth century, and women began to step into pulpits *because of* their gender. Their presumed passivity and sensitivity made them more receptive to the holy spirit. Their presumed piety made them more worthy vessels for God's word. Their presumed domesticity kept them pure from worldly corruption.²¹ In the Victorian era, into which Southard was born in 1877, the symbolic vessel for the religious life of the nation was a white woman. In particular, a domestic, pious mother who provided moral education for the family and did not labor outside of

²⁰Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*; Laurel T. Ulrich, *Good Wives : Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England ; 1650-1750* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1991); Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England : The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For alternative gender constructions, see Helen Horowitz, *Rereading Sex : Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

²¹Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*. See also Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), especially chapter four; Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2013). See also Methodism's importance to developing the white woman as a symbol of religiosity in A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1993).; Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (1986); Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

the home.²² And yet, despite their symbolic stature, most white women did not advocate for institutional recognition or clerical roles for women in the Victorian era. And women would not begin to organize around the issue of clerical rights until Southard herded twenty of them into a little YWCA room in the years after World War I.

That is not to say that individual women did not try for clerical status at many points in the nation's history. A few denominations outside of Quakerism opened clerical doors to women in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, including the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion, the National Baptist Convention, the United Brethren, the Free Methodists, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Disciples of Christ. Congregationalists, Unitarians, and Universalists had ordained women since the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, respectively. In some of these denominations, local churches needed no approval from any governing body to call and ordain a minister. Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Olympia Brown are often considered the first women "ordained" in the United States, with Blackwell's ordination by a Congregationalist church in

²²Historians have long wrestled with the result of investing so much symbolic capital in the moral purity and piety of women in the Victorian era. Its logic propelled major social movements: temperance, abolition, women's rights. It launched women into church work, foreign and domestic missions. It produced a literary style, sentimentalism, that would typify the nation for decades. It brought about the decline of theological pessimism in favor of optimism. Heaven and angels replaced fire-and-brimstone in the Protestant imaginary. This transition has often been called the "feminization" of Protestantism, most prominently by historian Ann Douglas. See Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977). Because of the way Douglas deployed it in the 1970s, the term is a loaded one. Douglas argued that the rise of women's cultural dominance in literature, religion, the arts was an opportunity wasted by the objectively poor sentimental style women chose for expression. The term "feminization" since, has remained mostly hinged to a negative value judgment. See, for instance, David Reynolds, *Faith in Fiction: The Emergence of Religious Literature in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981); Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). Historians often explain this presumed piety of women as a way to balance to presumed productivity of men and their immersion in capitalist spaces outside the home, a way to neutralize some of the morally challenging effects of an increasingly individualistic, laissez-faire marketplace. See Gail Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism," *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (September 1989): 432-65. Indeed, it is up for debate how much the "feminization" of the church in the nineteenth century can be seen as historical fact or a turn-of-the-century rhetorical product that historians have unwittingly adopted. While it does seem that Victorian Americans experienced the church as symbolically tied to the home and to women, there is also certainly a note of unadulterated panic in the counter-reaction of the Progressive era that should incline us not to take their grievances too literally.

1853, and Brown's by the Universalists in 1863. In the 1880s, a woman named Anna Howard Shaw and a friend of hers named Anna Oliver had pressured several Methodist bodies for an ordination, with mixed results but decent media coverage. The future founders of Women-Preachers, Kuhl and Southard, looked up to Anna Howard Shaw immensely, yet she had died shortly before the organization began. But women like Shaw and Oliver operated almost entirely alone in their clerical pursuits in the late nineteenth-century. There was no distinct ministerial rights movement for them to join.

The only organized attempts to unite these disparate women in ministry came in regional contexts. On the Iowa plains, a group of Universalist ministers kept fellowship with one another through letters and friendships around the turn of the century. They encouraged other women to enter the ministry, but did not organize formally for the cause.²³ In New England, hymnist and author Julia Ward Howe—not herself a minister but a frequent lecturer at churches—gathered a Women's Ministerial Conference in 1882 and kept it running into the 1890s.²⁴ The Conference drew on suffrage networks and attracted a rather elite set of women, including Antoinette Brown Blackwell and Anna Howard Shaw. The Conference was small and northern.²⁵ Its intention was mostly fellowship, though the Conference did compile an album with photographs of women ministers for display at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893.²⁶ Despite the prevalence of Quaker women in the field, Howe's ministerial conference did not attract Quaker women in large

²³Cynthia Grant Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880-1930* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990)

²⁴Howe began meetings with women ministers in 1875, but did not organize the conference formally until 1882. It is unclear exactly when the Conference disbanded. "The Women's Ministerial Conference: Organized in Boston 1882: To the Women Preachers of the Country", circular, Box 2, Folder 3, Helen D. Lyman Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. (Hereafter Lyman Papers). See also Carl J Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1997), 70.

²⁵Of a list of eighteen officers of the Conference in 1882, ten were from the Northeast, including the President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

²⁶Julia Ward Howe to Ada Bowles, Feb 7, 1893, Box 2, Folder 5, Lyman Papers.

numbers. The energy behind Howe's little Conference seems to have died when she did, in 1910.

Madeline Southard was not aware of Howe's meetings or of Iowa's circle of women ministers. But she read Anna Howard Shaw's autobiography several times, and had a portrait of Frances Willard hung in her sitting room.²⁷ Frances Willard, the longtime leader of WCTU, was (in some ways ironically) a great inspiration to Southard. In 1888, Willard published *Woman in the Pulpit*, making the case for women's inclusion in the Christian ministry and in Christian preaching.²⁸ Southard read it perennially. She considered Willard's memory (Willard had died in 1898) whitewashed by the modern women of WCTU. She accused them of obfuscating Willard's fight for women preachers in favor of remembering her temperance work. "Bless the memory of Frances Willard," Southard wrote on the train to St. Louis for the inaugural meeting of Women-Preachers. "She said it straight and hard enough. But the soft pedal has been put on many of her utterances, and those who eulogize her to the skies no do not know, most of them, some of the things she said."²⁹ Out the train window, Southard saw St. Louis, where Women-Preachers was to form in the shadow of WCTU. She put on her hat.

Southard's itinerant lifestyle in the Midwest allowed her to broach the subject of a woman preacher's association with women's-work women she encountered in her travels. She met gentle resistance. At the home of a Woman's Foreign Missionary Service (WFMS) official in Detroit, Southard observed, "The situation is exactly as I thought. The women of the WFMS believe in full suffrage for women in everything, but it would be most inadvisable for them to jeopardize their work throughout the world by taking an attitude that would antagonize the male controllers of all our church work." Though Southard said she understood perfectly, the next day

²⁷Madeline Southard, journal entry, July 30, 1919, Box 5, Folder 15, Southard Papers; Madeline Southard, journal entry, April 27, 1919, Box 5, Folder 14, Southard Papers.

²⁸Frances E. Willard, *Woman in the Pulpit* (Boston: D Lothrop Co., 1888).

²⁹Madeline Southard, journal entry, August 16, 1919, Box 5, Folder 15, Southard Papers.

she began printing pamphlets of *Woman in the Pulpit* for distribution in St. Louis. Women who revered Willard but rejected one of Willard's causes, women preaching, struck Southard as hypocritical.³⁰ Sometimes Southard's interactions with the women's-work faction of the church became even more heated. In one instance, Southard recalled that the Women's Home Missionary Society had "dropped me so completely when they found they could not handle me"—an incident that, while unclear in its details, was significant enough that news of it reached ministers far afield. Indeed, the resistance that Southard encountered, as she toured the Midwest soliciting opinions on the formation of a society of women preachers, was almost entirely from women's-work women. A male minister, a stranger to Southard, once approached her to applaud her work, saying she had "started something worthwhile, even tho I was blocked by a few women."³¹

The tension between Southard's idea for an association of women preachers and the WCTU's purposes was apparent even from the founding of Women-Preachers. Southard's organization planned to convene for their first meeting during the meeting of Mary Kuhl's Evangelistic Division at the WCTU conference in St. Louis in 1919. Yet Southard and Kuhl were aware of the possible conflict that may instigate, wary of transgressing onto WCTU's turf. Kuhl wrote presciently, in an early letter to Southard, "we want to do nothing that that will trespass on the rights or privileges of our glorious organization of the WCTU." Kuhl was concerned enough that she wrote to WCTU President Anna Gordon to obtain her full support. Southard also wrote to Gordon, in what seems an abundance of caution, soliciting her approval of the program for the meeting. Though Gordon and the directors of WCTU offered their support

³⁰Madeline Southard, journal entry, August 16, 1919, Box 5, Folder 15, Southard Papers.

³¹Madeline Southard, journal entry, April 4, 1920, Box 5, Folder 17, Southard Papers. Southard's spat with the Woman's Home Missionary Society involved their Corresponding Secretary, May L. Woodruff, but Southard offers no other details.

for Southard's project, they recommended instead that Southard's organization meet after the WCTU convention had concluded. They had no problem with the idea, they said in effect, but it would not take up WCTU space, time, or resources.³²

Southard had philosophical as well as cultural differences with women's work organizations, especially when it came to ideas of womanhood. Southard was a round critic of the religious significance of the home and motherhood. Victorian Protestant women had had an outlet for religious service in motherhood, perhaps woman's-work par excellence. The mother was a moral pillar and the source of religious education for her children. As one WCTU organizer once wrote to Southard, "A partnership with God is motherhood, what strength, what purity, what self-control, what love, what wisdom, should belong to her who help God fashion an immortal soul."³³ Southard's opinion could not have been further removed. By the time she founded Women-Preachers, Southard was past child-bearing age, unmarried, and was an ardent skeptic of spiritual motherhood and the "woman's sphere" it entailed. Women deserved, she wrote, "not a sphere but a hemisphere."³⁴ She rejected the idea that woman's true calling lay in domestic pursuits. She dismissed the Victorian convention that women were naturally more pious than men. In her master's thesis, later published as *The Attitude of Jesus Towards Women*, she made the case that Jesus thought of women as autonomous persons, not dependent on relationships to define them. Jesus did not, Southard noted, divinize his own mother.³⁵

Southard's spotty relationship with the women's work forces of the church was an essential conflict for the ministerial reformation as a whole. It encouraged Southard and the women who

³²Mary E. Kuhl to Southard, July 8, 1919; Mary Kuhl to Southard, September 2—(illegible), 1919, Box 8, Folder 18, Southard Papers.

³³Clara Parrish to Madeline Southard, Sept 12, 1903, Box 9, Folder 2, Southard Papers.

³⁴Madeline Southard, "Not a Sphere but a Hemisphere", *Woman's Pulpit* 1, no. 2 (1922).

³⁵M. Madeline Southard, *The Attitude of Jesus Towards Women* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1927). Du Metz, "Selfishness one Degree Removed: Madeline Southard's Desacralization of Motherhood and a Tradition of Progressive Methodism," *Priscilla Papers* 28, no. 2, (Spring 2014): 17-22.

followed her to identify not as reform or temperance workers, but as preachers, and to search for fellowship with other women who also sought to so identify. Southard lamented the way in which Frances Willard and Anna Howard Shaw were portrayed “not as preachers but as social reformers.”³⁶ Women-Preachers was a vehicle for Southard and her contemporaries to secure recognition for what they were: preachers of the gospel, ministers of the church. Though most of the women involved in Women-Preachers remained connected to women’s work organizations and causes, they all had distinct identities as preachers or as ministers that drew them to Southard and her organization. Though born in the halls of WCTU, Women-Preachers was quick to announce its independence.

The resistance Southard met amongst women of the WCTU and missionary crowd in the 1910s and 1920s was in some ways surprising. In the 1880s and 1890s, coincident with Frances Willard’s tenure at WCTU, missionary, temperance, and suffragist networks were strident supporters of women’s preaching and ministry. The *Union Signal*, WCTU’s journal, ran numerous stories in support of women’s ministry. So too did the *Woman’s Journal*, the paper of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.³⁷ Early ordinands Antoinette Blackwell Brown, Olympia Brown, and Anna Howard Shaw all left parish ministry for full-time suffrage work and considered suffrage activism a natural extension of their ministries. Suffrage embraced them right back: women preachers led prayers and services at suffrage conventions; suffrage journals offered news coverage of women’s ordinations and church decisions concerning women’s ministry.³⁸

³⁶M. Madeline Southard, “Who are We?” *Woman’s Pulpit* 1, no. 4 (April, 1923).

³⁷“Women Preachers: Mr. Dickinson Says they Will be Numerous; Laymen Also Will be Among Our Gospel Teachers; This Will be Due Greatly to Berkeley Temple” *Union Signal*, September 1889; Katherine Bushnell, “Keep Silence” *Union Signal*, March 12, 1892; “The Woman Question in Atlanta” *The Woman’s Journal* (Boston), June 27, 1891; Ada C. Bowles, “Women in the Ministry” *The Woman’s Journal* (Boston), October 26, 1895.

³⁸ Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman’s Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 19-22.

By the turn of the century, though, the support of women's-work women—especially those in temperance and missions—for women's ministry was waning. A movement to masculinize religion was under way—an element of a larger societal concern about masculinity.³⁹ The first three decades of the twentieth century, 1900-1930, saw an outpouring of worry that women were too powerful in the church, driving men away from the ministry and away from the pews.

Advocates of a manlier church impacted virtually every element of church life: the education of youth, theological emphases, ministerial activities, and the organizational structure of the churches. Urban revivalists like Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday whipped up crowds in cities, targeting their messages to men. Christianity, the argument went, was about virility, strenuousness, physical fitness, character development, and—depending on whom you asked—salvation or social service. Young men's organizations, particularly the Young Men's Christian Association and the Boy Scouts of America, gained prominence as outlets fit to make church boys into church men. Young adulthood—not childhood—became the formative religious age, effectively undercutting the authority of mothers in the religious upbringing of their children and laying the groundwork for modern youth groups.⁴⁰ A cultural and theological movement called fundamentalism surfaced in the 1910s, with masculinization written into its genetic code.⁴¹ A group called Men and Religion Forward had a brief but powerful life between 1910 and 1911. Ministers were expected to be, one Lutheran seminary professor wrote in 1902, “the manliest

³⁹See Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994). Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Ada C. Bowles, “Women in the Ministry” *Woman's Journal* (Boston), October 26, 1895.

⁴⁰Christopher Coble, “The Role of Young People's Societies in the Training of Christian Womanhood (and Manhood), 1880-1910,” in *Women and Twentieth Century Protestantism*, ed. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth and Virginia Lieson Brereton (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

⁴¹Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 - Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

among the manly,” “virile”, “robust” and “vigorous”.⁴² An ad-man turned novelist, Bruce Barton, portrayed Jesus as a businessman in his best-selling novel, *The Man Nobody Knows* (1925). The masculinization movement replaced the spiritual mother with the youthful athlete and the astute businessman. Manliness so consumed white, male Protestants that the brand earned its own nickname: muscular Christianity.⁴³

The masculinization movement put women’s-work organizations under threat. In the 1910s and 1920s, under the logic of bureaucratic efficiency, denominations began subsuming previously independent women’s missionary organizations into denominational structures. In 1910, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (which had split from Southard’s church before the Civil War), consolidated their women’s missionary organizations, stripped the women of their ability to make missionary appointments, and took away their periodical journal. In 1919, Disciples of Christ women and Protestant Episcopal women underwent a similar dispossession. In 1923, the Presbyterians joined them, and, a few years later, the Congregationalists. Denominations simply vacuumed up independent women’s mission boards and education auxiliaries as if they were errant dust. In reality, though, they were gold dust, often extremely wealthy even compared to the churches into which they were absorbed. The boards that merged with denominational structures were stripped of their fiscal independence. WCTU, more so than others, remained safe in a financial sense from this absorption, because it was inter-denominational and independent. But the end of Prohibition in 1933 would ultimately have the same effect. The threat to women’s-work was not merely about independence, it was about

⁴²G.H. Gerberding, *The Lutheran Pastor* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1902), 135, 48, 53, 136.

⁴³Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).; David Setran, *The College “Y”: Student Religion in the Era of Secularization, 1858-1934* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 - Present*. Bederman, “Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough.”

relevance. It was about the sense that women's-work had been *the* work of the church, and that it would be so no more.⁴⁴

In the years that Madeline Southard traveled the Midwest, hoping to build an association of women preachers, the women's missionary and temperance societies had these threats to their relevance in mind. As the WFMS member had told Southard, alienating the men of the church was a grave concern. In several ways, Southard appeared dangerous to women's-workers, even as she often labored for their causes. Her association of women preachers, they reasonably thought, might poke an angry bear. Such an association could further threaten men and jeopardize women's-work for the sake of something that, in the opinion of WCTU-types, was *not really* women's-work. Southard, in part due to her mixed relationship with women's work, was also inclined to sympathize with the masculinization of the church, and to use its language. She saw strength as the paramount virtue for ministers and preachers. When she attended a Billy Sunday revival in Kansas City in 1915, she appreciated his confrontational style; his ability to, as she put it "hit straight out."⁴⁵ Southard's own experience with physical labor during her childhood on a farm, and the labor that she saw lower and middle-class women perform daily in her travels, convinced her that woman's bodily strength was equal to men's. Women preachers could be just as strong, just as robust. Southard's portrayals of preaching as labor, and masculine labor at that, also arose from the kinds of work she was performing in the church.⁴⁶ The duties that she recounted in her journal rarely land on the spectrum of what one could call ministerial care. When she took full-time pastorate positions, she seemed ill-suited to them, and lasted only a few months. Her work, as she saw it, was in winning souls, not tending souls. The skills that

⁴⁴Robert, *American Women In Mission*, 302-303.

⁴⁵Madeline Southard, journal entry, March 28, 1915, Box 5, Folder 7, Southard Papers.

⁴⁶Madeline Southard, "The President's Address", *Woman's Pulpit* 1, no. 1 (1922).

she needed to do that work—energy, elocution, research, writing, physical strength, stamina—she did not gender female. “I want to be great (and have the right to do great things) as man is great,” she once wrote.⁴⁷

The moment Southard chose to craft an association of women preachers was an auspicious one for women’s professional organizations in the United States, many of which were founded between 1910 and 1930. As Nancy Cott has argued, women entered previously male professions—such as law, medicine, and ministry—in the early twentieth century, in part because it had been a symbolic goal of the woman’s movement, and in part because, after suffrage, women were drawn to the meritocratic, impersonal standards that the professions professed to embrace. As Cott notes, however, women’s professional groups, like the American Women’s Medical Association (founded 1915), had “a problematic identity and an ambiguous mandate.”⁴⁸ The key question of feminist organizing in the United States after the suffrage movement, according to Cott, was whether or not women could sustain the paradox within their movement: the paradox of denying sexual difference while building a movement based on it.⁴⁹ Women’s professional groups were especially prone to this contradiction, because they lobbied within professions that saw themselves as politically neutral and gender-blind, though of course they were not. Women-Preachers exhibited this same contradiction in spades. It never entirely hitched its wagon either to an argument for ministerial equality based on sexual sameness or on sexual difference. In this respect, it proved a rather slippery rhetorical opponent. Despite

⁴⁷As quoted in Du Metz, “Selfishness,” 18.

⁴⁸Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 230.

⁴⁹Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. As Joan Wallach Scott has argued, paradox is the key theme of feminist—in particular, the paradox of arguing for equality on the basis of sameness, while building a movement around difference. Scott cautions historians against reading feminist history as a catalogue of transitions between difference feminism and equality feminism. She notes that, because of the social condition in which feminism moves, feminism must always articulate both equality and difference at once, and must therefore be riddled with internal contradictions. Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminism and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997).

Southard's emphasis that she—and other women preachers—could function as preachers just like men, she also never entirely abandoned a sense of women's distinction. She slipped into either argument with apparent ease. In one sentence, Southard would reject the idea (embraced by many of her predecessors such as Frances Willard) that women were more naturally pious than men. Yet, in a following sentence, she was happy to argue that women did have a particular “mystical element” to her nature.⁵⁰ In an early issue of Women-Preachers' periodical, *Woman's Pulpit*, Southard identified that arguments opposing women's preaching were also paradoxical, and countered them effectively. How ironic, she wrote, are the twin arguments that women preaching would feminize the church but masculinize the women! Southard's response was to spin both accusations on their tails. The argument about the masculinization of women in the pulpit was, she implied, disingenuous, applied only to the kinds of labor men wanted to keep for themselves. “Women have always worked,” she wrote. “Men have raised no cry lest scrubbing and washing would make them unfeminine.” And, on the other hand, she suggested that the larger threat to the church's feminization came not from women but from the clergymen already in pulpits. “Some brethren are very fearful that women preachers will feminize the church,” she noted, “apparently unaware of the masculine monopoly of the pulpit has already done that.”⁵¹ The feminized clergyman was a common punching bag for the masculinization movement. Southard knew how to turn the stereotype to women's advantage. The women of Women-Preachers reiterated Southard's insistence both that women preachers did not feminize the church, and that preaching did not masculinize a woman. Members emphasized, in particular, that women could be excellent mothers and excellent preachers. At a Kansas chapter meeting, a male Quaker minister recounted the inspirational experience of growing up with a recorded

⁵⁰Madeline Southard, “The President's Address” *Woman's Pulpit* 1, no. 1 (1922).

⁵¹Southard, “The President's Address.”

minister for a mother, and later serving at the same meeting she had. A Methodist woman preacher insisted, likewise, that her children had not been ruined by her preaching.⁵²

In partially siding with the forces of masculinization, and distinguishing herself and other women preachers from women's work, Southard positioned Women-Preachers to survive the dissolution of women's missionary enterprise. Not all ministerial reformers followed Southard's lead. Some remained committed to the idea that their femininity was their greatest asset in the ministry. But, in the 1920s especially, when the heat of masculinization was the hottest, many did follow Southard. When a famous British Anglican preacher and suffragist, Maude Royden, came to the United States on a speaking tour in 1923, her publicist advertised her as "at once a true woman and a great man."⁵³ Southard suggested that the same could be true of all women preachers—that they could be true women and great men, all at once.

Human Organization

After its founding in 1919, Women-Preachers grew to a small but respectable size: 187 members in 1923.⁵ According to one historian, annual assemblies in the 1920s tended to draw 30 to 40 women. The association would get a little larger, though not much, and it would hang on to life tenaciously. (It still operates today). Southard began printing a periodical for the association, *Woman's Pulpit*, in 1922. Though they were never a large coalition, and only occasionally an activist one, Women-Preachers was the only organization of its kind for most of the twentieth century. As such it is a vital window into the cares and concerns of women with growing clerical aspirations.⁶ In Women-Preachers between 1919 and 1943, one can watch a slow transition: one can see the women of Women-Preachers gradually tune their focus away from evangelizing,

⁵²"Pastor of Church Mother Once Served," and "These Children Not Ruined," *Woman's Pulpit* 1, no. 5 (July, 1923).

⁵³Sheila Fletcher, *Maude Royden: A Life* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Ltd 1989), 220.

away from woman's-work, and towards ecclesiastical rights for women. Ultimately, this transition would be reflected in the name of the association itself.

Like most women preachers before her, Southard found the pulpit the symbolic stronghold of the church. She generally put very little store in ecclesiastical titles, which she called, derogatively, "human organization."⁵⁴ Yet she had founded an association devoted, in part, specifically to that purpose. The situation bemused Southard herself, most of all when she was elected to General Conference in 1920—the quadrennial meeting of the Methodist Episcopal Church—and found herself spending an exhausting month agitating for full clerical equality for women. "It is a bit strange," she wrote, "about my supporting that cause. I have never cared for church license or ordination, had given it very little thought." But a confluence of factors, Southard thought, had pushed her in that direction. She had founded Women-Preachers more with a view to fellowship than to advocacy. But she was influenced by the women she met who had given ordination quite a lot of thought, including her partner in founding Women-Preachers, Reverend Mary Kuhl. Kuhl cared so deeply about ecclesiastical recognition that she changed her denominational affiliation from Methodist Episcopal of her birth to Methodist Protestant, a smaller branch, so she could be officially ordained. Another member, Sara Haskell Wallace, encouraged Southard to write up a petition on the subject of clerical rights for General Conference in 1920. Southard had agreed, "hardly realizing what it was going to get me into."⁵⁵

Southard's organization was mostly like her: Methodist, midwestern and white. Yet it garnered small numbers of women from quite a range of denominations. Women-Preachers proudly counted members from fifteen denominations in 1922. The women are, *Woman's Pulpit*

⁵⁴Madeline Southard, journal entry, Aug 22, 1920, Box 5, Folder 17, Southard Papers.

⁵⁵Mary E. Kuhl to Madeline Southard, Nov 3, 1919, Box 8, Folder 13, Southard Papers.; Madeline Southard, journal entry, July 1, 1920, Box 5, Folder 17, Southard Papers.

added, “all of them preachers.”⁷ When they touted their members as such, Southard’s cohort built solidarity around a shared practice. But they were also boasting, distinguishing themselves from women’s-work women. Women-Preachers’s relationship to woman’s-work was as complex as Southard’s. On one hand, most members of Women-Preachers served missions, worked for women’s organizations, attended endless women’s conferences. On the other, they were intensely proud of their clerical credentials, and insistent that there should be more work for women in the church beyond woman’s-work. An article in the third issue of *Woman’s Pulpit* is representative. It recounted a luncheon at the International Sunday School Convention in 1922. Mrs. Stella B. Irvine, the National Superintendent for Sunday School work in WCTU, spoke at the assembly. According to Southard’s account of the event, Irvine said her license to preach was what really mattered to her, “the very highest honor that has ever come to her.” One gets the distinct feeling that Southard was gleeful that a woman with a major office in WCTU would hold a preaching license so dear. Other slights at WCTU—always small and subtle—typified Southard’s presidency in the organization, which lasted until she went on a mission trip to India in 1929. (Later, upon her return, she resumed the presidency for a few years). Southard’s association met annually, and each year women wrote to Southard requesting that their convention be scheduled so as to be concurrent with WCTU’s annual convention. Only twice did Southard demur to these pleas, and only when WCTU happened to be meeting in the Midwest. Despite their nourishment in the cradle of WCTU and birth in the halls of the YWCA, Women-Preachers really wanted to organize *clergy* women, not woman’s-work women. They worked hard and very delicately to put space between the two. Women-Preachers, like M. Madeline Southard herself, rejected their mother’s name. Or perhaps, more accurately, they relegated it to a decorative initial.

The threat of being indistinguishable from woman's-work organizations, combined with Women-Preachers's surprisingly ecclesiastical bent, resulted in a politics of border control in the organization. Southard and friends were immediately confronted with a difficulty in their endeavor to organize women preachers, which applied equally well to Southard as to any potential member: How do you know a woman preacher when you see one? How do you tell her apart from a WCTU evangelizer, a WFMS missionary, a WHMS organizer? Mary Kuhl noticed this difficulty immediately. She wrote to Southard before the 1919 meeting that their organization should only include ordained women. She failed to realize that Southard herself was not ordained, and hastily apologized.⁵⁶ When she founded Women-Preachers, Southard had a divinity school degree, but no other credentialing was available to her in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Clergywomen, in the sense Kuhl wanted them to be, ecclesiastically sanctioned, were few and far between, mostly Quakers, Disciples of Christ, Free Methodists, Universalists, Unitarians, and Congregationalists. Southard and Kuhl concluded that using ordination as a mark of belonging would be impractical. In 1923 Women-Preachers reflected on their membership standards:

Some think we should admit only those who are ordained. But this would defeat one of our purposes in organizing. There are several denominations represented in our membership that give no recognition whatever to women as preachers, yet individual members are preaching with power. We want to encourage these women, not shut them out. We advise them to remain in their own churches and pioneer the way for ecclesiastical recognition.

As if to make up for the fact that the ecclesiastical status of many members could only ever be aspirational, given the circumstances, *Women's Pulpit* quickly assured readers, "But we have been very careful in our membership. Some applicants have had to be rejected."¹⁰ For an association founded by an un-ordained, rural Kansan, Women-Preachers had shockingly

⁵⁶Mary E. Kuhl to Madeline Southard, Sept 23, 1919, Box 8, Folder 13, Southard Papers.

demanding membership standards.

Ordination was not a ball that Women-Preachers had to juggle for long, however. As some clerical roles opened to women in the 1920s within the Methodist Episcopal Church, Women-Preachers, composed mostly of Methodists, could become more stringent in their admission policies. Much of this opening in MEC was thanks to Southard herself. At General Conference in 1920, and much to her own surprise, Southard successfully petitioned for women's licensing as local preachers. Practically, this was a lay office, one that did not entail an ordination ritual. Licensed preachers could not perform baptisms, communion, or marriages. Southard herself had, ironically, been preaching many years without a license, an infraction she was unaware of. Preaching licenses were a start, but Southard hardly considered her work finished. For the General Conference in 1924, Southard was able to solicit letters from *Woman's Pulpit* readers, which she sent to Methodist commissions tasked with reporting to the General Conference on women in the clergy. She also encouraged Methodist readers of *Woman's Pulpit*, in particular, to send in fiscal support for a flyer campaign the same year. Shortly before MEC's conference, Southard assured readers that their letters and funds would serve the cause. "We shall fight for ordination," she wrote.⁵⁷

The 1924 Conference was, for Southard, part glorious success, part debacle. She traveled as a delegate from Kansas to Springfield, Massachusetts, in her usual way: by train, in a large hat. The Methodist Episcopal Church, North, (MEC) was, in 1924, the largest Methodist denomination in the United States. MEC was governed by a detailed constitution, the *Discipline*, which was amended every four years at General Conference. Delegates were elected to the Conference from districts all over the nation, making the Conference a large gathering, several

⁵⁷Madeline Southard, "More Reports Please" *Woman's Pulpit* (March-April, 1924).

hundred people strong. Committees met in advance of the General Conference to make recommendations pertaining to specific subjects, and had substantial sway over the direction of the Conference. They issued reports, majority and minority, which the Conference, all assembled, would then vote on. Southard's proposal for full clergy rights for women was defeated at the committee level, which instead recommended women be ordained as local elders and local deacons. When the report was presented to the assembly, the secretary noted that Southard wished to have debate about the report deferred to a later time. Indeed, Southard did wish this, to give herself time to draft a substitute to the report. But, before the delay could be permitted, Southard's opponents concluded that more time for Southard would not be in their favor, and moved to ratify the report immediately. Southard, rather shocked that many men who had fervently opposed licensing women as preachers in 1920 were now happy to ordain them as local elders in 1924, sensed an opportunity. Her delegation from Kansas was seated in the very rear of the auditorium, and, despite her hand-waving and shouting, she could not get the presiding bishop to see that she wanted to speak. In desperation, Southard sprinted up the aisle, waving a paper she happened to be holding, and was recognized by the presiding bishop, a spectacle that greatly amused the press. She opposed the report and in doing so managed to tactfully squeeze her opponents into supporting it. As Southard put it gleefully, "By our keeping the whole attention centered on what was not granted, and so opposing the report, our opponents themselves did all the talking for ordination. Some did not know just what they had done when it was over, they felt they had defeated us."⁵⁸ The local papers played up the drama for effect. The *Springfield Republican* reported that Southard had shaken her fist in the bishop's face.⁵⁹

Southard's success in 1920 and 1924 meant that Women-Preachers could consolidate their

⁵⁸Madeline Southard, "M.E. Conference," *Woman's Pulpit* 1, no. 10 (Jun 1924): 3.

⁵⁹"Shook Fist in Bishop's Face," *Springfield Republican*, May 13, 1924.

membership policies. By this juncture, nearly all the major denominations represented in Women-Preachers had some built-in institutional recognition for female clergy, however slight. As early as 1931, to be a full, active member in Women-Preachers, a woman needed some kind of denominational sanctioning—be it a preaching license, ordination as a local elder, a small-time supply or assistant pastorate, or a deaconess's orders.⁶⁰ Further, such denominational sanctioning was not taken at the applicant's word: denominational records were consulted before a new member could be admitted.⁶¹ In addition, a women had to be recommended for membership by two current members. A member could no longer, as Southard once had, just call herself a preacher. A clear line of separation between themselves and woman's-work—a separation marked by the church's institutional borders—had been achieved.

They Have No "Aimee"

Whether because these new standards had a way of favoring educated, wealthier women with connections, or whether because Southard's presidential presence weakened in the 1930s, *Woman's Pulpit* came to look more and more refined, middle-class, mainline, and more focused on ecclesiastical titles as it aged. Southard went on a mission trip to India and then to the Philippines in 1929, and for a while handed the presidency over to a Disciples of Christ minister, Mary A. Lyons. In Southard's absence, Women-Preachers' boundary maintenance by way of class markers grew stronger. Border control was a common concern for professional women of all stripes in the early twentieth century. Since all women who failed in a profession were said to represent the sex, and all women that succeeded said to be the exception to it, anxieties ran high. Professional women often imposed on themselves and their women colleagues higher standards

⁶⁰"Constitution and By-Laws" *Woman's Pulpit* 10, no. 3 (Jan-Feb 1932).

⁶¹"Standing Committees for 1931-1932," *Woman's Pulpit* 10, no 1. (Sept-Oct, 1931): 4.

than the professional norm, and Women-Preachers was no exception.⁶² Though in the 1920s and 1930s a man could virtually walk into a ministerial job, especially in Methodism, without degree or experience, women could not, and *Woman's Pulpit* devoted substantial space to the qualifications of its new members. New members were regularly ushered in with short biographies, sorted in order of prestige. The practice also revealed a certain elitism. An announcement of three new members in 1930 gave 217 words to introducing Reverend Belle Carter Harman, a “pioneer” Methodist Episcopal minister, 139 words to Miss Lida Florence Imhoff, an assistant pastor in Buffalo with a background in missionary boards, and 39 words to Mrs. Hattie H. Jones, a licensed preacher in the majority-black African Methodist Episcopal Church. In case readers needed clarification, Miss Imhoff’s biography concluded with an editorial note that Miss Imhoff “will be a valued member of the Association of Women Preachers of USA...We welcome Miss Imhoff in our fellowship.” Mrs. Jones, regrettably, did not receive such an editor’s welcome.⁶³

The example of Mrs. Jones reveals a deeper truth. Women-Preachers’ politics of respectability had clear racial dimensions. Though Women-Preachers admitted black preaching women like Hattie Jones, they did not admit Pentecostal preaching women, which by 1920 was the majority of black preaching women. Early Pentecostalism, notoriously mixed-race, threatened a fundamental claim of Women-Preachers, which was that as religious leaders, women could be just as educated, refined, rational, and decorous as men. Low-church, populist, and vivacious, Pentecostal preaching women, many of them black, were an arrow in Women-Preachers’ shield of respectability. “Fanatical” or “emotional” religion had been coded black since the 1830s, when backlash against the interracial worship of the Second Great Awakening

⁶²Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 229.

⁶³“New Members, Jan 1930” *Woman's Pulpit* 5, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1930).

construed black worship as unruly, overly impassioned, spontaneous, and anti-intellectual. Pentecostalism, which got its start in the heat of a Californian summer in 1906, transgressed Women-Preachers' sense of racial and religious decorum. And worse still, Pentecostal women preachers like Aimee Semple McPherson, Maria Woodworth-Edder, and Uldine Utley began to capture the public image of a woman preacher. Alma White, founder of Pillar of Fire Church, which practiced a 'holy rollers' style of Methodism, gained notoriety as America's first lady bishop.⁶⁴ Sinclair Lewis's novel *Elmer Gantry* (1926) featured a licentious woman preacher modeled on McPherson. Perhaps most insulting of all, Pentecostal churches were endowing their women the ecclesiastical recognition that Women-Preachers sought. Assemblies of God began ordaining women in 1935; International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in 1927.⁶⁵ For mainline women ministers and preachers, confusion with Pentecostal women evangelists was no small risk. When Margaret Blair Johnstone applied for ordination as a Congregationalist minister in the 1930s, she was asked to reconsider. The Chicago Congregational Advisory Board told her, politely, that they were trying to protect her. "Think of the sensationalism of women evangelists," they told her. "No matter how earnest you would be, no one would believe your sincerity."⁶⁶ Women like McPherson, the board implied, took up so much cultural space that there was none left for mainline women who wanted to enter parish ministry. Women ministers

⁶⁴On early twentieth-century Pentecostal and evangelical women preachers see Leah Payne, *Gender and Pentecostal Revivalism: Making a Female Ministry in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).; Janette Hassey, *No Time for Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academie Books, 1986).; Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*.; Susie Cunningham Stanley, *Feminist Pillar of Fire: The Life of Alma White* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 1993). Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993). Pope-Levison, *Building the Old-Time Religion: Women Evangelists in the Progressive Era*.

⁶⁵Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 16.

⁶⁶Margaret Blair Johnstone, *When God Says "No": Faith's Starting Point*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 37, as quoted in Eleanor McLaughlin and Rosemary Ruether, *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 317.

would always, despite their best efforts, be type-cast as Aimees.

Women-Preachers toiled hard against this association. In 1926 a woman who attended an annual assembly addressed questions about whether Women-Preachers were “fanatical or emotional”, by assuring all that “there is absolutely no fanaticism or sex antagonism in this movement. The leaders, all of them the finest type of women, do not permit anything of the sort.” The women of Women-Preachers are, she concluded, “devout women of fine mentality and consecrated judgement.”⁶⁷ Another visitor to the assembly of 1934 concluded that these were women of “dignity and refinement”.⁶⁸ Biographical notes from *Woman’s Pulpit* sometimes contained more blatant class-signals. “I have a very beautiful, new church building valued at \$45,000,”⁶⁹ wrote in one member from Oakland, Illinois. Another woman testified that she had “worn out three Ford cars” during her ministry.⁷⁰

Southard was also not about to let racial justice distract her from ecclesiastical justice. Though Women-Preachers sometimes offered their sympathies towards black Americans, they did not consider race a pressing issue until the 1940s. One woman recalled in *Woman’s Pulpit* a meeting of women preachers in Los Angeles in 1928, at which Southard spoke on the presidential race. She endorsed Herbert Hoover because he was the temperance candidate, and also the son of a woman preacher. (Hoover’s mother Hulda was a recorded Quaker minister). Some visiting women who came to hear Southard and who, the author notes, were “not of our profession,” expressed their worry that Hoover was supported by the Ku Klux Klan. This detail did not seem to give Southard any pause.⁷¹

⁶⁷“The Coming Assembly in Cleveland” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Sept-Oct, 1926).

⁶⁸Sarah A. Bowman, “First Impressions” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Sept-Oct, 1934).

⁶⁹“A. Mabel Mannington”, *Woman’s Pulpit* (Nov-Dec, 1928).

⁷⁰“Pioneer Woman Preacher Joins the Association of Women Preachers,” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Jan-Feb, 1930).

⁷¹Lydia P. Gillis, “Mrs. Lydia P. Gillis, 955 So. Alvarado St., Los Angeles, California”, *Woman’s Pulpit* (Nov- Dec 1928).

It was not merely the racially suspect elements of Pentecostalism that irked *Woman's Pulpit* readers, but Pentecostal women's flagrant disinclination towards institutions, education, and refinement. Education and mental acuity were vital to Women-Preachers' identity. Though Southard recognized that women preachers could be raised up by God in many ways, she noted with pride that the founders of the association were college women, and a large proportion of members were college graduates.⁷² God, it seems, mostly chose to raise up members of the educated class. Demonstrative rationality was an important quality in a Women-Preachers member. Letters between Mary Kuhl and Southard about the formation of Women-Preachers made note of this. Southard warned Mary Kuhl that they could not permit "erratics" among their number. "I agree that we must be very careful of the erratic you speak of," Kuhl wrote back to Southard in 1919. "For if we permit those who run off on a tangent or become sidetracked we will foul our purpose." Kuhl also warned against Seventh-Day Adventists, and women who preached nothing but the second coming.⁷³ The idea that not *all* women preachers were good for the future of women's preaching was an important one for the association. In an address at an assembly in Chicago in 1923, Mary A. Lyons, future president of the association and a Disciples of Christ minister from Cleveland, offered her own two cents on the issue. Should we urge all women to enter the ministry?—Lyons asked the assembly. Or should we be more wary? After all, she concluded, "Only the most God-fearing and Christ loving, women of high courage, of vision, of noble preparation, should take up the duties and privileges of the ministry."⁷⁴ Perhaps women's preaching was for the few, not for the masses.

Populists like Aimee Semple McPherson were especially anathema to the women of Women-

⁷²Madeline Southard, "Who Are We?" *Woman's Pulpit* (Apr 1923).

⁷³Mary Kuhl to Madeline Southard, Nov 3, 1919, Box 8, Folder 13, Southard Papers.

⁷⁴"Address of Rev. Mary A. Lyons" *Woman's Pulpit* (Dec 1923).

Preachers. Sociologist of religion Mark Chaves notes this wonderful tidbit from 1938, a report from a member in Europe:

One of the greatest anticipations of my trip to Europe last Fall was that of meeting women ministers in the various countries visited. Now that I am back and can reflect there is one thing in particular they and we here in the states do not have in common: they have no “Aimee” nor any of her school. And before one gets an entree with those well trained women of serious mien one must give evidence that she is ‘schooled’ and a bona-fide minister and not a mere sensationalist seeking headlines and hiding behind the prefix “the Reverend” to gain admission to their august assemblies, or bidding for entertainment by them at some social function.⁷⁵

The example of Aimee is particularly telling, since, after all, Aimee and Madeline had far more in common than most Women-Preachers members would be inclined to admit. Both were midwestern in origin, sanctified, revivalist, and insistent on their plainness. Two features distinguished them, however, in ways important enough to keep Pentecostals permanently from the ranks of Women-Preachers. First, the “bona-fides” that this member noted as so lacking in Aimee’s case, were enough to make Madeline tear down the aisle of an auditorium in front of several hundred men. Though she did not seek ecclesiastical recognition herself, Southard recognized its import to members of Women-Preachers whose claims to ministerial authority could not flow only through the spirit. Second, their attitudes towards pulpit comportment and qualifications differed immensely. Madeline was prodigiously educated for her time. She believed the pulpit was a place of great gravity, great thought, and great sincerity. Aimee, on the other hand, cultivated an intentional air of down-home simplicity. She was jocular and accessible from the pulpit, told jokes and spoke colloquially.⁷⁶

The ambiguous identity of Madeline Southard—her similarity to women preachers like McPherson, and yet, on certain points, her difference—was what made her a transitional figure

⁷⁵As quoted in Chaves, “Women that Publish the Tidings”, 264, from *Woman’s Pulpit* (March-April, 1938).

⁷⁶Blumhofer, *Everybody’s Sister*, 20-12.

for the ministerial reformation in this era. Kristin Kobes Du Mez has noted that Southard, and other women of her era like Katherine Bushnell and Lee Anna Starr (both Women-Preachers members), found the cultural space for women like themselves—sanctified and devoted to social reform—narrowing in the 1920s and 1930s.⁷⁷ In American Protestantism, a gulf was opening between holiness religion and progressive politics. Narrowing as well was the space for Southard’s identity as a woman preacher of education and comportment with social reform objectives. But, through the work of Women-Preachers, she was helping to make space for a new kind of woman: the ordained parish minister.

The Ascent of Ministry

When Southard voyaged to India and the Philippines in 1929, parish ministers took the reins of Women-Preachers. The result was an increased focus on ecclesiastical titles and rights. In 1930, the association organized a new commission on research, led by two Congregationalist ministers, Lee Anna Starr and Elizabeth Wilson. They decided to research “the Ecclesiastical Status of Women”, and began issuing yearly reports in 1931. The reports profiled battles over clerical rights in denominations, at home and abroad, and quickly became a staple of *Woman’s Pulpit*. As had always been true in Women-Preachers’ history, some members valued institutional orders more than others. But increasingly, the members that cared most intensely were running the show.

As more attention flowed towards ecclesiastical titles, the language that *Woman’s Pulpit* used to describe its constituency was shifting. The words “minister” and “reverend” hardly graced the pages of their periodical until the 1930s. When they did appear in the 1920s, they

⁷⁷Du Mez, *A New Gospel for Women*, 158.

referenced members specifically, and were not applied in general terms. By the late 1930s, however, “women ministers” was ascendant as a way to talk about the group as a whole. The Depression was certainly a factor. As the economy slumped, Women-Preachers began to think about their clerical pursuits in increasingly professional terms. Elizabeth Wilson wrote of resisting the urge to sacrifice one’s career in the church for a male replacement. As money for missions and other church programs dried up, Southard noted the influx of male church servants into pastorates, making pastorate appointments for women even more scarce.⁷⁸ As Women-Preachers encouraged women to assure men they did not covet their jobs, they also seemed to come to a realization: their clerical jobs were *jobs*. “The ministry as now constituted is an integral part of the present capitalistic system, a charge or preaching places is a bread and butter job,” Southard said in 1938, not without a hint of disappointment.⁷⁹ The professional, salaried implications of “ministry” seemed to better encapsulate what was at stake for Women-Preachers than the evangelistic, gig-work implied by the term “preacher.”

The Protestant ministry writ large was undergoing a similar realization. Professionalization of the ministry accelerated after World War II, but had its origins in the years of the Depression. Several studies in the 1930s showed the ministry lagging behind medicine and law in education, qualifications, and appeal to young men.⁸⁰ As late as 1940, the majority of

⁷⁸Madeline Southard, “Shall We Quit Preaching?” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Nov-Dec 1936); Elizabeth Wilson, “Ecclesiastical Status of Women” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Nov-Dec 1936).

⁷⁹Madeline Southard, “Making Friends for Woman’s Preaching Ministry” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Sept-Oct, 1938).

⁸⁰For instance, Robert Kelly, *Theological Education in America: A Study of One Hundred Sixty-One Theological Schools in the United States and Canada* (New York: George H. Doran, 1924); William Adams Brown, *Ministerial Education in America: The Education of American Ministers* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934); Edwin McNeill Poteat, Reverend John Doe, D.D.: *A Study of the Place of the Minister in the Modern World* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935); William H. Leach, *The Making of A Minister* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1938); Benjamin E. Mays and Joseph William Nicholson, *The Negro’s Church* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1933). Mark A. May, *The Profession of the Ministry: It’s Status and Problems* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934). See Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 216-217.

American clergy had never been to seminary.⁸¹ As an extension of the masculinization movement, denominations turned towards methods of modern business in their operations, and began advocating for a more educated, systematized, and credentialed clergy. Methodism in particular was in the process of transformation. For several decades it had been torn between its revivalist, enthusiastic roots and a churchly, respectable future envisioned by Methodists of high Progressive era stature, such as President William McKinley.⁸² Many of those most loyal to sanctification and emotion left the Methodist Episcopal church in the late nineteenth century including the Nazarenes, the Free Methodists, and the Salvation Army. The rise of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century was in some ways the dying gift of holiness Methodism to the world.⁸³ By the 1930s, holiness and revivalism, once the center of Methodism, was becoming its margins. In its place rose a Methodism of the mainline. With this “gothic-church” Methodism, as Nathan O. Hatch called it, came a consonant change in the clergy. The lay preacher had once been Methodism’s sign of the democracy of the spirit. Though it would take several more decades, there would eventually be few true “preachers” left in America. Their function would be replaced by inspirational speakers and the occasional tent evangelist. By Southard’s golden years, preaching was on its way out, professional ministry on its way in.

Yet Southard seemed unable or unwilling to drop the term “preachers,” even as it was losing ground. Southard spoke at annual conference in 1938, as she frequently had in years past. Her speech was previewed in *Woman’s Pulpit* as “Making Friends for Women’s Ministry.” But by the time Southard arrived at the conference, the title of her talk had changed to “Making Friends for Woman’s *Preaching* Ministry.” Southard seems to have been drawn like a magnet

⁸¹Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors*, 244.

⁸²Nathan O. Hatch, “The Puzzle of American Methodism” *Church History* 63, no. 2 (June 1, 1994): 175-189.

⁸³See Hatch, “The Puzzle of American Methodism”, and David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 209.

back to the symbolic power of preaching. But “preaching-ministry,” as a phrase, had no life in the association outside of Southard’s lecture. Perhaps Southard sensed the time for her leadership in Women-Preachers had mostly passed. Southard was absent from the organization between 1929 and 1933, and when she returned from her mission trip to India and the Philippines, she was dissatisfied with changes that Women-Preachers made in her absence. Southard was irked to find that Women-Preachers had changed their constitution, writing out “fellowship” as their principal purpose, and writing in instead that their first goal was “to increase the efficacy of women preachers.”⁸⁴ Southard sat down with the leaders that had managed Women-Preachers while she was gone, including Elizabeth Wilson, and told them “in no uncertain terms” how she felt about the change. “Fellowship was our chief object and [they] took it out,” she wrote bitterly in her journal.⁸⁵ The change reflected a vision of a more activist, professional Woman-Preachers Association.

Southard’s second stint as president, which began in 1933, ended in 1939. The presidency then passed to another midwestern Methodist, Florence Resor Jardine, between 1940 and 1943. World War II was another vital factor in the shift that Women-Preachers was undergoing. The war brought chaplaincy to the forefront of the association’s mind. During the war, American women were recruited to serve in non-combatant positions such as WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service). Yet the armed forces refused to let women serve even other women as chaplains, and the pages of *Woman’s Pulpit* erupted with something close to fury.⁸⁶

⁸⁴“Constitution and By-Laws” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Jan-Feb, 1932).; “Articles of Incorporation, 1930”, Box 1, International Association of Women Ministers Records, Burke Library and Archives, Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University.

⁸⁵Madeline Southard, journal entry, July 5, 1933, Box 6, Folder 12, Southard Papers.

⁸⁶ “Women Chaplains” *Woman’s Pulpit* 20, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1942), Florence Resor Jardine, “Medical Women Protest,” *Woman’s Pulpit* 21, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1943), Florence Resor Jardine, “The American Association of Women Preachers,” *Woman’s Pulpit* 21, no.3 (May-Jun 1943) Florence Resor Jardine, “Onward Christian Soldiers,” *Woman’s Pulpit* 21, no. 4 (Jul-Aug 1943)

Southard recalled that it had been her time at Great Lakes Naval Station that had inspired the idea for Women-Preachers. Now the time that Southard envisioned had come, yet her Women-Preachers still could not take chaplaincy roles. The fervor over chaplaincy only enhanced the feeling among Women-Preachers that the roles they sought were professional and ecclesiastical. To add insult to injury, chaplains returned from the war as heroes, or failed to return as martyrs. They were a cultural sensation. The “Four Chaplains”—one Catholic, two Protestant, one Jewish, who died on a sinking tanker, praying together—were catapulted to national fame in 1943. During World War II, the chaplain’s role was streamlined, administrative duties were reduced, and chaplains were sent to the front lines. More chaplains died in World War II than medics. Professional ministry back home, one historian wrote, “basked in public esteem” generated by these heroics.⁸⁷ The war, combined with the previous power of the masculinization movement, had revived ministerial work.

Women-Preachers were attuned to the rising tide of professional ministry. “There are books giving good reasons as to why we should be permitted to preach,” one member wrote in 1940, “but there is almost no information available as to what women in the pastorate are actually doing.”⁸⁸ The next generation of Woman-Preachers seemed determined to turn their attention to women’s work in pastorates. In 1943, the association experienced a dramatic leadership turnover with the election of a new president and a new vice president, Ruth Sergent Bast Laramee, a Congregationalist reverend, and Hazel Foster, a Presbyterian with a doctorate from the University of Chicago, respectively. After electing Laramee and Foster, the Association

⁸⁷E. Brooks Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 236. On the Four Chaplains, see Kevin Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Post-War America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸⁸Lucy T. Ayres, “A Pilgrimage to Women Pastors”, *Woman’s Pulpit* 18, no. 6 (Sept-Oct 1940).

of Women-Preachers voted to change its name to the Association of Women *Ministers*. Laramée in particular cared enough about the new title to convince her husband to pay for the legal name change. (The bill ran \$25.)⁸⁹ The nomenclature recognized the new reality of women's clerical ambitions in the mainline. Women wanted roles that were institutional, ecclesiastical, ritual, and professional. The organization founded by a holiness, Methodist preacher-woman who had not cared a bit about her clerical standing had helped thrust ecclesiastical roles into the center of the church.

When Women-Preachers became Women Ministers, Madeline Southard, perhaps fortunately, was absent. It was unusual for her to miss an annual meeting, but by this time she was 66 years old. Her mobility was decreasing and concerns for her health began to pepper her journal. Her involvement with Women Ministers grew increasingly faint as she aged, though she remained a figurehead, and tried to attend as many annual assemblies as possible.⁹⁰ Her journal does not note the change in name of the association she founded, and perhaps she was resigned to it. Despite her preference for “preachers” and for the authority of the pulpit, she could hardly fail to see that most of her activism for the past thirty years—and the activism of her organization—had been aimed directly at securing institutional roles for women in the church.

Other changes abounded in the early 1940s, not just for the International Association of Women Ministers, but for women in the church at large. The Depression, tacked onto the end of the masculinization movement, proved a decisive knock-out punch for missionary and reform work. By World War II, the women's mission movement in the mainline had, as one historian

⁸⁹Harriet Morley, *The Bribery of a Minister* (College Press and the American Association of Women Ministers, 1969), 35; Rev. Miss Elizabeth King to Edward J. Hummel, March 13, 1946, Box 1, International Association of Women Ministers Papers, Burke Library and Archives, Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University.

⁹⁰As *Woman's Pulpit* put it fondly, “[annual] assembly means seeing and hearing Miss Southard again.” *Woman's Pulpit* (Sept. Oct 1932).

put it, “virtually ceased to exist.”⁹¹ The end of Prohibition was also a terrible blow for temperance and the WCTU. In the 1920s, Women-Preachers’ emphasis on clerical rights had set them apart from woman’s-work. By the 1940s, woman’s-work, as it had existed, was outdated. There was no need for Women Ministers to distinguish themselves any longer. It was a brief lacuna for women in the mainline. How would they proceed? What roles were there for them? Perhaps, had Women-Preachers been larger, wealthier, or more activist, ministerial work could have been the answer for more women. Indeed, sometimes, this is the historical narrative advanced about the end of missions—that their demise forced women’s activism into ministerial channels.⁹² But this narrative leaves out an essential transitory moment in how mainline women articulated their church identity. Into the gap left by missions and reform would step a new creature: the churchwoman. It was through her pearl-ringed fingers that the ministerial reformation would next have to pass.

⁹¹ Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 302.

⁹² Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 304.

Chapter II. *The Minister and Her Wife:*

Ministerial Reform in the Age of Marriage and the Churchwoman, 1945-1960

Between 1948 and 1956, not a single Protestant denomination in the United States changed their rules about women's ordination.¹ These years are often considered valleys in the history of feminism, as well as in the history of women's ministry. One encyclopedic account of women clergy in America describes the post-war period as "the mixture as before," implying little change and little of interest.² Another maintains that women's leadership, both lay and ordained, was lower in the 1950s than at any point in the previous century.³ The story as told by the demographics looks similar. The percentage of women in American ministry overall, which had grown in the 1920s and 1930s, held steady without increase through the midcentury. Yet there was something new in this post-war mixture, gone mostly unremarked by chroniclers of women in ministry. As mainline missions declined during the 1930s and 1940s, women who had previously defined themselves around missions and "women's work" forged a new sense of themselves as "churchwomen."⁴ This chapter tries to uncover the churchwoman's relationship to

¹Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 15-18.

²Carl J Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1997), 123.

³Rita M. Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 39.

⁴The literature on churchwomen is limited but shows signs of vitality in recent years. See: Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Virginia Brereton, "United and Slighted: Women as Subordinated Insiders" in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960*, ed. William Robert Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gale L. Kenny, "The World Day of Prayer: Ecumenical Churchwomen and Christian Cosmopolitanism, 1920-1946," *Religion in American Culture* 27:2 (2017), 129-158; Caryn E. Neumann, "Enabled by the Holy Spirit: Church Women United and the Development of Ecumenical Christian Feminism" in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. Stephanie Gilmore and Sara M. Evans (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Melinda M. Johnson, "Building Bridges: Church Women United and Social Reform Work Across the Mid-Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. diss, University of Kentucky, 2015).; Janine Marie Denomme, "To End This Day of Strife: Churchwomen and The Campaign for Integration, 1920-1970" (Ph.D. diss, University of Pennsylvania, 2001).

the ministerial reformation. It argues that, though women's access to ministry was not a priority for mainline churchwomen, some ministerial reformers succeeded in using the churchwoman's cultural strength and resources in service of the woman minister's goals. In contrast to M. Madeline Southard (the subject of chapter one) who had refused to walk in the footsteps of missionary women or work within their institutions, ministerial reformers of the mid-century embraced the identity of the churchwoman. They attained positions of power within the churchwoman's establishment, deftly navigated her institutions, and in so doing were able to advance the cause of women in ministry.⁵

Ironically, the ministerial reformation's largest obstacle in these decades was also its sharpest weapon: marriage. Few elements of social life were as central to these decades in the United States as marriage, which became more common for young Americans in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶ In some respects, the ministerial reformation faced obstacles similar to other professional fields women entered during World War II, as the renaissance in domestic life for women after the war set women's entrance into the workforce back decades. Women's entrance into ministerial careers had been slightly accelerated by the war, as it had in other fields. Nationally, the number of women who reported "clergy" as their profession doubled between 1940 and 1950, a percentage increase that was higher than that of female lawyers, and a larger increase in

⁵Recent scholarship on women's activism has argued that the feminist lacuna of the mid-century was much less severe than it is made out to be. Scholars such as Susan Lynn, Susan Hartmann, Virginia Bretherton, Caryn E. Neumann and Ann Braude have found that women's religious organizations, in particular, can be seen as connecting tissue between the first and second feminist waves. Such mid-century activism tended to live in institutional homes—companies, labor unions, service organizations, religious bodies. Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Racial Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Ann Braude, "Faith, Feminism, and History," in *Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* ed. Catherine Brekus and Amy Koehlinger (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Leila J. Rupp and Verta A. Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990); Hartmann, *The Other Feminists*; Bretherton, "United and Slighted"; Neumann, "World Day of Prayer."

⁶Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (Penguin Books, 2005); Rebecca L. Davis, *More Perfect Unions: The American Search for Marital Bliss* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2010).

women in ministry than there would be between 1950 and 1960.⁷ The interest of women in hospital chaplaincy and college chaplaincy showed moderate increases during the war years.⁸ Women were sometimes called upon to minister to parishes in cases of clergy shortages, absent husbands, or deaths. In a particularly symbolic instance, the wife of George Fox, one of the famed four chaplains who died heroically on a troop ship in 1943, took over her husband's parish in Vermont after his death.⁹ Yet after the war, many women, and those around them, came to consider marriage and a professional career such as ministry at extreme odds. Indeed, for most women, marriage and childbearing were a hindrance to the pursuit of a ministerial career.

Yet ministerial work for women after World War II was not entirely analogous to, for instance, jobs in manufacturing. Ministry had several complicating variables in respect to marriage that distinguished it from other kinds of labor. Foremost was the figure of the minister's wife. Many women preachers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century had traveled alone and the conventional image of a Progressive era missionary was of a single, unwed woman.¹⁰ But, as chapter one argued, by World War II the focus of the ministerial reformation had come to rest on ordained, parish-centered ministry, not itinerant preaching, and most Americans

⁷Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 3-4.

⁸Placement programs for women in campus ministry, such as the Danforth Graduate program, were directly inspired by the lack of men to fill these roles during the war. (See Chapter 5.) Within the Council for Clinical Training, a leading clinical pastoral education group, women rose to 35% of the students during World War II, and decreased thereafter. Paula Ellen Buford, "The Lost Tradition of Women Pastoral Caregivers from 1925-1967: A 'Dangerous Memory'" (Th.D. diss, Columbia Theological Seminary, 1997), 122.

⁹"Women in the News," *Woman's Pulpit* 27, no.2 (April-May-June 1949): 1. Another notable example is Florence Li Tim-Oi, who was ordained to the Anglican priesthood in rural China when Japanese occupation made it difficult for rural Chinese Anglicans to access the sacraments. After the war, Li Tim-Oi renounced her vows to avoid controversy within the larger Anglican Communion.

¹⁰According to Virginia Lieson Brereton and Christa Ressmyer Kline, in 1882 American women's missionary groups sent 694 single women to missionary posts. By 1900, they were supporting 856 single women, more than double the number of wives they supported. Virginia Lieson Brereton and Christa Ressmeyer Klein, "American Women in Ministry: A History of Protestant Beginning Points" in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 306-8.

considered parish ministry the job of a married couple, not an inspired individual. Protestant ministers were expected to have wives who could keep a welcoming home, play piano, sing in the choir, organize women's groups, bake for church breakfasts, clean up after, and expect no salary in addition to their husband's.¹¹ The ministerial reformation during the mid-century had to manage expectations surrounding the wives of ministers. If women were going to enter the ministry, what role would minister's wives play? Some reformers argued that, since ministry was vested more in a marriage than it was in either individual, minister's wives should be ordained as well. These women insisted that it behooved the Christian ministry for both members of a marriage to be ecclesiastically recognized, and to share the responsibilities of ministerial work formally. Other reformers, mostly widows, insisted instead that a woman minister alone could carry the burden of both roles. As the *Boston Globe* put it, "A woman minister really does the work of two, that of the minister and his wife."¹² Widowed reformers insisted they were up to the challenge.

Also complicating the relationship between marriage and ministry was their mutual nature as rites of passage administered by the church. Reformers manipulated this symmetry to their advantage, and often presented marriage as the looking-glass through which women's ordinations should be viewed. Churchwomen who were ordained during this period or discussed

¹¹The literature on minister's wives is limited. On modern evangelical preachers' wives, see Kate Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019). For a psychological study, see William G. T. Douglas, *Ministers' Wives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). On women's relationship with ministry generally in the nineteenth-century, see Karin Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). On wives of nineteenth-century evangelicals, see Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism*. (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Pr., 1983) and Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Ministry Through Marriage," in *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Hilah E. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1981). On mid-century wives, see Paul Boyer, "Minister's Wife, Widow, Reluctant Feminist: Catherine Marshall in the 1950s," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (Winter 1978): 703–21.

¹²"Evangelists in Skirts" *Boston Globe*, June 2, 1891.

their ordinations during this period found ways to ritually hinge ordination to marriage. Married women were sometimes ordained at home instead of a church. Others were ordained side-by-side with their husbands. Some were ordained directly following their marriage ceremonies. Even widowed women compared their ordinations to their marriages, marking a spiritual connection between the rites and implying an emotional replacement. Never-married women, so visible in Madeline Southard's time as traveling preachers and missionaries, retreated to the background of the ministerial reformation, keeping themselves out of its symbolic center. Simply put, marriage was the essential structural feature of the mid-century ministerial reformation. All activism, either from within or from without, had to be structured around matrimony. Marriage could, and often did, prevent women from entering the ministry. This point should not be understated. More often than not, a woman's marriage was seen as a hindrance to any career outside the home, ministry included. Yet, this chapter shows that, when properly managed, one's marriage (or sudden lack thereof), could be utilized as a tool in the ministerial reformation.

This chapter stars three churchwomen—one married, one never-married, and one widowed—as they navigated marriage and the churchwoman's institutions on behalf of women's ministry. First, Mossie Wyker, president of the most powerful mid-century churchwoman's organization, Church Women United, between 1950 and 1955 used her significant platform to advocate for women's ministry in an organization that did not explicitly support it. A married and ordained minister herself, Wyker used her marriage to a fellow minister to justify her ministry to her churchwoman audience. Second, the never-married theologian Georgia Harkness intentionally retreated from the spotlight of the ministerial reformation, yet did vital work in the background. She championed marriage as a high calling for women, even as she herself did not participate in it. Her conformity in this regard made her advocacy for women's ministry appear

far less radical than it was. Finally, this chapter concludes with the story of Margaret Henrichsen, who entered the ministry after being widowed in middle-age. In 1953, Henrichsen published a successful memoir of her life in rural ministry. Her narrative captured the imagination of ministerial reformers and the general public, and garnered her wide acclaim. The subtext of Henrichsen's memoir was two-fold: that women ministers *could* do the work of the minister and her wife, and that women ministers could do so from positions—particularly in rural ministry—that were unthreatening to the larger male church establishment.

Two historians of women's ordination write that mid-century clergywomen "advisedly walked softly, but carried no stick at all, let alone a big one."¹³ No doubt ministerial reformers walked softly during these decades, but they did wield sticks, just those in the guise of pillows—marriage and churchwomen's organizations. To the extent they could, they made these institutions, *prima facie* unfriendly to women's ministerial work, the engines of reformation in the mid-century.

The Ordination of Mrs. James Wyker

In 1929, a young Christian (Disciples of Christ) couple invited a minister and several church elders into their home. All were dressed in robes befitting the occasion. There were, perhaps, candles lit for solemnity. The couple had been married three years earlier. Now, they were going to be ordained to the ministry together. Jim and Mossie Wyker had decided that, since they were entering rural ministry, they should be ordained at home instead of at seminary or in a church. As Mossie Wyker recalls it, she and Jim were given the rites side-by-side, a

¹³Schneider and Schneider, *In Their Own Right*, 137.

“double ordination,” in front of their fireplace.¹⁴ In doing so, they received their ordinations much like a marriage—with their mantel, a sign of fertility and prosperity, as an altar, and their home as a sanctuary. Wyker worried about acceptance of her orders as a women minister. In a book she wrote twenty years later she told the story of her ordination in the third person, entirely concealing from her readers that the tale was her own. But she had gained her ministerial credentials in the most palatable way possible to observers of her era: by ritually constructing a ministerial marriage.

In the history of women’s ministry, husband-and-wife ordinations appeared uncommonly, though the Wykers were hardly alone. Congregational minister Elsie Gibson was married the day she and her husband finished seminary at Hartford Theological. The following year, the couple were ordained together in what Gibson described as a “joint ordination” in 1935. Dorothy D. France and her husband were ordained Disciples ministers together in 1950. Howard Stone Anderson and his wife, Marlowe Addy Anderson, were ordained together to the Congregational ministry in 1926—the Andersons would later go on to prominent careers at First Congregational Church in Washington, D.C. At her husband’s ordination in 1928, Lorena Jones Warford was given the right hand of fellowship, an element of the ceremony usually reserved only for ordinands. Warford was later ordained to the ministry herself. Other women efficiently roped their marriage ceremonies and ordinations together. In 1901, Beatrice Williamson “turned from her wedding vows to make another vow,” in a ceremony that moved directly from marriage to ordination.¹⁵

¹⁴Mrs. James (Mossie) Wyker, *Church Women in the Scheme of Things* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1953), 12. Though Wyker does not say explicitly that this story is her own, every detail from this account corresponds with her personal history as told to *Christian Century* in 1952. Margaret Frakes, “She Heads United Church Women” *Christian Century*, May 1, 1952.

¹⁵“Women Who Publish the Tidings” *Woman’s Pulpit*, July-Sept, 1949; Elsie Gibson, “Women as Clergy? A Protestant Experience” *Ave Maria*, July 24, 1965; Dorothy D. France, “Setting the Pace” in *Dear Church: Intimate Letters from Women in Ministry*, ed. Dorothy France (Atlanta, GA: Chalice Press, 2010); Elsie Gibson, *When the*

Whether or not couples underwent their ordinations together or separately, articulating a positive relationship with marriage was an essential tactic for women ministers of the churchwoman era. Women's ministry could seem, to observers in the mid-century, the ultimate revolutionary act. It seemingly deconstructed women's social roles, given that it involved work outside the home and childcare, while also containing an implicit critique of the assumed gendered order of God's creation. The existence of the woman minister challenged the idea that men stood, necessarily, closer to God and Christ as their more proximate images and messengers. John R. Rice, a prominent fundamentalist Baptist, concisely articulated the menagerie of cultural threats that women's ministry posed in *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers* (1941). Rice saw this triple threat as evidence of the dissolution of God-given headship structures, marriage, and the sexual order.¹⁶ Married women ministers like Mossie Wyker, in response, insisted that their preaching did not make them the "boss" of their husbands, nor did it draw them to scandalous hairstyles. "The fact that I am married is a sign to others that I have accepted my role and rejoice in being a woman and a wife," Marilyn Rushton, a minister in Milwaukee, told her local paper, who were stunned to learn of the new "mini-skirted" minister in town. "My being in the ministry seems to enrich our marriage and is a real part of who my husband and I are together."¹⁷

Mossie Wyker would defend her "double ordination" with a similar conviction that her marriage and her ministry were inseparable and mutually supportive—and she made her case from a remarkable platform. In the years following her ordination, Wyker would go on to

Minister Is a Woman (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 109; "Dr. Anderson Head of Home Missions National Board," *Scarsdale Enquirer* (Scarsdale, New York), June 27, 1952; Lorena Jones Warford, "A Real Partnership," *Woman's Pulpit*, Apr-Jun, 1971; Dorothy Wangelin and Marjorie Meininger, "The Story of A Gracious Minister" *Woman's Pulpit*, Jan-Mar, 1966.

¹⁶ John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives, and Women Preachers* (Murfreesboro, Tenn: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941).

¹⁷Gibson, *When the Minister*, 38.

become president of a major Protestant organization, Church Women United (CWU), between 1950 and 1955.¹⁸ During Wyker's presidency, women's ordination was not high on Church Women United's priorities list. But Wyker elevated the issue of women's ministry within CWU. She defended her ministerial credentials through her marriage, and proposed a style of advocacy for the ministerial reformation that could rest comfortably with her fellow churchwomen of the era.

Church Women United was founded in 1941 by the leaders of struggling national missionary organizations.¹⁹ Their growth was prodigious. A year after their founding in 1941, the women had a budget of \$12,000. By 1950, they were working with \$185,000.²⁰ As Gale Kenny has argued, CWU helped missionary women reframe their advocacy for a new age. In the 1940s and 1950s, these women, like returned Protestant missionaries more generally, pivoted their work from global reform to domestic and personal reform.²¹ Between 1941 and 1950, Church Women United ran leadership trainings and programs for confronting racial bigotry. They organized intercessory prayer, and published articles devoted to better Christian living in their periodical. By 1948, they claimed to represent ten million American women.²²

Wyker's years at CWU were a time of transition for the organization. Church Women United was absorbed into the National Council of Churches (NCC) in 1950 as the women's arm

¹⁸Church Women United went by many names over the decades. During Wyker's tenure they were United Church Women. However, most of the scholarship on Church Women United refers to them by this later denomination.

¹⁹Kenny, "The World Day of Prayer", 132. Neumann, "Church Women United", 115.

²⁰Brereton, "United and Slighted", 151.

²¹Kenny, "World Day of Prayer", 132, 149. David Hollinger has also argued that, in the 1930s and 1940s, Protestant missionaries and their children reoriented their reform efforts inward, turning their gaze on their neighbors and their nation, and in doing so shaping the Civil Rights movement and the New Left. Hollinger's account of the afterlife of Protestant missions does not track directly what impact missionaries made on internal church policy such as women's ordination, nor does it trace a strong through-line between missionaries and churchwomen. David A. Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

²²Neumann, "Church Women United", 115. In 1948, CWU estimated that it organized 10 million affiliated churchwomen, with 25 state councils and 1000 local councils.

of the Council. The transition was in some ways painful. But to be asked to join NCC was tantamount to being anointed the most powerful Protestant women's church organization in the nation, and it was not an opportunity to easily pass up. Virginia Brereton has argued that churchwomen in Church Women United were both insiders and outsiders in the Protestant establishment, and this allowed them to be extremely effective activists. They had the security of their well-funded organization, filled with many well-funded women, and their status as (mostly) white Protestants at a time of extraordinary white Protestant hegemony. Yet they were also second-class citizens in their churches and in the nation. With the social support of their privilege and the chip-on-their-shoulder of their subjection, churchwomen were able to adopt and pursue policies far ahead of their time.²³ As historians of second wave feminism have noted for decades, feminism was built on the back of the civil rights movement, and CWU was no exception, getting their start in issues of segregation.²⁴ Though in composition mostly white, they were racially inclusive. They boycotted hotels that refused to serve African Americans as early as 1943, advocated for school desegregation in 1952, and gave a voice to pacifism and peace when it would label them Communists. Later, a group of them marched in Selma. They directly compared their vision of ecumenical Protestant harmony with their vision of racial harmony.²⁵

Mrs. James Wyker, as she liked to be called, was herself a bit outsider, a bit insider. Born Mossie Allman in 1901, she grew up in Richmond, Kentucky, twenty-five miles south of Lexington. In her young-adult years, Mossie's older sister went to China as a missionary, leaving vacant a post as minister's assistant in their Christian (Disciples of Christ) church. Mossie, who

²³Brereton, "United and Slighted", 151.

²⁴On feminist beginnings in the Civil Rights Movement, see Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

²⁵Brereton, "United and Slighted," 150; Neumann, "Church Women United," 117-118.

had in the past taught Sunday school and took youth leadership positions, got the job. The church liked her so much in the role that they funded a year's study for her at the Disciples' College of the Bible in Lexington. At College of the Bible, Mossie met James D. Wyker. Jim was a spitfire, fresh off a summer roaming around Europe. The ecumenical movement in Protestantism had greatly shaped his youth. In Stockholm in 1925, Jim had listened in on the Life and Work of the Church conference, an important early ecumenical event. His passion for ecumenism was new to Mossie. She recalled, "I could admire people of other denominations, but somehow I felt there must be just a little something wrong with them or they would be Disciples. And here was Jim demanding that I commit my life to Christian unity!"²⁶

As Mossie and Jim's relationship grew, so did the ecumenical movement. Ecumenism was a vital ingredient in the ministerial reformation in the post-war years, though its influence had mixed results.²⁷ Two transformations it precipitated were especially important. First, it forced ecumenically interested churches, the mainline, to standardize their ministries. To participate in exercises of Christian unity, churches realized they needed to be structurally legible to other churches. This meant having consistent answers to questions such as: Who is permitted to perform a church's sacraments? What are the requirements to serve in ministry? How does a given congregation worship on a daily basis? The ministry, along with many other aspects of church life, came under closer regulation from national church bodies. Second, ecumenism also made churches more sensitive to the activities of their peers. When one church made a change regarding women, the others noticed. For women in ministry, these developments could cut two ways. Ordaining women before other churches might endanger ecumenical relations, but so too

²⁶Frakes, "She Heads United Church Women", 585.

²⁷Jill Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism: The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 6.

might holding out against ordination if it became the norm. Likewise, bringing stronger structure to one's ministry had the effect of masculinizing it and professionalizing it, but institutional demarcations also had a way of exposing hypocrisy. As the path to ministry grew more standardized, it became harder to refuse women who had met those standards.

Wyker married Jim late in 1926. When Jim decided to go into ministry, beginning study at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Wyker's life began to take on the contours of a minister's wife. Since the mid-nineteenth century, wives had been essential assets for ministers in residence at mainline parishes. Not only was a minister's wife supposed to service the life of the church by living an exemplary Christian life, cooking, cleaning, teaching the children, and singing in the choir, but she was also expected to minister specifically to her husband and to the women of the church. Historian Karin Gedge describes the minister's wife as "pastor to the pastor," consulting with him about difficult decisions, parishioners, and his other work duties.²⁸ Her job, as one minister's wife put it in 1951, was to give herself to her husband, "so that he would always have something to give to others."²⁹ In 1959, a survey of 6,000 ministers' wives found that 85% described themselves as deeply involved in their husband's work.³⁰ The minister's wife also built personal relationships with women of the parish, sometimes in her husband's place. While male ministers, especially in the late nineteenth century, could face accusations of impropriety over close relationships with female parishioners, a minister's wife could build such connections without concern. The dicey problem of ministry to women was, Gedge writes, outsourced to the parish wives.³¹ One Episcopal bishop even went so far in 1849

²⁸Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 135; Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife : Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism*. (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Pr., 1983), 3.

²⁹Catherine Marshall, *A Man Called Peter* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1951), 227, as quoted in Boyer, "Minister's Wife, Widow, Reluctant Feminist: Catherine Marshall in the 1950s."

³⁰Douglas, *Ministers' Wives*, as cited in Gibson, *When the Minister*, 91.

³¹Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 133.

as to suggest that future wives of ministers could benefit from a “private form of ordination,” to test the women to see whether they could live up to so serious a role.³² Wives continued to be important accessories for ministers into the twentieth century: the U.S. census in 1960 found 76% of clergymen nationwide were married, a percentage that included celibate Catholic priests. In 1983, sociologists surveyed a group of male mainline Protestant ministers and found that 94% were married.³³

In the midcentury, ministers’ wives were of particular cultural interest. These wives were, as historian Paul Boyer recounts, held to similar standards as others of their time (subordinate to men in their careers, superior in their spiritual integrity), but were in addition asked to exemplify these standards publicly.³⁴ More advice literature for minister’s wives was produced between 1939 and 1963 than in the prior century, and the Lilly Endowment funded a major psychological study of minister’s wives in 1959.³⁵ Several wives of high-profile ministers were public figures. Catherine Marshall, widowed wife of the minister of New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., published a memoir of her husband, *A Man Called Peter*, to great success in 1951. A movie adaptation followed. Ruth Safford Peale, the wife of Norman Vincent Peale, the acclaimed minister of Marble Collegiate Church in Manhattan, served in high Presbyterian denominational posts and helped launch Peale’s publishing endeavors.³⁶

Mossie Wyker’s experience was consistent with other wives of ministers at the time, with one exception: Jim saw her work as ministry in itself. One Sunday, Jim traveled to a conference

³²William Mead, *Lectures on the Pastoral Office Delivered to the Students of the Theological Seminary at Alexandria, Va* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1849), 217, as cited in Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy*, 135.

³³E. Wilbur Bock, “The Female Clergy: A Case Study of Professional Marginality” *American Journal of Sociology* 72 (1967): 538; Carroll, Hargrove, and Lummis, *Women of the Cloth*, 190.

³⁴Boyer, “Minister’s Wife” 707.

³⁵Douglas, *Ministers’ Wives*.

³⁶Boyer, “Minister’s Wife”, 707-709.; Douglas Martin, “Ruth Stafford Peale, 101, Dies; Helped Ministry Flourish,” *New York Times*, Feb 7, 2008.

and asked Wyker to give a sermon in his place at his student pastorate on Long Island. She did so successfully, though her southern accent alarmed the New Yorkers. (“Speak a little slower next Sunday, and use more English?”—one parishioner begged her.) Inspired by her bravery, Jim decided that, when the time came, he and Wyker would be ordained together as Disciples ministers. Wyker recounted being staggered by this suggestion. She “resisted and struggled” but finally consented.³⁷ The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) had ordained women on occasion since the 1880s. Like the Congregationalists, Disciples ministers were called locally. The decisions for those calls rested with the congregation in need, with minimal oversight from a national body. As several scholars have pointed out, this congregational style of governance—which was also practiced in Congregational, Baptist, Unitarian, Quaker, and Universalist churches—tended to enable women’s early entrance into ministry.³⁸ Yet to say these denominations celebrated or championed the ordination of women would be to put it too generously. More accurately, if a local congregation wanted to call a woman to their pulpit, national organizations had few tools to prohibit them.³⁹

The Wykers began co-pastoring churches in New York, Ohio, and Missouri. In one town, they were the only full-time ministerial staff for the Presbyterian, Disciples, Methodist, and Evangelical and Reformed congregations. In another town, Mossie Wyker taught Sunday school to the Baptist, Methodist, and Congregationalist children as well as the Disciples. Wyker would later call this kind of work “grassroots ecumenism.” In Ohio, Wyker was involved in the

³⁷Mossie Wyker, *Churchwomen in the Scheme of Things* (St. Louis, Missouri: Bethany Press, 1952), 12; Frakes, “She Heads United Church Women,” 585.

³⁸Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 140-142; Barbara Brown Zikmund, “Winning Ordination for Women in Mainstream Protestant Churches,” in *Women and Religion in America*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

³⁹One Disciples historian even suggests that the earliest ordinations had more to do with cheaper train fares for ordained ministers than it had to do with the church’s thoughts about women. Sharon E Watkins, “Women and Leadership in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)” (Speech, November 27, 2000), <http://councilonchristianunity.org/women-and-leadership-in-the-christian-church-disciples-of-christ/>.

statewide division of the Disciples' women's organization. Through that community she discovered Church Women United. In 1950, she gave a sermon at the communion service of Church Women United's general assembly in Chicago. Everyone loved it so much that, to her complete surprise, they elected her president.⁴⁰

There was a certain irony to choosing a woman minister for president of an organization that did not advocate for them. But Wyker, as *Christian Century* pointed out, was "far removed from the cartoonist's idea of the 'club woman' or from the picture most people have of the woman preacher."⁴¹ By this the author seemed to mean that Wyker was soft-spoken, handsome, married, a mother to many children. The compliment was certainly a signal that, in the early 1950s (despite the best efforts of the American Association of Woman Ministers), the general impression of a woman preacher remained more Pentecostal-evangelical than it was mainline-ecumenical, and more single-woman radical than it was married-woman denominational. Wyker failed to meet the stereotype of the woman preacher because she was too understated and her labor too institutional. Her existence as a woman minister did not strike the author as, in and of itself, confrontational. This "far remove" was, of course, Mossie Wyker's great strength as a ministerial reformer. During Wyker's tenure at United Church Women, the organization did not advocate for women's ordination in overt ways. They did not see themselves as reformers of church structures. Indeed, before they joined NCC, Church Women United reveled in their lack of denominational and clerical ties.⁴² Under this understanding of their activism, denominational issues like women's ordination were unlikely to surface as pressing. Yet Wyker had spent twenty years as a rural minister (and as a rural minister's wife), and she, if few others around her,

⁴⁰Frakes, "She Heads United Church Women," 587.

⁴¹Frakes, "She Heads United Church Women," 584.

⁴²Brereton, "United", 156.

thought of ministry as a compelling women's issue. In her publications and in her presidency, she framed women's ordination for the era of the churchwoman. In doing so, Wyker was able—often rather slyly—to leverage the resources of Church Women United and the cultural cache of churchwomen into work for the future of clergy women.

In 1953, Wyker published a book, *Church Women in the Scheme of Things*, in which she advanced many of the typical causes of church women: involving Christian women in politics, in policy, in self-improvement, in charitable service. Alongside these usual suspects, Wyker included an entire chapter on churchwomen and ordination. She began the chapter with caveats: She knew this was a controversial subject. She only decided to address it after years of prayer. She was dispassionate about the subject because she, herself, was already ordained. She was thus writing not as a “frustrated female demanding certain rights in the church, but because she believes that, as the current President of the United Church Women of America, she has a responsibility to lift this area of concern.”⁴³ Wyker addressed her argument directly to churchwomen, and accused them of being the starring antagonists to the ministry of women, as well as to all other areas of female advancement. This argument had the benefit of placating male ears, and it also helped identify ordination as a churchwomen's issue. Churchwomen commonly worked to reform themselves, so Wyker presented the problem as an internal one. “Who is really to blame?”, Wyker wrote. “Is it the men alone? Very often *women* have been heard to assert that a woman should not serve on a national board with men—that it was not her ‘place’! And as for ordination—well!”⁴⁴ Wyker concluded her chapter with a plea: “More than anything else she asks that church women themselves think carefully before they oppose the ordination of women who believe they are called to become ministers of the gospel, and who desire to serve the

⁴³Wyker, *Church Women*, 61-62.

⁴⁴Wyker, *Church Women*, 6.

church to the limit of their abilities.”⁴⁵ Wyker pushed for opportunities, not rights. Rights-talk alarmed her and “feminism” even more so.⁴⁶ If women wanted to enter the ministry, or any other area of life, thought Wyker, she had to be willing to earn her way. She discussed in detail how important it was for women to appear in their activism. Activism should never be militant, aggressive, or eager. Wyker even exhibited this style in her prose. She had a constant tendency to slip into the third person when discussing her own life or opinions, as if not to risk coming on too strong. Even the book’s title had a disarming lack of specificity.⁴⁷

Finally, the ministry, Wyker argued, was out of step with women’s entrance into other professions. Women were performing perfectly well as professional lawyers and doctors. Why not ministers? Professionalization was a wise tactical note to hit in the mid-1950s. Since the end of the World War II, the mainline had made frantic efforts to professionalize their ministry on par with other white-collar fields, and had generally felt they were struggling to keep up. When Americans began going to schools of higher education in large numbers after World War II, they expected their ministers had as well. However, the vast majority of Protestant ministers in 1940, even in the mainline, had never graduated college, and even fewer seminary. Denominations worked to rectify this, and, as a result, the number of seminary students across the nation nearly doubled between 1940 and 1950. The ecumenical movement made evident the importance of shared educational markers, and, by the early 1950s, seminary became, for the first time, a truly professional degree.⁴⁸ Professionalization helped push the meaning of mainline ministry towards ordination and other institutional markers, and away from preaching. The churchwoman found

⁴⁵Wyker, *Church Women*, 63.

⁴⁶Mossie Wyker, “The President’s Message,” *The Churchwoman*, Jan 1954.

⁴⁷Wyker, *Church Women*, 117.

⁴⁸E. Brooks Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 246.

that could be to women's advantage. Wyker was sympathetic to the argument that preaching was not really the strength of a woman minister. Luckily, however, "a person does not have to be a preacher to be a Christian minister," Wyker wrote. "Some ministers are preachers, but not all ministers are preachers; or, all preachers are ministers, but not all ministers are preachers."⁴⁹ Her assumption should tell us how far the Protestant ministry had come since the days of Madeline Southard, the subject of chapter 1. Southard, in the 1920s, found quite the opposite to be commonsense: All ministers were preachers, but not all preachers were ministers. But the centrifuge of church power had shifted from the pulpit to the orders, from itinerancy to the parish.

Church Women and the Scheme of Things may not have landed as gently on churchwoman's ears as Wyker hoped. In a rather defensive note in the *The Churchwoman*, Church Women United's periodical, a few months after the book's publication, Wyker reminded members that "feminism" and "rights" had never been the inspiration for her book. And, in a statement that seems to directly contradict much of the text, she testified to believing that the problem of ordination was not an urgent one, though she maintained her support for it. Perhaps addressing concerns that women's ordination might hinder the institution of marriage, Wyker assured her audience, "If I should ever enter full employment, I would not want to serve a church as its minister because I see ministry as a 'team job' where man and wife serve together, however they may determine their assignment of service." Her ministry, she implied, was inextricable from her marriage. It was embedded within it, and therefore no threat to it.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Wyker, *Church Women*, 53.

⁵⁰Wyker, "The President's Message", *The Churchwoman*, Jan 1954.

Yet at the highest levels of mainline power, Wyker's book had a warm reception. *The Churchwoman* advertised it several times, and *Christian Century* reviewed it positively.⁵¹ NCC recommended it be placed on syllabi of the six missionary education summer conferences that it sponsored in 1954, and even prepared a study guide to go along with the book.⁵² More important than her publishing, however, was Wyker's ability to leverage another avenue for women in ministry. In 1952, Wyker took her thoughts from *Church Women and the Scheme of Things* and forged them into a committee within Church Women United. It was partly through the amorphous agendas of committees that Wyker was able to channel Church Women United's and NCC's resources into activism for women ministers.

Wyker called her new commission the Committee on the Study of the Status of Women. A group of Church Women United members would research the status of women in the communions of NCC. They would send out surveys and mine NCC's research department, and would return bearing statistics—sociological data that could be used to assess the state of things. Church Women United were thrilled with the prospect, perhaps because it spoke to their own frustrations with their status within NCC. The commission began by sending surveys to each of twenty-nine member communions of NCC with active women's divisions. The women's divisions received the surveys, and were asked to conduct research to adequately fill them out. The survey questions focused only on two issues: women's position in policy-making in the churches, and women's ordination. Notably absent from the request, especially given who was performing the research, was data about the women's divisions themselves. Wyker's commission apparently did not think the health, wealth, and influence of women's divisions a pertinent gauge of women's status. This oversight was a clear harbinger of things to come.

⁵¹"Books in Brief," *Christian Century*, Jan 20, 1954.

⁵²Melinda Johnson, "Building Bridges," 158-159.

Wyker's commission reported back to Church Women United in October of 1953. It had found at least minor leadership involvement for women in most member denominations, but also the complete absence of clerical leadership in some denominations, and policies explicitly against women's ordination in seven communions. Church Women United recommended that NCC form a committee of their own to address women's church leadership and recommended to the NCC that it collect data on the subject.⁵³ NCC enthused over the report. They accepted Church Women United's recommendations, and encouraged them to continue their research. NCC recommended in return that United Church Women move beyond data collection and into activism. They suggested the churchwomen urge all member denominations to support women's church leadership, that they offer guidance to churches on seating women on councils, that they encourage seminaries and institutes to educate students about women's leadership, that they draft a list of recommended women speakers. Finally, NCC recommended that the Committee on the Study of the Status of Women "encourage the ordination of women" to the best of its abilities.⁵⁴ Though Wyker's commission had targeted women's ordination as an issue to be studied, it was only with NCC's suggestion that the commission actively moved to support ordination. United Church Women had begun their foray into women's ministerial issues. Wyker had successfully spun data collection into affirmative activism for ordination. And she had also done so in such a way that made it seem the prerogative was not the women's own, but the male leaders of NCC.

Mossie Wyker's idea for a commission on the status of women had a clear influence. The World Council of Churches launched a commission on 'The Life and Work of Women of the Church' in 1946. The World Council of Churches, the pinnacle of ecumenical organizing,

⁵³Johnson, "Building Bridges," 157. The seven communions with regulations explicitly against women's ordination were Evangelical United Brethren, Augustana Lutheran, United Lutheran, Presbyterian Church in the US, Presbyterian Church in the USA, Protestant Episcopal, and Reformed Church in America.

⁵⁴Johnson, "Building Bridges," 158-159.

formed officially in 1948 in Amsterdam, though planning had stretched back to ecumenical conferences in the 1920s, such as the ones Jim Wyker attended in Europe. In the late 1940s, United Church Women, indeed, all ecumenical Protestants, buzzed with the prospect of a global means of coordination for Christians. Denominations the world over sent representatives to Amsterdam. The Disciples of Christ sent Mossie Wyker. She was one of only 35 American women to attend as an official,⁵⁵ and one of an estimated six clergywomen.⁵⁶ When the Life and Work of Women gave its report, she was in the audience.⁵⁷ So was Georgiana Sibley, president of Church Women United at the time (Wyker's predecessor), and Twila Lytton Cavert, who sat on Sibley's executive board.

Indeed, the World Council's study only existed at all thanks to Cavert, herself a churchwoman. Cavert had attended a pre-assembly organizational meeting for WCC in Geneva in 1946 with her husband.⁵⁸ In addition to her service for United Church Women, Cavert was on the national board of the YWCA. While she and her husband were staying in Geneva, she stopped by the world headquarters of YWCA and was surprised to find them collecting data about women in the church. She recalled:

It came to me down at the Y that there was really something ridiculous about this: why *should* the YWCA, with all the programmes it has already deal with *this*? Why shouldn't the *church* get busy? I had observed so much in both American and Asia of women working with such vigor and dedication and nobody paying any attention to them... So I said to one of the Y officers; 'Frankly, I don't think the World YWCA is the place where this business about women in the church should be dealt with. I think the World Council ought to get busy on it.'⁵⁹

⁵⁵A list of American women attendees can be found in *The Churchwoman*, Jun-Jul 1948.

⁵⁶Janet Crawford, "Rocking the Boat: Women's Participation in the World Council of Churches, 1948-1991 (Ph.D. diss, Victoria University of Wellington, 1995), 55.

⁵⁷Crawford, "Rocking the Boat," 55.

⁵⁸Heather Warren, *Theologians of A New World Order: Reinhold Niebuhr and the Christian Realists, 1920-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 122. Samuel McCrea Cavert was the general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches, NCC's predecessor body. He was sent by FCC to help get WCC off the ground. As was custom in the day, Mrs. Cavert traveled with him.

⁵⁹As quoted in Crawford, "Rocking the Boat", 46-47.

As it turned out, it was mostly Cavert who got busy on it. Right away, she hosted afternoon tea for leaders of the council-in-the-making. It is unclear exactly what unfolded over tea. But, after the party, the World Council agreed to commission a study on women in the church. Cavert would end up administering it herself. She worked unpaid, volunteer hours that often stretched from 8:30 am to 6:00 pm, lengthening as the inaugural conference neared in 1948. The study generated survey responses from 58 countries. The topics covered included women's volunteer church work, women's involvement in church governance and policy, women's participation in ecumenism, and women's professional church work. The study recommended further research on women's ordination, which it saw as a pressing issue.⁶⁰ It is hard to know precisely how pivotal this attention to women's issues in WCC was for the ministerial reformation. However, one researcher employed by the American Association of Women Ministers, Hazel Foster, observed renewed interest in women's ecclesiastical status in 1950. She saw more news coverage, more books, more curiosity about the issue. She argued this was "stimulated directly" by the World Council of Churches.⁶¹

The turn towards sociological data—towards studies and commissions and reports—was an important moment for the ministerial reformation. What one historian describes as a sudden "immersion" in statistical data was paradigmatic of the years after World War I.⁶² The idea that statistics could be levied at complicated questions was new to the era, and sometimes data collection seemed like it had value in and of itself. Within the ecumenical world, studies were all the rage. The scale of sociological data and the large conclusions one could, presumably, draw

⁶⁰Crawford, "Rocking the Boat," 48, 50, 52.

⁶¹Hazel Foster, "Ecclesiastical Status of Women", *Woman's Pulpit* (Jan-Mar, 1950): 3.

⁶²Sarah Elizabeth Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and Making of Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3-4.

from it, fit cogently into the ecumenical drive to envision and organize all the world at once. Studies also sat well with the constitutions of mid-century progressives, who felt that progress was possible but not inevitable, that it required incremental steps, rigorous examination, and compromise. Even the American Association of Women Ministers had their own research arm. In the post-war years, the research department's reports assumed an increasingly central place in *Woman's Pulpit*, their periodical. AAWM's resident sociologist, Hazel Foster, wrote discourses annually on the "Ecclesiastical Status of Women." In 1956, *Woman's Pulpit* called Foster's reports, "Perhaps the most significant piece of work done by our association."⁶³ In general, the churchwoman's faith in research commissions was unshakable. Wyker wrote that WCC's commission on women could "become a force for good in the world."⁶⁴ Church Women United supported WCC's commission financially during Wyker's presidency, and by the early 1960s, the WCC and CWU commissions were explicitly coordinating their efforts.⁶⁵ While studies remained popular in ecumenical bodies like WCC and Church Women United, their proliferation could sometimes feel like a mechanism of deferral. When the World Presbyterian Alliance met in 1955, delegates voted to support the ordaining of women. But they decided against passing on this recommendation to member churches in favor of continuing research. One woman, in response, exclaimed, "Women have been studied long enough!"⁶⁶ The looming authority of WCC's commission on women may have also resulted in slow movement at the denominational level. Hazel Foster, though she adored the commission, also suspected that denominations might

⁶³"Annual Assembly", *Woman's Pulpit* 34, no. 4 (Oct-Dec, 1956): 1.

⁶⁴Wyker, *Church Women*, 106,

⁶⁵Wyker, *Church Women*, 84, 104.; Hazel Foster, "Ecclesiastical Status of Women", *Woman's Pulpit* 38, no.4 (October, 1961): 4.

⁶⁶Hazel Foster, "Ecclesiastical Status of Women," *Woman's Pulpit* (Oct-Dec, 1955): 4.

have been dragging their feet on women's issues between 1950 and 1952 as they awaited the results of WCC's research.⁶⁷

Mossie Wyker's presidency of Church Women United ended in 1955, but she continued to serve the woman's ministerial cause within the churchwoman's world. In 1954, she met with members of the American Association of Woman Ministers in Evanston, Illinois. Afterwards, Wyker kept in touch with the association, and became a member as early as 1962.⁶⁸ In 1957, she joined WCC's commission on women, now called (with extreme churchwomanly tact) the Department on Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society.⁶⁹ In 1958, she was assigned to a special program in NCC devoted to professional work of women in the church. In that capacity Wyker attempted to connect women ministers and seminarians with Church Women United, work that continued into the 1960s.⁷⁰ Despite Wyker's efforts, the ordination of women would not become a real priority for Church Women United until the 1970s. Mossie Wyker may not have dramatically shifted Church Women United's priorities, but she had set several wheels in motion. She had refused to shy away from the fact that, though she loved the church deeply, it underserved its women. Churchwomen were becoming restless, she wrote in her book. "They have been told by a woman theologian that the church is the last stronghold of male domination."⁷¹ And if you judge by Wyker's tone, they were dangerously close to believing it.

⁶⁷Hazel Foster, "Ecclesiastical Status of Women," *Woman's Pulpit* (Jan-Mar, 1950): 3; Hazel Foster, "Ecclesiastical Status of Women," *Woman's Pulpit* 30, no.1 (Jan-Mar, 1952): 1. The history of Second Wave feminism itself often begins with a study. The President's Commission on the Status of Women, established by John F. Kennedy in 1961, looked much like the World Council's and Church Women United's commissions. They even shared some supporting cast members. Dr. Cynthia Wedel, for example, served on the President's Commission. She would have been familiar with such operations, since she was Mossie Wyker's successor as president of United Church Women, from 1955-1958. Other women involved in Church Women United on the President's Commission included Dorothy Height, Margaret Hickey, and Pauli Murray. See Neumann, *Church Women United*, 124; Hartmann, *The Other Feminists*, 97.

⁶⁸"UCW Speaker," *Woman's Pulpit* (April 1962): 3.

⁶⁹Mossie Wyker, "The Development of Church Women's Organizations in the United States of America" (World Council of Churches, Department on the Cooperation of Men and Women in Church and Society, April 1957).

⁷⁰Johnson, "Building Bridges", 163.

⁷¹Wyker, *Church Women*, 5.

A Time to Speak and a Time to Be Silent

When theologian Georgia Harkness wrote this cutting line—that the church was the last stronghold of male domination—in 1937, she surely did not expect it to become the slogan of the ministerial reformation.⁷² Harkness, born 1891, shared many of life’s contours with Madeline Southard (the subject of chapter 1). She was a cradle Methodist, college-educated to the graduate level. Like Southard, she would never marry. Harkness came, however, from a different kind of Methodism, a different region of the country, and different family circumstances. Georgia was born in a town named after her grandfather: Harkness, New York. Her parents ran a successful farm. (Southard’s mother had run an unsuccessful farm). Harkness shared few of Southard’s reservations about refinement and prestige, and lived a life much closer to urban centers. In college at Cornell University, Harkness nearly died falling off a cliff, and afterward decided to enter church service. She enrolled in a program of Religious Education at Boston University in 1918. Her master’s degree stretched into a doctorate. She entered academia afterwards, taught philosophy, and wrote books of theology for popular audiences. Her timing was auspicious. Religious publishing boomed in the interwar years.⁷³ According to one biographer, Harkness was “undoubtedly the most widely-read theologian of the mid-twentieth century,” a testament to the popularity of her books at the lay level.⁷⁴ Though Harkness felt discouraged at her job at Elmira College (she had applied for a job at Yale), her publishing career blossomed. And as early as 1924, she began advocating for women’s ministry, mostly in editorials and articles for major Protestant periodicals.

⁷²In its original form, the line was “the most impregnable stronghold of male dominance”.

⁷³Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4-5.

⁷⁴Rosemary Skinner Keller, *Georgia Harkness: For Such a Time as This* (Nashville: Abigdon Press, 1992), 111.

In the post-war years, Harkness was a visible public advocate for women's ordination. One historian calls her "a voice crying out in the wilderness."⁷⁵ This description, I would argue, is a bit misleading. Harkness was certainly the loudest voice in the wilderness, but to say she "cried out" mistakes her style. For, though Harkness could be direct and provocative at times, particularly in writing, she also exhibited and encouraged a kind of church-womanly pose towards the ministerial reformation. She did not seek parish ministry for herself, though she recognized pastorates as crucial to women's ministry. She tended to remain silent when the stakes were highest, such as at Methodist General Conferences. She advocated for a kind of activism that was anti-militant, and that attempted to empower men to make change. Her strategic silences are, in retrospect, far more indicative of the contours of the ministerial reformation in the mid-century than are her wilderness cries.

Harkness earned a preacher's license in 1922, was ordained a local deacon in 1927, and a local elder in 1939.⁷⁶ She never entered parish ministry or a field that would require membership in the Methodist Annual Conference. Harkness joined the American Association of Woman-Preachers as early as 1932. She was a frequent visitor to their annual assemblies, and a contributor to their journal, *Woman's Pulpit*. Harkness, like most churchwomen, was knee-deep in ecumenism. Her career accelerated after she attended the Life and Work Conference at Oxford in 1938, a predecessor conference to the World Council of Churches. At Oxford, Harkness gave a short speech (four minutes, she recalled) on women and youth in the church. She used the logic of ecumenism on women's church issues, reminding her audience, "the Church is a

⁷⁵Schneider and Schneider, *In Their Own Right*, 130.

⁷⁶Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 395; Paul Chilcote, *The Methodist Defense of Women in Ministry: A Documentary History*, (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 256.

supranational, supra-racial, supra-class fellowship,” but also, “a supra-sex fellowship.”⁷⁷ For reasons that Harkness could never quite put her finger on, the speech was sent back home in an Associated Press dispatch, and gained national attention. Shortly before she went to Oxford, *Christian Century*, the voice of the mainline, published an article on women and the church by Harkness. It was there that Harkness wrote the line Wyker would paraphrase years later: “It is a paradoxical fact that the Christian gospel has done more than any other agency for the emancipation of women, yet the church itself is the most impregnable stronghold of male dominance.”⁷⁸

Harkness’s star rose throughout the next decade. When Methodists held a uniting conference in 1939 to form, from four prior churches, the Methodist Church, the women’s divisions planned a celebratory woman’s evening for its conclusion. Harkness was the invited speaker. She intended to give a speech, “What Price Unity?” that argued for women’s clerical rights.⁷⁹ However, the conference ran shorter than expected and the woman’s evening was unceremoniously cut from the schedule. Harkness canceled her flight to Kansas City.⁸⁰ It was the first of many small grievances, most induced at the national level, that Harkness would experience from her denomination. But her invitation was a sign: she was the highest-profile Methodist woman of her day.

Harkness expanded “What Price Unity?” and published it in *Christian Advocate* instead as “Women Ministers.” It was a masterwork of churchwomanly activism. Unlike Madeline Southard, Harkness lauded motherhood and domestic work, and signaled her great respect

⁷⁷Keller, *For Such a Time*, 188.

⁷⁸Georgia Harkness, “Women and the Church,” *Christian Century*, June 2, 1937.

⁷⁹Chilcote, *The Methodist Defense of Women in Ministry*, 257.

⁸⁰Lud H. Estes, ed. *Journal of the Uniting Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Methodist Protestant Church* (New York: Methodist Publishing House, 1939), 322.

women's volunteer efforts in the church. "There is no greater service that a woman can render," said the 40-year-old childless matron, "than to rear up an oncoming Christian generation." Yet, she went on, it is no slight on these services to argue that they are not the limit of what women can give.⁸¹ (Harkness would never herself marry or have children, and would spend the second half of her life in a domestic, and possibly romantic, relationship with a woman.) Like Mossie Wyker, Harkness cautioned women against certain kinds of activism. Women, she wrote, "ought not either militantly or plaintively to bewail our fate. Prohibition was not won by Carrie Nation, or woman suffrage by Sylvia Pankhurst." This did not mean, for Harkness, that women should not work for change. It meant, rather, that they were to be the hands behind the curtain. "Any marked change," she wrote, "can come only through the agency of men"—in the specific, gendered sense—"whose sense of justice and Christian concern for personality are focused on the issue." Change might begin with women, but it would have to pass through male hands.⁸²

After her slighting in 1939, Harkness rarely missed Methodist General Conferences, which were held quadrennially. In 1944, Harkness watched a proposition for full clergy rights for women voted down on the floor. In 1948, Harkness spoke in favor of full clerical rights for women at General Conference. (Another woman also spoke in favor, but suggested that these rights be extended only to unmarried women and widows, playing into the post-war sensibility that women's employment should never conflict with marriage.) Neither woman succeeded in her pleas. In the Methodist Church at the time, women could be ordained as local deacons and local elders, victories won primarily by Madeline Southard and the Association of Woman-Preachers in the 1920s. To serve as a local elder was to be tied to a single congregation and its

⁸¹Georgia Harkness, "Women Ministers," *Christian Advocate*, Nov 2, 1939, as quoted in Chilcote, *The Methodist Defense*, 270.

⁸²Harkness, "Women Ministers", as quoted in Chilcote, *The Methodist Defense*, 269.

whims. This position did not guarantee employment, a pension, or what Methodists call “membership” in an annual conference, the status that confers these benefits. The local elder was also an increasingly contested role in the church, as Methodists tried to standardize their ministry to meet the demands of ecumenism. A local elder’s ability to perform rites such as communion, baptisms, and marriages was governed by the national denomination, and was in constant flux. In 1948, the General Conference rescinded the ability of local elders to perform communion.⁸³ What Harkness and her supporters advocated for, calling “full clergy rights,” was essentially an issue of employment and equal treatment. With full clergy rights, ordained women could be guaranteed placement in a pastorate, participate in the itinerancy system (wherein Methodist ministers were reshuffled to new parishes every few years), and could collect pensions. Harkness recognized that ordination, per se, was not the issue in Methodist women’s church status—the right to have a parish was.⁸⁴ Though proposals for full clergy rights for women had been made at every conference since unification in 1939 and many before as well, the issue had generally been discussed only briefly, and voted down.

General Conference 1952 was an especially bad year. Harkness, once again, was in the audience as a delegate. This time she did not speak. In her later years, Harkness would lay out rules for women’s activism. One of those was to trust your male friends. “Sometimes,” she wrote, “they can speak for us better than we can for ourselves.”⁸⁵ In a stroke of bad timing, the issue of women’s ministry was brought to the floor in the concluding moments of the conference, which had run on longer than expected. The Committee on Ministry had, in its majority, voted against the extension of clergy rights. Expressing something near boredom, a minister named

⁸³E. Brooks Holifield, “Clergy” in *Cambridge Companion to American Methodism* ed. Jason E Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 175.

⁸⁴Keller, *For Such a Time*, 191.

⁸⁵As quoted in Keller, *For Such a Time*, 27.

Oscar Thomas Olson introduced the topic for the Committee. “This has been voted upon again and again in our annual conference,” he said. “I do not care to discuss it.” Ignoring Olson’s suggestion, another minister, James S. Chubb, suggested that they pass the minority report of the Committee instead, which supported full clergy rights for women. A third minister, a district superintendent named Claude M. Temple, stood up to express his support for Olson’s position, though he opted for levity instead of disdain. “This morning someone admitted from the platform that we had passed certain legislation last night because we were groggy...I am wondering when we get back home if this Minority Report should prevail, if people would be saying, How groggy can you get?” Temple continued in explanation that he had a woman minister in his conference, who he was always at pains to place in a congregation, though he had every respect for her. He would explain to a congregation that he had the perfect minister for them, but then had to break the news that this minister is a woman. Congregations, Temple recalled, would say to him, “Don’t be silly!” At this anecdote, the Conference laughed jovially.⁸⁶

The subtext of Temple’s vignette was unoriginal. No one had ever been able to say, definitely, which church constituency was most responsible for holding up women’s ministry. Finger-pointing flew in all directions, and only accelerated as the ministry professionalized in the post-war years. Clergymen, seminaries, and church administrators tended to make the case that women ministers could not exist because rural, conservative localities would not tolerate them. Women ministers tended to make the case, conversely, that their rural communities accepted them just fine, and that it was fellow clergymen who resented them the most. Minister-administrators like Temple claimed they would have *liked* to bring women into the fold, but they were prevented from doing so by the attitude of those in the pews. In 1956, the executive

⁸⁶“Methodist General Conference Says ‘No’ to Women,” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Apr-June, 1952): 3.

secretary of the Massachusetts Baptist Convention, in a similar instance, told *Woman's Pulpit* that he blamed local churches for the Baptists' paucity of women ministers, lamenting that he wished churches would take women, but they simply would not.⁸⁷

However unoriginal in content, the tone of Temple's story, peppered with punchlines, was novel. It was also a mistake. Harkness determined, after General Conference in 1952, that the issue would never be laughed at again. In 1944, 1948, and 1952, the Council on Ministry at General Conference had received, respectively, thirty-three, ten, and twenty petitions, called "memorials", about women's full clergy rights.⁸⁸ When delegates and administrators sat down in their respective committees prior to the 1956 conference, the Committee on Ministry was alarmed to find it had over 2,000 memorials to read on the subject of full clergy rights for women. One of the committee members recalled that he "felt as if the roof had fallen in on me."⁸⁹

The memorial campaign was driven by the Women's Division for Christian Service (locally known as the Women's Society for Christian Service), the women's organization within the Methodist Church. In 1955 the WSCS had 1.8 million women on its rolls and an income of \$10 million dollars, making them in all likelihood the wealthiest faction of the Methodist Church.⁹⁰ For months, the women of WSCS had been on a petition-writing campaign. The barrage of memorials was hard for the Committee on Ministry to ignore. There was also at least one woman on the committee. As a male committee member recalled, she had shown up to their

⁸⁷Betty Driscoll Mayo, "Women Drive for Equality in Pulpit," *Woman's Pulpit* (Jan-Mar 1956): 8.

⁸⁸Lud S. Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1944 General Conference of the Methodist Church* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1944), 669-670, 935-954; Lud S. Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1948 General Conference of the Methodist Church* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1948); 1080-1084; "Methodist General Conference Says 'No' to Women," *Woman's Pulpit* (Apr-June, 1952): 3.

⁸⁹Lud H. Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1956 Methodist General Conference* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House), 635.

⁹⁰"Women's Division—10 Million 'Business,'" *Christian Advocate*, Feb 2, 1956. Robert, *American Women in Mission*, 302.

meeting and presented her point of view in a church-womanly fashion. In his recollection, she sat down and said, “‘I came here to fight for Full Clergy Rights for Women,’ but she said it with a smile.” The smile, apparently, made all the difference with this committee member, who was convinced that she came to her advocacy “in a spirit of love.” The smiles and the memorials won over the sub-committee, and the majority of the members (40 of 72) voted in favor of extending full clergy rights to women. It was the first time the majority report of the Committee on Ministry would be in support of clergy rights for women.⁹¹

It is worth pausing for a moment over WSCS’s support for full clergy rights in 1956. WSCS was the child of the Women’s Foreign and Home Missionary Societies who were, in the 1910s and 1920s, Madeline Southard’s chief adversaries against women’s preaching and ministry. By the 1950s, however, they leant increasingly into ministerial reformation causes. In 1952, for instance, the thirty-eight WSCS societies in Massachusetts began observing Status of Women Sundays, in which women led worship services, preached from the pulpit, and collected the offering. WSCS was not alone among denominational women’s groups in generating interest in women’s ministry in the mid-century. The women’s arm of the Congregational Christian Churches (later United Church of Christ) ran a yearly “Woman’s Fellowship Sunday” between 1954 and 1962, in which women were encouraged to assume responsibility for the worship service and in which women’s relationship to the church was highlighted in the sermon. The program was initiated by an ordained minister, Lillian S. Gregory, who led the National Fellowship of Congregational Christian Women between 1957 and 1963. The local meetings of NFCCW also emphasized worship components, and encouraged women to write liturgies for NFCCW gatherings. The organization’s newsletter, *Guide Posts*, frequently published worship

⁹¹Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1956 General Conference*, 635-638.

services written by women for various contexts.⁹² That women's church groups such as WSCS and NFCCW were beginning to dip their toes into women's parish and liturgical leadership indicates that the ministerial reformation had come to conform to the churchwoman's standards. Paradigmatic was an article in the *Christian Advocate* published shortly before General Conference in 1956. Titled, "A Helpmeet, a Pastor," it profiled Martha Turner of Syracuse, New York, who took over her husband's pastoral duties when he went on yearly mission trips to Germany. She was also an officer of WSCS. Turner stated plainly, when asked, that she supported women's admission to annual conferences. Like Mossie Wyker, her ministry conformed to marital expectations. And also like Wyker, she had begun to see women's clerical rights as a churchwoman issue.⁹³

At the 1956 Methodist General Conference, the majority report, as it was presented to the floor, was also subject to the forces of marriage. The report recommended that women be included in all ministerial provisions, with the distinct exception that only unmarried women and widows would be allowed to participate in the traveling ministry. Likewise, upon marriage, a woman ministerial member of the conference would be required to cease her membership. As in 1948, this limitation was floated as a way to avoid running too hard into the headwind of marriage (and, the possibility of a sexed, even pregnant, female minister). It also helped that, as discussed below, many of the most prominent women ministers of the mid-century were widows. To the drafters, the provision seemed to mitigate the confrontation between church employment and marriage, without excluding many women. Yet the Conference, when assembled, found the proposition ungainly. Marriage was not, after all, precisely the problem that they were trying to

⁹²"Women's Fellowship Sunday Committee Records," Box 7, Lillian S. Gregory Papers, Congregational Library and Archives, Boston, Mass.; "Publications," Box 8, Lillian S. Gregory Papers.

⁹³"A Helpmeet, A Pastor," *Christian Advocate*, Mar 15, 1956.

circumvent, but rather, as one delegate put it, “home responsibility.” One delegate cited several women ministers in his conference who were married but had no children and few domestic duties (like, for example, the childless Martha Turner). Another delegate told the story of a successful woman pastor who worked as an associate to her husband in rural North Carolina.⁹⁴ As portrayed, the ministries of these women were gleaming manifestations of, not conflicts with, their wifely service. The “unmarried and widowed” clause was voted on and eliminated. As dangerous as it was to transgress on marriage, it was perhaps more dangerous to transgress on *ministerial* marriage.

In general, the gist of the argument on the floor was administrative. Would it be too hard for District Superintendents to place women in congregations? Methodists, like Episcopalians and Roman Catholics, placed ministers in local parishes almost entirely from the top down. District Superintendents, usually ordained ministers in their prior lives, assessed a pool of conference member ministers and dealt them out to congregations. Church polity details such as these could make a large impact on the ministerial reformation in individual denominations. Churches who called pastors locally, like Disciples of Christ or Congregationalists, could offer far less resistance to the ministry of women. (Congregations that did not “call” a minister at all, but left it to the spirit, such as Quakers and holiness groups, could put up even less of a fight to women’s ministry.) But centralized placement policies like the Methodists’ required the consent of the denomination on a national level and at least the tacit approval of the laity at large. Though parishes had little institutional power to resist a minister they opposed, they could certainly raise a fuss with the District Superintendent.

⁹⁴Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1956 General Conference*, 702.

To those in support of the majority report, the position of the District Superintendents seemed a minor quibble. “Pity the poor District Superintendent,” one delegate summarized, unimpressed. The real stakes, he said, were whether “no woman shall be called of God, to spiritual leadership within that part of the organization structure of the Methodist Church that we call the Annual Conference?” Perhaps most influential to the delegates was a brief statement by a visiting delegate from Bengal. “We from the far-flung ends of the world look up to America for inspiration and guidance in matters of progress and forward movement,” said Ashoke B. Singh. “I am amused at myself that I should come from the back woods of Bengal to champion the Full Clergy Rights of the all-powerful American woman.” The delegates seem to have been effectively shamed by this foreigner who could so deftly use their American exceptionalism against them.

Through all this, Georgia Harkness remained seated and silent. When the vote had been taken, full clergy rights for women passed by a majority so great it needed not be tallied. One delegate rose and recommended that the Conference recognize Georgia Harkness for her “valiant fight.” The Conference gave her a standing applause. Harkness rose at last. “I must have a moment to thank you for this very wonderful expression,” she said. “Some of you wondered why I didn’t speak this afternoon. It says in the Bible there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. I thought we would do better if we let the rest of you speak.”⁹⁵

The Minister and Her Wife

⁹⁵Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1956 General Conference*, 723.

At one point in the debate at General Conference in 1956, the president of the New England Conference's WSCS, Mrs. Edwin S. Anderson, spoke in favor of full clergy rights. She addressed the fear that Claude Temple had raised, that local churches would not accept women ministers. We know this to be false, Anderson said. She cited the example of a woman named Margaret Henrichsen, a minister in Maine. Henrichsen had, in Anderson's words, "started out with two small churches and is now serving five additional churches which had no pastors."⁹⁶ Henrichsen, Anderson implied, was a perfect example of not just the acceptance of women ministers, but of the potential for their great success.

Just few years earlier, Margaret Henrichsen would have been stunned to hear her name come up at General Assembly. Henrichsen grew up in New Jersey and spent the first half of her life in Chicago and suburban Boston. She was married to an electrician and she loved teaching Sunday school. After her husband's premature death in 1943, having no children of her own nor any way to support herself, Henrichsen uprooted her life. She wrote to the District Superintendent, a friend of hers, who offered her work as a supply pastor for the Methodist congregations of the Sullivan, Maine, area. Age 42, she threw all of her furniture and belongings in the back of a truck and headed up the coast. She had virtually no experience in parish ministry, no theological education, no ordination nor any other credentialing to speak of.⁹⁷

Henrichsen's appointment to the Sullivan region was typical of women's parish ministry throughout American history. Women tended to serve in undesirable, poorly-paid jobs and in sparsely-attended, tiny churches with financial woes. They filled, in short, the pastorates men refused to fill. The Schoodic region, of which Sullivan was a part, was desperately underserved. When they had ministers, they were usually students from Bangor Theological Seminary, forty

⁹⁶Estes, ed. *Journal of the 1956 General Conference*, 708.

⁹⁷"The Church Role," *Christian Century*, Nov 4, 1953.

miles to the north, who would have been inexperienced and temporary. In this sense, very little about Henrichsen's station in Maine was new to the history of women in ministry. What *was* new was that, beginning in the early 1950s, people in the cities and the centers of Protestant power became interested in her experience. Though Henrichsen would not gain any denominational status of note until 1967, she published a successful memoir of her ministry in 1953 with a major publishing house, Houghton Mifflin, and her story spread like wildfire among women's groups and ministerial reformers. In the post-war years, rural ministers like Henrichsen briefly became the symbol for the reformation.

In Maine, Henrichsen served not one but seven congregations. This feat was the central conceit of her book, *Seven Steeples*, which was filled with stories of blizzard drives to the bedsides of the dying, on-the-spot weddings, forest fires, and the resurrection of moribund churches. Her narrative was marked by struggle. Her parsonage had no running water or central heat. On winter nights, she put on a sweater and tied its sleeves together, to better insulate herself. She studied for her ordination course with her feet inside her oven. But she also loved rural life. She would sit by the sea for prayer and watch birds. On Sundays, Henrichsen kept quite the schedule: East Sullivan at 10am, North Sullivan at 11:15am, Franklin at 1pm, Goldsboro at 2pm, Asheville at 5pm, Prospect Harbor at 7:15pm, and Sorrento on holidays.⁹⁸ People loved her story, which nicely combined both senses of the word "pastoral."

Henrichsen was ordained a local elder in 1949. Like many women ministers of her day, she connected her ordination to her marriage. She sometimes vaguely suggested that her ministry and ordination implied a new marriage, or a higher marriage. She had only entered ministry, after all, because of the death of her husband, events which she always connected intimately in her

⁹⁸Margaret Henrichsen, "My Seven Steeples," *Life*, Oct 19, 1953. Accounts of this route differ slightly in various places.

retellings. “After my husband died,” she told one interviewer, “it was suggested to me that there might be some small churches with nobody to care for them”— as if, with no husband to love, a congregation could be a replacement.⁹⁹ The day of her ordination was rescheduled so that she might accommodate a boy parishioner’s request to be baptized in honor of his mother on Mother’s Day. Thus, instead of being ordained at the Maine Annual Conference with a room-full of male ordinands, Henrichsen was ordained alone. She found the ritual incredibly moving. “When I was married,” she recalled, “I had felt that that would be life’s highest moment until the moment of graduation out of this life into the heavenly kingdom. But that day of ordination was an even deeper happiness and a higher moment than my wedding day had been.”¹⁰⁰ Henrichsen’s passage narrative thus carefully balanced her personal investment in her ordination with her deference to familial concerns.

Widows, especially widows of ministers, played a vital role in the ministerial reformation at mid-century. In 1960, 15% of women ministers were widowed, compared to less than 1% of male clergy.¹⁰¹ Ministers’ wives in particular often assumed their husband’s parish responsibilities at least temporarily, and often permanently, after his death. “Going into church work after my husband’s death was a therapy for me,” one minister’s widow testified in 1962, having taken over her husband’s parish in Grove City, Pennsylvania.¹⁰² Other women, especially those widowed young, found themselves suddenly with a family to support and their chances for employment within the church. Josephine Huffer, widowed in 1926 with three small children in rural Indiana, found employment and a future for herself running a small church in an

⁹⁹“Face to Face,” *Zion’s Herald*, May 20, 1953.

¹⁰⁰Henrichsen, *Seven Steeples*, 144.

¹⁰¹Bock, “The Female Clergy”, 538.

¹⁰²Hazel Foster, “The Ecclesiastical Status of Women,” *Woman’s Pulpit* 40, no. 3-4 (Jul-Dec 1962): 4 – 7.

“undesirable” part of Shelbyville.¹⁰³ When Hilda Libby Ives was widowed in 1918 at the age of thirty (with five children under the age of nine), she had a mystical experience in the midst of her grief. Surrounded suddenly by the warmth of God at the height of her despair, she felt that she had been called to serve. After several years in social work, Ives took up a rural parish in Albany, Maine, in 1924 and was ordained to the Congregational ministry. Ministry suited her, and she took administrative positions with the Maine Congregational Christian Association and the Massachusetts Federation of Churches and began teaching seminary at Bangor Theological and Andover Newton. The leading Congregational periodical, *Advance*, published a profile of her in 1945, Mossie Wyker included her story in *Church Women in the Scheme of Things*, and by the 1950s Ives had some degree of national renown. Henrichsen described her as “the great pioneer woman minister of New England.” When Henrichsen’s own husband died, she called Ives for advice, and Ives encouraged her to pursue ministry.¹⁰⁴

Rural ministry had particular cache as the province of widowed and single women ministers and in the mid-century was seen as an area in which women could make solid, uncontroversial contributions to the ministry of the church. Henrichsen’s story should remind us that the ministerial reformation was, for most of its history, a rural movement. Historian Cynthia Grant Tucker, in her study of Unitarian and Universalist women ministers in the Progressive Era, has argued that frontier communities have historically been the wellspring of women’s ministerial history because those communities had to allow more flexible gender roles in order to survive.¹⁰⁵ Women ministers, Henrichsen and others argued, could save the rural churches of

¹⁰³Mary Fowler, “Women in the Church,” *Woman’s Pulpit*, (Apr-Jun 1951): 7.

¹⁰⁴Richard D. Pierce, “Hilda Libby Ives” *Woman’s Pulpit* 24, no 2. (Mar-Apr 1946), as reprinted from *Advance*, Dec 1945; Henrichsen, *Seven Steeples*, 3; Wyker, *Church Women*, 48. Robert Ives, interview with author, August 10, 2016. See also Hilda Libby Ives, *All in One Day: Experiences and Insights*. (Portland, Me.: B. Wheelwright Co., 1955).

¹⁰⁵Cynthia Grant Tucker, *Prophetic Sisterhood: Liberal Women Ministers of the Frontier, 1880 -1930* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 4. Beverly Zink-Sawyer makes a similar argument in regard to Antoinette Blackwell Brown,

America. The director of town and country work for the Congregational home missions association noted in 1948 that rural churches served by women ministers performed favorably compared to those served by male ministers. He encouraged women's further ordination, on the grounds that they had been so successful with small churches.¹⁰⁶ Financial considerations—and a certain degree of desperation—primed small churches to accept appointments of women ministers. “A man with a family to raise can hardly be expected to work on the financial basis that these churches impose,” Henrichsen noted. Rural, impoverished Maine, where Henrichsen labored, had a disproportionately high percentage of early female Methodist ordinands. After the expansion of full clergy rights in 1956 in the Methodist Church, Maine women made up four of the first ten women admitted to full conference membership. These four became known as the “4-H Club”: Margaret Henrichsen, Gertrude Harris, Alice Hart, and Esther Haskard. Perhaps unintendedly so, the title was fitting in another way, with its association with rural, agricultural life. But women's prevalence in country ministry also cultivated an image of women's ministerial work as unthreatening to male ministerial enterprise, and as unlikely to infringe on prestigious pulpits or large churches. “No woman whom I know has any aspirations for St. John the Divine or Madison Avenue Presbyterian,” Henrichsen observed.¹⁰⁷

Women in rural ministry loved their profession, while also recognizing the exceptional difficulty of their jobs. At a Methodist pastor's training school, Henrichsen met other women ministers from the area. One evening, as part of a skit, they wrote a tune to “O Susanna!”:

Oh we are women ministers of good old Pine Tree State,
We work up in the country that's a woman parson's fate,

Olympia Brown, and Anna Howard Shaw, early nineteenth-century ordinands. Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth-Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 20.

¹⁰⁶Elsie Gibson, *When the Minister Is a Woman* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 22.

¹⁰⁷Margaret Henrichsen, “The Woman Minister, By One of Them,” undated (ca.1969), Box 1, Folder 10, Margaret Henrichsen Papers, Boston University School of Theology. (Hereafter Henrichsen Papers).

We milk the cows, we hoe the spuds, we even chop the wood,
And then we preach on Sunday, boy, we think we're pretty good!

The women carried on, poking fun not only at their relegation to the backwoods but at the unusual expectations on them as women ministers.

The minister's a busy man as you will all agree,
Just add a piled-up laundry and a missionary tea,
The telephone is ringing, there's a wedding at the door,
And the District Superintendent is expected just at four.
Brothers, Brothers, we lead a busy life,
We chose to be the minister and have to be her wife!¹⁰⁸

Much later in the second-wave feminist movement, women would lament the “second shift” of a wife or mother who performs domestic duties and also works outside the home.¹⁰⁹ Henrichsen and the other women ministers of the Pine Tree State recognized that they had entered a profession in which the job was generally expected to be carried out by a couple. They thus found themselves held doubly responsible, and recognized the double standard. Henrichsen's ditty was typical of the era in its tone, however. The song balanced restlessness with joviality. Henrichsen and her friends loved their company at the pastoral retreat; they would have been trying to make the men laugh. She exemplified Mossie Wyker's recommendations for women's ministerial activism: never be too assertive, bury the lede, refuse to claim anything as your right. Yet the skit was also a political statement. The woman's minister's “fate” was rural ministry; she “had” to work double duty as the minister and her wife. Henrichsen recounted this song in her book, amplifying its audience greatly. It is the closest *Seven Steeples* comes to an explicit comment about the status of women's ministry.

¹⁰⁸Margaret Henrichsen, *Seven Steeples* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), 40.

¹⁰⁹Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution At Home* (New York: Avon Books, 1990); Judy Syfers, “I Want a Wife,” *Ms. Magazine*, Dec 20-27, 1971.

Henrichsen's arguments for women's ministry, when she did make them outright, had a strong churchwoman bent. She insisted that women's primary and natural work was familial, caring, domestic, and that women were happy to take on poor, underserved parishes, and leave the prestigious ones to the men. Men need not worry about women rushing into the ministry, she said in a speech, "with the primary function of women as mother and home-maker, there will probably never be undue numbers of women seeking their life work in this particular field."¹¹⁰ Yet Henrichsen also advanced an argument that these roles prepared women especially well for ministry. "A woman," Henrichsen wrote, "can meet sickness and grief with quick insight and gentle understand. Many a woman has quite literally sobbed at her troubles on my shoulder and then said, 'I'm glad you're a woman. I couldn't have done this if you had been a man.'"¹¹¹

There was also something about the asexual status of aged, widowed women that made them appealing ministers. Women's religious service has been tied to celibacy for millennia, an association reduced but not eliminated in Protestantism.¹¹² In type-written, stream-of-consciousness notes in her personal papers, Henrichsen meditated on this theme. In what was possibly preparation for a sermon, possibly a poem, she wrote:

Glad you're a woman—
Keeper of the hearth...
Chief job is to be womanly
Women are keepers of sacred
flame (Vestal virgins)¹¹³

It is worth pausing here, over Henrichsen's comparison of herself to a Vestal virgin. This particular analogy might, at first, surprise. Vestal virgins were pagan priestesses of ancient Rome,

¹¹⁰Henrichsen, "The Woman Minister, By One of Them."

¹¹¹Henrichsen, "The Woman Minister, By One of Them."

¹¹² Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction," in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in Jewish And Christian Traditions*, ed. Eleanor McLaughlin and Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 23.

¹¹³Index card, undated, Box 1, Folder 1, Henrichsen Papers.

an odd choice of comparison for a mid-century American Methodist. Why not analogize oneself to virginal figures more proximate to Christian ministerial history, Catholic women religious? At the time, however, Catholic nuns may not have been a tempting analogy. Anti-Catholicism was virulent in the 1950s—the ministerial reformation would be not assisted by comparisons to the cloister. Vestal virgins may have been the most proximate imaginative option for Henrichsen, as she tried to weave herself into a pre-modern history of sexless women’s ministry.¹¹⁴ To stretch the comparison even further, as historian Peter Brown has argued, Vestal virgins meant different things to their communities than did Christian virgins, and this difference also illuminates Henrichsen’s analogy. Early Christian renunciants claimed to represent the highest form of humanity, to be a model for how all Christians should live. Women renunciants made intentional decisions to enter an elevated state. Vestal virgins, in contrast, were conscripted into service, they did not choose it. The virgins of Vesta’s temple were not making a claim about how all women should live. Rather, they were important precisely because they were, in Brown’s word, “anomalous.” They had an exceptional role which served to highlight the importance of the unexceptional role for women: marriage and procreation.¹¹⁵ Henrichsen thought of her chastity and ministry in terms more consistent with the latter than the former. Her status as an unsexed widow was exceptional. She portrayed her ministry as a consequence of her widowhood: a path thrust upon her, not chosen. And her performance in her unusual profession served to highlight the centrality of marriage and family life for women. Marriage was an important marker for the ministerial reformers of the post-war era, but so too was marriage’s implications about sexual

¹¹⁴Perhaps the “enrolled widows” (sometimes “consecrated widows”) mentioned in 1 Timothy 5 would also have tempted Henrichsen, but there is so little mythos surrounding women in this service that she may not have even been aware of them.

¹¹⁵Peter Brown, *The Body and Society Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 8-9.

life. Though married women like Mossie Wyker made their case for inclusion, unmarried women and widows were preferred as ministerial subjects in these decades: their unusual sexual status seemingly more consistent with their unusual ministry.

Henrichsen managed to cultivate a remarkable audience for her message about women's ministry. When she left Boston, she likely did not realize that by relocating to coastal Maine she was on a path to intersect with the who's-who of the mainline establishment, many of whom summered in the area.¹¹⁶ Much to her surprise Henry P. Van Dusen, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York from 1945-1963, was a summer member of Henrichsen's congregation. (She recognized him at once, but it took her weeks to get up the courage to approach him after service). Henry Sloane Coffin, Van Dusen's predecessor at Union, visited Henrichsen's Sullivan church, as did the president of Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexander Zabriskie, and the Episcopal theologian Edward S. Gleason.¹¹⁷ Van Dusen and Henrichsen struck up a friendship, and, during her weeks off in the winter, Henrichsen would stay with him in New York City and take classes at Union. Henrichsen's Union Theological Seminary connections and successful book offered her a larger platform than her ecclesiastical status conferred. She spoke to the Women's Society at Riverside Church in New York City several times, and was a frequent speaker on the WSCS circuit in the New England area. For his part, Van Dusen was a supporter of the ministerial reformation, at least as early as his presidency at Union, which would have roughly coincided with his meeting of Henrichsen. Henrichsen invited him to attend her ordination, though his busy schedule interfered.¹¹⁸ Henrichsen's church in Sullivan was, in all

¹¹⁶See Hutchison's discussion of the importance of summer communities to the Protestant mainline in William Hutchison, "Protestantism as Establishment," in *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* ed. William Hutchison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 10-11.

¹¹⁷Henrichsen, *Seven Steeples*, 188. Edward S. Gleason to Margaret Henrichsen, August 15, 1964, Box 1, Folder 4, Henrichsen Papers. It seems likely that Henrichsen also attended Coffin's funeral service in New York City in 1954. "Service in Memory of Henry Sloan Coffin," Box 1, Folder 1, Henrichsen Papers.

¹¹⁸Henry Pitney Van Dusen to Margaret Henrichsen, telegram, May 26, 1949, Box 1, Folder 9, Henrichsen Papers..

likelihood, the only woman-led congregation that Van Dusen ever attended regularly. When, in 1952, Van Dusen told Mossie Wyker that his seminary was fully in support of women's ordination, one can imagine he may have been thinking of Henrichsen.¹¹⁹

Seven Steeples was itself a huge success. The book was reviewed in *New England Quarterly*, and, of course, *Woman's Pulpit*, and had a printing in London and a second edition in 1967. *Life* magazine ran a full feature on Henrichsen's life and ministry. (In thanks for the publicity, Houghton-Mifflin, Henrichsen's publisher, sent a copy of her book to the desk of Henry Luce.¹²⁰) Henrichsen was also profiled in *Zion's Herald*, the major periodical of New England Methodism. In subsequent years, other publishing houses tried to replicate Houghton-Mifflin's success with their own autobiographies of rural women ministers. Simon and Schuster published the autobiography of a Congregational minister, Margaret Blair Johnstone, in 1954. Harper Brothers published the account of Leila Anderson, another Congregational minister, in 1960. In 1955 a local press published the autobiography of another Maine woman minister, Hilda Ives, the widow who had encouraged Henrichsen to enter the ministry.¹²¹ After the publication of *Seven Steeples*, Henrichsen received recognition from several colleges: an honorary doctorate from Colby College in 1954, a distinguished citizen award from Bates College in 1956, an alumna achievement award from National College of Education in Evanston, Illinois, in 1956. The book had propelled her, if not to national fame, at least to the status of a local celebrity.¹²² Between her successful publishing and her remarkable connections in the Protestant establishment, Henrichsen had become the poster-child of the ministerial reformation.

¹¹⁹Wyker, *Church Women*, 54.

¹²⁰Henrichsen, "My Seven Steeples"; Undated letter to Henrichsen on Houghton-Mifflin letterhead, signature illegible, Box 1, Folder 4, Henrichsen Papers; "Face to Face" *Zion's Herald* 131 (May 20, 1953): 1-3.

¹²¹Margaret Blair Johnstone, *When God Says "No": Faith's Starting Point* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954); Leila Anderson, *Pilgrim Circuit Rider* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1960). Ives, *All in One Day: Experiences and Insights*.

¹²²"Margaret K. Henrichsen Becomes Another 'First,'" *Woman's Pulpit* 46, no. 3 (July-Sept. 1967).

Henrichsen had assumed her Methodist pastorates in the early 1940s with virtually no experience in ministry, no theological education credentials, and not even a strongly-articulated sense of calling to the ministry. Her rural churches and the Maine district superintendent had been sufficiently desperate for leadership, and the Methodist ministry not yet professionalized enough, that Henrichsen faced very little difficulty filling the role. Yet, women's ability to enter even the rural field of service began to constrict in the 1950s. The professionalization of the ministry, under the pressures of an increasingly educated laity and ecumenism, made trajectories like Henrichsen's much more difficult. In the late 1950s, it became clear that if women wanted to serve in parish ministries, they would first have to go to seminary. The following chapter follows them there.

Chapter III. *Crossing the Brook:*

Women, Religious Education, and Theological Schools, 1920-1950

Henrietta T. Wilkinson had always wanted to be a minister. When she graduated from college in the 1920s, she wished she could follow her male friends into seminary. But she was a Presbyterian in the American south and this path was forbidden to her. Although she was determined to work in the church in some way, she knew she could not be a choir director, and had no interest in being a church secretary. That left Christian education: the teaching and coordinating of a church's educational programs, such as Sunday school, Bible study, summer camps, youth groups, and adult education. In consideration of such a career, Wilkinson visited the General Assembly's Training School for Lay Workers in Richmond, Virginia.¹ The school trained foreign and home missionaries, Sunday School workers, pastor's assistants, Bible teachers, voluntary workers, and women's society leaders.² The students were almost entirely female. On her visit, Wilkinson was not impressed. She found the faculty overburdened and the paint peeling from the walls. Her dreams lay elsewhere. "Secretly," she remembered, "I knew that I wanted to be a minister." Her undergraduate transcript in her hand, she left the campus of Assembly's Training School (ATS) and marched directly across the street to Union Theological Seminary, a seminary in her denomination, the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). The students of the Training School and Union had a phrase for traversing these two campuses as

¹In 1958, General Assembly's Training School for Lay Workers was renamed the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, and in 1997 federated with Union Theological Seminary to become Union-PCSE. Finally, in 2010, the school was renamed Union Presbyterian Seminary.

²"The General Assembly's Training School for Lay Workers, Richmond, Va., Bulletin, Catalog" 4, no. 4 (January-March, 1924), ATS-PCSE Centennial Celebration Collection, <http://www.atspscecentennial.org/ats--psce-catalogs.html>

Wilkinson did. They called it “crossing the brook”—a reference the street that divided the two schools, Brook Road.³ Having crossed the brook, so to speak, Wilkinson found the academic dean of Union in his office. She asked if she would be able to take courses at Union, should she enroll at the Training School across the street. He informed her that she would be able to take courses in child psychology at Union, and ancient Greek, if she wished, but nothing else. No course offered by ATS could be taken instead at Union. Disappointed, Wilkinson wondered why she couldn’t take courses from the great professors at Union, why she had to settle for the school across the way. She enrolled at the Training School anyway.⁴

Between the Great Depression and the immediate post-war years, many women with ministerial aspirations like Wilkinson pursued religious education for their professional church work. Finding entrance to the ministry impossible or unlikely, in religious education women found an alternative model: service-driven employment at the parish level that garnered them some career stability and prestige. Professionals in religious education could expect to find employment overseeing or coordinating church education and childcare programs such as Sunday schools, Bible study courses, adult education, nurseries, day cares, and summer camps. Though not technically in ordained ministry, religious educators worked closely with parish ministry staff, would often have offices in church buildings, served as a counseling resource for troubled parents and children, and in many ways were the de facto ministers to the children of the congregation.

Religious education as a professional career between 1930 and 1960 was also a gateway, for

³Carolyn Ledford Ragans, Oral History, November, 2014, ATS-PSCE Centennial Celebration Collection, <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/audio-stories.html>. See also William Sweetser, *A Copius Foundation: A History of Union Presbyterian Seminary, 1812-2012* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 199, 434.

⁴Henrietta Wilkinson, “Bridges,” in *Voices of Experience: Life Stories of Clergywomen in the Presbyterian Church USA*, ed. Alice Brasfield and Elisabeth Lunz (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1991), 29-35.

women, to theological education. Despite Wilkinson's reticence about the Training School, it offered a curriculum not dissimilar to what Wilkinson would have received in studying to be a minister: courses in the Bible, ancient languages, evangelism, and church history. Likewise, though Union was mostly closed to Wilkinson, it was in close affiliation and proximity with the Training School. She could attend lectures and services there, socialize with the students and professors. As the twentieth century wore on, this proximity would increase, not only at the Training School and Union in Richmond, but at training schools and theological schools nationwide. These two types of institutions would eventually converge entirely, the former absorbed into the latter. By the 1940s, it would be unnecessary to "cross the brook" between women's religious training and men's religious training. They would be housed on the same side of the proverbial river.

The importance of women's professional education is often underestimated as a causal factor in the ministerial reformation in the United States. Two assumptions seem to preclude scholarly interest in the phenomenon. First, historians and sociologists have tended to limit their vision only to women in ministerial programs of study, that is, to the number of women pursuing Bachelor of Divinity degrees in any given period. When the data is assembled this way, it seems clear that women simply did not go to theological school in numbers of any significance before 1970.⁵ Some have concluded, therefore, that there is a "(non)relationship" between denominational rules about women's ordination, many of which changed prior to 1970, and women's presence at theological schools.⁶ The ministerial reformation, in short, must have had

⁵Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 19; Jackson Carroll, et al, *Women of the Cloth: New Opportunities for Churches* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 76-77; Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, MI: Cary Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 19. Chaves's argument here is in support of his larger point that rules about women's ordination are "loosely coupled" from the practice of having women ministers. Women were allowed, technically, to be ministers in most denominations far before they actually found seminary a compelling option. Thus, he argues,

little to do with theological education. Women may not have been attaining many Bachelor or Master of Divinity degrees before 1970, that much is true. But they were certainly attaining theological degrees, in particular the Bachelor or Master of Religious Education (BRE/MRE), and this training, contrary to common analysis, was not irrelevant in the reformation. Second, the entrance of women into theological schools is hard to craft a narrative around. This may be because women had actually very little trouble *getting in* to theological schools. With the exception of some well-known scandals in the nineteenth century, stories of overt admission struggles in the mainline are relatively hard to come by. The story of women's entrance to theological schools in the twentieth century has very few episodes of spectacular personal conflict. It is, in many ways, an institutional story, and it developed slowly, as institutional stories are wont to do.⁷

the rules bely the actual acceptance of women in ministry in most denominations, which was extremely limited. Chaves' example on this point is particularly ill-chosen, however. He cites the case of PCUSA, which awarded women full clergy rights in 1956. Between 1948 and 1962, however, PCUSA seminaries produced only nine women BDs a year. Chaves believes this indicates that women were not choosing ministry because of entrenched misogyny in the churches. Yet, as this chapter shows, these are the strongest years of Presbyterian Christian education. Women at this time had a viable option other than ministry, one in some ways more comfortable and prestigious.

⁷A brief note on terms is necessary. This chapter is concerned with the entrance of women into mainline divinity schools and seminaries—not Bible colleges, junior colleges, or other institutions with religious affiliations. Collectively, the accrediting body for seminaries and divinity schools refers to them as “theological schools” and I shall follow this convention. Divinity schools tended to be closely affiliated with major universities, such as Harvard Divinity School or Vanderbilt Divinity School, whose focus was the education of a Protestant intelligentsia: ministers but also professors of religion, theologians, and church administrators. Mostly founded in the Progressive era, divinity schools sought to rescue education in religion from what many considered to be the provincial backwater of the seminary. Seminaries, in contrast, primarily educated and trained the ministry, and frequently had denominational affiliation and financing, such as Union Theological Seminary in Richmond or Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. Divinity schools tended to admit women earlier than seminaries, and attracted them in larger numbers. Between 1961 and 1965, more than a quarter of all women who went to theological school attended a university divinity school, while only a tenth of men did so. This may have been because divinity schools had a reputation for sending their students on to careers other than the parish ministry—academia, ecumenical work, denominational governance, so women's presence was not as threatening to ministerial borders. Denominational seminaries, in contrast, produced a far larger percentage of parish ministers than did university seminaries and were in general slower to admit women, though this was far from always the case. The schools' trajectories with women students are similar enough that they can be generalized. See Jackson Carroll, et. al., *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 77-79. (There is some disagreement, however, about the claim that divinity schools admitted women earlier. In a history of women at Vanderbilt Divinity School, Kim Maphis Early suggests that denominational seminaries preceded university divinity schools in admitting and giving degrees to women. Carroll's opinion, however, seems more commonly embraced by historians.

This chapter argues that the story of the ministerial reformation must pass through the story of religious education in America. When we widen our historical vision beyond women in ministerial programs to include women's professional education in religious education (sometimes called Christian education) in the United States between the Great Depression and the 1960s, the importance of women's early presence at theological schools is suddenly apparent. Religious education was crucial for women's entrance to theological schools, for their professional growth and development during the mid-century, and for the cultural rewriting of the minister's role as one of *teaching* and *counseling*—more feminized roles into which women could easily slide.

The chapter makes this argument in three parts. The first part profiles the rise of religious education as a vocation connoting professionalism and prestige in the mainline between 1900 and 1930. The luminaries who advanced the importance of religious education—William Rainey Harper, William Adams Brown, George Coe, John Dewey and others—made the argument that ministers were, in essence, educators, and that education should be a central mission of the church. Their success with this argument, in first half of the twentieth century, had an unintended effect. By the mid-century, the professional credentials women gained with degrees in religious education, and religious education's improving reputation as a discipline itself, would present a generation of women in church work with the realization that their studies, work experiences, and professional goals were only a stone's throw away from those of the pastors they worked with. If ministers were educators, why couldn't educators be ministers? The second part of this chapter charts the effects of these arguments on theological education, particularly the rise of training schools for religious educators in the 1910s. Training schools mostly educated women

See Kim Maphis Early, "Women's Work" in Dale Johnson, ed. *Vanderbilt Divinity School: Education, Contest, Change* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), 199.)

for para-church careers, and focused increasingly on their religious education programs as foreign missions stalled in the 1930s. Many training schools were then absorbed into theological schools in the 1930s and 1940s, with whom they already had close relationships. The result of these mergers was the arrival of religious education—and its majority female students—at traditional theological schools. Crucially, these mergers occurred before those schools achieved the professional gatekeeping power accorded to them today. Until the 1950s, a theological degree would have been helpful for entering parish ministry or receiving an ordination, but it would not have been necessary in most mainline denominations. When theological schools did become more vital border guardians to the professional ministry in the 1950s, the schools found, somewhat to their surprise, that women were already enrolled. Finally, the last part of this chapter further details the implications of religious education's entrance into traditional theological education. Programs of religious education brought not only female students to theological schools, but also new pedagogical styles and the emerging fields of psychology and pastoral counseling. Religious education programs helped introduce pastoral counseling to theological schools, which served to gently feminize the profession of the ministry.

Above All Else a Teacher

Religious education as a professional field—a job with compensation and required qualifications—began around the turn of the twentieth century. Its antecedent was the Sunday school movement in the Victorian era, which shifted the location of childhood education in religious matters from the home to the church.⁸ Parish education had always had a prominent

⁸On the nineteenth century Sunday school, see Anne Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

place in some American Protestant communities, usually as a prerequisite to baptism and church membership. As revivals and conversion experiences shook Protestant America in the nineteenth century, churches that refused to participate in such evangelism turned increasingly to childhood education as an alternative solution to member retention.⁹ Gathering before, during, or after the regular Sunday service, Sunday schools collected the children of the parish together for a time of religious learning modeled on classroom learning, not on the sermonic model that their parents received. Though the Sunday school movement in the nineteenth century had male proponents like Horace Bushnell, the majority of teachers at the parish level were lay women, working on a volunteer basis. Henrietta Wilkinson's mother, for instance, a registered nurse, taught Sunday school as a lay volunteer during Wilkinson's childhood.¹⁰ Victorians considered women to possess pious and nurturing natures, suited to work with children and to children's moral upbringing.¹¹ Mothers were the ideal Sunday school staffers. Yet, by the turn of the century, a larger movement to masculinize the church began to touch Sunday school as well. In 1903, theology professors from the University of Chicago founded the Religious Education Association (REA), under the understanding that Sunday school needed a shot of historical criticism, scientific method, professionalization, and, implicitly, male leadership.¹² The REA

⁹Letty Mandeville Russell, *Christian Education in Mission* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 20-21. Religious education served a similar purpose for progressive churches during the fundamentalist-modernist controversies in the 1920s. Matthew Bowman describes the efforts of liberal evangelical religious educators like George Coe to substitute education and social science for traditional conversion experiences in the 1920s. See Matthew Bowman, *The Urban Pulpit: New York City and the Fate of Liberal Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), particularly 193-200.

¹⁰Wilkinson, "Bridges," 27.

¹¹Boylan, *Sunday School*, 114-116.

¹²Steven Schmidt, *A History of the Religious Education Association* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1983). That the founders of the REA were male, and that the Sunday School movement that preceded it had male philosophers, like Horace Bushnell, has led some historians to argue that religious education did not begin as a pink-collar profession, and only became one in the 1930s. However, given that the vast majority of the teachers in the earliest Sunday School movement were female, it seems more fitting to think of the male-filled decades between 1900 and 1930 as a blip on the radar rather than an originary moment. See Dorothy Jean Furnish, "De-Feminizing Religious Education: A Double Bind," *Religious Education* 71, no. 4 (August 1976): 355-62. Glenn Miller also narrates a decline of the field into a "pink ghetto." Glenn Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant*

began publishing a journal, demanding professional standards for Sunday school teachers, and petitioning theological schools to begin programs in education. When the REA was founded, there were no professional, salaried religious educators in the United States. Twenty years later there were about 800.¹³ The percentage of men in the field crept upwards in the same years, reaching parity with women by 1929. The title “Director of Religious Education” (DRE)—for a person employed by a parish to coordinate educational efforts—was popularized after 1910 at the lay level.¹⁴

Historian Conrad Cherry has argued that powerful mainline Protestants between 1880 and 1925, seeking to infuse American democracy and culture with the influence of the church through investment in prestigious universities, made the case that mainline, ecumenical Protestantism and education belonged together. Religion and education, they claimed, were close relatives on the tree of human culture.¹⁵ This aptly describes the attitude of religious education reformers in the era. Sunday school, to reformers such as William Rainey Harper, first president of the University of Chicago and founder of the REA, was not just a casual activity of the church, but an essential democratic pipeline for the church’s mission and purpose. Advocates for a revitalized Protestant religious education sought to place education on par with theology, Bible study, and language as a prerequisite area of study for future ministers. For Sunday schools, they recommended more rigorous, graded lessons, modern textbooks, and better teacher training.¹⁶

One REA member even described the four major movements in contemporary Protestantism in

Theological Education, 1870-1970 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007) , 581.

¹³Dorothy Jean Furnish, *DRE/DCE: The History of A Profession* (Nashville, TN: Christian Educators Fellowship of the United Methodist Church, 1976), 39.

¹⁴Furnish, “De-Feminizing Religious Education,” 356-357. Glenn Miller notes that in 1912, only about 12 people served as a “DRE”. In 1926, over 800 did. Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 569.

¹⁵Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Towards Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995).

¹⁶William Adams Brown, *The Church in America: A Study of the Present Condition and Future Prospects of American Protestantism* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), 279.

1926 as the social gospel, ecumenism, fundamentalism, and religious education.¹⁷ This fervor over religious education was of accord with a larger movement afoot in the United States, as education caught the eye of urban liberals as an essential social force in the Progressive era. John Dewey, the great American philosopher of education, was, not incidentally, a charter member of the REA.¹⁸

There were also Protestant rumblings over evangelism and member retention echoing in the halls of religious education's success. As Priscilla Pope-Levinson and Matthew Bowman have documented, Protestants of the Progressive era were engaged in heated debate as to the nature of Christian conversion. Was it best achieved through direct, experiential means—a born again or visionary experience—or through intellectual persuasion?¹⁹ Was the true crusader for the gospel an evangelist or an educator? The REA coterie were strong advocates for the latter. One member, William Adams Brown, a professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, argued in 1922 that the educator *was* an evangelist, and the religious education movement “a plea for another and better kind of evangelism.”²⁰ Brown's colleague George Coe, who directed an experimental Sunday school at Union Theological Seminary in New York, viewed Christian education almost sacramentally, as a vehicle through which God worked to provide salvation.²¹ As the missions movement faded after the Depression, mainline churches were coming to agree that local religious education, not global evangelism, was the key to member maintenance. The end of mainline missions opened what scholars of professionalism call a “jurisdictional

¹⁷William Adams Brown, “A Century of Theological Education and After.” *Journal of Religion* 6, no. 4 (July, 1926), 363-383.

¹⁸Dorothy Jean Furnish, “Women in Religious Education: Pioneers for Women in Professional Ministry,” in *Women and Religion in America*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass: Harper and Row, 1981), 311.

¹⁹Pope-Levinson, *Building the Old-Time Religion*, 6. Bowman, *The Urban Pulpit*, 193-218.

²⁰William Adams Brown, *The Church in America: A Study of the Present Condition and Future Prospects of American Protestantism* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), 279-283.

²¹Bowman, *The Urban Pulpit*, 197.

vacancy.”²² The element of church life once fulfilled by missionaries and evangelists needed replacement—religious educators stepped in to fill the gap.

The attempt to put religious education at the forefront of the Protestant interest and seminary education succeeded in the short term, principally between 1920 and 1960. It helped that religious education’s strongest advocates were themselves powerful figures in seminary education in the Progressive era. Harper, along with John D. Rockefeller, founded the University of Chicago in 1890 with the intent to wed progressive education to progressive Christianity. William Adams Brown, another leading REA member, held a professorate at Union Theological Seminary. Both men advocated for theological school reform, and a broader definition of what counted as “ministry.” Brown published an influential survey of American theological education in 1934 in which he argued that the minister “was above all else a teacher.”²³ Harper insisted throughout his career that the definition of ministry needed to be expanded to include teaching, administration, academia, music, and medical work.²⁴

In some denominational contexts, teaching in general already had cachet as a gospel calling, and here the plow of the REA found fertile soil. Presbyterians in particular had long had a close relationship to education. The minister in Presbyterian churches, which, since Presbyterian arrival in the colonies, had been required to have a formal, classical education, is technically termed a “teaching elder” and Presbyterians quickly caught the religious education bug.²⁵ Likewise, German and Scandinavian Lutherans, particularly those that came to form the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod in the United States, built large parochial school systems in the

²²Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.

²³Mark A. May et al., *The Education of American Ministers*. (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934), 11. As quoted in Gilpin, *Preface to Theology*, 118.

²⁴Schmidt, *History of the REA*, 29.

²⁵Randall Balmer and John R. Fitzmier, *The Presbyterians* (Westport, Conn.; London: Praeger, 1994), 31, 49.

1920s that required the employment of many teachers. Though these teachers were not technically considered the equivalent of ordained pastors, when pressured by the Selective Service during World War II to say whether the male teachers qualified as clergy for draft purposes, the Synod was quick to clarify that in their denomination, teachers were indeed “ministers of religion.”²⁶ The question of what that made the female parochial school teachers—which by 1954 was a majority of Lutheran school teachers—remained ambiguous.²⁷

For women, the impact of the rise of religious education was not usually remarked upon, but it was latent. If ministers were, in essence, *teachers*, and teachers could be properly called *ministers*, then Christian educators and Sunday school teachers might belong at seminary. Indeed, they might also belong in the ordained ministry.

Bridging the Brook

The founding of the Religious Education Association augured in a larger professionalizing trend for religious education. Schools and programs of religious education popped up to fill the demand for a trained Sunday school workforce. These schools, called missionary or lay training schools, were in general founded between 1900 and 1915, and most had majority female enrollment.²⁸ The General Assembly’s Training School (ATS) that Henrietta Wilkinson attended

²⁶Mary Todd, “Not in God’s Lifetime: The Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod” (Ph.D. diss, University of Illinois Chicago, 1996), 141-142.

²⁷Todd, “Not in God’s Lifetime” 143.

²⁸Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 210.

was founded in 1914.²⁹ In its inaugural year twenty-four women and four men took classes.³⁰ Many other training schools also got their start in the first decades of the twentieth century, including the Philadelphia School for Christian Workers (1907), Presbyterian College of Christian Education in Chicago (1908), and the National Training School of the YWCA in New York (c. 1906).³¹ Training schools came at a pivotal time both in women's professional education and in women's church work. The number of women receiving a professional education in America increased dramatically between 1890 and World War I.³² Experiments in women's professional education abounded, such as in the Chautauqua movement.³³ Training schools were the church counterpart to schools of teaching, nursing, and social work that educated many of these new professional women. Training schools were also the product of women's mainline missionary enterprises, which were at their peak before World War I. In 1915, one observer counted thirty-six missionary training schools exclusively for women, and seventeen for men and women, in the United States.³⁴

Training schools had much in common with evangelical (later fundamentalist) Bible colleges, which had begun to dot the nation in the 1880s, flourished in the 1920s, and which

²⁹William B. Sweetser, Jr. *A Copius Fountain: A History of Union Presbyterian Seminary, 1812-2012* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016); Samuel C. Jr. Shepherd, *Avenues of Faith: Shaping the Urban Religious Culture of Richmond, Virginia* (Tuscaloosa, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 2001).

³⁰*Dear Book of the Assembly's Training School for Lay Workers for Missionaries, Pastor's Assistants, Sunday School Superintendents and Teachers, Women's Society Leaders, All Christian Workers* (Richmond, Va: Assembly's Training School for Lay Workers, 1915), <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/ats--psce-catalogs.html>.

³¹Other examples include the Chicago Baptist Missionary Training School (c. 1881), Chicago Training School and Deaconess School (1885), Scarritt Training School of Kansas City and later Nashville (1892), Presbyterian Training School in Baltimore (1903), Women's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville (1907), Congregational Training School for Women in Chicago (1909).

³²Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 116.

³³Andrew Chamberlin Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism 1874-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). See also Andrea Turpin, *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of American Higher Education, 1837-1917* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2016.)

³⁴Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 208.

initially embraced co-education.³⁵ Training schools and Bible colleges shared a missionary emphasis, a practical educational style, a focus on Bible study, and a preference for short-term degrees. Yet, as historian Glenn Miller notes, training schools were distinguished from Bible colleges by denominational affiliations—the Presbyterian Church in the United States, in ATS’s case—and by their disinclination towards the dispensationalism that intellectually dominated Bible colleges in these decades.³⁶ Training schools relished their denominational affiliations, and frequently articulated a vision of their mission that accentuated their denominational contribution. In 1918, the Board of Directors of ATS described the fledgling school as meeting “a crying need in our Church” for the proper education of southern Presbyterian lay workers.³⁷ These denominational affiliations would become central in the years and the mergers to come.

Many training schools began with foreign and domestic missions as their focus, but they tended to be diversified, offering training in various lay careers besides mission work. ATS, for instance, had by 1915 more professors of Sunday school management and pedagogy than they had of missions, and in addition offered certificates in church secretarial work, women’s society leadership, and pastor’s assistantships.³⁸ These other degrees enrolled a substantial portion of training schools’ student bodies. Of the 49 students enrolled at ATS in 1918, only eleven were in training for foreign missions.³⁹ As missionary work languished after the Depression, many of the training schools focused increasingly on their programs of religious education. The Presbyterian

³⁵On Bible colleges and women, see Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God’s Army : The American Bible School, 1880-1940* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 129-131.

³⁶Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 207-208.

³⁷*Minutes of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States with an Appendix* (Richmond, Virginia: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1918), 28.

³⁸*Dear Book of the Assembly’s Training School for Lay Workers for Missionaries, Pastor’s Assistants, Sunday School Superintendents and Teachers, Women’s Society Leaders, All Christian Workers* (Richmond, Va: Assembly’s Training School for Lay Workers, 1915), <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/ats--psce-catalogs.html>.

³⁹*Minutes of the Fifty-Eight General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States with an Appendix*. (Richmond, Va: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1918), 28.

School for Christian Workers, for instance, began with degree programs in deaconess work, pastor's assistantships, and church secretarial work, as well as religious education. But by 1931 a Bachelor in Religious Education was the only degree offered.⁴⁰

Religious education appealed to women of the Progressive era for many of the same reasons as other feminized fields such as nursing and teaching.⁴¹ As a care profession that focused on children, it did not transgress much on the expectation that women's work should be nurturing work with the young, sick, or dispossessed. Many religious educators began their careers as teachers before realizing that religious education could combine their love of teaching and their love of the church. A survey in 1926 found that more than half of the nation's DREs had previously held salaried teaching jobs.⁴² Freda Gardener, who eventually taught religious education at Princeton Theological Seminary, started her career teaching elementary school. She happened to meet a woman studying religious education at ATS and, "As soon as I heard the term," she recalled, "I thought, that's the kind of education I would like to be a part of."⁴³

The Depression made religious education a pink-collar job, and in so doing forever changed the fortunes of the field.⁴⁴ Religious educators were never highly paid, their work was often part time, and seen as ancillary and secondary to the work of the minister. Young, professionally trained men with families to support fled the profession between 1930 and World War II. Some churches dispensed of the DRE position altogether, and infrastructure development such as the

⁴⁰Lois Boyd and R Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America : Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983), 78.

⁴¹On women and teaching, see Geraldine Joncich Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes : A Social History of Women Teachers in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2016).

⁴²Dorothy Jean Furnish, *DRE/DCE: The History of A Profession* (Nashville, TN: Christian Educators Fellowship of the United Methodist Church, 1976), 18.

⁴³Freda Gardner, Oral History, November 2014, ATS-PSCE Centennial Celebration, <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/audio-stories.html>.

⁴⁴Dorothy Jean Furnish, "Women in Religious Education: Pioneers for Women in Professional Ministry," in *Women and Religion in America*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass: Harper and Row, 1981), 312, 315.

building of classroom annexes came to a halt.⁴⁵ During the economic downturn, women were more willing to work part time, and for lower wages. By 1938, women made up 74% of the religious education workforce.⁴⁶ This gender disparity would hold in a similar ratio through the 1980s.⁴⁷

Although training schools prepared many satisfied, career religious educators like Gardener, they were also outlets for ministerial reformers like Henrietta Wilkinson. Although most theological schools admitted women by the 1920s, their attendance was not recommended, and any future in the ministry was strictly discouraged. Women with ministerial ambitions had begun making small inroads to theological schools in the mid-nineteenth century. Antoinette Brown Blackwell petitioned for admission to Oberlin's theology department in 1847-8, having previously attained a Bachelor degree at the college. She succeeded, but was not permitted to receive a diploma.⁴⁸ Olympia Brown faced similar battles at St. Lawrence in 1861.⁴⁹ Gustine Courson was admitted to Lexington Theological Seminary in 1895 over the protest of the president.⁵⁰ Anna Howard Shaw, a Methodist reformer, attended Boston University's School of Theology in 1876 without the financial assistance provided standard to male seminarians.⁵¹ Other theological schools made it clear women *could* attend, but would not be particularly welcome. The University of Chicago Divinity School admitted women from its founding, but made public announcements to the effect that women would be discouraged from ordination. Hartford

⁴⁵Furnish, *DRE/DCE: The History of A Profession*, 37-39.

⁴⁶Furnish, "Women in Religious Education," 312.

⁴⁷Furnish, "De-Feminizing Religious Education", 356-357. David W Danner, "A Data-Based Picture: Women in Parish Religious Education," *Religious Education* 76, no. 4 (August 1981): 369-81: 372-373.

⁴⁸Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown Blackwell, *Friends and Sisters : Letters 1846-93*, ed. Carol Lasser and Marlene Deahl Merrill (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 12.

⁴⁹Carol Bohn, "Women in Theological Education" (Dissertation, Boston University, 1981), 62.

⁵⁰On Gustine Courson, see "Disciple History Tells of Women in Seminary", *Woman's Pulpit* 42, no. 3-4 (July-Dec 1964): 8.

⁵¹Anna Howard Shaw, *The Story of A Pioneer*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

Theological Seminary also admitted women from their start in 1889, though only on the condition that women enrollees swear off entering the ministry.⁵²

Although Wilkinson wanted desperately to go to Union Theological Seminary in Richmond instead of the Training School across the street, she had already gleaned that a theological school would be a difficult place to be a woman. During her undergraduate studies at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, Wilkinson was asked on a date by a seminarian, likely a student at neighboring Columbia Theological Seminary. The outing did not go well. The young man rudely informed Wilkinson that he and his colleagues were praying for her, because they thought that she was a bad influence on the students of Agnes Scott, where she had recently been elected student body president.⁵³ Wilkinson had been considering enrolling at Columbia after her graduation from Agnes Scott. The experience with the seminarian, however, convinced her this was a poor idea. Training schools, with their majority-female student body, comparatively large numbers of female faculty, and the support of a woman's dean, were far more appealing to most women than the difficult path of a theological degree.

For a few fleeting years, training schools cornered the market in educating Christian educators. But the revival of interest in religious education that the Religious Education Association's founding in 1903 had jumpstarted would be too successful to be contained at the humble (female) training school. As religious education grew in professionalism, prestige, and male participation in the 1910s and 1920s, theological schools began to sense this shift in gravity and began to make room for religious education within their walls. Columbia University in New York, in loose affiliation with Union Theological Seminary, began supporting a laboratory

⁵²Pamela Salazar, "Theological Education of Women for Ordination," *Religious Education* 82, no. 1 (1987): 69–71. Perhaps because this condition was difficult to enforce, Hartford stopped doing so in 1920.

⁵³Wilkinson, "Bridges", 29.

classroom for the training of Sunday school teachers in 1909, which George Coe initially directed.⁵⁴ In 1910, Yale Divinity School established a department of Religious Education.⁵⁵ In 1911, the School of Theology at Boston University began a chair in the field. Newton Theological Seminary (later Andover-Newton) began a program in religious education in 1919.⁵⁶ By 1924, there were more courses in religious education at American theological schools than there were courses in evangelism.⁵⁷

The entrance of the Master or Bachelor in Religious Education (BRE/MRE) to theological schools introduced a novel idea to these institutions—that multiple types of professional training might be executed under the same theological school roof.⁵⁸ Yet this expansion in students and degree programs resulted in a variety of protective measures, lest religious education—and its women—creep dangerously onto ministerial terrain. Programs of religious education at theological schools were initially kept at a gentle distance from ministerial study, through a variety of bureaucratic means. The arrangement reflected the larger field of American higher education at the time. Schools that had tried their hand at co-education in the nineteenth century, such as Oberlin, Wesleyan, University of Chicago and Berkeley, began to seek ways of limiting female enrollment or inclusion in the 1910s and 1920s. Likewise, distinct sister schools sprang up in the 1930s at institutions such as Duke and the University of Pennsylvania.⁵⁹ As Andrea Turpin has argued, women’s entrance into higher education during the Progressive era did not immediately augur in a more egalitarian gender order. Instead, as women went to college,

⁵⁴Matthew Bowman, *The Urban Pulpit*, 194.

⁵⁵Glenn Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 570.

⁵⁶Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *A School of the Church: Andover-Newton Across Two Centuries* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 182.

⁵⁷Cherry, *Hurrying Towards Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism*, 41. See also Pope-Levison, *Building the Old-Time Religion*, 6.

⁵⁸This logic would be extended when seminaries began adding Masters of Arts (MA) programs and Ph.D. programs in the 1940s.

⁵⁹Nancy Weiss Malkiel, *Keep the Damned Women Out: The Struggle for Coeducation* (Princeton, 2018), 4-5.

colleges found ways to reinforce gender distinctions, to build walls between the purpose of women's education and men's education.⁶⁰

In similar fashion, theological schools crafted distinct, segregated religious education programs within their walls. These were complete with different course requirements, times to degree, and degree awards than the ministerial degree (which, at the time, was a three-year course of study resulting in a Bachelor of Divinity (BD)). Auburn Seminary in New York, for instance, created a "School of Religious Education" in 1921, with distinct degree requirements from students pursuing ministry. Yale Divinity School, likewise, offered two separate programs in religious education: one, a single-year of study for lay workers, and another, a Bachelor of Divinity in Religious Education for those pursuing ordination. Yale thus not only sifted the future Sunday school workers from future pastors, it also effectively separated men and women with shared interest in religious education.⁶¹ Berkeley Baptist Divinity School forbid women from the BD degree and from courses in homiletics into the 1930s.⁶² According to one historian, women studying religious education at Princeton Theological Seminary, Auburn, and San Francisco Theological Seminary were expressly prohibited from other degree programs.⁶³ Such barriers kept large numbers of women at an arm's length from the ministerial programs in seminary. One history describes the arrangement as "a coup for seminaries, for it brought them

⁶⁰Andrea Turpin, *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of American Higher Education, 1837-1917* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2016).

⁶¹See Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 570; Elizabeth Howell Verdesi, *In But Still Out: Women in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 119.

⁶²The school was later renamed American Baptist Seminary of the West. Marion Kline, autobiographical reflections, 1991, Profiles of Women in Ministry Project, Box 5, International Association of Women Ministers Papers, Burke Library, Union Theological School.

⁶³Bohn, "Women in Theological Education", 66. Another historian even suggests that the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, the birthplace of the religious education movement, supported several professors in the field but outsourced most of the actual training of religious educators to Northwestern's Education department, which was housed physically within the divinity school, but not, apparently, operated by it. See Schmidt, *A History of the Religious Education Association*, 74.

many women students without committing them to produce full-fledged clergywomen.”⁶⁴

The coup was, in the end, more of a pyrrhic victory. However hard the seminaries might have tried to keep clear boundaries between their BD men and their RE women, these barriers were often poorly defined and permeable, separated only, as ATS and Union were in Richmond, Virginia, by weak institutional borders and small geographic “brooks.” From their earliest beginnings, training schools and seminaries, nationwide, built bridges across these brooks. Faculty sharing was especially common. The faculty at University of Chicago’s Divinity School often lectured at the Baptist Chicago Training School. Faculty at Garrett Theological Seminary likewise taught at Methodist training schools in Chicago. The Women’s Missionary Union Training School and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville were tight-knit enough to share the same faculty entirely. And for at least the first four years of ATS, the faculty of Union assisted the school free of charge.⁶⁵ In addition, some proximity between future Christian educators and future ministers was generally thought to have positive social effects on both student bodies. Parishioners expected ministers to have wives with whom to share the work of the parish. No woman was a better candidate for a minister’s wife than a woman trained in Christian education. Auburn Seminary opened their School of Christian Education specifically “to put by the side of the pastor well-trained men and women who will be his intelligent and sympathetic helpers in this work.” In fact, Auburn’s religious education program mostly put young, marriageable Christian women by the side of the future pastor.⁶⁶ At neighboring training schools and seminaries, opportunities for social mixing were common. ATS and Union Seminary

⁶⁴Carl J Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1997), 143.

⁶⁵Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 209; *Minutes of the Fifty-Eight General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States with an Appendix*. (Richmond, Va: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1918), 28.

⁶⁶As cited in Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 118.

in Richmond shared a choir.⁶⁷ Union students would sometimes come over for dinner at ATS's dining hall.⁶⁸ ATS also hosted Union Seminary's annual football game, the Calvin Bowl, on their front lawn. (The Bowl conveniently put all the married men on one team, single men on the other, and female ATS students served as cheerleaders.)⁶⁹

These close relationships eventually eroded clear institutional boundaries between training schools and theological schools, and implicitly, between men's religious training and women's religious training in the mainline. In the 1920s and 1930s, theological schools and training schools began to consider formalizing their fraternizing. When missionary enterprises were stripped from female leadership and vested under denominational guidance in the 1920s, so too were many missionary training schools.⁷⁰ The shift in leadership brought about a sense of redundancy. If training schools were not, in essence, the spheres of women's religious training, what was their purpose? Perhaps the most prestigious training school in the nation, Lucy Meyer Rider's Chicago Training School and Deaconess School shifted to male governance in the 1920s against her better judgement. The school began admitting men for the first time and offering a BD degree. Less than fifteen years later, Chicago Training School was deemed insufficiently distinctive, and merged with neighboring Garrett Biblical Institute in 1934.⁷¹

The example of Chicago Training School is representative. In the 1930s and 1940s, seminaries began incorporating nearby training schools into their institutions. Historian Glenn Miller attributes these consolidations to the Depression and rising costs for seminaries and schools of religious education alike.⁷² The merger of Garrett Biblical and Chicago Training

⁶⁷"The Presbyterian Choir (ATS and UTS Shared Choir)", ATS-PSCE Centennial Collection, <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/choir.html>

⁶⁸Gloria Sutton Cauthorn, Oral History, November, 2014, ATS-PSCE Centennial Celebration Collection.

⁶⁹"Calvin Bowl", ATS-PSCE Centennial Celebration Collection, <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/calvin-bowl.html>

⁷⁰Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 216-218.

⁷¹Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 212-215.

⁷²Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 588.

School was intended, in part, to ameliorate both schools' financial woes, in addition to remedying the "duplication" between the institutions.⁷³ Other mergers served the interest of professionalizing the Sunday school force further. In 1937, the Presbyterian Church in the USA made an enormous effort towards the professionalization of their religious education staff by crafting a new category of church employee: the commissioned church worker (CCW). The CCW was required to have a four-year bachelor's degree, with at least two years of specialization in religious education. Candidates for the role had to appear in front of the presbytery for an annual examination, not unlike a ministerial candidate.⁷⁴ Consonant with this professionalizing effort, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA recommended in 1941 that Presbyterian seminaries set up graduate schools of Christian education for women within their walls. Instead of building a program from within, several theological schools complied with this recommendation by absorbing nearby training schools. Princeton Theological Seminary entered an agreement with Tennet College of Christian Education in Philadelphia in 1941 to take over their assets. In return for their buildings, faculty, staff, and students, Tennet requested Princeton carry on their mission: training women to become Christian educators. McCormick Theological Seminary followed suit in 1949, merging with the Presbyterian College of Christian Education.⁷⁵

As theological schools slowly embraced the field of Christian education, they were also embracing women. Initially, the schools felt they were gaining many tuition-paying students with little risk. Not only were women mostly enrolled in non-ministerial programs, but

⁷³"Proposals Concerning an Affiliation of the Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions with Garrett Biblical Institute", March 1934, Series 10, Box 21, Folder 3, Chicago Training School Digital Archives, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Archives.

⁷⁴Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 122-125.

⁷⁵Paulus Michael, "Historical Tour of Princeton Theological Seminary," Princeton Theological Seminary, 2002, <https://library.ptsem.edu/historical-tour-of-princeton-theological-seminary>. Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 588.

seminaries themselves were not yet the border guardians for the ordained ministry that they would come to be. In 1940, the majority of Protestant ministers in the United States had no seminary education.⁷⁶ But this was changing. A series of large-scale studies on the professional ministry in the 1920s and 1930s, including one authored by William Adams Brown, showed ministry lagging severely behind law and medicine in educational standards.⁷⁷ After World War II, higher education was within reach for more Americans, and laypersons began to expect their ministers to have education equal or exceeding that of their own.⁷⁸ The number of seminarians doubled nationwide between the end of World War II and 1950. By the 1950s, mainline denominations required a seminary degree—at the graduate level—for ordination.⁷⁹ Theological schools rebranded the Bachelor in Divinity degree as a Master in Divinity, tightened admittance requirements, and formed an accrediting body.⁸⁰ Like law schools and medical schools, theological schools became an essential gateway to the profession by the mid-1950s.

As it were, women already had their foot in the seminary door through their presence in religious education departments. Although the existence of women at theological schools was infrequently noted in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, historians would later come to see mergers with training schools and religious education departments as markers of gender change for the institutions. Garrett Biblical—now Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary—cites the moment it absorbed Chicago Training School as the time that women first came in substantial numbers to

⁷⁶E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Abassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 244.

⁷⁷W. Clark Gilpin, *A Preface to Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 113-114. These studies were Robert L. Kelly's *Theological Education in America* (New York: Doran, 1924), William A. Daniel's *The Education of Negro Ministers* (New York: Doran, 1925), and Mark May, William Adams Brown, and Frank Shuttleworth's *The Education of American Ministers* (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1934).

⁷⁸Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 246.

⁷⁹Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 246.

⁸⁰Cherry, *Hurrying Towards Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism*, 135.

the Methodist seminary.⁸¹ Princeton Theological Seminary tells the same story of its relationship with Tennet Training School.⁸² Women had arrived at theological schools, not by organized demand, nor through any intention on the part of the institutions, but, as one historian described it, “by accident.”⁸³ It was indeed an accident aided by a confluence of factors, principally the rise of religious education as a professional field and the incorporation of training schools into seminaries.

The theological schools that held out the longest against the admittance of women also tended to be those that did not merge with training schools and had no religious education departments internal to them. The Dean of Harvard Divinity, William Sperry, made that association quite clear in a report from 1949. Women had recently been admitted to Harvard’s schools of law and medicine. Defending the divinity school’s disinclination to follow in their footsteps, Sperry wrote: “Most women divinity students devote themselves to the field of religious education, presumably proposing to become employed in Sunday schools. We have no department of religious education as such, and there is at this moment no inclination to organize such a department, even had we the means to do so.”⁸⁴ A department of religious education, Sperry implied, functioned essentially as a women’s department. Without one, there was hardly any point in admitting women. Harvard would hold course on this position until 1956.

Of course, those theological schools that did begin religious education programs or incorporate training schools had some issues to work out. Training in religious education was seen by many, predictably, as a lower kind of education than what theological schools provided.

⁸¹“Our History”, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2018, 135. <https://www.garrett.edu/about-us/our-history>.

⁸²Paulus, “Historical Tour of Princeton Theological Seminary.”

⁸³Bohn, “Women in Theological Education,” 59.

⁸⁴As cited Ann Braude, “A Short Half Century: Fifty Years of Women at Harvard Divinity School” (Address, September 19, 2005), <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2005/09/19/short-half-century-fifty-years-women-harvard-divinity-school#>.

To compensate, seminaries impressed upon their new women students that standards would not be relaxed to accommodate them. The insistence was somewhat ironic, given that training schools had remarkably similar standards of admittance to theological schools in the 1930s and '40s—generally admitting some students without bachelor degrees but preferring those that had them. The conditions of Garrett's merger with Chicago Training School are particularly revealing. Women admitted in the future would have to stack up to the admissions and scholarship standards set by Garrett, not by the Training School. But in return, women would have access to all courses offered by Garrett and "enjoy in every respect, equal privileges with [students] of Garrett."⁸⁵ Although it is unclear from merger documents whether Garrett demanded that its new students train in the core curriculum, that provision was also common when seminaries absorbed training schools.⁸⁶ The irony of these mergers were particularly stark for some women. Methodist reformer Myrtle Saylor Speer applied to attend Garrett's ministerial program in 1915, but was denied entrance as a woman. Instead, Speer enrolled at the Chicago Training School. Later in life, she was amused to find that she was now classed as an alumna of Garrett.⁸⁷

A Profession of Care

Despite their confidence to the contrary, theological schools were not unchanged when they absorbed training schools and built religious education programs. For decades, the style of education for teachers of Sunday schools had differed dramatically from the style of education

⁸⁵"Proposals Concerning an Affiliation of the Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions with Garrett Biblical Institute", March 1934, Series 10, Box 21, Folder 3, Chicago Training School Digital Archives, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Archives.

⁸⁶Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 589. Miller says this trend of requiring MREs to train in the core curriculum played out in different ways, but was common to many institutions.

⁸⁷Lenore Hughes, "Myrtle Saylor Speer Paves Way for Women's Ordination" *Woman's Pulpit* (July-Sept 1977).

for a pastor. A professional degree in Christian education entailed the cultivation of practical skills, pedagogical strategies, and generally required fieldwork at a local Sunday school. ATS included “Large Emphasis on the Practical” in its list of principles in 1924. ATS boasted that their students received frequent hands-on instruction, “So when they go out to their work they should know not only what to do, but also *how* to do it.”⁸⁸ In contrast, theological schools of the 1920s and 1930s retained a strong sense that the pastor should also be an academic. Biblical scholarship, textual analysis, proficiency in Greek and Hebrew, theological literacy—these were the skills of the male seminarian. The focus on scholarship in ministerial preparation developed in the first half of the nineteenth century. As Karin Gedge and Donald Scott have argued, the academic emphasis of early theological schools had the effect of downgrading the importance of pastoral work in the profession.⁸⁹ The Progressive-era founding of university divinity schools initially accelerated the trend, reducing emphasis on preaching and encouraging seminarians to take coursework in other university departments. The most ambitious seminaries, those vested in prestigious universities, tried to form minds and encourage personal growth as much as they tried to train ministers for their profession.⁹⁰ Yet when theological schools incorporated religious education, they generally, despite their best efforts, also introduced a more practical style to their pedagogy, and turned their attention increasingly to parish work. As women came to seminary, so too did job skills training, and a new focus on care for the parish flock.

The most important example was the arrival of pastoral counseling at theological schools in the 1920s. Pastoral counseling, the practical skill of the pastor *par excellence* by the 1960s,

⁸⁸*Minutes of the Fifty-Eight General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States with an Appendix* (Richmond, Va: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1918), 28.

⁸⁹Karin Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 118. Donald Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 66.

⁹⁰Cherry, *Hurrying Towards Zion*, 5-6.

entered seminaries by way of religious education programs.⁹¹ Religious education and pastoral counseling had been blood brothers since the founding of the REA, and shared many institutional homes and founding figures. Much like religious education, pastoral counseling was an outgrowth of interest in the psychology of religion around the turn of the century. George Coe, a prominent REA member, was a disciple of G. Stanley Hall and Edwin Starbuck, early pioneers in the psychology of religion. In addition to running a Sunday school laboratory classroom, Coe also ran a department called “Religious Education and Psychology” at Union Theological Seminary.⁹² William Rainey Harper advocated putting religious education in touch with scientific inquiry, especially psychological research on childhood religiosity.⁹³ Ministers, some liberal Protestants began to argue, should consider personal and psychological counseling with their parishioners an essential, not incidental, part of their job. One advocate of counseling estimated that between the late 1920s and the late 1940s, 2500 ministers received training in the care of the psychologically disturbed.⁹⁴ By the late 1950s, clinical pastoral education (CPE) programs were standard curriculum requirements at theological schools, and more than 80% of theological schools offered courses in psychology.⁹⁵ Much like summer parish residencies, CPE programs placed seminary students in hospitals and psychiatric facilities as summer chaplains. Often under the supervision of social workers or psychologists, seminarians were encouraged to form personal connections with patients, to listen receptively, and to suspend their evangelistic goals. It was the dream of CPE programs, historian Stephanie Muravchik writes, that someday “all ministers could as readily and competently counsel as pray with a parishioner.”⁹⁶

⁹¹Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 589.

⁹²See Cherry, *Hurrying Towards Zion*, 17 and Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 589.

⁹³Schmidt, *A History of the Religious Education Association*, 14-15.

⁹⁴Anton Boisen, "The Minister as Counselor" *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1948): 19.

⁹⁵Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 242.

⁹⁶Stephanie Muravchik, *American Protestantism in an Age of Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 39.

The rise of pastoral counseling, later expanded to include the larger concept of pastoral care, was the tail end of a long transformation in the clergy's conception of its professional responsibilities. Andrew Abbott describes the transition, which began around the turn of the twentieth century, as a shift from an "evangelistic model" to a "pastoral model."⁹⁷ Contemporaries to the shift observed the phenomenon in similar terms. In 1956 Robert Michaelson described ministry as moving away from the centrality of preaching—the essential clerical skill of the Progressive era—to a more diverse skill set including pastoral care and religious education in the mid-twentieth century.⁹⁸ Anton Boisen, an early hospital chaplain, contrasted his counseling efforts to "the old evangelists of the Dwight L. Moody type" who brought the sick a message of salvation but did not attempt to understand their particular, personal problems as he did.⁹⁹ Historians, regarding this transition, have often described the change more ambitiously, as one from a Protestantism concerned with salvation to one concerned with self-realization.¹⁰⁰ Though Christian clergy have, as Holifield points out, been helping troubled souls since the origins of their office, in the mid-twentieth century Protestant America began to believe that this counseling, relationship-building work was the heart of the ministerial job.

Religious education and pastoral counseling—teaching and spiritual care—not only shared a common path into American ministry, but also mutually opened clerical doors to women. By the 1950s, the mainline ministry was swiftly becoming a care profession. This would have long-term

⁹⁷Andrew Abbott, *The System of Professions: An Essay on the Division of Expert Labor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 285.

⁹⁸Robert S. Michaelson, "The Protestant Ministry in America: 1850-Present," in H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, eds., *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956).

⁹⁹Anton Boisen, "The Minister as Counselor", 16.

¹⁰⁰E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 11; T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: The Quest for Alternatives to Modern American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Philip. Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952).

consequences for women's work in the church. Teaching, assisting the ill, and personal counsel, were, after all, activities that fell much closer to the female end of the gendered work spectrum than preaching, parish financial management, and liturgical leadership. Harvard theologian Paul Tillich went so far as to credit pastoral counseling, in 1960, with "reintroduc[ing] the female element, so conspicuously lacking in most Protestantism, into the idea of God."¹⁰¹ Seward Hiltner, an early doyen of pastoral counseling, pronounced his female students more naturally gifted than his male students, and bemoaned the difficulties women had entering the ministerial profession. "The *sine qua non* attitude in counseling—being prepared to look within the other person's frame of reference," Hiltner wrote in 1953, "appears to have, in our culture, a certain female flavor to it."¹⁰² Although the pastoral counseling intelligencia were mostly ordained men, there were notable exceptions. In the 1920s, Protestant laywomen's associations had helped organize and fund hospital chaplaincies, and Catholic women religious had a long history as "sister visitors" to the ill and infirm.¹⁰³ Helen Flanders Dunbar, a medical doctor and graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York, founded a pioneering CPE program in 1930. Women were admitted to CPE programs with little controversy from their inception, most commonly as spouses of ministers-in-training. Women's training schools that held onto life in the 1940s, such as the Women's Missionary Union Training School in Louisville, Kentucky, began offering coursework in CPE for their female students.¹⁰⁴ Of the first generation trained in the emerging discipline between 1925 and 1938, 12% were women.¹⁰⁵ This "female flavor," present from the

¹⁰¹Paul Tillich, "The Impact of Pastoral Psychology on Theological Thought," *Pastoral Psychology* 11 (February 1960): 19 – 20, as quoted in Susan E. Myers-Shirk, *Helping the Good Shephard: Pastoral Counselors in a Psychotherapeutic Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 62.

¹⁰²Seward Hiltner, "Ladies and Gentlemen" *Pastoral Psychology* 4, no. 34, (May 1953).

¹⁰³Wendy Cadge, *Paging God: Religion in the Halls of Medicine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 23, 33.

¹⁰⁴Paula Ellen Buford, "The Lost Tradition of Women Pastoral Caregivers from 1925-1967: A 'Dangerous Memory'" (Th.D. diss, Columbia Theological Seminary, 1997), 187-190.

¹⁰⁵Buford, *Women Pastoral Caregivers*, 42, 121.

inception of pastoral counseling in the 1920s, only grew stronger in the 1950s and 1960s. As Susan Meyers-Shirk argues, pastoral counseling, which initially embraced a language and style reliant on academic psychology in the 1920s, began to move towards thinking of itself—and therefore the ministry—as an instrument of care in the 1950s. “Pastoral care” in some cases even replaced “pastoral counseling” as the preferred term.¹⁰⁶ As care became the framework for understanding much pastoral work, women became more natural fits for the profession.

The ministry’s slow transformation into a care profession in the twentieth century has rarely received gendered readings, perhaps because of the notoriety of scholarship on the ministry’s “feminization” (or lack thereof) in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Yet it is evident that this transition was one that assisted reformers in their claim that they could do ministerial work as well as men. Many of the women trained in the earliest CPE programs in the 1930s and 1940s went on to become ordained ministers in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Dorothy Faust, Louise Long, Elizabeth Sullivan Ehling, Helen Tytus Terkelsen, Nora Calvert, and Thelma Dixon-Murphy.¹⁰⁸ Their training in CPE made them more attractive ordination candidates. Ehling, a Presbyterian religious educator with CPE coursework, recalled a question at her ordination interview in 1957 about her lack of training in Greek. A member of the committee responded that it was far more important “that Elizabeth Ehling speaks the living language of psychotherapy than the dead language of Greek!”¹⁰⁹ Likewise, ministerial reformers often cited the building of relationships with parishioners as a woman minister’s forte. “The ministering woman is one who has the qualities of motherhood,” one woman wrote in *Woman’s Pulpit* in 1940. “She will have the

¹⁰⁶Myers-Shirk, *Helping the Good Shepherd*, 172-200.

¹⁰⁷Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977) ; Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy*.

¹⁰⁸Elsie Gibson, *When the Minister Is a Woman* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 95; Buford, *Women Pastoral Caregivers*, 167, 224, 232-4, 253.

¹⁰⁹Buford, *Women Pastoral Caregivers*, 224.

ability to comfort, a deep understanding of human problems, a delicate intuition in dealing with sensitive souls.”¹¹⁰ In 1953, Mossie Wyker, an ordained minister in the Disciples of Christ, defended her vocation with a plea to the feminine nature of certain pastoral skills. “Would she [a woman minister] not be as good as a male minister in the realm of counseling, in pastoral calling, in performing wedding ceremonies, in ministry to children and young people in community services...?”¹¹¹ Other women ministers, especially those in parish ministry, hospital and college chaplaincy, reiterated their feeling that counseling was the woman minister’s strong suit.¹¹² Nora Calvert, a Presbyterian minister (ordained 1968) and CPE supervisor, argued that pastoral counseling was “very much a woman’s ministry”—sharing its contours with the relational work of the family and the home.¹¹³

The perceived feminine associations of CPE were also reflected in the fact that many of the earliest women trainees were minister’s wives, who often took courses in pastoral care alongside their husbands. A third of women who trained in CPE before 1938 were wives of ministers, and fledgling CPE programs were happy to admit them, despite their lack of seminary experience.¹¹⁴ The common understanding was that wives of ministers would have to—or already were—counseling parishioners in the “delicate offices before which the man minister confesses his inadequacy”—principally, the problems of other women.¹¹⁵ For several years in the early 1950s, Boston University School of Theology offered an eight-hour course for minister’s wives in pastoral counseling that enrolled 70 to 80 women. BU began the class at the request of the wives themselves, who had taken an interest in counseling after hearing about their husbands’

¹¹⁰Maie D. Ellis, “Women in the Ministry,” *Woman’s Pulpit* 18, no. 7 (Nov-Dec 1940).

¹¹¹Mrs. James (Mossie) Wyker, *Church Women in the Scheme of Things* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1953), 48.

¹¹²Pam Proctor and William Proctor, *Women in the Pulpit: Is God an Equal Opportunity Employer?* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 76, 96.

¹¹³As quoted in Buford, *Women Pastoral Caregivers*, 293.

¹¹⁴Buford, *Women Pastoral Caregivers*, 105-107, 121, 188-190.

¹¹⁵Ellis, “Women in the Ministry.”

coursework. The course was taught by Robert C. Leslie, an instructor in pastoral psychology at BU, who noted that “as minister’s wives, they will also be involved in counseling, not only in cases that come to their husbands, but in the casual experiences of a neighbor who has a problem to discuss.”¹¹⁶

Ultimately, the association of the ministry with professions of care—such as counseling, teaching, and social work—gave ministerial reformers leverage, a way to argue that they belonged. By the end of the 1940s, women specialists in religious education had nearly as much education as their peers in ministry, and far more education than the average Protestant minister ten years their elder. Women MREs were attending the same institutions as male BDs, admitted on the same standards. In the Presbyterian context, as one church historian noted, this meant that the educational standard for religious educators was “*nearly* on par with that for ordained clergy.”¹¹⁷ Religious education’s presence at seminaries had also helped rebrand the ministry as a care profession and the minister as a teacher. It had introduced pastoral counseling and skills training as central features of the minister’s professional education. Many religious educators, and those that valued them, had begun to realize that they were, for all purposes, in nearly the same profession as ministers. By the 1950s and 1960s, this vocational proximity began to be reflected in ritual form. Henrietta Wilkinson, the young woman who attempted to “cross the brook” between the Assembly’s Training School and Union Theological Seminary in the 1920s, wishing she could become a minister, graduated from the Training School and began her career as a director of Christian education. As Wilkinson married, had a family, and lived through her youth, her work and her degree in religious education gained prestige. In 1965, her denomination ordained their first woman minister, Rachel Henderlite, a lifelong religious educator, whose story

¹¹⁶“Wives Study Pastoral Work,” *Zion’s Herald*, October 28, 1953.

¹¹⁷Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 122-125.

is detailed in the following chapter. Wilkinson was finally ordained herself to the ministry shortly thereafter, at 65 years of age.¹¹⁸ Religious educators had become, not only the near equals of their ministerial counterparts, but potential ministers themselves.

¹¹⁸Wilkinson, “Bridges”, 35.

Chapter IV. *Ministers of Religious Education:*

Ordaining Bible Teachers, 1950-1965

In the 1950s, for the first time since the decline of missionary work, women seeking gainful employment in the mainline church had a stable option before them. With a degree as a Master in Religious Education (MRE) and a position as a Director of Religious Education (DRE), a single woman could support herself coordinating the educational efforts of a local congregation or parish: running Sunday school, Bible study, nurseries, day care, summer camp programs, adult education; managing a teaching workforce and curriculum; counseling with young adults and parents; coordinating with local social workers, public school counselors, and civic groups. She could expect to make about \$1700 annually—slightly more than the median salary for a working woman in 1950, and significantly more than the median salary for an ordained woman at the time (\$1090).¹

This chapter argues that, much in the way women's missionary power enabled women preachers of the Progressive era, mainline women's brief—but strong—power base in religious education enabled ministerial reform in the mid-twentieth century.² The chapter builds from the prior chapter's discussion of the institutional changes that religious education brought to theological education and the ministry, to the ways that ministerial reformers responded to these changes. First, this chapter follows the stories of several women who rode the prestige and

¹A survey of Congregational DREs in 1947 showed an average income of \$1776. Erwin Shaver, "Directors of Religious Education: A Survey" *Religious Education* 42, no 1 (Jan-Feb, 1947): 3-24. Salary cited is for "women clergy" in *Report PE-no 1B, Special Reports: Occupational Characteristics*, a report published in *Census of population: 1950: A report of the seventeenth decennial census of the United States*, (Washington: U.S. Govt Print Office, Bureau of the Census, 1956).

²Elizabeth Howell Verdesi ably articulates and names this power base in religious education in her work, *In But Still Out*. She does not, however, elaborate on the implications for women entering ministry. Elizabeth Howell Verdesi, *In But Still Out: Women in the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

education they had attained as religious educators right into the ordained ministry. It begins with Rachel Henderlite and Margaret Towner, both early Presbyterian ordinands whose status as Christian educators helped make them candidates for the rite in their denominations in the 1950s and 1960s.³ Likewise, one of the most famous woman religious educators of the century, Sophia Lyon Fahs, would also find that her status as an educator could be converted into an ordination. Towner, Fahs, and Henderlite represent, in some ways, the halcyon days of religious education when the field was respected so well as to seem transposable to the ministry. Yet their stories also indicate the weaknesses of religious education as a professional field. Henderlite, Towner, and Fahs were sought out by their denominations to be ordination candidates because of their status as educators. But Henderlite and Towner agreed to ordination because they felt acutely the insufficiencies of their authority in their churches as mere Christian educators. The second part of this chapter develops this growing sense of inadequacy in professional religious educators, and details the decline of religious education as a source of authority for women in the mainline in the 1960s. The stories of Olivia Pearl Stokes and Alice Hageman inform this section. Stokes, a powerful National Council of Churches administrator in religious education, would consistently refuse ordination throughout her career, until, in 1966, she felt she could refuse no longer. Alice Hageman stands as representative of the next generation of women, those who went to seminaries in the 1960s for Christian education, but who, once there, transferred to ministry-track programs. The overarching narrative of religious education in the twentieth century is that

³The attentive reader will note the prominence of Presbyterian women in this chapter. While the general trend is applicable to most of the mainline, in Presbyterian America the pipeline from religious education to ordained ministry was particularly fluid. Among all denominations, Presbyterians did the most to professionalize the religious education field over the course of the twentieth century. Presbyterians were also more likely to be educated and higher earners than the average American, and thus their daughters more likely to go to professional school. The fact that a Presbyterian pastor is called a “teaching elder”, one women educator-turned-minister pointed out, made her career move “a very plausible transition.” Louise Reed, “Women Honor Presbyterian Cleric” *Washington Post*, Oct 1976. Reed was quoting Jeanne Clark, an associate pastor at Providence Presbyterian Church.

it professionalized just enough to gain its practitioners entrance into a ‘higher’ calling, and then fell swiftly into irrelevancy by comparison.

Chosen for Ordination: Henderlite, Towner, and Fahs

This chapter, like the last, begins with a young woman arriving at the General Assembly’s Training School in Richmond, Virginia, in 1944.⁴ She was not enrolling as a student, however, but beginning employment as a professor. Only thirty-eight, Rachel Henderlite’s road to Richmond was paved with academic prestige. She was born to a Presbyterian minister and his wife in North Carolina in 1905. She deeply revered her minister father. “I was a P.K. [preacher’s kid] and I thank God for it,” she once wrote.⁵ Like most of the women at the Training School, Henderlite was a southern Presbyterian, a member of Presbyterian Church in the US (PCUS). As a young woman, she attended Agnes Scott College, a women’s college in Decatur, Georgia. She chose a career that was, for women of her day, “quite common practice”: religious education.⁶

Specifically, Henderlite wanted to teach Bible in small women’s colleges and junior colleges. A woman headed the department of religious education at Agnes Scott, a potential role model, but Henderlite thought her teaching was terrible. “I think maybe the reason I went into teaching Bible is I thought, heaven’s sakes, it sure can be done better than that!”⁷ Other influences were more direct. In college Henderlite attended YWCA and YMCA conferences, encountering

⁴In 1958, the school was renamed the Presbyterian School of Christian Education. In 1997 it merged with neighboring Union Theological Seminary, itself later renamed Union Presbyterian Seminary.

⁵Carol Lakey Hess and Estelle Roundtree McCarthy, “A Life Lived in Response: Rachel Henderlite: Christian Educator, Advocate for Justice, Ecumenist, and First Woman Ordained in the PCUS” *American Presbyterians* 69, no. 2 (1991): 134.

⁶Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Rachel Henderlite Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Pearl Digital Collections. (Hereafter Henderlite Papers).

⁷Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

important ecumenical figures such as Kirby Page, John R. Mott, Harry Emerson Fosdick, and E. Stanley Jones.⁸ Another female professor at Agnes Scott made a habit of inviting her students to her apartment on Sunday evenings to meet and talk. Henderlite recalled the evenings were “like a peepshow into a world of forbidden ideas”—ideas that included the emancipation of women.⁹

In her senior year at Agnes Scott, Henderlite contracted tuberculosis, and moved home to convalesce and to work with her father as an assistant to his ministry. Henderlite’s father was a Southern Presbyterian pastor in Gastonia, North Carolina. Father and daughter would talk about predestination and grace over the dinner table, in the car, in his study, wherever they found themselves.¹⁰ Once recovered, Henderlite attended Biblical Seminary of New York, a missionary and Bible teachers’ training school which had, since its founding in 1899, mostly educated women, though some men attended as well.¹¹ In the church at the time, she recalled, “There was no place for a woman minister. But there was a place for a woman teacher.”¹² Henderlite taught at several junior colleges after her graduation in 1936, but returned home once again to care for her ailing father. When he died in 1941, Henderlite enrolled at Yale Divinity, in a doctoral program. Feeling as if her ability to teach the Bible was limited by her lack of theological knowledge and church history, she avoided coursework in Christian education—she knew she did not want, ever, to be a director of Christian education at the parish level. She pursued Christian ethics as a course of study instead. This decision made her the student of H. Richard

⁸Rachel Henderlite, “Reflections of a PK” in *What Faith Has Meant to Me*, ed. Claude A. Frazier, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 78.

⁹Henderlite, “Reflections of a PK”, 78.

¹⁰Henderlite, “Reflections of a PK”, 77.

¹¹Julie Kind and Ruth Tonkiss Cameron, “New York Theological Seminary: Biblical Seminary of New York Records 1881-1973, Finding Aid” Burke Library Archives at Union Theological Seminary, New York, 2014, https://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/locations/burke/fa/misc/ldpd_11693337.pdf

¹²Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

Niebuhr, which she regarded as one of the best things to ever happen to her.¹³ It also landed her in the courses of Liston Pope, a theologian who had built his career off of a book, *Millhands and Preachers*, which, ironically enough, profiled Henderlite's hometown, Gastonia, and critiqued her father and the southern church's deference to the owners of the cotton mills.¹⁴ Henderlite would come to agree with Pope that the church needed to do more for the millhands of Gastonia, in whatever form they took.

In the early 1940s, there were a few women at Yale Divinity, both in BD programs and, like Henderlite, in doctoral programs. Though Henderlite remembers a friendly environment for herself, perhaps eased by the fact that she was not on a ministry track, the women did face logistical difficulties. Yale Divinity provided no housing for women at the time, so the women congregated in a house leased by the Disciples of Christ, ostensibly for their female seminarians and married students. The women called it the "Disciples House," but a series of Presbyterian women seminarians lived there, including Henderlite. One room was eventually nicknamed the "Presbyterian room" in their honor.¹⁵ The women of Yale Divinity were hardly alone in their struggle to subsist. The theme runs through the history of women at American theological schools. Anna Howard Shaw, who attended Boston University School of Theology in the 1870s, famously almost starved trying to pay rent. Women seminarians at Union Theological School in New York made do with only one ladies bathroom on campus until the 1960s. (When the plumbing was eventually renovated in 1965, Union circulated a notification to the students explaining that when the buildings were built in 1919, "it was not evident that ladies were *here to*

¹³Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

¹⁴Henderlite, "Reflections of a PK", 80.

¹⁵Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

stay. Now we know they are and we are taking this step in witness to our faith.”¹⁶⁾

After several years teaching Bible at junior colleges, Henderlite came to ATS in Richmond. At ATS, Henderlite taught Christian ethics and Christian education. Although the students were mostly women, when she arrived Henderlite was the only woman faculty member (out of roughly ten professors), with exception of the women’s dean. When teachers at neighboring Union Theological Seminary went on sabbatical, Henderlite was sometimes asked to fill in, “crossing the brook” in her own way, from ATS to Union. As a professor, Henderlite was stoic, calm, and serious, but her humor would burst through at unexpected moments. Her students loved her; they called her “Miss H.” (“I really almost sort of worshiped her, which wasn’t good,” one former student recalled.¹⁷⁾ Henderlite held gatherings in her apartment for the young women for serious theological discussion, much as her own professor had years before.¹⁸⁾

Henderlite’s brook crossings sometimes made it plain that she did not quite belong on the other side. Within her first few years at ATS, Henderlite was asked to join a speaker series held at Union’s chapel. When she saw the list of fellow speakers, she was honored to be included. Her peers had their lectures listed in the church bulletin as “sermons.” But when Henderlite arrived on the day of her speech, the bulletin read, “Talk, Ms. Henderlite.” She was asked to wear a hat, and to give her “talk” from behind a lectern on the floor, instead of the pulpit.¹⁹⁾ Such requests were hardly unusual in the history of women’s preaching, which is filled with stories of such arrangements, some voluntary, some coerced. Henderlite’s experience, which she recalled with

¹⁶⁾Beth Rhude, “Responsibility of Women in a Changing World: An Address to AAWM,” *Woman’s Pulpit*, December 1965.

¹⁷⁾Elizabeth Root Rice, Oral History, November 2014, ATS-PSCE Centennial Celebration Collection, <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/audio-stories.html>.

¹⁸⁾Katherine Womeldorf Paterson, Oral History, November 2014, ATS-PSCE Centennial Celebration Collection, <http://www.atpscecentennial.org/audio-stories.html>.

¹⁹⁾Memorial Service for Rachel Henderlite, 1991, Box 9, Folder 7, Henderlite Papers.

humor thirty years later during a convocation address (from the same pulpit she was originally denied), is a particularly late example, though by no means unique.²⁰ Rhetorician Roxanne Mountford has pointed out that the “rhetorical space” of the pulpit has been historically gendered male, sometimes inviting protective action from men such as the kind Henderlite encountered, but often doing that work itself. The pulpit’s maleness has been so overwhelming, Mountford argues, that women preachers and ministers have often chosen not to stand there, preferring to create their own rhetorical spaces external to churches or from church floors.²¹ Henderlite clearly made no such choice in the 1940s, though she delivered her convocation address in the 1970s from the same pulpit she was previously barred from—an act of reclamation.

Henderlite was also a transgressive figure in terms of race relations in the urban south. In Richmond, she helped found a new church, All Souls Presbyterian, to which she developed strong ties. The congregation was majority black, the first integrated PCUS congregation in Richmond (and according to All Souls, the first integrated church of any denomination in Richmond).²² Henderlite was one of two white members when the church was founded in 1952, and by the mid-1960s Henderlite was one of eleven white members out of over 300. Henderlite’s civil rights activism was not limited to Richmond. She participated in the March on Washington in 1963, and also marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1964.²³

Henderlite never wanted to do parish work, and knew especially that she did not want to be a

²⁰Reverend Prathia Hall recounts being asked to give sermons from the floor as late as the 1970s and 1980s. Courtney Pace Lyons, “Freedom Faith: The Civil Rights Journey of Dr. Prathia Hall” (Ph.D. diss, Baylor University, 2014). 217.

²¹Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005). See also Elizabeth Ursic, *Women, Ritual, and Power: Placing Female Imagery of God in Christian Worship* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014); Lisa Shaver, *Beyond the Pulpit: Women’s Rhetorical Roles in the Antebellum Religious Press* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

²²All Souls claims to be “the first integrated church in Richmond” on its Facebook page.

²³Rachel Henderlite, “The March to Montgomery,” *Presbyterian Outlook* 147, no. 16 (April 19, 1965).

minister. Yet her academic credentials and experience in Christian education were forming her into the perfect ordinand. In the Presbyterian context, religious education thrived during the 1950s. Historian Elisabeth Verdesi has argued that, though religious education held some prominence in prior decades, after 1950 it became “the most dynamic program area in the Presbyterian Church.”²⁴ Alongside the professionalization of the field and its incorporation into prestigious seminaries, the midcentury also saw frequent Sunday school curriculum reform and the beginnings of denominational youth fellowships, like the Westminster Foundation.

Henderlite was in the right field at the right time, and, in addition, had a doctorate and a professorate to her name. In 1959 Henderlite took a leave from ATS to serve on PCUS’s Board of Christian Education, directing Sunday school curriculum development. This denominational appointment further raised her profile. In 1964— eight years after their northern brethren— PCUS approved the ordination of women at General Assembly. It was not immediately apparent which women would compose the initial class inducted into this role. Unlike their northern comrades, PCUS had not previously approved the ordination of women as deacons before they approved their ordination as elders. Yet as it happened, the initial ordinations in both denominations would bear striking resemblances to one another.

When Henderlite found out about the new options for women, she began to consider ordination. She still had no desire to do parish work, or to preach, or to administer sacraments. Ordination appealed to her for a more basic reason: job security. Ordained faculty at ATS could attend General Assembly as delegates and vote there. Likewise, as part of their ordination exams, Henderlite’s fellow faculty members had been vetted by the denomination and confirmed in their orthodoxy. No one had ever vetted Henderlite in that manner. The problem became apparent to

²⁴Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 141-143.

her in her early years at ATS. Henderlite had been assigned to teach the introductory Old Testament course, a challenging assignment, since “when you get into Genesis you shake the students to death.” Some local missionaries did not like the way Henderlite taught the course, and raised quite a stir in protest. Henderlite felt exposed by the criticism. She had also learned that ordination could confer job security in other ways, especially when she discovered she did not make the same salary as her male colleagues at ATS.²⁵

Yet still, Henderlite did not seek out ordination—ordination sought her out. In 1964, Henderlite was working at her office at the Board of Christian Education, a small room on the fourth floor of a building in downtown Richmond.²⁶ Unannounced, it seems, a committee from the Hanover Presbytery of Virginia marched into her office. The men asked Henderlite if she would like to be a candidate for ordination in their presbytery. Hanover had a reputation as a progressive presbytery. The presbytery enjoyed “being a little ahead, being the vanguard,” Henderlite remembered. She agreed to be PCUS’s first female ordination candidate. One of the chairmen of the candidate committee was a former student of Henderlite’s. She said to him with a grin, “don’t forget that I gave you an ‘A’ in ethics.”²⁷

Scholars of ritual have long emphasized the import of the setting or location for ritual events. Rituals, Jonathan Z. Smith argues, draw our attention to certain things over other things, much like architecture. The structure of a space and ritual action that occurs within a space thus mutually contribute to one project—the training of our attention—and are therefore quite vital to

²⁵Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

²⁶“Woman Minister Foresees Major Changes in Church” *Greensboro Daily News*, May 14, 1965.

²⁷Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

one another.²⁸ In Henderlite's case, the location and thus in some sense the focus of her ordination was disputed. Hanover Presbytery wanted to ordain Henderlite at presbytery meeting.²⁹ Presbytery meeting would have been an unusual venue for such an event. The meetings were composed of ordained representatives from each congregation in the presbytery, and held roughly twice a year to make decisions for the churches in the region. The meetings were governed by procedural rules and were mostly dry, clerical affairs that could run a full day. Hanover's desire to ordain Henderlite in those conditions likely suggested that the presbytery sought to revel in their own progressive success and saw Henderlite's ordination as a product of their own efforts. Having the ceremony at presbytery meeting would also have protected the ordination from wide criticism—no lay persons would be likely to be in attendance. To ordain Henderlite in presbytery meeting was, in part, to hide her ordination from the larger world, to make it a celebration between clergy alone.

Henderlite did not warm to the suggestion. She insisted her ordination take place at All Souls instead.³⁰ All Souls had symbolic resonance over and beyond its status as Henderlite's home church community. She took great pride in the congregation at All Souls, both for its racial integration and for its education level. In addition, the only real resistance that Henderlite encountered to her ordination derived not directly from her gender, but from her social justice activism. In January of 1965, Henderlite had received a unanimous confirmation vote from the presbytery that she had passed her ordination examination. A final confirmation vote would take place in May. In March, however, Henderlite received a letter from a member of the presbytery,

²⁸Jonathan Z Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Ursic, *Women, Ritual, and Power: Placing Female Imagery of God in Christian Worship*.

²⁹Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

³⁰Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

Stuart Sanders II, a businessman in Richmond, who had voted to pass her examination a few months prior. Sanders had seen Henderlite participating in a march in Richmond on March 15, 1965, and, he wrote, “I just want you to know that I shall regret for many a year my voting for your ordination.”³¹ The march that raised Sanders’s ire was organized in response to the violence in Selma, Alabama. On ‘Black Sunday’ in Selma, the week prior, many were injured and a white minister, James Reeb, was killed. Students from two seminaries—one contingent from UTS and one from the historically black Virginia Union University—led the march in Richmond. Beginning at Virginia Union and making its way to the state capitol, the march gathered 300 demonstrators, of which Henderlite brought up the rear.³² She was perhaps exceptionally visible because only 30 or 40 of the marchers were white. Henderlite wrote back pleasantly to Sanders that they seemed only to disagree on means, not on ends.³³ And three days later, unfazed, Henderlite traveled to Selma to begin the long march with Martin Luther King Jr. to Montgomery on March 25, 1965. When asked why she had gone, she responded that she could not just sit at her desk.³⁴

Henderlite’s ordination at All Souls took place May 12, 1965. The optics could not have been more distant from those that Hanover Presbytery originally suggested. On the night of the ordination, the church was filled to burst with equal numbers of black and white community members, about 300 persons, and far more lay members than clergy.³⁵ Henderlite held the service in the evening, after work, so as many people as possible could attend.³⁶ Dr. Holmes Rolston,

³¹Stuart Sanders II to Rachel Henderlite, March 15, 1965, Box 8, Folder 1, Henderlite Papers.

³²Allan Jones, “700 March in Four Cities: Largest Virginia Crowd Here,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, March 16, 1965.

³³Rachel Henderlite to Stuart Sanders II, March 22, 1965, Box 8, Folder 1, Henderlite Papers.

³⁴Rachel Henderlite, “The March to Montgomery,” *Presbyterian Outlook* 147, no. 16 (April 19, 1965).

³⁵“A Woman in the Pulpit” *Gastonia Gazette*, May 17, 1965.

³⁶Rachel Henderlite interview by Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge, Austin, TX, January 24, 1977. Box 9, Folder 4, Henderlite Papers.

who gave the opening prayer, noted in his preamble how racially integrated the audience was. A black man, Lawrence Smith, delivered the charge of her ministry—a choice interesting both for Smith’s race and the fact that he was not, himself, a minister. The coverage of the event in the Associated Press played up Henderlite’s ordination as “a ceremony that crossed lines of race as well as sex.”³⁷ This was, no doubt, the ritual focus that Henderlite intended.

In contrast to how assertive Henderlite was about the location and conditions of her ordination, she was shockingly ambivalent about its occurrence at all. “I have no zeal to be the first ordained woman in our church and wish it were not so,” she wrote late in 1964, “but I do feel that there is some compulsion to take advantage of this opportunity and responsibility which has been opened to us.”³⁸ In her benediction at the ordination service Henderlite expressed further concerns. “May I make a personal confession to you?” she asked. “It is that, although I recognize the call to the ordination to the ministry of the Word that has come to me, I leave the ranks of the laity with serious misgivings.” Ordination was not an uncomplicated promotion. The New Testament, Henderlite argued, tended to side with the oppressed and critiqued ecclesiastical authority. She would have to stay vigilant to remain in solidarity with Christ and the marginal. Perhaps in this spirit of humility, Henderlite wore a dress to the ceremony instead of pulpit robes.³⁹ Her skepticism towards institutional authority—even her own—presaged similar concerns that would emerge in full force in the ministerial reformation in the 1970s (as considered in Chapter 6). Like the ministerial reformers that would follow her, Henderlite resolved this tension by appealing to a higher power, one dictating her path. Though ordination might confer certain hazards, “the choice was not mine, as it was not yours when God called you

³⁷“A Woman in the Pulpit” *Gastonia Gazette*, May 17, 1965.

³⁸Rachel Henderlite to Mrs. H. Kerr Taylor, November 4, 1964, Box 8, Folder 2, Henderlite Papers.

³⁹“Women on the Go: Dr. Rachel Henderlite plans extraordinary ordination”, *The Courier-Journal*, Louisville, KY, May 2, 1965.

to be one of his elders.”⁴⁰

After the ordination, Henderlite moved to Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and become there the first full-time woman seminary professor in a PCUS seminary. (Her professorate at ATS, according to the press coverage of her ordination, did not count). She received a barrage of congratulations on her ordination, including one from Mossie Wyker, the former president of Church Women United and an ordained minister in Disciples of Christ (see Chapter 2). The American Association of Women Ministers also wrote to her offering their congratulations. Misunderstanding Henderlite entirely, they asked for a picture of her, “preferably in a pulpit robe (perhaps taken at the service).”⁴¹ They also encouraged her to become a member of AAWM. In the mid-1960s, AAWM remained committed to full institutional inclusion for women ministers as a barometer of their success (see Chapter 1). Henderlite’s ambivalence about her own ordination would not have played well with the AAWM crowd. Nor would their conviction in their own righteousness, which always bordered on snobbery, have appealed to the perennially humble Henderlite. If Henderlite did send AAWM a picture, they did not publish it.⁴² And, when *Woman’s Pulpit* ran a story about Henderlite, they did not mention her as a member.

Despite her reticence about ordination, Henderlite recommended it to her female students, especially those pursuing religious education, for the rest of her life. One of those students was Louise Farrior, whom Henderlite had as a student at ATS in the 1940s. After graduating, Farrior worked with Henderlite on curriculum for the Board of Education, and then followed her into the ministry. “I think her ordination cinched my decision to resume seminary studies,” Farrior

⁴⁰Rachel Henderlite, sermon, “...But Did Not Go”, May 12, 1965, Box 8, Folder 3, Henderlite Papers.

⁴¹American Association of Women Ministers to Rachel Henderlite, July 7, 1965, Box 8, Folder 1, Henderlite Papers.

⁴²“Called to Seminary Faculty”, *Woman’s Pulpit*, July-Sept, 1965.

recalled. She was ordained in 1967.⁴³

Like Rachel Henderlite, Louise Farrior, and Henrietta Wilkinson, many early Presbyterian ordinands had backgrounds in religious education. Margaret Towner was the director of Christian education at First Presbyterian Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania when she was ordained to the ministry in 1956, the first woman in the northern section of the Presbyterian church, PCUSA. Much like Henderlite, Towner pursued ordination at another's suggestion. Her pastor from her hometown church in Syracuse, New York, wrote to her in June of 1956 and recommended that Towner initiate the process for an ordination. Several months had passed since the General Assembly voted, in the spring of 1956, to approve women's ordination, and Towner's former pastor thought the clock was ticking. It would be better for the church as a whole, he argued, for the ordination of women to begin sooner rather than later. Why not begin with her?⁴⁴

In 1956, Margaret Towner was a short, unmarried, powerful woman of 31. She was an excellent athlete and had interests in photography, music, and medicine. She eventually decided that church work would be her future, and she enrolled at Union Theological Seminary in New York for a three-year Bachelor in Divinity program, graduating in 1953. Everything about Towner's career, even her decision to pursue the BD, was directed towards her future as a Christian educator. In the early 1950s, the reputation of Christian education in Presbyterian circles was at its peak. Towner even had some professional status as a Commissioned Church Worker. The irony, of course, was that Christian educators had come to believe that their

⁴³Louise H. Farrior, "Call to Decision" in *Voices of Experience: Life Stories of Clergywomen in the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, ed. Alice Brasfield and Elisabeth Lunz (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1991), 44-45.

⁴⁴Deborah Block, "Wearing the Robe," in *Celebrating Our Call: Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women*, ed. Patricia Lloyd-Sidle (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2006), 22.

profession's importance dictated they attain the very best theological training. In 1967, Elsie Gibson noted in her study of women in ministry that many women intending to pursue Christian education were seeking ordinations. Her survey revealed four common reasons why. First, women thought ordination would raise the status of the religious education field as a whole. Second, they saw their roles *as* ministerial roles, and so believed they should have ministerial training. Third, they thought more highly of the education that a BD would offer them; that it would, ironically, prepare them better for teaching than the MRE. Finally, they wanted to develop a 'team ministry' in their parishes.⁴⁵ Towner, at one point or another, articulated all four of these arguments. Of her decision to pursue a BD, she recalled that she "felt that only by taking the same courses as a future pastor would I receive adequate training as a Christian educator."⁴⁶ The comment spoke volumes about the lesser status of the MRE.

When the members of First Presbyterian heard of the plan for ordination, many assumed Towner was leaving the church. She assured them that she was not, and would in fact be doing the same job she had done before the ordination.⁴⁷ In general, she portrayed the ordination more as a boon to her colleagues in ministry at Allentown than to her own professional development. First Presbyterian in Allentown was large and busy, with over 1,000 members.⁴⁸ An ordination would allow Towner to share more of the workload with the minister and associate minister. She could preach, if necessary, and administer sacraments, if necessary, but she did not see these things as her primary purpose. In an article about her in *Life* magazine, Towner made it clear that her ordination would not stand in the way of her Sunday school. "I won't preach" she told *Life*, "though I can if I must. But if I were in the pulpit Sundays, my teachers and children would be

⁴⁵Elsie Gibson, *When the Minister Is a Woman* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 25-26.

⁴⁶"Presbyterian Church USA Ordains First Woman Minister", *Presbyterian Life*, October 27, 1956.

⁴⁷"Presbyterian Church USA Ordains First Woman Minister", *Presbyterian Life*, October 27, 1956.

⁴⁸"Presbyterian Church USA Ordains First Woman Minister", *Presbyterian Life*, October 27, 1956.

neglected. And it is to them I minister.”⁴⁹ An article in *Presbyterian Life* likewise assured everyone that “Miss Towner considers herself a poor preacher, and has not sought ordination to have a pulpit.”⁵⁰

Towner positioned her ordination in much the same way minister’s wives did theirs in the 1950s: their ordinations were not in service to themselves but to a larger ministerial unit. Essentially still subordinate, they did not threaten the masculinity of the pulpit. Towner articulated a vision of ministry that had risen to recent prominence in the mainline: team ministry. By 1966, a third of mainline congregations had multi-person ministerial staff. A similar percentage of seminary graduates began their careers in these associate positions, under a head pastor.⁵¹ Women were far more likely to hold these ancillary positions than they were to be in the role of lead minister. But, like ministerial marriages, the idea of team ministry helped women position themselves safely on the periphery of parish ministry while still acquiring ordinations.

The article about Towner’s ordination in the *New York Times* called her, in scare quotes, a “minister of education.”⁵² Other early Presbyterian ministerial reformers had stories that resembled Towner’s, whose transition into ordained ministry was eased by the addition of *education* to their titles as ministers.⁵³ Historians Lois Boyd and R. Douglas Breckenridge argue that Towner “typified the background and vocational interest of the majority of Presbyterian

⁴⁹“A First Lady Minister in Robes of a New Role”, *Life*, Nov 12, 1956.

⁵⁰“Presbyterian Church USA Ordains First Woman Minister”, *Presbyterian Life*, October 27, 1956.

⁵¹E. Brooks Holifield, *God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007). 245.

⁵²“Woman Minister Still ‘Margaret’ ” *New York Times*, October 28, 1956.

⁵³Margaret Howland, for example, ordained in 1958 in Brooklyn, New York, became, after her ordination, the assistant pastor in her church. But press coverage of her ordination clarified that her main concern as associate minister would be the church’s education program. (“Presbyterian Church Gets Woman Minister” *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1958.) Other examples of early Presbyterian women ordinands whose ordinations were informed by their service as religious educators include: Elizabeth S. Ehling (“Presbytery To Ordain First Woman Minister” *New York Times*, May 2, 1957), Ella-Jean Streeter (“Woman Minister Ordained” *New York Times*, October 24, 1958), and Letty Mandeville Russell, discussed later in this chapter.

women who entered the ministry in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁴ Likewise, historian Elizabeth Howell Verdesi writes that Towner's opinion of herself as "essentially an educator, even though ordained" generally characterized Presbyterian women ordained between 1956 and 1960.⁵⁵

Unusual to Towner's ordination story, however, was the press's particular interest in her physicality, in the way she embodied the role of minister. Towner was a small woman, five feet two inches tall, but not diminutive. She was an ardent athlete. In addition to pitching for church baseball games, Towner loved tennis, golf, equestrian, skiing, sledding, skating, lacrosse, badminton, hockey, and swimming—all of which the *Times* noted in a litany.⁵⁶ Her small stature and athletic build were widely commented upon. Historically, "the female preaching body was a controversial body," historian Amy McCullough notes, and Towner's was no exception, having, it seems, an ambivalent quality. On one hand, details about Towner's athleticism—such as the fact that as a child, she organized a neighborhood football team and played running back—indicated her ability to play with the boys, as it were. But on the other hand, her small size gave her away as a woman, set her apart as different.⁵⁷

A photo essay that *Life* ran about Towner's ordination featured a memorable picture of Towner before the ceremony in pulpit robes and stole. As late as the mid-1970s, pulpit robes made especially for women were difficult if not impossible to come by. In 1976, one woman minister surveyed the sartorial terrain and found that only four companies sold garments fashioned specifically for women, and not all of those were even listed in the catalogues.⁵⁸

⁵⁴Lois Boyd and R Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America : Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983), 80.

⁵⁵Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 139.

⁵⁶"Woman Minister Still 'Margaret,'" *New York Times*, October 28, 1956.

⁵⁷Amy P. McCullough, *Her Preaching Body: Conversations about Identity, Agency, and Embodiment among Contemporary Female Preachers* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2018), 26.

⁵⁸Kathryn Piccard, "Vestments", November, 1976, Box 28, Folder 8, Katrina Swanson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

Instead, some women ordinands wore tailored male robes; others made their own.⁵⁹ As early as the 1920s, women in ministry had debated the whether, when, and how of ministerial attire. Lee Anna Starr, an early member of the Association of Women-Preachers, wrote to its founder, Madeline Southard, in 1921, with details about where she purchased her three pulpit robes (one white China silk, one black China silk, and one black wool). “I am very much in favor of women ministers wearing the gown,” she wrote to Southard, suggesting the existence of some debate about the issue. Starr wore her robes even for lectures, pastoral duties, and Woman’s Christian Temperance Union events.⁶⁰ Deborah Block, a Presbyterian woman minister in the 1970s, initially wore white robes to symbolize her baptism, until a man told her she looked like an angel in them. She switched to black.⁶¹ Other women ministers, like Rachel Henderlite, resisted the clericalism implicit in the pulpit robe and avoided them whenever possible.

Towner had borrowed the robes for her ordination ceremony from a particularly short local male minister. Unfortunately, they were still too large and required last-minute hemming. In the photo of Towner in *Life*, by acclaimed photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt, two older women are pinning up her robes, one at each sleeve. They kneel in front of her as Towner holds out her arms, palms upwards. The dress of the older women could not be more different than Towner’s. They are wearing pumps, structured jackets, pencil skirts, and pearl earrings. Towner looks softly down at them. The photo suggested the odd fit that Towner was for the robes, and implicitly for the ministry. But it also captures a serene moment, and Towner, in holding out her wrists for tailoring, is holding herself in the form of a gentle cross. She looks as if she could be

⁵⁹Block, “Wearing the Robe,” 20.

⁶⁰Lee Anna Starr to Madeline Southard, May 24, 1921, Box 9, Folder1, Madeline Southard Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

⁶¹Block, “Wearing the Robe”, 20. Other women ministers embraced a more bespoke clerical attire. Gary Nadel, “Mr. and Mrs. Minister” *New York Times*, Feb 1, 1976.

blessing the two women kneeling at her feet. Towner's body was classically ambivalent. She belonged, and was a misfit—a Christ figure whose body did not quite fit the form.

It was not only Presbyterian educators like Henderlite and Towner who were singled out for ordination in the mid-century. One of the most famous religious educators of the twentieth century, Sophia Lyon Fahs, was offered an ordination in 1959. Fahs accepted, and was ordained by the Unitarians at the end of her career, at age 82. Fahs attained a Bachelors in Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York, directed Union's School of Religion in the 1920s, re-wrote the Unitarian education curriculum in the 1930s, and was an important innovator in the philosophy of religious education for theologically liberal Protestants. Like her mentor, William Adams Brown, Fahs had long sought to convince Protestant liberals that ministers were, in fact, educators, and vice versa. She lobbied liberal seminaries to train their future ministers in child psychology and develop programs of religious education.⁶² She compared theological education unfavorably to medical education and wondered why there was no divinity equivalent of pediatrics.⁶³ Her ordination in 1959 had something of the tone of an honorary degree about it. Montgomery County Unitarian Church in Bethesda, MD, had invited her to be ordained. The church had the largest Sunday school in the denomination, and Fahs was clearly a figurehead for their values.⁶⁴ Likewise, Fahs was certainly not intending to enter parish ministry in her 80s. Yet in her ordination sermon, Fahs attributed the honor to her status as an educator. "It is because as

⁶²Unlike in the mainline, religious education professionalized very little in highly liberal denominations like the Universalists and Unitarians during the 1950s. Many of their denominational seminaries had no programs in religious education. In the mid-fifties, only five of seventy directors of religious education in Unitarian and Universalist congregations had theological degrees. Religious education programs in these churches, though mostly lay-led, were very successful, however, and would come to be a defining feature of the Unitarian-Universalists when they later merged. Fahs's insistence on incorporating religious education into theological education was probably influenced by her friendships with and exposure to mainline educators and institutions, such as Union, Chicago, and the mainline professional conferences that Fahs frequented such as the International Council of Religious Education. Edith Hunter, *Sophia Lyon Fahs: A Biography* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1988), 246, 248-249.

⁶³Hunter, *Sophia Lyon Fahs*, 244-245.

⁶⁴Hunter, *Sophia Lyon Fahs*, 257.

a church you have discovered that all ministers are educators, and all religious educators are preachers and priests in a broad sense, that you have ordained me to ‘the ministry’ in general,” she said.⁶⁵ In a sense, she implied, as an educator she had been a minister all along. The ordination was merely an acknowledgment of this truth.

“MRE - - - BD”: Stokes and Hageman

Between the ordinations of Margaret Towner in 1956 and Rachel Henderlite in 1965, religious education was at its peak power and prestige in the mainline. But by the mid-1960s the profession was on the decline. Mainline church revenue, for the first time since the war, began to fall. Budget cuts hit religious education particularly hard. In other ways the professionalization of the field had stalled. The Commissioned Church Workers of PCUSA found themselves squeezed out of jobs by ordained ministers, on one hand, and cheaper, untrained lay women on the other.⁶⁶ It was becoming clearer that being “commissioned” may have garnered some stability in a parish, but it offered few other benefits. Although they were examined and installed by presbyteries, CCWs had no vote in presbytery meeting, no guaranteed employment or salary, and no pensions.⁶⁷ In addition, ordained ministry for women became a more viable option between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s, with ordination opening officially to women in the Presbyterian Church USA, the Presbyterian Church US (Southern Presbyterians), the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, and several others, and with the Methodist Church offering full conference membership to women elders.⁶⁸ For the first time, the

⁶⁵Dorothy Jean Furnish, “Women in Religious Education: Pioneers for Women in Professional Ministry,” in *Women and Religion in America*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass: Harper and Row, 1981). 324.

⁶⁶Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 146-147.

⁶⁷Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 122.

⁶⁸Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard

Masters in Divinity and a subsequent ordination was looking like the more promising path for a woman in the church, even for religious educators.

The story of Olivia Pearl Stokes, a prominent Baptist educator, is particularly revealing both of the relationship between ordination and religious education in the mid-century and the particular challenges black women had navigating between the two career paths. Stokes, born 1916, was a pioneer in religious education, the first African American woman to receive a doctorate in the subject, and one of the field's most innovative mid-century figures. She grew up attending Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, a major power center for black Baptists since the 1920s. Abyssinian, under the direction of pastor Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., boasted an exceptional Christian education program as early as 1923, with a Sunday school staffed by men and women with graduate degrees in the field. The Stokes' arrived in Harlem from North Carolina in 1925. Their mother marched Stokes and her siblings to Abyssinian, and put their hands in the hands of Dr. Horatio Hill, the DRE. "These are my children. Educate them," she said to Hill.⁶⁹ Stokes was inspired by the example of the religious education staff at Abyssinian to enter the profession. Stokes began her professional life as many black women religious educators did in the 1940s: with the YWCA. With the distinct exception of Abyssinian, opportunities to work at a professional level in Christian education in black churches were slim. Sunday school and educational programs had not undergone the same professionalization they

University Press, 1999). 17. The decision of PCUSA to ordain women was also influenced, ironically, by the conditions in the professional field of religious education. In 1955, the committee studying the ordination of women for PCUSA reported on the three factors that it had considered in depth: the conditions of European churches already ordaining women, the Bible and biblical scholarship, and the "hurtful limitations" placed on Commissioned Church Workers. Paradoxically, in approving ordination for women, PCUSA did not improve conditions for CCWs, but instead, in essence, made them obsolete. Verdesi, *In But Still Out*, 135.

⁶⁹Olivia Stokes, oral history transcript, Interviews of the Black Women Oral History Project, 1976-1981, OH-31; T-32. Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/c/sch01406c00170/catalog>. Accessed January 11, 2019. 16. Will need written consent of Schlesinger to quote in publication.

had in majority white mainline churches, and still tended to run on volunteer lay labor.⁷⁰ Stokes, however, through Abyssinian and through her family's prominence in North Carolina, had opportunities to connect with ecumenical and racial justice institutions from an early age. Black luminaries passed frequently through her childhood home, including A. Phillip Randolph, Walter White, and W.E.B. DuBois. By the time Stokes was fifteen, she was serving on church councils and as a church youth organizer.⁷¹

Stokes completed her doctorate in religious education at Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1952, and began work as the Director of the Department of Education for the Massachusetts Council of Churches the following year, overseeing the religious education of 1.5 million Protestants in the state. She was a successful administrator, but ordination was always knocking on her door. As early as 1942, Stokes was approached with offers of ordination by the National Baptist Convention, Inc., which had ordained women since the 1880s, albeit infrequently. Stokes refused ordination at the time, for several reasons. First, she believed that ordination by the National Baptists, in particular, would have little value. There was, in that church, she said, "just no place for women clergymen." The president of NBC opposed women's ordination, as did most of the clergy. To be a clergywoman would be a demotion. "There was really no point in going into a secondary role when as an educator you could be in a primary role," she noted. Stokes also believed, for many years, that she had more status as an educator than she would as a minister in the mainline more generally. Untethered to a clerical hierarchy,

⁷⁰Stokes recalled in 1979 that "opportunity for professionals in the field of Christian education in the black church has been very, very, limited. Unless you were in one of the white denominations that had a structural, formal, planned education, the black church, whether its AME or Baptist or CME have basically had a volunteer, not a professional staff. So that the opportunities for persons holding degrees in Christian education came mostly from the YWCA in the early days. Persons like Dorothy Height, finding no opportunity in the church, moved on to the YWCA. Many of our black Christian educators did." Stokes, oral history, 53.

⁷¹Stokes, oral history, 2, 21.

she could locate herself on an orthogonal axis of authority. “As an educator,” she recalled, “I could enter places I could never have entered as a minister. I could enter the same pulpit as Bishop Stokes,”—an Episcopal bishop and a distant cousin—“but if I had gone in as a clergyman, I’d have been second and third down the ladder.”⁷²

For reasons particular to her career, but also in a sign of the times, Stokes finally relented in 1966 and was ordained by the American Baptists, shortly before taking up a post at the National Council of Churches as their Associate Director of Urban Education. At state-level ecumenical work in Massachusetts, Stokes had found her lay status to be an advantage overall. She coordinated with thirteen denominations in the state, some of whom had certain restrictions on non-ordained persons speaking at their churches. But Stokes’s stature in the ecumenical community had always secured exceptions for her. At the national level of NCC, however, Stokes was going to be coordinating with forty-two denominations, not all of whom would know her personally. On a local scale, being an educator had conferred benefits. On a national scale, ordination was the currency of church authority.⁷³

Stokes’s trajectory speaks to the larger relationship between black churches and women’s ordination. One historian aptly describes this history as “mixed.”⁷⁴ Independent, Pentecostal, and storefront churches have frequently been led and founded by black women. Historian Barbara Brown Zikmund estimates that over half of all women ordained in the United States since 1853 have been in Holiness, Pentecostal, and para-military denominations.⁷⁵ Many black women in the nineteenth century were pioneers in women’s preaching, like Jarena Lee, Amanda Berry, and

⁷²Stokes, oral history, 22-23.

⁷³Stokes, oral history, 52-53.

⁷⁴Barbara Brown Zikmund, “The Protestant Woman’s Ordination Movement” in *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in America*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Bloomington, IL: Indiana University Press, 1981), 134.

⁷⁵Zikmund, “The Protestant Woman’s Ordination Movement,” 133.

Sojourner Truth. Likewise, some black churches such as African Methodist Episcopal Zion began ordaining women in the Progressive Era, and were some of the first churches to do so. Historians C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya estimate that, relative to their percentage in the population, there may have been more black women preachers and pastors than white women preachers and pastors over the course of American history.⁷⁶ Yet, as many sociologists have pointed out, a denomination's formal rules about women's ordination may not be predictive of the practices of parishes or their friendliness towards women in ministry.⁷⁷ This disjunction has been especially true in black churches. Even amongst the Progressive National Baptists, who split from the National Baptist Convention, Inc. to pursue more liberal approaches to social issues in the early 1960s and have never had any rules against women's ordination, approval of women's ordination amongst church members had yet to reach 50% in 2000.⁷⁸ Other black denominations, particularly those with more centralized governments, had formal rules against women's ordination well into the twentieth century, including the African Methodist Episcopal Church and Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. In explaining black church's reticence towards women's ordination, historians point to the importance of the ministry for career advancement and political power for black men. Black women have been hesitant to infringe on this rare possibility for black male employment and empowerment, and men of black churches have acted to protect it.⁷⁹ Likewise, the theology of the black church is, as historians have been

⁷⁶C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, "The Black Denominations and the Ordination of Women," in *Down By the Riverside: Readings in African American Religion*, ed. Larry Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 370.

⁷⁷Chaves, *Ordaining Women.*; Frederick Schmidt, *A Still Small Voice: Women, Ordination and the Church* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

⁷⁸Bill Leonard, "In the Name of Our God and Our Baptist Heritage: Reflections on History and the Progressive National Baptist Convention," *Baptist History and Heritage* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 6-17.

⁷⁹See Pamela A Smoot, "Hear the Call': The Women's Auxiliary of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.," *Baptist History and Heritage* 46, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 49-59; Vashti McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011); Lincoln and Mamiya, "The Black Denominations and the Ordination of Women." Sociologist Sandra L. Barnes has also found

recently noting, “evangelical in all but name.”⁸⁰ The situation put—and continues to put—black ministerial reformers in a double-bind. In black churches, women ministers were likely to encounter hostility to their presence as ministers, while in white churches black women could expect to find prejudice, tokenism, or paternalism. Historically, many black women pursuing ordained ministry, like Olivia Pearl Stokes, chose ordination in majority-white churches instead of in black churches. (In those majority-white denominations, black women ministers tended to serve majority-minority congregations).⁸¹ Others transitioned from black Baptist to black Methodist denominations.⁸² Similarly, some black congregations opted to leave black denominations so they that could call a particular woman to their pulpit.⁸³ To this day, ministry remains an exceptionally challenging path for black women.⁸⁴

Olivia Pearl Stokes was not the only religious educator to seek clerical orders in the

that a black church’s involvement in racial justice activism is actually negatively correlated with their support for women in the ministry. Sandra L Barnes, “Whosoever Will Let Her Come: Social Activism and Gender Inclusivity in the Black Church,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 45, no. 3 (September 2006): 371–87.

⁸⁰Melani McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders: A Global History of American Evangelicals* (New York (N.Y.): Oxford University Press., 2018).6.

⁸¹ Marjorie Heyer, “Black Women, White Pulpits,” *Washington Post*, Oct 12, 1985. For this article, Heyer interviewed Dorothy Carpenter, a professor at Howard Divinity School. Carpenter noted that black women entering parish ministry in the majority-white mainline have often served in majority black congregations, an arrangement she saw as unsustainable. See also Lincoln and Mamiya, “Black Denominations and the Ordination of Women”, 377.

⁸²Examples are not hard to come by. When she decided to become ordained, Alice M. Henderson Harris, the first female Army chaplain, appointed 1974, migrated from the National Baptists to the African Methodist Episcopal church because AME was friendlier towards women in ministry. Carl J Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1997), 184. Elizabeth Scott, an AME pastor in Pittsburgh in the 1970s, came to the African Methodist Episcopal church through the Baptist and then Catholic churches, finally arriving at “the faith which permitted me to preach the Gospel.” Robert Flipping, Jr. “Black Women Enter Ministry” *Pittsburgh Courier*, Jan 11, 1975.

⁸³ Deborah Wolfe, for instance, was ordained in 1970 in affiliation with American Baptist Church and the Progressive National Baptist Church. She filled her father’s pastorate at a church that had traditionally been affiliated National Baptist. When the church ordained Wolfe, they transferred their affiliation to ABC and PNBC. Deborah Wolfe, Oral History transcript, Black Women Oral History Project, 1976-1981. OH-31. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Prathia Hall had a remarkably similar trajectory. After she took over her father’s parish in the 1980s Hall transitioned the church, Mt. Sharon Baptist Church in Philadelphia, out of affiliation with NBC and into dual affiliation with PNBC and the American Baptist Church. Pace, *Freedom Faith*, 227.

⁸⁴See also Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice African American Women and Religion* (Philadelphia, Pa: Temple Univ. Press, 2014).

1950s and 1960s. Other women, such as Letty Mandeville Russell, a Presbyterian educator, gravitated towards ordination as well. Russell graduated from Wellesley College in 1951 and began working as a director of religious education at Church of the Ascension in Harlem, NY. Within a few years, however, she had concluded that a theological education and ordination was necessary to lift religious education out of its stigma. Russell found in Christian education a field lacking respect, a dull part of church life in the minds of church leaders: merely a “‘band-aid’ for institutional survival.”⁸⁵ Russell believed Christian education should not be isolated from the life of the church, as it tended to be, but instead could be a way to understand the entirety of church life. She decided to pursue ministerial training so that religious education would be rightly recognized as on par with ministerial work. “I wanted to be a minister so that I would have the right to say that education was part of everything that happened in a Christian congregation where Christ was equipping his people for their service in the world,” she wrote.⁸⁶ Russell enrolled in the first class of women admitted to Harvard Divinity in 1956. She was ordained in 1958 and installed at Church of the Ascension in Harlem.

As Stokes, Russell, and Henderlite were making mid-career decisions to pursue ordinations, and the older generation of educators, like Fahs, were being awarded with it, younger women were abandoning Master of Religious Education programs for the Bachelor of Divinity. Letty Russell’s mentee Alice Hageman made the decision to switch to the BD mid-way through her seminary career. Hageman came to Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1959 and enrolled in the MRE program. She took classes with the pillars of Union—Reinhold Niebuhr, John Bennett. But her MRE degree also required field education, so she began teaching Sunday

⁸⁵Letty Mandeville Russell, *Christian Education in Mission* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 19-21.

⁸⁶Russell, *Christian Education in Mission*, 24.

school for the churches of East Harlem Protestant Parish.⁸⁷ Among the churches of the parish was the Church of the Ascension, where, the prior year, Letty Mandeville Russell had been installed as a minister. Russell and Hageman became friends, and seeing Russell in the pulpit of Church of the Ascension was an eye-opening experience for Hageman, her first and best impression that a woman could stand in that role.⁸⁸ Hageman had come to feel that her MRE program was of lesser status. Other women at Union came to similar conclusions. A fellow student at Union, Beth Rhude, observed in 1965 that there was a “great degree of transfer” between the MRE and BD degrees, which Rhude saw as motivated by the shame MREs felt when they learned its lesser status.⁸⁹ Hageman decided to transfer. At the time, transcripts at UTS were typewritten each semester. No erasures could be made, only additions. Thus, Hageman’s transcript eventually read “MRE - - - BD.”⁹⁰ Hageman chose a degree with more prestige but no clear employment prospects. She entered the BD program with the ordination question still unresolved in her mind. She was one of 37 women out of a class of 151, and one of only 6 female BD candidates.⁹¹ (There were twice as many female MRE candidates). “By and large, the men assumed they would be ordained, whatever their work,” Hageman recalled. “No one, women or men, really thought we women would be ordained or serve as pastors in churches.”⁹²

By the mid-1960s, one historian reports, the professional field of religious education was “in

⁸⁷East Harlem Protestant Parish was founded in 1948 by students at Union Theological Seminary in New York, as a mission to the urban church that focused on bridging the gap between American Protestantism and impoverished industrial workers.

⁸⁸Alice Hageman, “Alice Hageman” in Sara Evans, ed., *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

⁸⁹Rhude, “Women in a Changing World.”

⁹⁰Seminary transcript, Union Theological School, Box 2 Folder 2, Alice Hageman Papers, Special collections, Divinity Library, Yale University. (Hereafter Hageman Papers).

⁹¹List of donors, class year 1962, collected 2001, Box 2, Folder 2, Hageman Papers.

⁹²Hageman, “Alice Hageman”, 179.

disarray.”⁹³ In 1969, a committee from the United Presbyterian Board of Christian Education considered what would have been unthinkable even ten years prior: the elimination of the MRE degree from all Presbyterian seminarians. Continuing the MRE, the committee argued, implied that women could not measure up to the more rigorous standards of the BD. From the power center of women at theological schools, the MRE had fallen far. Its mere existence, this committee implied, was an insult to women in the church.⁹⁴ In 1965, in an acknowledgement of the complete incorporation of religious education into theological schools, the Association of Schools of Religious Education turned over its authority to the American Association of Theological Schools.⁹⁵ “It is hard to believe,” one woman minister wrote ten years later, that in the 1920s and 1930s, “the professor of religious education was high man on the totem pole at many theological seminaries and that religious education was considered the most important function of the church.”⁹⁶

In the long term, professionalization would be a brief phase in the history of Christian education, not a lasting change. But the lessons learned in women’s mid-century success in religious education would transfer, in some ways, to the next generation. Working with children and adolescents, working in roles considered nurturing, had helped verify women’s claims that they were safe candidates for ordination—that they would not rock the male boat of parish ministry, but would serve to assist it and enhance it. Luckily for ministerial reformers, as religious education waned, a new youthful populace was emerging in the United States, one in

⁹³Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Towards Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 41-43.

⁹⁴Board of Christian Education of UPC-USA, “Workshop on Changing the Image of Women”, Chicago, IL, July 18-23, 1969, Box 27, Folder 14, Elizabeth Farians Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

⁹⁵Glenn Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870-1970* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007).588.

⁹⁶Diane Miller, ed. “What is Distinctive About Being a Woman in Ministry?” *Kairos*, Autumn 1975.

dire need of religious guidance: the university student. Ministerial reformers began heading, not to Sunday school classrooms as educators, but to college campuses as chaplains.

Chapter V. *A Mission to Campus: Women in Campus Ministry, 1950-1975*

In the early summer of 1953, Constance Fern Parvey, a young Lutheran from the Dakota plains, arrived at Camp Miniwanca on Lake Michigan. A few weeks prior, Parvey had graduated from University of Minnesota. Twenty-three years old, she joined twenty other Christian women of her age, all recent university graduates, at the lake-front camp for five weeks of training. The young women read together, participated in discussion sessions, took classes in Bible study and theology, worshiped, and were tutored in personal strength, bravery and piety. They were in training for a mission, of sorts. At the end of the five weeks, they would be sent off to colleges and universities at least 1,000 miles from their own undergraduate institutions. They would live there on campus a full year, supported financially by the program that had brought them together, but otherwise alone. Their task was to serve, in any way they could, student Christian life at the universities.

Between 1950 and 1970, ministry on university campuses was a gateway for the ministerial reformation. As women's presence in Bachelors of Divinity programs accelerated in the 1960s, the roles available to them in parish ministry did not keep pace. Many denominations in 1960 still did not ordain women, including all major branches of American Lutheranism, the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Southern Baptists, the Southern Presbyterians, the Mennonites, and the Reformed Church of America. In lieu of taking an undesirable parish (or finding such a path improbable), many ministerial reformers opted to serve instead in places of higher education. On campuses, women found pockets of theological liberalism. They found weaker denominational barriers to their service, including jobs that rarely required ordination. And they found a community of fellow women in campus ministry. The Danforth Foundation, which

brought Parvey and her colleagues to Lake Michigan and supported them in their fellowship year, provided crucial financial support in the 1940s and 1950s that enabled young women to enter college ministry at a time when few such opportunities existed for female university graduates. And, though foreign missions were moribund, women claimed campus ministry as their own by painting the university as the new mission field. In effect, the ministerial reformer of the 1960s who found that she could no longer be a missionary, who recognized that Sunday school teaching was declining in prestige, and who could not yet be ordained or easily serve in parish ministry, went, instead, to campus.

Mainline women entered this emerging profession, not *en masse*, but in numbers that outstripped their representation in the ministerial field as whole. In 1966, a survey of nearly one thousand mainline campus ministers found that 8% were female.¹ This number may sound paltry, but throughout the mid-century women held steady at 4% of clergy in America writ large, and only a fraction of that 4%, by most estimates, were in mainline denominations.² Among these women in campus ministry was Constance Parvey. After her Danforth fellowship, Parvey would become a member of the first class of women at Harvard Divinity School, a campus minister for most of her life, and, in the early 1970s, one of the first women ordained in the Lutheran Church of America. Over the course of her life, Parvey would move in all the circles one would expect of

¹John Schmalzbauer, "Campus Ministry," in *Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Education*, ed. Michael Waggoner and Nathan Walker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 455. In 1969, Phillip Hammond estimated that there were 1,300 full-time campus ministers in the mainline (UCC, Disciples, Episcopal, PCUSA, Methodist, Lutheran, ABC, SBC, LCMS). That would make a rough total of 100 women in full-time campus ministry, though the number in part-time work would likely be much higher. Campus Ministry Women, an organization discussed later in this chapter, would estimate their membership in the 1970s around 400. See Phillip Hammond, "The Radical Ministry" in Kenneth Underwood, ed., *The Church, the University, and Social Policy: The Danforth Study of Campus Ministers*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 6-9.

²"Number of Women Ministers increasing," *Woman's Pulpit* (Oct-Dec, 1955). The article relies on a Bureau of Labor Statistics study. In 1978, a National Council of Churches study would find that ordained women were still 4% of all clergy; two-thirds of this 4% were Pentecostal or holiness, and only 17.4% were mainline. The same report stated that between 1930 and 1970, women's percentage in the number of overall clergy had increased less than 1%. See Carl J Schneider and Dorothy Schneider, *In Their Own Right: The History of American Clergywomen* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publ. Co., 1997), 127.

a ministerial reformer of her day—the Student Christian Movement, sponsorship from the Danforth Foundation, civil rights and peace activism, a seminary that had just begun to admit women, long stints in campus ministry, a path-breaking ordination, an interest in liturgical renewal, and a later life consumed with work on women’s church issues. In this chapter, Parvey’s life offers us a window to women’s ministry on campuses in the decades of civil rights and student unrest, and to the Lutheran denominational battles over women’s ordination in the late 1960s. Parvey’s story, from campus minister to ordination pioneer, exemplifies the larger argument of this chapter, that, between 1950 and 1970, campus ministry gestated the ministerial reformation. The time the reformation spent on campus would also shape its tone and methods in decades to come.

“Danny Grads” and the Student Christian Movement

The first organized campus ministry in the United States was the Young Men’s Christian Association, which arrived on the college scene in the 1880s and dominated it between 1900 and 1920. When the Y’s popularity on campuses declined in the late 1930s, and universities themselves secularized, there began what one historian has called “turf wars” over who should fill the void.³ Should the universities themselves step in to lead student faith life? Denominations? Local churches?⁴ Of all the Protestant ministers active on college campuses in 1900, only twelve worked full time with students. But by 1930, two-thirds of campus pastors reported that their work with students was all-consuming and that their job distinguished them

³David Setran, *The College “Y”: Student Religion in the Era of Secularization, 1858-1934* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 3- 7.

⁴The Lutherans, for instance, though they had had ministers stationed at campuses since the turn of the century, did nothing to support campus as a distinctive church ministry until the late 1930s. See Burnice Fjellman, “Lutheran Campus Ministry and Student Organizations, 1969-94” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 32, no.4 (Fall 1995): 473.

from parish ministers.⁵ Organization of these university ministries varied widely, but in the mainline the general trend was towards financial and organizational support from the denominations. Initially, denominations saw such a ministry as targeted primarily at students, but by the 1950s, the definition of the church's presence on universities was expanding, likely in response to booming universities after World War II, and increasing fears that universities were liable to be infectious sites of atheism and communism. William F. Buckley's bestseller *God and Man at Yale* (1951) portrayed university life as, on the whole, destructive to Christian faith, and criticized the Yale campus chaplains for putting up little fight.⁶ After Buckley's alarm, ministers stationed on universities were called to service not just students but also faculty and staff; in some larger sense, to stand as symbols and watchmen for the church.⁷ The term "campus ministry," with its capacious sensibility, emerged in the 1950s — novel enough in 1963 that one minister wrote that the epithet was "relatively new."⁸

Constance Parvey's trajectory into Lutheran campus ministry was hardly preordained by her background. Parvey was born in Aberdeen, South Dakota, in 1931, in the middle of the dust bowl. She grew up in North Dakota, in a tiny town of German, Polish, and Finnish immigrants. The town's name, Fredonia, was rumored to mean "settlement of free women."⁹ Parvey's father came from a Finnish apostolic background, her mother Roman Catholic, but both had left the faith. On Sundays, the family went hunting or fishing, played cards or sang together.¹⁰ Parvey

⁵E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Abassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 251.

⁶William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of 'Academic Freedom'* (Chicago: Regnery Co, 1951). See also, George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief* (Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 1994).

⁷Kjellman, "Lutheran Campus Ministry", 473.; E. Theodore Bachmann, "College Bound" *Lutheran Women* (April 1963).

⁸Bachmann, "College Bound", 6.

⁹Constance Parvey, "School: 1936-1941", autobiographical working papers, undated, Box 49, Folder 11, Constance Parvey Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. (Hereafter Parvey Papers).

¹⁰Constance Parvey, speech, undated, Box 49, Folder 7, Parvey Papers.

was, she recalls, a “contemplative and moody” child, yet she sometimes saw angels in the trees behind her father’s farm.¹¹ During World War II, many of the Parvey’s neighbors supported the Axis. The friction got her interested in politics, in “the world underneath the world.”¹² In college at the University of Minnesota, Parvey began attending a Lutheran church, despite the disapproval of her parents.¹³ She found she liked the Lutherans, who fit her ethnic background (German and Scandinavian), and the writings of Martin Luther, whose attempts to theorize a priesthood of all believers made Parvey feel there was space for her in the church.¹⁴ She liked the university chaplains too, whose seriousness about politics and theology she admired.¹⁵ Parvey was an ardent student, overcome, at times, by the gravity of what she was discovering. One day, she was walking across campus when the dean of the university asked her how she was doing. Not inclined towards frivolous conversation, Parvey answered honestly, and, as she was wont to do, immediately overwhelmed him with her intensity and forthrightness. “You know, Connie,” the dean replied, “the trouble with you is that you always ask ‘why’ questions and we only deal with how questions around here.”¹⁶ On the dean’s recommendation, Parvey applied for a fellowship from the Danforth Foundation.

The Danforth Foundation was a prime mover in the campus ministry profession between 1942 and 1980. Founded by William H. Danforth in 1927 in St. Louis, the foundation used the

¹¹Constance Parvey, diary entry, August 2, 1957, Box 4, Folder 9, Parvey Papers; Constance Parvey, “Feminism as a Principle of World-Reordering Jonathan Edwards Lecture at Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Nov 30, 1988, Box 49, Folder 10, Parvey Papers.

¹²Speech, “25th Anniversary of the Ordination of Reverend Constance Fern Parvey: Connie’s Reflections” Dec 7, 1997, Box 5, Folder 13, Parvey Papers.

¹³Constance Parvey, speech, undated, Box 49, Folder 7, Parvey Papers.

¹⁴Constance Parvey, speech, undated, Box 49, Folder 7, Parvey Papers.

¹⁵Constance Parvey, “Memo To Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Higher Education and Schools, Department of Campus Ministry, Re: Campus Ministry Statement”, undated, Box 19, Folder 8, Parvey Papers.

¹⁶Constance Parvey, “Woman Priest: Purposes, Principals, Problems, Joys”, undated, Box 65, Folder 3, Parvey Papers.

windfall from Danforth's successful company, Ralston-Purina, to donate to causes in higher education, often at the nexus of religion and the university.¹⁷ The foundation built chapels at public universities in the 1940s and 1950s, offered funding to university faculty who could give spiritual guidance to their students, and sponsored other campus ministry causes.¹⁸ Though women were not eligible for many of the Danforth scholarships, in 1943 it began awarding fifteen to twenty-five Danforth Graduate Fellowships a year exclusively to young, unmarried women who had just graduated from college.¹⁹ The foundation's patriarch had observed that as men left campuses to serve in World War II, women began to fill leadership roles in student religious groups, but they were mostly untrained and inexperienced. Danforth, looking for a cause to champion in his retirement, set out to train them.²⁰ He believed that potential women leaders had insufficient means to "test their bent and ability," so the 'Danny Grad' fellowship, as it came to be called, was born. The program was directed principally by William Danforth himself, though he hired two ministers to help him train the young women at Miniwanca: William J. Hutchins, past president of Berea College and a Presbyterian minister, and Ruth Isabel Seabury, an ordained Congregationalist missionary.²¹ Other contacts that Danforth had made in

¹⁷William H. Danforth was the grandfather of John C. Danforth, the former US Senator, ambassador to the United Nations, and philanthropist.

¹⁸Margaret M. Grubiak, "The Danforth Chapel Program on the Public American Campus," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 19, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 81.

¹⁹Some sources say the Danforth Foundation awarded 50 such scholarships, some say 15, some say 20. The records of this program are fragmented and I am indebted to Genie Hopper Zavaleta, a Danforth Graduate in 1947-8, for her help. In the early 2000s, Zavaleta discovered that the Danforth Foundation had no records of the program at all, in part because of a fire, and in part because the administrator who collected the records of the program in the 1940s and 1950s died suddenly and her records were never found. Zavaleta began a historical archive of the program herself, and was able to make contact with roughly half of the women who participated. See also: "National Leadership Conference", American Youth Foundation, 2019. Accessed Jan 9, 2019.

<https://ayf.com/camps/miniwanca/national-leadership-conference/>.

²⁰Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

²¹William J. Hutchins Papers, finding Aid, Berea College Special Collections and Archives.

<https://berea.libraryhost.com/?p=collections/findingaid&id=251&q=&rootcontentid=54526>; Genie Hopper Zavaleta, Interview with author, October 30, 2018.

the world of upper-crust Protestantism also came to teach classes and visit with the young women.²²

Ruth Isabel Seabury in particular stands out in the recollections of Danny Grads. Seabury taught Bible to the young women at Miniwanca and instructed them in modern issues on campuses to prepare them for what they might encounter.²³ She was undeniably an inspirational figure for the young women. A globe-trotting missionary with national recognition, Seabury had a successful career in speaking engagements and published several books about missions. She was unmarried, and a woman in a position of religious authority, much as the young Danny Grads were about to be. As they completed their training at Miniwanca, the Danny Grads were observed and their skill sets assessed, in order to pair them appropriately with a university. When the time came, the girls were gathered together, and, to great excitement, the assignments were announced.²⁴ Danny Grads were then given a stipend for living, room and board, \$25 a month in discretionary spending, and were sent out to their universities. Their primary task was to assist with student religious life.²⁵

Christian student life proliferated after World War II. Beginning in the 1930s, a loosely associated Student Christian Movement (SCM) swept over campuses nationwide, concentrated in organizations like the World Student Christian Federation, the YM- and YWCA, and denominational centers near campuses. The Student Christian Movement introduced many young women and men to issues of racial justice and anti-war activism in the 1950s and 1960s,

²²Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

²³Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

²⁴“Danny Grads 55-60”, notes on semi-annual meeting at Berea College in 1955, Box 74, Jeanne Audrey Powers Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University. (Hereafter Powers Papers).

²⁵Jeanne Audrey Powers, “Jeanne Audrey Powers” in Sara Evans, ed., *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 49-5.

baptizing future leaders in these causes.²⁶ As historian Doug Rossinow has argued, the movement's theological focus on existentialism cultivated in a generation of young adults many of the interests that would drive the new left: authenticity, alienation, the revolutionary potential of the marginalized.²⁷ Perhaps most importantly for the ministerial reformation, SCM taught young students that to be a good Christian was, in part, to be a critic of the church.

Danny Grads sat directly at the heart of this movement: young women who began as students of SCM but who were, through their fellowships, becoming its leaders. As one Danny Grad later recalled, the women in the program shared the realization "that the student Christian movement had become more important to them than their original plans."²⁸ Danny Grads serviced the religious life of their universities in various ways. Some worked for denominational outfits like the Wesley Foundation. Others took positions at churches near the university, and tailored their ministry to the students in the congregation. Some administered campus chapels, coordinating with student groups for the use of the space. Those who had fellowships in the 1940s tailored their ministries to returning servicemen.²⁹ Others served Student Christian foundations directly or directed YWCAs.³⁰ In addition to their local duties, Danny Grads were required to travel to every university within 200 miles for Religious Emphasis Week, attend SCM national gatherings, read for two hours a day on a subject novel to them, and cultivate a

²⁶Sara Evans, "Introduction" in *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* ed. Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 1; Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).; David Cline, *From Reconciliation to Revolution: How the Student Interracial Ministry Took Up the Cause of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

²⁷Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*.

²⁸Powers, "Jeanne Audrey Powers", 49.

²⁹Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, Oct. 30, 2018.

³⁰"Jean Lois Witman to be Wed Jan 29" *New York Times*, Jan 12, 1949; "Miss Goodfellow to be June Bride: Her Troth to John R. Steding, Ex-Lieutenant in AAF, is Announced by Parents" *New York Times*, April 20, 1947; "Dowell-Deane," *New York Times*, Friday, April 22, 1955; Lawn Griffiths, "Graduates remember Danforth Chapel's origins on college campuses" *East Valley Tribune* (Tempe, Ariz.), Oct. 20, 2007.

disciplined prayer life.³¹ Materials from the Danforth Foundation described the program as “a year of adventurous living and constructive Christian service.”³²

In the recollection of one alumna, the three principal directors of the program, Seabury, Hutchins, and Danforth had slightly divergent ideas about what they were training the women for through these fellowships. Seabury expected the young women to go from their Danny Grad fellowships into missionary work. Hutchinson expected them to become directors of religious education. And Danforth wanted to see them remain in campus ministry.³³ Though many did enter religious education, and at least one became a missionary, Danforth’s wish was mostly to be granted.³⁴ In several cases, including Constance Parvey’s, the one-year Danforth Fellowship launched women into life-long religious work with students, and some, later, into ministerial reform.³⁵ One alumna recalls that many girls went to seminary after their fellowships, and that the prestigious Union Theological Seminary in New York was a favorite choice.³⁶ Perhaps the most renowned alumna was Jeanne Audrey Powers, an early Methodist ordinand, best known as an activist for lesbian and gay clergy in American Methodism. She credited her Danforth Fellowship with shaping her trajectory, having, she recalls, “no idea what I wanted to do with my

³¹Powers, “Powers,” 50.

³²Pamphlet, “1954 Danny Grads: Entering a Year of Adventurous Living and Constructive Christian Service”, Box 74, Powers Papers.

³³Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

³⁴Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

³⁵A complete list of other Danny Grads that entered ministry or remained in campus ministry would be difficult to compile, and Powers and Parvey are no doubt the two most prominent. Others that I have been able to find include: Shirley Crockett, class of 1954-55, continued in college ministry and deanships, became a Congregational minister in 1976, and was ordained in 1993. (“Danny Grads Reunion 93”, Box 74, Power Papers). Jeanne Ackley Lohman, class of 1945-6, became an executive director of a university YWCA in Chicago; Elizabeth Carpenter Batchelder, class of 1948-9, went to Yale for an MDiv in 1952; Joanne Smith Edmunson, class of 1948-9, became a Presbyterian deacon then elder; Barbara Tarrant Wiggans, class of 1948-9, directed the YWCA at University of Illinois.

³⁶Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, Oct. 30, 2018.

life when I heard about the Danforth Foundation.”³⁷ She stayed in campus ministry for most her career, and was ordained in 1958.

The program not only introduced women to campus ministry, it also introduced them to one another, forming the first network of women in campus ministerial work. The foundation gathered the Danny Grads together up to three times annually, at Miniwanca in the summer, over the holidays in St. Louis, and then at Berea College at the conclusion of the fellowship year. It also solicited monthly letters from each of them for a newsletter. Though the program did not tell its young women to pursue ordination or ministry, it certainly implied this trajectory was a possibility. In some ways this was explicit, with the choice of a woman minister, Ruth Seabury, as a teacher and model figure for the young women. In their preparatory weeks at Camp Miniwanca, the women were instructed in worship preparation, Bible study, and pastoral counseling—Miniwanca was a seminary in the woods.³⁸ In other ways, the suggestion to enter ministry was more implicit. At their semi-annual gatherings, the young women led worship with one another and reflected on the relationship between their professional lives and marriage. The women concluded that if home duties were taken care of, the two were not in conflict. Further, one Danny Grad remarked at a year-end gathering, that her fellow Danny Grads “should strive to find a vocation (it’s our Christian responsibility to do so) in a field which uses our likings and our own particular abilities.”³⁹ The foundation also encouraged them to discuss the role of women in the church and in the world, and, at the end of their fellowships, asked them to reflect on what their experience had meant to them as women, an unusual angle of analysis for the time. For most of the Danny Grads, the value of womanhood—as separate from manhood—was

³⁷Powers, “Powers”, 49. Powers is best known for coming out as a lesbian during a sermon in 1995.

³⁸Danforth Foundation flyer, “1953-1954 Offer to Young Women Graduating from College or University”, personal collection of Genie Hopper Zavaleta.

³⁹“Danny Grads 55-60”, notes on semi-annual meeting at Berea College in 1955, Box 74, Powers Papers.

intuitive, but by the 1950s modest concerns with the gender arrangement were being voiced. One Danny Grad described a discussion at a gathering in 1955:

The value of feminine characteristics was expounded by some and doubted by others who seem to feel that being a woman sometimes relegates them to a second-choice position that ability didn't warrant. In maintaining the appeal of womanhood, we shouldn't 'bring ourselves' down to men, as they have called womanhood highly and it should be our responsibility to uphold its highest aspects.⁴⁰

Although the eighteen young women seemed to compromise comfortably in this moment on the value of feminine characteristics, the fellowship had launched them, alone, into a field dominated by men, at universities dominated by men, and then asked them to reflect on their experience as women. It is hardly surprising that some expressed discontent with their lot, and may have yearned for something more.

Many of the young women also cultivated a strong sense of identity as Danny Grads, describing a "Danny Grad spirit" and referring to each other, for decades after, as "Danny Grad Sisters." Women of the classes of 1956-7 and 1948-9 held regular reunions into the twenty-first century.⁴¹ William Danforth was, by all accounts, equally devoted to the program. He corresponded personally with the young women throughout their fellowships, and attended their retreats at Camp Miniwanca. When he died in 1957, the program terminated.⁴² But by then it had given over 200 women a start in campus ministry. "We were forerunners of the future!" one

⁴⁰"Danny Grads 55-60", notes on semi-annual meeting at Berea College in 1955, Box 74, Powers Papers.

⁴¹Eugenia Hopper Zavaleta to Jeanne Audrey Powers, Feb. 7, 2002, Box 74, Powers Papers.

At one of those reunions, at Miniwanca in 2002, the assembled women began a scholarship fund for the American Youth Foundation in the Danny Grad name in commemoration of the program.

⁴²William H. Danforth to Constance Parvey, June 1, 1953, Box 7, Folder 5, Parvey Papers.; Constance Parvey, speech, circa 1985, Folder 7, Box 49, Parvey Papers.; Genie Hopper Zavaleta suggests that the inheritors of the Danforth Foundation chose to focus their efforts on getting women into teaching positions at seminaries, instead of college campuses. Interview with author, Oct 30, 2018.

Danny grad recalled. Another, Genie Hopper Zavaleta, remembers the program, more generally, as “an amazing contribution to women in leadership in the church.”⁴³

During Constance Parvey’s Danny Grad fellowship at Vanderbilt, she audited classes with Nels Ferre, read the Niebuhrs, and was stunned by the use of the Bible to justify segregation.⁴⁴ As part of her fellowship, she served as a staff member of the Student Christian Association.⁴⁵ Afterward, she took another job in campus ministry at Duke University, as the lay Lutheran chaplain to the students.⁴⁶ In the spring of 1955, Parvey interviewed for a job in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an associate in ministry position coordinated by the local church, University Lutheran, and Harvard, Radcliffe, and MIT. The pastor of University Lutheran, Henry Horn, conducted her interview by taking her up Mission Hill, overlooking the city. Lutherans in Boston were scarce; as Parvey once put it, “strangers in the alien lands of old Puritan and new Roman Catholic Eastern Massachusetts.”⁴⁷ The skyline Parvey saw, standing atop Mission Hill, would have been dominated by the gothic twin spires of Mission Church, an enormous Roman Catholic basilica.⁴⁸ Horn, as well as his fellow ministers who operated on or near universities, thought often about being a minority. They saw themselves as a tiny, dissenting Christian

⁴³Flyer, “Danny Grad Scholarship Fund”, Box 74, Powers Papers; Letter, Goldie Rouse Buckner to Danny Grads, Feb 7, 2001, personal collection of Genie Hopper Zavaleta.; Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

⁴⁴Speech, “25th Anniversary of the Ordination of Reverend Constance Fern Parvey: Connie’s Reflections” December 7, 1997, Box 5, Folder 13, Parvey Papers.; Constance Parvey, “Feminism as a Principle of World-Reordering Jonathan Edwards Lecture at Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Nov. 30, 1988, Box 49, Folder 10, Parvey Papers.

⁴⁵Constance Parvey, “Woman Priest: Purposes, Principals, Problems, Joys”, undated, Box 65, Folder 3, Parvey Papers. According to Zavaleta, taking courses would have been an unusual activity for a Danny Grad, as they were not allowed to do coursework for credit. Parvey, it seems, received no credit for these courses, and never got a degree from Vanderbilt.

⁴⁶Constance Parvey, “Memo To Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Higher Education and Schools, Department of Campus Ministry, Re: Campus Ministry Statement”, undated, Box 19, Folder 8, Parvey Papers.

⁴⁷“School: 1936-1941”, autobiographical working papers, undated, page 9, folder 11, box 49, Constance Parvey Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

⁴⁸Also known as Basilica and Shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

presence in overwhelmingly secular universities. Perhaps Parvey had something interesting to say on the theme, as a minority—of a sort—herself, and she got the job. She began assisting with campus work for the Lutheran Ministry in Greater Boston. In addition, she took classes at Harvard Divinity School, as a member of the first class of women admitted in 1956.

College-educated women in the 1950s received, as historian Sara Evans puts it, conflicting messages about their potential. As students they cultivated skills for the marketplace, but as women they were implored to embrace a domestic life.⁴⁹ One campus minister recalled that, though no one directly pressured her to marry, “it was in the air, in the molecules, so pervasive an expectation that it overrode any conscious decision making.”⁵⁰ When she entered Harvard in 1956, Connie Parvey was 25 years old, tall, stunning, and unmarried. Sometimes Parvey’s work on campuses seemed, to her, a bridge to another life. In 1958, she considered applying for a position at a rural college, but decided against it, sure that there would not be anyone there she could marry.⁵¹ She wanted “an ordinary life and family; to live simply and express my devotion through raising children, helping them get educated, seeking my community, learning to hem and sing....” She was engaged for a time to a philosophy student, but the relationship ended in 1957.⁵² After the separation, Parvey had nightmares that God had forever consigned her to celibacy.⁵³ Yet at other times, young Parvey saw her ministerial work less as a pathway to marriage than as an alternate route, holding marriage and her career in opposition. The emotional hole left by the end of her engagement, she wrote, could be filled

⁴⁹Evans, “Introduction”, 3.

⁵⁰Jan Griesinger, “Jan Griesinger”, in *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* ed. Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004),193.

⁵¹Constance Parvey, diary entry, Feb 1, 1958, Box 4, Folder 9, Parvey Papers. The college may be Berea College, in Kentucky.

⁵²Constance Parvey, diary entry, Jul 4, 1957, Box 4, Folder 9, Parvey Papers.

⁵³Constance Parvey, diary entry, Feb 1, 1958, Box 4, Folder 9, Parvey Papers.

either by “a job I can throw myself into or a man who can love me.”⁵⁴ Though she once admitted to having an attraction to one of her students, she saw this in direct conflict with her significant ambitions for the future of her work⁵⁵. Which path should she pursue?—she frequently asked her diary.

Parvey found Harvard Divinity congenial to her presence. Though she was keenly aware she was one of the first women admitted, she was focused on her studies, and had a community of support. Krister Stendahl, the Swedish theologian, had just begun his long affiliation with Harvard Divinity when Parvey enrolled, and became a mentor to her; the two Lutherans drawn together. Marianka Fousek, a member of Parvey’s cohort who would go on to be a successful theologian, cultivated a strong if sometimes tumultuous friendship with Parvey as well. Many of the women of Parvey’s class lived with the dean, Douglas Horton, and his wife, Mildred McAfee Horton, a prominent Congregationalist, president of Wellesley College, and also, coincidentally, a trustee of the Danforth Foundation. The Horton’s home gave these women a place to gather,⁵⁶ and Mildred McAfee Horton kept in touch with Parvey throughout her career.⁵⁷

As part of her work for the universities of Cambridge, Parvey traveled to neighboring schools to make contacts with students without Lutheran chaplains and worked towards coordinating Lutheran university ministries in New England. Her campus work was consuming, and Parvey did not finish her degree at Harvard Divinity until 1962. Afterwards, she had trouble finding a job. She settled on a position at University of California, Los Angeles, as a director of the University YWCA, overseeing a staff of ten. In Los Angeles, Parvey began to fall in with

⁵⁴Constance Parvey, diary entry, Feb 1, 1958, Box 4, Folder 9, Parvey Papers.

⁵⁵ Constance Parvey, diary entry, undated, between Jul 13, 1959 and Aug 8, 1959, Box 4, Folder 9, Parvey Papers. Parvey was hardly unusual for considering a relationship with a student. Danny Grads not infrequently married students from the university at which they served.

⁵⁶Ann Braude, “A Short Half Century: Fifty Years of Women at Harvard Divinity School” (Address, September 19, 2005), <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2005/09/19/short-half-century-fifty-years-women-harvard-divinity-school#..>

⁵⁷Mildred McAfee Horton to Constance Parvey, Feb 4, 1978, Box 7, Folder 3, Parvey Papers.

activists on the Christian left. She took classes with Sister Mary Corita Kent, an artist and peace activist, and met Hans Küng, a liberal Catholic theologian who would later publicly support the ordination of women.⁵⁸ Although Los Angeles in the early 1960s provided Parvey a lively intellectual community, she found the YWCA unsuited to her sense of call. Her loyalty was to her church, not some interdenominational body, and when she was asked to do more paperwork and less pastoring she left. Parvey landed an associate campus ministry job at University of Wisconsin-Madison. As the beginnings of student radicalism stirred in the early 1960s, Parvey sensed a change on campus. In autobiographical notes, she called this time a “period of transition.”⁵⁹ The 1950s, she wrote much later, had been about spiritual transformation and reconciliation in student Christian life. The 1960s, she was beginning to learn, would be about political transformation.⁶⁰

Going Native

The reputation of campus ministry in the 1960s reflected the reputation of the students: radical and in revolt. When a minister goes to campus, one scholar cautioned in 1969, he or she runs the risk of “going native.”⁶¹ Though campus ministers supported activist groups to various extents, they were, as a class, far more liberal than their parish peers.⁶² Early in the student movement, campus ministers made their sympathies clear. During the Free Speech Movement at U.C. Berkeley in 1964-1965, the organizer Mario Savio and his executive committee met

⁵⁸Constance Parvey to Reverend Ralph Peterson, “Report to the Commission on the Ministry: Professional Women”, Jan 1968, Box 53, Folder 13, Parvey Papers. On Hans Kung, see Hazel Foster, “Ecclesiastical Status of Women,” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Oct-Dec, 1967)

⁵⁹Constance Parvey, “Autobiography: A Case Study in Female Spirituality”, undated, Box 49, Folder 11, Parvey Papers.

⁶⁰Constance Parvey, “Running with the Time and Against the Grain”, 2006, Box 50, Folder 6, Parvey Papers.

⁶¹N.J. Demerath, III, and Kenneth J. Lutterman, “The Student Parishioner: Radical Rhetoric and Traditional Reality” in Underwood, ed., *The Church*, 92.

⁶²Hammond, “Radical Ministry”, 6-9.

frequently in the Westminster House, the Presbyterian campus ministry center.⁶³ Shortly before Columbia University erupted in protests in 1968, the campus ministers of Columbia published a collection of essays, *Never Trust a God Over 30*, which praised and offered their support to student activists. “It would appear,” one campus minister wrote in the collection, “that the involved and concerned university pastor has begun to create a place for himself in the university which makes him a valuable colleague for the student radicals.”⁶⁴ This was, the essays implied, the campus minister’s proper place. Paul Goodman, an influential author and thinker of the new left, praised campus ministry in the *New Republic* and the *New York Times Magazine*. He presented the profession as one with moral backbone that had important questions at its heart. He levied upon it what might be the ultimate compliment of the day, that the ministry consists of “partly being in the humanities and partly dropping out.”⁶⁵ Seminarians were also rallying around the cause of Civil Rights and ending the war in Vietnam, particularly after a seminarian at Vanderbilt Divinity School, James Lawson, was expelled for his participation in sit-ins in the South. Some of the students involved in Student Interracial Ministry (SIM), a coordinating group for civil rights efforts amongst seminarians, went into careers in campus ministry after their

⁶³Keith Chamberlain, “The Berkely Free Speech Movement and the Campus Ministry” in Robert Coehn, Reginald E. Zellik, and Leon F. Litwak, ed. *The Free Speech Movement: Reflections on Berkeley in the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 357.

⁶⁴Albert Friedlander, ed., *Never Trust a God Over 30: New Styles in Campus Ministry* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 116. Barbara Wheeler, a campus minister at Columbia during the 1968 protests, credits the chaplains at Columbia with the fact that no one died during the protests. She recalls that many truces were brokered at Earl Hall, the inter-faith ministry. Barbara Wheeler, Oral History Interview by Beth Hessel and Elizabeth Wittrig, November 29, 2018, New York, Pearl Digital Collections, Presbyterian Historical Society.

⁶⁵Paul Goodman, “Chaplains and Students”, in Friedlander, ed. *Never Trust*, vii. See also Paul Goodman, “The New Reformation” *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 14, 1969; Paul Goodman “Student Chaplains,” *The New Republic* 156, no. 1 (Jan 7, 1967): 29-31.

graduations.⁶⁶ SIM also relied on the presence of supportive campus ministers to host interns and programs.⁶⁷

Some contemporaries such as Jeffrey Hadden and Phillip Hammond suspected that liberal ministers were not simply self-selecting for campus jobs, but were actually being actively channeled there by their denominations.⁶⁸ Finding radical ministers too difficult to place in pastorates, denominations, they theorized, pawned them off on universities. For most campus ministers, this was a welcome reprieve. “Campus ministers,” one wrote in 1970, “almost always benefit from an ecclesiastical freedom not given to the average clergyman in local parish. They can have and are usually able to express liberal and radical views more freely, engage in more liturgical innovation, and involve themselves to a much greater degree in political controversy.”⁶⁹ Most campus ministers answered to, and were funded by, the denominations themselves, not the universities. This allowed them be vocal critics of the institutions in which they lived and worked, to a greater degree, even, than faculty. At the same time, denominational oversight was minimal, and appointment boards were themselves composed of fellow campus chaplains, unlikely to reprimand a colleague. So concentrated was the radicalism of campus ministers that some scholars began to worry about the future of the church. Hadden wrote presciently in 1969 that denominations were systematically isolating radical clergy from parishes—moving them instead into campus ministry, administration, seminary teaching, experimental ministries, and

⁶⁶Cline, *From Reconciliation to Revolution*, 7-8. Student Interracial Ministry participants who entered campus ministry after their graduation from seminary include: Hank Elkins, Charles Helms, and Tom Ross. (Cline, *Reconciliation*, 49, 18, 151). In 1966, SIM also began a campus ministry program of a sort, in which they sent white seminarians to internships on black college campuses where they assumed formal duties teaching, and informal duties as counselors and as a “quiet ministry.” (Cline, *Reconciliation*, 150-151).

⁶⁷Cline, *Reconciliation*, 21, 85.

⁶⁸Hammond, “The Radical Ministry”; Jeffrey Hadden, *The Gathering Storm in the Churches* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1970).

⁶⁹Joseph Hardigee, “Preparatory Statement” in *The Professional Identity of the Campus Minister: Report on the First Consultation on the Future of the Campus Ministry*, ed. Church Society for College Work (Cambridge, MA: Church Society of College Work, 1970).

mission work.⁷⁰ He predicted that radical clergy had saturated these positions so thoroughly that there was nowhere for them to go besides the parishes. This, he suspected, would wreak havoc on the mainline, unless ministers could convince their flocks that the church must be the harbinger of radical political change.

For women in campus ministry, their placement was partly a systematic isolation by the denomination and partly the only job available that used their education, their skills, and their sense of calling. Eleanor Scott Myers, a campus minister at University of Kansas in the 1960s and 1970s, remembered that “campus ministry was one of the only doors through which Protestant women were, at the time, able to enter the active ministry.”⁷¹ Harriet Stewart, a seminarian at Vanderbilt Divinity School, wrote cajoling in her divinity school paper, “If the divinity dame will always say, ‘I think I want to go into Wesley Foundation work,’ she will receive a tender smile—truly she is a good fellow! Every male student director needs a female assistant these days, and sometimes at a women’s college, a woman alone might suffice. Of late, there is prestige here, ladies.”⁷² Campus ministers were also, frequently, the only female ministerial role models available to young women.⁷³ Carolyn Louise Stapleton, an early Methodist ordinand, discovered her call to ministry as a student at Michigan State University in the 1960s, where she was involved in the Wesley Foundation. She was moved by the model of the associate director of the Wesley Foundation, who was a woman. Stapleton recalls she was

⁷⁰Jeffrey Hadden, “The House Divided”, in Underwood, *The Church, the University, and Social Policy: The Danforth Study of Campus Ministers*, 283.

⁷¹Eleanor Scott Myers, “Eleanor Scott Myers,” in *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* ed. Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 221.

⁷²As cited in Kim Maphis Early, “Women’s Work” in *Vanderbilt Divinity School: Education, Contest, and Change*, ed. Dale A. Johnson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001), 200.

⁷³Male campus ministers also encouraged women to enter ministry. Presbyterian minister Susan Andrews estimates that her campus chaplain at Wellesley encouraged fifteen women into ministry in the early 1970s. *Susan Andrews*, video, Living History (Presbyterian Historical Society, 2012).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KQ9kUXyu3E&feature=youtu.be>.

“the only woman I had ever seen in any form of professional ministry.”⁷⁴ Crucially, although directors of campus chaplaincy tended to be ordained, assistant and associate positions under these chaplains proliferated, as did ancillary and staff positions, and these jobs did not require ordination. Hadden’s point about saturation may apply indirectly to women who entered campus ministry. Thanks in part to the Danforth fellowships and to a lack of other ministerial opportunities, women came to fill many of the roles just subordinate to these male directors.⁷⁵ These positions were mostly held by un-ordained women with seminary training. There was nowhere for the women to go but to roles that required ordination.

At University of Wisconsin between 1963 and 1966, Parvey participated in student activism. She taught a mini-course, part of a trend at universities in the 1960s inspired by Paul Goodman towards “classrooms without walls” and “universities-in-exile.”⁷⁶ Alarmed to find that their universities were, in fact, establishments in their own right, students and supportive faculty formed alternative course catalogs and met outside of university spaces. Parvey and her colleagues began a non-credit Department of Religious Studies.⁷⁷ When the war in Vietnam captured the attention of students, Parvey encouraged her students to involve themselves in peace

⁷⁴Patricia Thompson, *Courageous Past-- Bold Future: The Journey Towards Full Clergy Rights for Women in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, United Methodist Church, 2006). 147. There is also evidence that the same is true for Catholic women who would go on to engage in Catholic feminism and the women’s ordination movement. Mary Henold recounts the experience of Joan Workmaster, a Catholic feminist activist who identified the source of her feminism as arising from her “involvement in campus ministry at her Catholic women’s college and, specifically, liturgical changes after the Second Vatican Council that encouraged women’s participation.” Mary Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 15.

⁷⁵Though it is difficult to find numbers of women in campus ministry at any one time, and even harder to discern how many were in part-time campus ministerial work, between 1975 and 1976, for instance, though only two women were considered “campus pastors” by National Lutheran Campus Ministry (that is, ordained pastors), women made up a majority of “campus ministers” and “campus associates” on the NLCM’s staff roll. “National Lutheran Campus Ministry Staff, 1975-1976”, Box 19, Folder 9, Parvey Papers. The two campus pastors were Elizabeth Platz and Constance Parvey.

⁷⁶Other women in campus ministry also expressed sympathies with this movement, and taught similar courses. Alice Hageman, “Resume and Personal Statement,” Dec. 9, 1969, Box 2, Folder 4, Alice Hageman Papers, Yale Divinity School, Yale University; Anne Colman, untitled, *Campus Ministry Women* 3, no. 2 (1974).

⁷⁷Constance Parvey, “Running with the Times and Against the Grain”, 2006, Box 50, Folder 6, Parvey Papers

and civil rights activism.⁷⁸ She knocked on doors for John F. Kennedy in 1960, and worked full-time on Eugene McCarthy's campaign for the presidency in 1968.

As the student experience came to seem foreign to most of the church, campus ministers often acted as cultural translators. They saw themselves, on one hand, as emissaries to the students, and, on the other, prophetic voices to the church. One campus minister at Berkeley in the 1960s described his ministry as one of "critical solidarity" with the student radicals.⁷⁹ The term could describe Parvey's attitude as well. In an article for *The Lutheran* in 1970, Parvey tried to explain the actions of students to the middle-aged readership of the periodical. Their protests against university officials, she wrote, were protests against the offices, not the persons, and were, for the students, a proxy for the authorities they would really like to target, those leading the war in Vietnam. University officials needed to take these protests seriously but not personally. Parvey also had a critique for this rebellious generation, whose insistence on instant gratification of their demands she suspected was a product of consumer capitalism. Caught between the church and the students, Parvey tried to encourage mutual understanding.⁸⁰ Campus ministers of the time testified repeatedly that this work of translation—between the church at large and the student radicals—was an essential feature of their ministry.⁸¹

A natural metaphor existed for such cross-cultural work: mission. The analogy had been around since the 1950s, when an Episcopal bishop described college campuses as "the greatest domestic mission field," but it gained new relevance amidst student unrest in the 1960s.⁸²

Campuses were increasingly considered, by observers, ivy-walled foreign nations, practically

⁷⁸Constance Parvey, "The Awakening of A Woman Minister: Influence of Church and Society" Box 65, Folder 4, Parvey Papers.

⁷⁹Chamberlain, "The Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the Campus Ministry", 359.

⁸⁰Constance Parvey, "Student Unrest: A Crisis in Manners and Morals", *The Lutheran*, August 19, 1970.

⁸¹See also, for instance, Chamberlain, "The Berkeley Free Speech Movement and the Campus Ministry." 358.

⁸²Ellen Wondra, "Mapping the 'Greatest Domestic Mission Field' in a New Educational Landscape" *Anglican Theological Review* (Jan 1, 2017): 65.

incomprehensible to those outside it. “The church on the university campus is the frontier,” one campus minister wrote in 1967.⁸³ When sociologist Phillip Hammond profiled the profession in 1966, he used a missionary paradigm to understand the historical evolution of campus ministry—beginning with an era of explorers, moving through an era of colonial administrators, and finally into the modern era of the campus minister as a fellow citizen.⁸⁴ Parvey, too, was enamored of this way of conceiving campus ministry. Commenting on a colleague’s essay about the profession, she wrote:

It is very important that we underline as central to our criteria for campus ministry, our self-understanding as mission. We still have a mentality that the only mission is foreign mission. We must understand the new quest for religious life coming out of American secular religious experience and find a way to be a ministry and minister to those needs... We are not bringing the gospel to those who have not heard it before, but to those who have and who have, either themselves, or their parents, rejected it.⁸⁵

The gender implications of the analogy were not often remarked upon directly, but one can hear them reverberate if one listens closely. The periodical *Lutheran Woman*, which covered almost exclusively matters of foreign missions even into the 1960s, described campus ministry as an example of “the church in mission”⁸⁶ and devoted entire issues to this mission field in 1963 and in 1964, including intercessory prayer on behalf of Lutheran universities, campus ministries, and Christian students.⁸⁷ The Danny Grad fellowships themselves were structured like nineteenth century missions. Young, single women were sent on assignment to unchosen locations that, as a requirement, were to be far from their homes, and received a stipend for their Christian service to

⁸³Freelancer, ed., *Never Trust a God*, 63.

⁸⁴As cited in Henry Horn, *Lutherans in Campus Ministry* (Chicago: National Lutheran Campus Ministry, 1969), 30.

⁸⁵Constance Parvey to Eric Mood, memo, May 10, 1976, Box 19, Folder 5, Parvey Papers. Emphasis original.

⁸⁶E. Theodore Bachmann, “College Bound: Church-related campuses and ministries to college students are two expressions of the Church in mission in higher education”, *Lutheran Woman*, April 1963.

⁸⁷“God’s Servants on Campus” *Lutheran Woman*, April 1964; “Calendar of Intercessory Prayer” *Lutheran Woman*, April 1964.

an underserved population.⁸⁸ At least one woman even entered her Danny Grad fellowship with the idea of receiving training and ideas for a foreign mission.⁸⁹ Only enhancing the connection between women and campus ministerial work was the rise of the idea of the “teenager.”⁹⁰ The university student before World War II was generally considered an adult. But the undergraduate of the 1950s and 1960s was a young-adult, an adolescent, immature and in need of further nurturing. Women had overseen the care-taking and education of children in mainline churches for several decades. It was a logical extension to expand their ministries into undergraduates. The young women in campus ministerial work could pass as surrogate mothers to the students.

The mid-century arrival of the teenager also synthesized with the pastoral counseling programs appearing in seminaries. The work of the campus minister was, given its flock, even more oriented towards psychological and spiritual care than that of minister in a parish. Wrote one frustrated male Lutheran campus pastor in 1969, campus ministers were glorified baby-sitters, tasked only with “counseling students and meeting with students and feeding students and having fellowship with students.” He was irked by successful evangelical campus ministries like Campus Crusade for Christ, “whose intention is not the care and feeding and the cuddling and coddling of students,” and therefore were free to be ministries proper.⁹¹ The prevalence of

⁸⁸The rule that women in the Danny Grad program remain single was strongly enforced. According to Zavaleta, one Danny Grad famously married the day after her program terminated. Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

⁸⁹Genie Hopper Zavaleta, interview with author, October 30, 2018.

⁹⁰See, for instance, Grace Hale, *Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹¹Clyde R. McCormack, “Campus Crusade for Christ -- A Crisis in Lutheran Theology and Practice” *Lutheran Quarterly* (Aug. 1, 1969): 263-4. It is much more difficult to determine if service in evangelical organizations like Intervarsity Christian Fellowship and Campus Crusade for Christ were also gateways to ministry for evangelical women, but they clearly did serve in campus ministerial capacities in these organizations, especially alongside their husbands. See Keith Hunt and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The Story of Intervarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A. / 1940-1990* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 192-193. Similarly, there is some evidence that campus ministry was and remains a viable ministry for evangelical women. Helen Jean Bond Parks, a campus minister for Southern Baptist Student Union between 1948-1952 recalled that half of her fellow ministers in SBCSU were women. Likewise, historian Kate Bowler has found that many modern evangelical women celebrities get their start in campus ministry. Paula Ellen Buford, “The Lost Tradition of Women Pastoral Caregivers

women campus ministers fit with the sense that, as the Lutheran minister implied, students were children in need of cuddling and coddling. Women campus ministers could do this mothering without feeling compromised. Jeanne Audrey Powers, a Methodist campus minister in the 1950s, recalled that the associate director positions at Wesley Foundations were almost always women, whose roles were to be “a mothering presence to students having difficulty adjusting to college life.”⁹² Another observer suggested that women campus ministers strategically adopted the role of surrogate mothers, as a way to evince a firm but loving moral authority.⁹³ Women campus ministers and those who observed them often felt that helping students through difficult adjustments was their greatest skill in the profession. Henry Horn, Parvey’s supervisor at University Lutheran, wrote in an overview of campus ministry as a profession in 1969 that there are many types of campus ministers: the youth-leader, the mediator of social change, the teacher. The counselor type, he wrote, has training in psychological disciplines and specializes in adolescence. “He dominated campus ministry in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and he was more often a SHE.”⁹⁴ Perhaps Horn was thinking specifically of Parvey, for her spunk in the counseling capacity became something of legend. In a story her colleagues remembered decades later, a Lutheran woman came to Parvey seeking counsel. The young woman was pregnant, the result of an inter-racial, non-Lutheran relationship. She knew her parents would never let her marry, but she wanted to keep the baby. Parvey, as the story goes, told the young woman that in Cambridge it did not matter much what you did, so long as you did it with class. To prove it,

from 1925-1967: A ‘Dangerous Memory’” (Th.D. diss, Columbia Theological Seminary, 1997), 259). Kate Bowler, *The Preacher’s Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 18.

⁹²Powers, “Jeanne Audrey Powers,” 54.

⁹³Pam Proctor and William Proctor, *Women in the Pulpit: Is God an Equal Opportunity Employer?* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 120.

⁹⁴Horn, *Lutherans in Campus Ministry*, 100.

Parvey dipped into the discretionary fund and bought the young women a beautiful maternity dress.⁹⁵

By inhabiting mothering roles and articulating a vision of campus ministry as a missionary enterprise, women campus ministers conformed to gender expectations. But this conformity afforded them quite a bit of cover to try on the role of an ordained minister on campuses. The duties of campus ministers have historically been—and continue to be—notoriously ill-defined.⁹⁶ In some cases, the campus ministry staff at a university was the entire Religion department—women campus ministers taught courses in bible, ethics, and theology long before the academic hiring of women as professors of religion gained steam.⁹⁷ Women campus ministers also had ample opportunity to give sermons—though they did not always call them such—to student Christian groups, local congregations, and other student organizations such as sororities. One Danny Grad in 1945 wrote to William Danforth that she had, in the last month, seven speaking engagements.⁹⁸ Many campus ministers, such as Parvey and Jeanne Audrey Powers, were also given appointments at local congregations as assistant pastors, and participated part-time in parish work in addition to their duties on campus. Women campus ministers also exercised more liturgical freedom than might be assumed. At the University of Wisconsin, Constance Parvey led a group of students in composing and then actualizing a communion-agape feast. She helped her students redecorate and rename the Lutheran chapel. Liturgical freedom was perhaps even more stark for Catholic women in campus ministry. A Catholic chaplain in Detroit, Marie Sylvestro, took confession from her students and celebrated

⁹⁵Speech, “25th Anniversary of the Ordination of Reverend Constance Fern Parvey: Connie’s Reflections” December 7, 1997, Box 5, Folder 13, Parvey Papers.

⁹⁶Schmalzbauer, “Campus Ministry”, 458-460.

⁹⁷Anne Colman, untitled, *Campus Ministry Women* 3, no. 2 (1974).

⁹⁸Jeanne Ackley (Lohman) to William Danforth, Nov. 8, 1945, personal collection of Genie Hopper Zavaleta.

the Eucharist with them. According to historian Mary Henold, Sylvestro's students told her, "You are my priest."⁹⁹ It was common for un-ordained women in campus ministry work to come to the slow realization that they were essentially ministers without the titles. Lee McGee, an Episcopal chaplain at American University, realized she was "doing all the things that an ordained person would do"—just without the ordination.¹⁰⁰

On campuses, women campus ministers were exposed to the social movements sweeping the nation, especially civil rights and eventually second-wave feminism. Parvey's experience on campuses and her Danny Grad fellowship at Vanderbilt had brought the civil rights movement to her. In Nashville she met Morehouse College president and civil rights leader Benjamin E. Mays and his wife, and once rode with them in their car. She was asked to sit in the back; the Mays worried the appearance of Parvey sitting next to a black man would cause trouble, an incident that stuck with Parvey for years afterwards.¹⁰¹ Participation in the civil rights movement was vital for ministerial reformers, many of whom experienced it as part of the Student Christian Movement or as campus ministers. Indeed, the ministerial reformation of the 1960s owed far more to civil rights than it did to early whispers of second wave feminism. In the 1960s, comparisons between the subjection of black Americans and the subjection of women in the church began to proliferate. In 1966, the president of the American Association of Women Ministers wrote that "these two revolutions of race and women are inadvertently traveling together." These movements, she continued, shared an "emancipation proclamation": that in Christ we are neither bond nor free, male nor female.¹⁰² Other reformers came directly from civil rights activism into the ministerial reformation. Prathia Hall, an organizer for the Student

⁹⁹Mary Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 217.

¹⁰⁰Lee McGee interviewed by Margo Guernesey, April 26, 2016, page 4, private collection of Margo Guernesey.

¹⁰¹Benjamin E. Mays to Constance Parvey, June 22, 1968, Box 7, Folder 13, Parvey Papers.

¹⁰²Eva Henderson, "Revolution in Woman's World," *Woman's Pulpit* (Jan-March, 1966).

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s, and, by some accounts, the original source of the phrase “I have a dream” in the civil rights movement, was ordained in 1977 in the American Baptist Church and spent her later years advocating for women’s ministry in black churches. Hall directly connected racial discrimination with sex discrimination, refused to associate her parish with the National Baptist Convention for their discrimination against women’s leadership, and insisted sexism must be purged from the church.¹⁰³ A young, bi-racial lawyer named Pauli Murray helped forge a legal path for civil rights in the 1950s, and would later, in the 1970s, become one of the first women ordained in the Episcopal Church.

The civil rights movement was also crucial for churchwomen, whose advocacy against racism had deep roots, but whose work for the ministerial reformation was only in its infancy. Lutheran Church Women (LCW), the women’s arm of LCA, provide a particularly telling example. In 1970, LCW was instrumental in advocating for the ordination of women in their church. It was only, however, through introspection about racial justice that LCW decided it needed to have anything to do with women’s ministry. In March of 1970, leaders of Lutheran Church Women met with black community leaders for a program on racism. The meeting was intense, lasting hours, and the black speakers moved many of the white Lutheran women to consider their complicity in racism. These conversations, writes Dorothy J. Marple, “opened up the discussion of the place of women and their subordination in the church.” In the hours after the meeting, LCW formed a quick committee. The committee members stayed up into the night drafting a resolution in favor of women’s ordination. The president of LCW at the time, Doris H. Spong, said afterward, “Not only were we thinking about our own racist feelings and actions, but also how women needed freedom to use their God-given gifts in service to others in every part of

¹⁰³Courtney Pace Lyons, “Freedom Faith: The Civil Rights Journey of Dr. Prathia Hall” (Ph.D. diss, Baylor University, 2014), 194-196.

the church's life." The resulting resolution was distributed to seminary presidents, synodical presidents, board and agency executives.¹⁰⁴ It recommended that LCA change its policy on women and ordination, and that seminaries, congregations, boards and commissions make women welcome.¹⁰⁵

In the mid-1960s, with ordination still unavailable to her in the Lutheran church (the cause would not be achieved until 1970), Constance Parvey left Wisconsin feeling sour about ministry and the church in general. In her four years at the university as an associate chaplain, three different men had supervised her. By the third, Parvey was tired of being passed over for the promotion. She had trouble finding other campus work, in part because the National Lutheran Council (NLC), which coordinated university work for the LCA and the American Lutheran Church (ALC), was also coordinating, at the time, with the conservative Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod on several campuses.¹⁰⁶ Henry Hetland, director of the NLC's division of college and university work, wrote to Parvey in 1963 that a job at University of Chicago would be impossible for her, since there was a "need for a man who can effectively collaborate and compliment the Missouri Synod chaplain."¹⁰⁷ With no other job prospects in campus ministry, she passed an uncertain few years. She returned to Boston in 1967 and edited the Harvard Divinity Bulletin. During these liminal years she almost lost her faith.¹⁰⁸ But she began to think more about women's issues in the church. "Should the opportunity come for me to return to a ministry mission that would require my level of experience, I would return," she wrote in 1968,

¹⁰⁴Dorothy J. Marple, "God at Work Among Us" in Gloria Bengston, ed. *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995), 24-25.

¹⁰⁵"Lutheran Women Speak Up on Ordination" *Woman's Pulpit*, Jan-March, 1970.

¹⁰⁶In the mid-century, ALC, LCA, and LCMS were also roughly equal in size, making up about 95% of American Lutherans, with the rest mostly in the Wisconsin Evangelical Synod. See Mark Granquist, *Lutherans in America: A New History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

¹⁰⁷Henry Hetland to Connie Parvey, May 14, 1963, Box 64, Folder 2, Parvey Papers.

¹⁰⁸Constance Parvey, "The Awakening of A Woman Minister: Influence of Church and Society" Box 65, Folder 4, Parvey Papers.

“but it is the better part of realism to see that this would be difficult to impossible without ordination; that is, a full opening of the sacramental, liturgical, and administrative responsibilities of our church.” For a long time she had believed that she should not speak out about the ordination of women, that the Holy Spirit would move the church when the time had come. These years left her impatient. Now, she wrote, “I feel that this way of thinking is adequate and that the Holy Spirit needs a little help!”¹⁰⁹

Parvey was not alone in her feeling. In 1954, Parvey’s mentor at Harvard, Krister Stendahl, published an influential argument on behalf of women’s ordination in Sweden. In 1958, the state church of Sweden, confessionally Lutheran, opened the priesthood to women, in part because church employees were employees of the state. Despite ongoing controversy over the decision in Sweden, the move rocked the American Lutheran churches, and the Swedish ordination scandal was covered extensively in an English-language periodical, *Lutheran World*. By the late 1960s, the pressures were stacking up on American Lutheranism. The state churches of Denmark and Norway had allowed women’s ordination since 1947 and 1938 respectively, and with Sweden joining them, American Lutherans were in the minority of Lutherans worldwide in their refusal to make women clergy.¹¹⁰ Stendahl’s influential exegesis was translated into English and published in the United States, to wide acclaim, in 1966. In 1967, the president of ALC, Fredrick Schiotz, discovered that two women were in residence at a Lutheran seminary, at least one of whom was aiming for ordination.¹¹¹ Schiotz wrote to the Lutheran Council in the USA—a

¹⁰⁹Constance Parvey to Ralph Peterson, “Report to the Commission on the Ministry: Professional Women,” January, 1968, Box 58, Folder 13, Parvey Papers.

¹¹⁰Paul Opsahl, “Ordination of Women in the Oikumene: Exhibit C-8”, Jan, 1969, Subcommittee on the Ordination of Women, Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the USA, digital collection, Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Though Norway would allow for the ordination of women as early as 1938, no women were actually ordained for another twenty years. Grace Grindal, “How Lutheran Women Came to be Ordained” in *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry* ed. Gloria Bengtson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995).

¹¹¹This seems likely to have been Barbara Andrews, who was the first full-time female student at Lutheran Theological Seminary (admitted 1964). She was allowed to take pre-ordination courses there. June Melby Benowitz,

body through which all major branches of American Lutheranism coordinated at the time—requesting guidance. Studies on the ordination of women began within the Lutheran Council.¹¹²

Lutheran debates over the ordination of women were, not surprisingly, structured around parish ministry, or, as they called it, the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Could a woman do the things a parish minister was required to do, liturgically and organizationally? Henry Horn believed that the terms of this debate were unfair to women, who, after all, were mostly demonstrating their ministerial capacities not in parishes but on campuses. He lamented in 1969, that, “in the tradition of the National Lutheran Campus Ministry, stretching back to the very beginnings, women have been most effective agents of the ministry; it would be hard to imagine our ministry without their contributions....Our Lutheran hang-up on ordination in terms of the parish model has not only given a false model to many of our ordained clergy, but it has made all other church vocations second-rate affairs.”¹¹³

Another of these second-rate affairs, overlooked by Lutherans considering women’s ordination, was their order of deaconesses. Of all American Protestants, Lutherans took their deaconess program most seriously. Deaconess’s orders were separate from clerical orders, and deaconesses maintained cultural and geographical space from the rest of the church, laboring mostly in hospitals and in social work and living in deaconess homes. Though Lutheran deaconesses flourished in Europe, they struggled in America, where they were likely seen as overly Catholic in flavor.¹¹⁴ At their peak in 1938, there were 487 Lutheran deaconesses in the United States. Historians Virginia Lieson Brereton and Christa Ressmeyer Klein estimate that, in

ed., *Encyclopedia of American Women and Religion*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, Ca: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 18.

¹¹²Maria Erling, “The Americanization of American Lutheranism: Democratization of Authority and the Ordination of Women, Part I”, Lutheran University Press, 2011. <http://www.elca.org/jle/articles/186>.

¹¹³Horn, *Lutherans in Campus Ministry*, 106-107.

¹¹⁴L. DeAne Lagerquist, *From Our Mothers Arms: A History of Women in the American Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1987), 70.

all U.S. denominations combined, deaconesses never topped more than 2,000 at any one time.¹¹⁵ Deaconesses, in general, were too isolated from the rest of the church, and felt their identity specifically *as deaconesses* too acutely, to make effective ordination advocates. Madeline Southard went so far as to call deaconess work a “palliative.”¹¹⁶ (She perhaps had her suspicions confirmed when she wrote to a prominent deaconess in 1923, recommending membership in the Association of Women-Preachers. The deaconess turned her down, writing, “as I never expect to make a business of preaching, do not know as I shall join...”¹¹⁷) Brereton and Klein conclude that the deaconess movement, though it channeled women’s religious service, “did not have the same critical importance as the missionary movement in the development of female leadership.”¹¹⁸

Henry Horn’s suspicion that Lutherans would neglect women’s contributions to campus ministry and other church vocations was ultimately correct. American Lutherans would hardly consider Lutheran women’s service as campus ministers, or in any other non-parish ministerial capacity, in their consideration of ordination. However, when the decision was finally made in favor, women in campus ministry were waiting in the wings, and were the many of the first to receive ordinations. One of the reasons women campus ministers may have been so keen to be ordained is related to an outburst of liturgical fervor that hit campuses particularly hard in the

¹¹⁵Mary Todd, “Not in God’s Lifetime: The Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod” (Ph.D. diss, University of Illinois Chicago, 1996), 144-149; Virginia Lieson Brereton and Christa Ressmyer Klein, “American Women in Ministry: A History of Protestant Beginning Points” in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 310-311.

¹¹⁶As quoted in Kenra Weddle Irons, “M. Madeline Southard on ‘Ecclesial Suffrage’” *Methodist History*, 45:1 (October 2006).

¹¹⁷Deaconess Josephine S. Fink to Madeline Southard, July 13, 1923, M. Madeline Southard Papers, Box 9, Folder 1, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

¹¹⁸Brereton and Klein, “American Women in Ministry”, 310-311.

1960s. Liturgical renewal, though it oriented Lutheran conversations about ministry towards the parish and priesthood, also helped push ministerial reformers like Parvey towards ordination.

The Tug of the Eucharist

Even without a mid-century liturgical revival, the Lutherans' entrance into the ministerial reformation would have brought new theological issues, particular to a church with sacramental and priestly leanings. As Parvey herself noted in a history she wrote of the ecumenical ordination movement, most prior ministerial reformations, such as within American Methodism, were structured around arguments for basic equality, for the full utilization of spiritual gifts, and for meeting the needs of the church. With the Lutherans, novel problems emerged: principally, the meaning of the priesthood. As one observer in Sweden put it, "That a woman should occupy a pulpit may not seem to be altogether strange. But that she should stand before an altar is different..."¹¹⁹

Historically, churches that emphasized the priesthood as an ontologically separate class of persons, serving as intermediaries for gifts of the spirit, have been more likely to resist women's ministry.¹²⁰ In the 1950s and 1960s, much of this resistance might be summed up in one word: representation. The priest, in higher ecclesiologies of this sort, is not simply a delegate for the people before Christ, but represents Christ to the people. A woman, because of her sex, cannot represent Christ, who was male, and who stands in an essentially gendered relationship to his church, "the bride of Christ." At no point is this representation more vital than during the Eucharist (Holy Communion) when the priest re-enacts elements of the Last Supper for the

¹¹⁹As quoted in Constance Parvey, "Appendix" in *The Force of Tradition: A Case Study of Women Priests in Sweden*, ed. Brita Stendhal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 144.

¹²⁰Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 116-127.

congregated, in the place of Christ (*in persona Christe*). The relevance of representation, however, rides partly on the importance of Eucharistic life for Protestant churches.

Representation was never a major issue in, for instance, Congregationalist, Disciples, or even Methodist ordination debates. But Lutherans, throughout their history, have inclined more towards a high church ecclesiology and held Holy Communion more central than most Protestants. Most Lutherans emphasize the Lord's Supper in their worship, have a strong liturgical calendar, and place altars at the center of their churches, with pulpits to the side. With the entrance of Lutherans into the ministerial reformation, the terms of the ordination debate shifted, as Parvey described it, "from equality to representative function."¹²¹ For decades in American Protestantism, women strived to be ministers. Now, they wanted to be priests.

Crucial for our story here is the oft-overlooked point that theologies of priesthood and sacrament themselves ebb and flow with historical currents. Just as American Lutherans were realizing they had to confront the issue of women's ordination, a liturgical renewal movement heightened the stakes for the debate. Inspired by Vatican II and ecumenism, interest in ritual and worship proliferated among American Protestants across the nation, beginning in the 1940s in theological circles and showing its fruits in parish worship after Vatican II, in the 1960s. Lutherans, for their part, cooperated on a new service book and hymnal, released 1958, which, controversially, introduced a full Eucharistic prayer to their worship. (Martin Luther had excised much of this prayer in the sixteenth century). Protestant churches across the spectrum de-centered their lecterns and centered their communion tables.¹²² Episcopalians began taking Holy

¹²¹Constance Parvey, "Appendix", 144.

¹²²Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 240.

Communion weekly. Roman Catholic and Protestant worship bent gently towards one another, and looked far more similar in 1970 than they had in 1940.¹²³

More subtle theological shifts were also in the air. Though it may surprise, the idea that women could not represent Christ to the congregation, specifically in Eucharistic functions, appears to be a product the mid-twentieth century. The American Lutheran committee charged with studying women's ordination found that, "Seldom does any Lutheran author (in the old Lutheran tradition) argue from the fact that Christ chose only men as apostles. Never is the idea mentioned that the ministry must be male in order to represent Christ properly." The idea, they concluded, perhaps to their surprise, only became prevalent in the 1950s.¹²⁴ The notion had roots in liturgical renewal. Theologians of liturgy began advancing a theology of the Eucharist that made it the central tenet of Christian life in the 1930s. They tried to resolve a longstanding theological question: in what sense is Christ "present" during the Eucharist? Previous theologies of this presence focused on "presence" in the sense of Christ's power, or on transubstantiation, but increasingly liturgists were thinking about the presence of the *historical* event, the Last Supper itself. The upshot of this distinction was that it emphasized that the rite is, in many ways, a re-enactment (or, in a popular term, a "re-presentation") of a historical event. The change is subtle but important: new Catholic theologies of the Eucharist, after the liturgical renewal movement, tended to shine a spotlight on the ways in which the act as re-presented resembles the act as it happened in the first century. These theologies of the Eucharist shaped the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, particularly *Sacrosanctum concillium*. Through Vatican II and in published

¹²³James White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 24.

¹²⁴Fred Meuser, "The Lutheran Tradition and the Ordination of Women: Exhibit C-4", Jan 1968, Subcommittee on the Ordination of Women, Division of Theological Studies, Lutheran Council in the USA, digital collection, Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

works, these ideas percolated into American Protestantism, including American Lutheranism.¹²⁵ Liturgical renewal thus both advanced the importance of the Eucharist, *and* reformed Christian understanding of the ceremony to impress upon witnesses the qualities of the rite that are historical re-enactment.¹²⁶ For women aiming at the ministry, the question became one of casting. Could a woman really play the leading role in what was a performance of (and a participation in) a historical event starring a man?¹²⁷

One might assume liturgical renewal was merely a hindrance to the ministerial reformation in the Lutheran context, given the renewed importance of the Eucharist and its representative function, and liturgy more generally. The reality is more complicated. In general, much like ecumenism, the renewal's effect was not definitive in either direction. On one hand, the emphasis on liturgy, and the Lord's Supper in particular, brought new concerns about the ability of women to perform these ministerial functions. On the other, the movement was, like Vatican II, an effort at modernization, generally championed by progressives, and presented liturgical reform as a liberation from centuries of stifling worship.¹²⁸ With its modernizing

¹²⁵Timothy C.J. Quill, *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1997).

¹²⁶For Catholics in particular, the introduction of Mass in the vernacular after Vatican II likely only increased the impression of the rite as a re-enactment.

¹²⁷Elements of this issue—that women could not act *in persona Christe*—had existed in Catholic theology for centuries. Aquinas made the point, for instance, that the elements used in sacramental signs should have some resemblance to the things they signify. The idea that the priest represents Christ in his sacramental capacities was likewise ancient. And the gendered relationship between Christ and his church as presented in the New Testament had not gone unnoticed. However, before the mid-twentieth century, simple subordination arguments had sufficed to explain why women should be excluded from the priesthood. Like carpenters fitting joints together, Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican theologians assembled these theological pieces in the 1950s into the notion that women could not represent Christ to the church. In 1976, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith would release the encyclical *Inter Insigniores* dealing specifically with the ordination of women, in which they would hinge their argument almost entirely upon the idea that women cannot act *in persona Christe*. Considering the importance that this theological principle has assumed in Catholic theologies of ordination, its relatively recent vintage is surprising. Likewise counterintuitive is that it was only with the ordination controversy in the Church of Sweden in the late 1950s that the question began to demand a more thoughtful response from Catholics. Furthermore, the Lutheran Council's report on the ordination of women implies that theologies of *in persona Christe* may have had their roots not in Catholicism but in Swedish Lutheranism. See: *The Ordination of Women: Official Commentary* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1976), 1.

¹²⁸Quill, *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism*, 221.

rhetoric, liturgical renewal found a particularly happy home on campuses and within the Student Christian Movement. On campuses, liturgical renewal was about authenticity and experience, ideas that obsessed the new left. Liturgical reformers resurrected ancient rituals from the early church, and even from Judaism, searching for the “authentic” form of the rite. Sacraments, previously considered “means of grace”, essentially functional, began to shade into experiential, even mystical, encounters with Christ.¹²⁹ Depending on whom one asked, students were either the center of beautiful ritual creativity or alarming ritual destruction. In the late 1960s, theologian Julian N. Hartt called the university chapel “a presiding genius in the liquidation of traditional liturgical forms.”¹³⁰ Constance Parvey was more sanguine. Her investment in liturgy expanded with the movement. At Harvard, Parvey studied under a Russian Orthodox theologian, George Florovsky, who trained her interests. At University Lutheran in the mid-1950s, Parvey helped a young interfaith couple—one Lutheran, one Jewish, lead a celebration of the Passover Seder for the church, with over 100 participants annually.¹³¹ At Wisconsin, she could have taught anything in her “not-for-credit” Department of Religious Studies, but her course of choice was liturgy.

Issues of “representation,” as brought on by liturgical renewal, played a considerable role in American Lutheranism’s debates over women’s ordination. Peter Brunner, a Lutheran theologian, wrote what appears to be the most widely read argument against ordaining women in American Lutheran circles, published in *Lutheran World* in 1959. Brunner’s starting assumption was that women were obliged to be subject to men (since they were created *for* and *from* him). He also worked from the principle that, in acts of the ministry, the priest represents Christ

¹²⁹Quill, *The Impact of the Liturgical Movement on American Lutheranism*, 222.

¹³⁰Julian N. Hartt, “Priestly and Preaching Structures of Faith and Ministry”, in *The Church, the University and Social Policy: The Danforth Study of Campus Ministries*, ed. Kenneth Underwood (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press: 1969), 74.

¹³¹Constance Parvey, “Running with the Time and Against the Grain”, 2006, Box 50, Folder 6, Parvey Papers.

himself. Thus, the question was, is it possible for women to maintain their commitment to subordination *and* represent Christ? Brunner concluded negatively. A woman pastor would infringe upon her requirement of subjection, and she would be a contradiction, since she would impinge upon gendered analogies that exist at the heart of the created world: Christ is male to the church's female and subject over it, just as men are male and subject over women. So deeply did Brunner feel these analogies structured our cosmos that he concluded the article with a forewarning. "It is quite possible that the combination of woman and the office of pastor might for a long time, as far as one can empirically ascertain, be accompanied by the best of results," he wrote. "But finally the day will come when this conflict which is building up in the hidden depths of created being will manifest its great force even through empirical symptoms. In the long run it will eventually take its toll in the total cultural structure of an era."¹³² The problem was, for Brunner, simply existential. A woman cannot be a man.¹³³

The Lutheran Council committee charged with drafting a report on ordaining women in 1968 and 1969 felt compelled to address Brunner's ten-year old article several times during its report. The committee was not sympathetic. One member wrote that in its examination of classical Lutheran texts, such as the writings of Martin Luther, the Augsburg Confession, and other Reformation theologians, they found no mention of the idea that women could not properly represent Christ. Brunner's argument made too much of analogy, they concluded.¹³⁴ But they could not decide the question definitively themselves. In 1969, the committee drafted a lengthy report on women's ordination, and determined that its results were inconclusive. It is widely

¹³²Peter Brunner, "The Ministry and the Ministry of Women" *Lutheran World* 6, no. 3 (December 1959): 272.

¹³³Alert theologians more sympathetic to women's ordination tended to point out, in return, that there were theological dangers attendant to the idea that gender mattered for priesthood. This, they claimed, is simply the Donatist heresy—the idea that the quality of a minister of the gospel can impact the quality of the sacraments they enable.

¹³⁴Meuser, "The Lutheran Tradition and the Ordination of Women".

suspected that had representatives from the Missouri Synod not been on the committee, it would have recommended ordination.¹³⁵ But ambiguity enabled ecumenism. If the evidence was indeed inconclusive, each member denomination could move on the issue as they pleased, and it need not preclude Lutheran cooperation. (Unfortunately, very shortly after the committee's results were published, a conservative resurgence in the Missouri Synod quashed this hope.) With the Lutheran Council's tacit permission, ALC and LCA voted to begin ordaining women at their respective annual conferences in June and October of 1970.

Women did not immediately flood the ranks of Lutheran clergy. In the first four years that ordination was an option for women in ALC and LCA, ten women were ordained.¹³⁶ At least three of those ten, however, worked in campus ministry.¹³⁷ A campus minister at the University of Maryland, Elizabeth Platz, and another campus minister from University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Barbara Andrews, were the earliest women ordained in LCA and ALC, respectively. With ordination now in the realm of possibility, Constance Parvey applied for another job in Cambridge: a coordinate position as associate pastor of University Lutheran Church and as Lutheran campus minister to Harvard and MIT. She got the job in 1972, technically a calling that would facilitate an ordination.¹³⁸

¹³⁵Erling, "The Americanization of American Lutheranism: Democratization of Authority and the Ordination of Women, Part I".

¹³⁶ Jean Martensen, David Alderfer, and Martin Smith, "Twenty-Five Years After the Ordination of Women: Participation of Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Commission for Women, 1995), 4. A similar dynamic also seems to have played out in Reform Judaism. After Sally Priesand's ordination in 1972, women did not rush into the rabbinate. But a high percentage of those that did worked in Hillel campus ministry. In 1979, there were sixteen ordained Reform women, four of whom served Hillel ministries. Neil Kominsky, "A Brief History of the Task Force on Women in the Rabbinate" in *The Sacred Calling : Four Decades of Women in the Rabbinate* ed. Rebecca Einstein Schorr, Alysa Mendelson Graf, and Renee Edelman (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2016).

¹³⁷ In addition to Parvey, Elizabeth Platz and Barbara Andrews were both in campus ministry at the time of, or just prior to, their ordinations. See Benowitz, *Encyclopedia of American Women and Religion*, 18.

¹³⁸"Announcement of Election", Sep 19, 1972, Box 5, Folder 13, Parvey Papers.

Liturgical renewal also had an impact on how early women ordinands in Lutheran congregations understood their new roles. Parvey, for her part, considered the ordination of Lutheran women a sea-change in sacramental terms. “I am using the term ‘priest’ because it is the sacramental role that is really the new dimension of women as pastors,” she wrote in 1973. “Most other pastoral duties women do all the time—personal counseling, management, teaching, community involvement, are of a ‘place.’...But women in a sacramental role, that represents a bit of an ‘earth tremor.’...Coming to the realization that I am a new archetype has been a central part of my “work” this past year.”¹³⁹ Other women entering Lutheran ministry found their experience structured by the renewed importance of liturgical life. Elizabeth Platz had worked in campus ministry for several years before the doors to ordination opened. She was happy with her work, and asked herself if she even wanted ordination. Yet still she felt drawn. At University of Maryland, Platz would have witnessed several celebrations of Holy Communion a week (one during mid-week service, at least one on Sunday). This was what was missing in her ministry. “There was the ‘tug’ of the Eucharist,” she recalled, using a name for Holy Communion more often deployed by Catholics than by Lutherans. “Each time it was celebrated there was the haunting feeling of being drawn to its mystery but somehow also to responsibility. There was the incompleteness in working with students and faculty. One could counsel but the completion of offering confession and absolution, of blessing a wedding, of bringing the sacrament was not there.”¹⁴⁰

In the 1970s, alongside the Lutherans (and, as we shall see later, the Episcopalians), women of other, less sacramental denominations began expressing liturgical motivations for their

¹³⁹Constance Parvey, untitled notes, c. 1973, Box 64, Folder 5, Parvey Papers.

¹⁴⁰Elizabeth Platz, “My Story, Our Story” in *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry*, ed. Gloria Bengston (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1995), 49-50.

ministries. Presbyterian Alice Hageman, ordained in 1975, recalled that her ordination was necessitated by the liturgical requirements of her job. She had been conflicted about the decision. She had a background in campus ministry and felt she had some reservations about ordination. Ultimately, however, she pursued it. “I sought ordination because I was in a parish, the person primarily responsible for the liturgy, and I could not tolerate being liturgist without being able to celebrate the sacraments.”¹⁴¹ Likewise, Barbara Troxell, a Methodist minister who worked with the YWCA at Stanford University in the 1960s, saw her ministry as culminating in administration of the Lord’s Supper, which, despite her post at the YWCA, she still was able to perform on occasion. As a researcher who interviewed her put it in 1970, “While [Troxell’s] ordination is not highlighted in her present on-campus service, she is glad to be ordained because there is continuing possibility for a sacramental ministry.”¹⁴²

Parvey’s ordination was the first of a woman on Harvard grounds. It took place in Memorial Church at the center of campus. Krister Stendhal and Henry Horn participated. Parvey was 41 years old. She wore her hair down, over the front of her shoulders, and it blended into her stole. Her friends and family in the audience remembered two parts of the ceremony best: the laying-on of hands and the intercessions. But, when she wrote about the experience, Parvey recalled the moment she served as celebrant in Holy Communion in the most detail. As she took the chalice and paten, she thought of Martin Luther and transubstantiation. She thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his sermon on the Lord’s Supper. With Lutheran heroes and Bostonian heroes on her mind, she faltered over the words. “Suddenly,” she wrote, “I was no longer in the

¹⁴¹Alice Hageman, “Alice Hageman” in *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* ed. Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 189.

¹⁴²Elsie Gibson, *When the Minister Is a Woman* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 83.

pew, but had become the steward of a feast, charged to announce a great banquet.”¹⁴³ Like her churchwoman predecessors in the 1950s (see chapter 2), Parvey connected the ordination ceremony to a marriage, but with a different spin. Usually, she wrote, a person is ordained in their youth. “Ordination in such cases is not so much a ratification of ministries an affirmation of a future ministry—like getting married. But for me, as a wise friend put it, ‘You are like someone who has had a love affair for the past two decades, and now finally it is possible for the lovers to marry.’” Attendees agreed with the metaphor: some even applauded after the ordaining pastor declared her ministry bestowed, as if the groom and bride had kissed.¹⁴⁴ (Parvey’s mother, however, was not satisfied with the analogy. She leaned over to a friend and said: “Getting ordained is okay but when is she going to get married?”)¹⁴⁵

Campus Ministry Women

Women campus ministers were not unchanged by campus life in the 1960s. In the late 1960s, women campus ministers began to discover each other and organize around their gender and vocation. Campus work tended to be more conducive to relationships between ministers than parish work was; the demands of a campus flock often required ministers to work together.¹⁴⁶ Though many women in campus ministry would have been isolated from other women in ministry, some of them had built friendships through SCM networks, Danforth Fellowship gatherings, and campus ministry professional networks. In late 1969, some women members of the National Campus Ministers Association (NCMA), the leading professional body in Protestant

¹⁴³Constance Parvey, “About the Ordination and Installation”, *The Inkspot* (University Lutheran Association of Greater Boston) 49, no. 1 (Spring, 1973).

¹⁴⁴Parvey, “About the Ordination.”

¹⁴⁵Constance Parvey, “Feminism as a Principle of World-Reordering”, Jonathan Edwards Lecture at Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Nov 30, 1988, Box 49, Folder 10, Parvey Papers.

¹⁴⁶Hammond, “The Radical Ministry”, 13. Hammond states that 85% of campus ministers reported weekly contact with fellow ministers, while only 65% of parish ministers reported monthly contact with other ministers.

campus ministry, began to organize a communication network for women in the field. They were alarmed by the lack of women attending campus ministry meetings, and the paucity of female names on NCMA mailing lists. The women had a vague impression that other women in campus ministry were out there, but invisible to the larger institutions—either because they were unordained, were wives of campus ministers, were secretaries to campus ministries, or were in associate and assistant roles.¹⁴⁷ They also had the impression that these women were doing the “real” work of campus ministry—counseling students, leading Bible study, organizing—while men attended meetings. In July of 1970, two women attended the national meeting of United Ministries in Higher Education (UMHE), which coordinated many mainline campus ministries. UMHE made a formal statement, at the meeting, that they opposed discrimination against women. Perhaps the time seemed ripe. The women rose and demanded funds for a women’s organization within the body. They succeeded in wrestling a promise of \$30,000 out of the leadership, and used it to found a Women’s Campus Ministry Caucus within UMHE.¹⁴⁸ Throughout the 1970s, the Women’s Caucus held conferences just prior to each meeting of the NCMA. They lobbied UMHE for better pay and job placement for women in campus ministry. (In 1970, UMHE helped place only one woman in a campus ministry position). They administered grants to projects at the intersection of women, the church, and the university. They started a small periodical, *Campus Ministry Women*; circulation hovered around 200.¹⁴⁹ The periodical listed jobs in campus ministry, relevant conferences, books, and sources of funding.

¹⁴⁷“Proposal submitted to the Lilly Foundation by Women’s Campus Ministry Caucus”, Feb 25, 1974, Box 1, Folder 21, Campus Ministry Women Papers, Special Collections, Divinity Library, Yale University. (Hereafter Campus Ministry Women Papers).

¹⁴⁸Documents from Women in Campus Ministry (later, Campus Ministry Women) show conflicting accounts of how much money CMW received from UMHE. While UMHE seems to have promised them \$30,000, some sources indicate they only ever received \$15,000. “Women’s Caucus Statement”, January, 1971, Box 1, Folder 20, Campus Ministry Women Papers.

¹⁴⁹The journal had several names in its early years, including the *Interim*, and the *Women’s Campus Ministry Caucus Newsletter*, but *Campus Ministry Women* stuck.

As one member put it: “We tried to get more women hired. We tried to get more women ordained.”¹⁵⁰ The Caucus was explicitly feminist, and saw itself as part of a larger women’s movement. At meetings women shared their stories about “the way men in campus ministry were treating us, the way male church leaders were ignoring us, the way the men we lived with were threatened, the sexism we endured at national campus ministry conferences, the way our jobs were so part time or tenuous or even unpaid, the way we risked our livelihood by being feminist activists.”¹⁵¹ One participant recalled these meetings felt like a miracle.¹⁵²

One young minister in Dayton, Ohio, Jan Griesinger, began reading *Campus Ministry Women* in 1971. When she enrolled at DePauw University in 1960, she had only imagined one future for herself: minister’s wife. But she was active in her campus’s Student Christian Fellowship, and several women she knew had gone on to seminary. She decided to do the same, and enrolled at United Theological Seminary in Ohio in 1967. Like many other women who attended seminary in the 1960s, Griesinger “had no idea what I would do with my seminary education.” She knew not a single woman minister. After her graduation, she worked for the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion, and was stationed as a campus minister in Dayton, Ohio, providing students abortion counseling. She was ordained by United Church of Christ in 1970. In *Campus Ministry Women*, Griesinger saw a job advertisement for a World Student Christian Fellowship position on its Women’s Project. Her job was to find and organize women in campus ministry in the United States. In this role, Griesinger effectively became the principal organizer of the Women in Campus Ministry Caucus, which eventually came to call themselves Campus Ministry Women (CMW).¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰Griesinger, “Jan Griesinger”, 201.

¹⁵¹Griesinger, “Jan Griesinger”, 197-200.

¹⁵²Myers, “Eleanor Scott Myers”, 221.

¹⁵³Griesinger, “Jan Griesinger”, 191-199.

When funding for Campus Ministry Women from UMHE and the World Student Christian Fellowship ran out, Griesinger sought additional funds from Danforth and the Lilly foundations. In February, 1974, Griesinger sent grant applications to both foundations, requesting about \$150,000 over three years for the continuation of CMW. Griesinger's vision for CMW was that it would be a separatist alternative to NCMA, UMHE, and other campus ministry professional associations. The Lilly Endowment declined the proposal.¹⁵⁴ According to Griesinger's account of the exchange, the Danforth Foundation responded very positively at first, and asked CMW to attain the tax status that would allow them to give CMW a grant. As Griesinger filed the paperwork, Danforth's program director, Robert Rankin, considered the funding proposal. The topic of women in campus ministry was apparently new to Rankin, and peaked his interest. (By the 1970s, the Danforth Foundation, as far as can be discerned, had no institutional memory of the Danny Grad program that had once been the pride of William Danforth). In July of 1974, Rankin finally responded to Griesinger's proposal. He had spoken to some other women, he wrote, and concluded that the issue of women in campus ministry was complex. It deserved further study before a decision about funding could be made. Griesinger deduced from Rankin's letter that "Danforth has done some homework and discovered a number of women/people who think our [Caucus] is not 'representative' or borders on the lunatic fringe or something like that."¹⁵⁵ She also recalled that Rankin had responded to the proposal by saying there was too much about women in it, and not enough about ministry.¹⁵⁶ Whatever the reason

¹⁵⁴The Lilly Foundation cited, as their reason, that they had just begun a million-dollar campus ministry project, the National Institute of Campus Ministry, and so had no room in their budget to support another campus ministry cause. Jan Griesinger to "Sisters" in campus ministry, July 11, 1974, Box 2, Folder 21, Campus Ministry Women Papers.

¹⁵⁵Jan Griesinger to "Sisters" in campus ministry, July 11, 1974, Box 2, Folder 21, Campus Ministry Women Papers.

¹⁵⁶This language does not appear in Rankin's letter of July 1, 1974, and I can find no mention of it until September of 1975, when Griesinger writes to a colleague that she remembers this was Rankin's initial reaction. Jan Griesinger to Elaine Myles, Donna Schaper, and Ann Baker, Sept 16, 1975, Box 2, Folder 23, Campus Ministry Women Papers.

for his reaction, Rankin demanded further research. The Danforth Foundation began to organize a conference on the needs of women in campus ministry and appointed a representative to oversee it: Julia Mahoney.¹⁵⁷

To Greisinger, this was a bad sign. Julia Mahoney had worked for many years in campus ministry, but she was Roman Catholic, and a vowed religious sister. Although CMW had some Catholic women from its inception, it was mostly composed of mainline Protestants. Catholics had their own campus ministry coordinating body, the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, which did not associate much ecumenically. Robert Rankin's vision for Campus Ministry Women (and the conditions for Danforth funding) was that CMW would organize and represent Catholic and Jewish women as well as Protestant women. Griesinger's concern with Mahoney was immediate. Addressing the rest of the caucus, she noted that Mahoney was a good person, but not politically aligned with the caucus. Her thoughts on Mahoney slipped quickly into generalizations about Catholic women in campus ministry. "They resist separatist trends because [campus ministry] is one of the few areas of Catholic ministry where they have been able to function with some degree of equality and recognition," Griesinger wrote. She qualified—"This is not to say they do not experience both covert and overt discrimination"—but Catholic women seemed in general happier to work through existing campus ministry organizations rather than develop their own. Most alarmingly, to Griesinger, the Catholic women she had encountered in campus ministry "were extremely straight and seemed to exhibit zero feminist consciousness."¹⁵⁸

Griesinger's concerns about anti-feminist Catholic women in campus ministry were mostly unjustified, though she was correct that they rested more easily within their institutions than Protestant women did. In the late-1960s, one article estimated there were ninety Catholic

¹⁵⁷Robert Rankin to Jan Griesinger, July 1, 1974, Box 2, Folder 21, Campus Ministry Women Papers.

¹⁵⁸Jan Griesinger to "Sisters" in campus ministry. July 11, 1974, Box 2, Folder 21, Campus Ministry Women Papers.

women working full time for Newman Centers nationwide, though undoubtedly more worked part-time. Another source estimates 300 in 1972.¹⁵⁹ In general, women in Catholic campus ministry were no less involved in radical action than their Protestant counterparts. A Catholic campus minister, Barbara Wheeler, helped negotiate between students and faculty during the uprisings at Columbia University in 1968.¹⁶⁰ And Marsie Sylvestro, as mentioned above, was illicitly celebrating the Eucharist with her students and administering confession.¹⁶¹ But Greisinger was correct to see that Catholic women in campus ministry already organized themselves through the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, and she was certainly correct that Mahoney did not share her radical, separatist vision.

Tensions between Griesinger and Mahoney only increased as the Danforth consultation was planned, delayed, and finally arrived in April of 1975. Mahoney had not invited everyone Griesinger requested to the conference. A survey Mahoney circulated in advance of the conference implied that feminism might sometimes be a hindrance to women. The perceived slights kept mounting. At a follow-up conference in August of 1975, Griesinger discouraged denominational sub-meetings, which Mahoney felt unfairly targeted the Catholics. From the beginning, Griesinger had felt she was in a “power struggle” with Mahoney. Despite the tension, the consultation concluded that they could live together under one institutional umbrella. They applied to Danforth for funding for this new, more ecumenical organization. But the discord between the moderates and the radicals, the separatists and the institutionalists, Catholics and the Protestants (only a few Jewish women were present at these meetings), dragged out the process

¹⁵⁹Undated pamphlet, ca. 1969, *National Council of Catholic Women*, Box 32 Folder 6, Elizabeth Farians Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Ann Kelley, “Concerns of Catholic Women in Ministry: A Full Report” *Women’s Campus Ministry Caucus Newsletter* 1, no. 6 (February 1973).

¹⁶⁰Wheeler, Oral History Interview. Wheeler later left the Catholic church.

¹⁶¹Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 217.

and freighted it with baggage. Griesinger felt hounded by the thought that Danforth was uncomfortable supporting Campus Ministry Women until it included more moderate Catholic women as well as liberal Protestants. Griesinger and CMW considered pleasing the Danforth Foundation a necessary evil, at best. When representatives from Danforth came to their meetings, they felt the watchful eye of the patriarchy upon them. Finally, in September of 1975, a year and a half after Griesinger had submitted the original proposal, Rankin broke the bad news. He was sorry to leave them in the lurch after such a long courtship, but the Danforth Foundation was going in a different direction, and would no longer be funding any projects in campus ministry.¹⁶²

Though the ultimate decision not to fund CWM was beyond Rankin's control and applied equally to all other campus ministry projects, the Danforth Foundation certainly approached Campus Ministry Women timidly and slowly. It is a small irony that the foundation, after sending women into campus ministry for the past thirty years, had helped shape them into activists they now felt marginally uncomfortable supporting. CWM soldiered on regardless, patching together interim funding, including from Church Women United and from newsletter subscriptions. By 1977, Campus Ministry Women were organizing about 400 women in campus ministry, and had formed six local branches in college towns like Columbia, Missouri, and Toledo, Ohio.¹⁶³ The group eventually dissolved in the 1990s. Griesinger attributed the decline to CMW's attempts to get foundation funding, efforts she came to see as hypocritical and contrary to the nature of the organization. Yet Griesinger thought that the legacy of Campus Ministry Women lived on in women's ministerial groups particularly: "The strong feminist network among women in church

¹⁶²Jan Griesinger to friends in campus ministry, Feb 3, 1975, Box 2, Folder 22, Campus Ministry Women Papers; Jan Griesinger to Rosemary Kutz, April 29, 1975, Box 2, Folder 22, Campus Ministry Women Papers; Jan Griesinger to Marna McKensie, Sandy Park, Melson Guy Vunham, Lynn Rhodes, Floris Michelsen, Ann Coleman, Donna Schaper, and Rosemary Kutz, April 3, 1975, Box 2, Folder 22, Campus Ministry Women Papers; Robert Rankin to Sandy Park, September 15, 1975, Box 2, Folder 23, Campus Ministry Women Papers.

¹⁶³"List of all income 1970-1976", *The Interim* (April 1976), 4.

leadership today was fostered in a significant way through the women in the campus ministry movement,” she wrote in 2003.¹⁶⁴

Though Constance Parvey was not directly involved in Campus Ministry Women, she was undergoing a feminist awakening much like the one Campus Ministry Women embraced. Parvey remained in campus ministry in Cambridge for most of the 1970s, and women’s causes in religion began to consume her interest. When she applied for the job at University Lutheran in 1972, there was hardly a whiff of women’s issues on her resume, the only exception a speech at Wellesley College in 1970.¹⁶⁵ But her ordination, the first of a woman in the New England Synod of LCA, must have sparked something in her. By the late 1970s, she had organized seminars on women and religion, taught a class on women and scripture at MIT, and hosted feminist theologian Rosemary Ruether at MIT. She had sat on panels with Rabbi Sally Preisand and Mary Daly, gave speeches on campuses across the nation, consulted on theology for Church Women United, led workshops on women in priesthood, written a defense of the ERA in *Lutheran Women*, and served on LCA’s committee on women in church and society.¹⁶⁶ She never married, but she bought a long, slim wrap for carrying babies and wore it as a stole.¹⁶⁷ She wrote a poem about her lost faith in complementarity between men and women. She had once believed in it,

¹⁶⁴Jan Griesinger, “Jan Griesinger”, 206.

¹⁶⁵“Resume”, 1972, Box 19, Folder 9, Parvey Papers.

¹⁶⁶Syllabus, “The Archaeology of Women’s Identity: Images of Women in Scripture,” nd., Box 29, Folder 5, Parvey Papers; Constance Parvey to Institute Women, note, nd., Box 28, Folder 11, Parvey Papers; Flyer, “Women and Religion”, lecture series, State University of New York, College at Oswego, December 8-10, 1974, Box 19, Folder 17, Parvey Papers; Martha Edens to Constance Parvey, February 19, 1977, Box 19, Folder 11, Parvey Papers; Symposium flyer, “Women and the Priesthood: Perspectives on the Ordination of Women in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal Traditions”, Boston, Mass, April 28, 1973, Box 32, Folder 1, Parvey Papers.; Constance Parvey, “ERA: A Theological Argument” *Lutheran Women* 13, no. 10 (November 1975): 9-12.; Robert S. Marshall to Constance Parvey, October 17, 1972, Box 27, Folder 3, Parvey Papers.

¹⁶⁷Speech, “25th Anniversary of the Ordination of Reverend Constance Fern Parvey: Connie’s Reflections” December 7, 1997, Box 5, Folder 13, Parvey Papers.

she wrote, but when she came to realize the idea served only men, she discovered she had lost something dear:

How I long to catch again,
The vision of mutuality
Between women and men.

She described the loss of this vision as a fall from grace.¹⁶⁸ In 1977, Parvey received an appointment to work on the World Council of Churches' commission on women, which took her overseas. But, in the 1990s, she returned to campus ministry again, unable to break its spell on her.

The political surges of the 1960s and 1970s changed Constance Parvey, morphing her from a civil rights and peace activist on campus into a pastor and a feminist. On campuses, women ministers discovered direct action and second-wave feminism. Rising out of the flames of the Student Christian Movement, the civil rights movement, and the New Left, the ministerial reformation of the 1970s would begin strategizing around rights, authenticity, and direct action. Second-wave feminism, developing in the 1960s and becoming a large presence by the early 1970s, would amplify these ideas. At the same time, the same cultural forces that were shaping ministerial reformers were also chastening them. The New Left and feminism would confront ministerial reformers with a deep skepticism of institutions that extended to all the things reformers held dear—religion, church, the idea of working to reform institutions from within. This skepticism would begin, in the 1970s, to touch upon the idea of the ministry itself.

¹⁶⁸Constance Parvey, "Mutuality", poem, Box 49, Folder 5, Parvey Papers.

Chapter VI. *A Call to Authenticity:*

Women Seminarists, Feminism, and the New Left, 1970-1980

In the 1970s, ministerial reformers found themselves in ambivalent cultural space. For decades, reformers had advanced their agendas on the assumption that church and clergy alike were institutions of the highest good. But these assumptions came under attack in the 1970s from forces arising both from second wave feminism and from the larger coalition of liberals called the New Left. Since at least the 1940s, it had been self-evident why some mainline women would want to be ordained ministers with denominational recognition, professional credentials, and institutional support. Suddenly, this was not so apparent. Critiques of the church and institutional religion occupied the air like a flock of birds. Many secular feminists saw religion as antithetical to women's rights; some radical black power groups openly rejected Christianity as a white-man's religion; the mainline's tepid approach to the war in Vietnam convinced many leftists that no prophetic witness could be found there. A survey of Americans in 1970 found that three-quarters of the nation thought that religion was losing influence.¹ The following year, John Lennon sang inducements to imagine a world with no religion at all. The 1970s, historian Dan Berger has written, "witnessed the diffusion of certain 1960s values and mores, especially to those places that were not epicenters of New Left militancy."² Ministerial reformers were one small constituency feeling this diffusion acutely. Much like the emergence of the women's liberation movement from the civil rights movement and the New Left, many ministerial reformers of the 1970s earned their stripes in New Left activism before turning their efforts to

¹John Corrigan and Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 8th ed. (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010), 341.

²Dan Berger, "Introduction", *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 3.

issues of women and the church.³ They were thus forced to reconcile their credentials as liberals, in some cases as radical liberals, with their ministries.

The pressing question for the reformation in the 1970s was *how could women ministers be both revolutionaries and clerical insiders?* This chapter details the ministerial reformation's encounter with and response to this question, through its interaction with the New Left. The New Left's emphasis on anti-institutionalism, anti-professionalism, liberation, and personal authenticity demanded an answer from women ministers, and their answers transformed the tenor of the ministerial reformation in the 1970s. The chapter has three parts. The first focuses on women seminarians in the 1970s. The New Left championed the young student as the teller of truth and the university as a site of reform, and in the 1970s the ministerial reformation reflected this pattern. It began to revolve around seminaries and seminarians, a younger collection of women, instead of ecumenical bodies and established churchwomen.⁴ At theological schools, women seminarians began to organize for better conditions for themselves and for their ministries after seminary. In these groups, they also discovered a new consciousness about their relationship to the church as women. Radical feminist theologies encouraged prospective women ministers to consider whether the church was an institution worth working in at all, and whether the clergy itself was an implacably patriarchal clique. The second and third parts of this chapter describe how ministerial reformers responded to these pressing questions. The second section

³This is of course also true of the larger women's liberation movement, as Sara Evans has shown. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁴Mark Chaves and James Cavendish have also noted a generational shift in the women's ordination movement in these years. See Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), especially chapter 7; Mark Chaves and Cavendish James, "Recent Changes in Women's Ordination Conflicts: The Effect of a Social Movement on Intraorganizational Controversy," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997): 574–84. Chaves and Cavendish cite 1970 as a pivotal time of change for women's ordination. In this article, they find four new factors impacting the reformation in the 1970s: the frequency of the conflicts within denominations, a shift from the organizational elite to the grass roots, extra-institutional tactics, and more vocal opposition.

focuses on ritual responses, and on women's attempts to reinvent ordination as a feminist rite of passage. Finally, the third section of this chapter argues that, to help navigate the rocky coastline of the New Left, ministerial reformers developed an authenticity politics of their own. They had "coming out" moments in their ordinations, or upon entering seminary. Their calls to ministry were narratives of authentic self-discovery. By claiming their vocational aspirations as existential states, they could meet the New Left on its own rhetorical turf.

In any history, it is difficult to know what movements best capture the influences one is trying to track—and how to name those movements. Most recent scholarship about women and religion in the latter half of the twentieth century tends to focus intently on the intersection between second-wave feminism specifically and religious women. This scholarship has argued, quite successfully, for the importance of religious women in the feminist movement, and the vibrancy of feminist movements within religious organizations.⁵ My approach embraces these insights, but follows more closely historians like Sara Evans, Mark Oppenheimer, and Doug Rossinow. These historians' approach to "seeing" religion in second-wave feminism takes them

⁵There have been two historiographical trends in this scholarship. The first insists that veins of religious feminism had an existence separate from the larger second-wave, in origin and emphasis. See, for instance, Mary Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).; Mary Jeremy Daigler, *Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012). The second argues that religious women, their ideas, and institutions made important contributions to second-wave feminism. See, for instance, Ann Braude, "Faith, Feminism, and History," in *Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*.; Sara Evans, ed., *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).; Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Caryn E. Neuman, "Enabled by the Holy Spirit: Church Women United and the Development of Ecumenical Christian Feminism," in *Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States*, ed. Stephanie Gilmore (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 113–34. Sarah Azaransky, *The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

through the history and influences of the larger New Left movement.⁶ When we dig underneath the second-wave feminist topsoil and place feminism in a larger cultural movement, we can better encounter cultural attitudes that were essential for the American mainline at the time, and for ministerial reformers in particular—attitudes about institutions generally and the church specifically, professionalization and the clergy, and new ideas about personal truth on the political and theological left. Second-wave feminism compounded the effects of the New Left. But second-wave feminism alone did not entirely invent the cultural assumptions against which ministerial reformers had to constantly labor in this decade.

For ministerial reformers, this compounding effect came at the intersection of feminist encouragement and New Left critique. Just as criticism from the left piled on religious institutions, the mainline, and the ministry, feminism encouraged women to go to work. Gaining access to the workforce for women was, especially for middle-class, white women, what second-wave feminism in this decade best accomplished. Between 1970 and 1980, six million mothers of young children entered the workforce.⁷ Popular literature such as Betty Friedan's bestselling *The Feminist Mystique* and *Ms.* magazine affirmed career ambitions as important to women's self-actualization.⁸ Yet, for ministerial reformers, entering the workforce meant entering a beleaguered profession—one haunted by anti-institutional and anti-professional attitudes of the day. At the same time, many of the gains the second-wave made in workplace rights for women were lost on ministerial reformers. Women ministers were not directly affected by Title VII of

⁶Evans, *Personal Politics*; Mark Oppenheimer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: American Religion in the Age of Counterculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).; Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

⁷Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012).146.

⁸On the importance of access to the workplace in second-wave feminism, see Robert O Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Hang, 2012), 103-133. Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2006).

the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which assured against sexism in hiring, but was found inapplicable to religious organizations. In this respect, ministerial reformers learned early on in the decade that they could not ride the legislative victories of second-wave feminism into more job security. Thus for women who wanted to be, or were, ministers, the overall effect of feminism in the 1970s was equivocal. As feminism encouraged women to work outside the home, it offered few legal protections for women ministers. As it empowered women to reach beyond previously-supposed limits, it also lambasted the institutions that ministerial reformers sought to enter.

Mary Farrell Bednarowski has described women religious thinkers in the late twentieth-century United States as ambivalent—full of generative tension between their identity as women and their belonging in patriarchal churches.⁹ Women ministers were suddenly smacked with a similar kind of ambivalence in the 1970s. But for them, the tension was exponential. Not only did they have to confront a general Christian history of misogyny, but also a specifically clerical one. They were more than members in churches; they wanted to lead churches. And they chose this institutional, clerical, power at precisely the moment that the value of such power was under intense dispute.

The Chic Minority

In January of 1969, fifteen seminarians at Boston University School of Theology delivered a set of demands to the dean. The demands, ten in total, included causes common to anti-war and New Left activism. The students insisted the school divest from defense industries, end the recruitment of military chaplains on campus, and overhaul the curriculum. They pressed the administration to reinstate a suspended student, Alex Jack, who had organized a sanctuary event

⁹Mary Farrell Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

for two AWOL marines in the school's chapel the prior September in defiance of a court order. The students gave the administration two weeks to comply with these demands.¹⁰ In the context of similar student action directed at university administrators nationwide in the late 1960s, the demands at Boston University seem par for the course. Yet something was different about them. The original set of ten demands included a provision for the recruitment of female students and faculty to the School of Theology. But three women seminarians also participated in the demonstration, and they clearly wanted more than this single resolution provided. They delivered their own list of seven *additional* demands for the Dean, specifically on women's issues at the seminary. Where the "ten demands" had recommended recruitment of more female students and faculty, the "women's demands" insisted the theological school allocate money for this recruitment. They also demanded the hiring of two female professors (preferably, they qualified, not in religious education), new programs to prepare women for seminary teaching, a conference on the role of women in the church, and better and cheaper housing for women students.¹¹

The "women's demands" at Boston University heralded a new era for theological schools. In the 1970s, theological schools experienced a tidal wave of women students, so swift and of such magnitude that it required institutional attention. Between 1972 and 1974 alone, the number of women in American theological schools increased 75%. For the decade, the percentage increase would be 340%.¹² Lesley Watson, a case in point, entered Yale Divinity in 1971. When she arrived, she was one of 35 women on a campus of 350 students. In 1971, the women of Yale

¹⁰George Collins, "BU Students of Theology Protest" *Boston Globe*, Jan 30, 1969. "We are always open to requests from the students," the dean responded, but we "do not yield to demands." The students later rescinded this deadline.

¹¹George Collins, "BU Students of Theology Protest" *Boston Globe*, Jan 30, 1969.

¹²Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis, *Women of the Cloth: A New Opportunity for the Churches* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 76-77. The 340% increase was thirteen times the percentage increase of men at theological schools in that decade.

Divinity had one dormitory floor, one female faculty member, and no courses in women's studies. By the time Watson graduated in 1974, she would have been one of almost 100 women, occupying seven dorm floors, with four courses in women's studies, and with the support of seven female faculty members.¹³ The atmosphere, Watson recalled, had undergone rapid change. "It is good to be a woman at Yale these days," she wrote.

Theological schools in the late 1960s, as one historian put it, "had one foot in the university and one foot in the church," and were therefore at the intersection of two institutions experiencing dramatic change.¹⁴ The mainline was undergoing an assault on their status that would have repercussions into the twenty-first century. Attendance and revenue declined in the late 1960s, and a rift was opening between progressive church leaders and their more conservative lay-folk.¹⁵ Mainline churches, as historian William Hutchison memorably wrote, had fallen "between the times"—failing to take unambiguously progressive stances on the pressing political issues of the day, yet leaning to the left enough to alienate conservative members.¹⁶ Pressure on the mainline ramped up from all corners. James Forman, a Civil Rights activist, interrupted services at Riverside Church in New York City in 1968 to demand that the church make reparations to black Americans to the tune of \$500 million. In 1969, the general assembly of the National Council of Churches was a hairsbreadth away from chaos, with intense pressure from anti-war, youth, and radical factions.¹⁷ On the other hand, conservative factions

¹³Lesley Watson, "Women at Yale Divinity School" *Campus Ministry Women Newsletter* 3, no. 2 (1974).

¹⁴David Cline, *From Reconciliation to Revolution: How the Student Interracial Ministry Took Up the Cause of Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univeristy of North Carolina Press, 2017), 161-2.

¹⁵In 1968, ten of the largest Protestant denominations in the nation had fewer members than in 1967. In 1972, the United Methodist Church reported a membership loss of half a million over the prior four years. John Corrigan and Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 8th ed. (Boston: Prentice Hall, 2010), 341.

¹⁶William Hutchison, ed., *Between The Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

¹⁷Jill K. Gill, *Embattled Ecumenism : The National Council of Churches, the Vietnam War, and the Trials of the Protestant Left* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 274-275.

within denominations were also making their grievances known. Theological schools were epicenters for this internal turmoil. A conservative resurgence in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod resulted in a schism at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, with liberal faculty and students leaving to form a “seminary in exile.” In response to the anti-war movement, seminarians occupied buildings at Union Theological Seminary in New York, McCormick Theological School, and Andover Newton Theological School.¹⁸ Many seminarians were involved in organized draft resistance.¹⁹ Harvard Divinity seminarians briefly provided sanctuary to an AWOL marine in their chapel in September of 1968.²⁰ Students at Boston University led by Alex Jack harbored two defected soldiers in their chapel a month later, without the permission of the theological school.²¹ The “ten demands” and the “women’s demands” issued to the Dean at Boston University were a result of the fall-out between the student organizers of the sanctuary event and the administration.

Women’s dramatic increase at theological schools coincided with this national, student-led resistance movement, centered on institutions of higher education. Women seminarians, it quickly became clear, could use the tools of anti-war resistance organizing for their own devices. They began small. In 1969, women seminarians at Yale Divinity led a sit-in of the men’s restroom in the library stacks—there was no women’s restroom in the area.²² A seminarian at Boston University, Carolyn Pearson, was involved with the sanctuary organizers in the late

¹⁸Cline, *Reconciliation to Revolution*, 166.

¹⁹Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Resistance During the Vietnam War* (UNC Press: Greensboro, 2003), 81-91.

²⁰Michael S. Foley, *Confronting the War Machine: Resistance During the Vietnam War* (UNC Press: Greensboro, 2003), 312. See also, “Marine Seeks Sanctuary at Harvard Divinity” *Boston Globe*, Sept 23, 1968. And “Military Seize AWOL Marine in Harvard Divinity Chapel” *Boston Globe*, Sept 24, 1968.

²¹William J. Fripp, “BU Sanctuary Continues for Soldier” *Boston Globe*, October 3, 1968.

²²The sit-in was cheekily called the “Liberation of the Shit-Room.” Carol P. Christ, “Carol P. Christ” in Ann Braude, ed. *Transforming the Faith of Our Fathers : The Women Who Changed American Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

1960s. When Alex Jack was suspended for leading the event, the charge was that he was “unfit for Christian ministry.” Pearson, writing in BUST’s student paper, transposed the phrase to apply to women. “Are we ‘fit for Christian ministry?’” she wrote, two days before the women’s demands were brought to the Dean. “Just because I am physically weaker than some men, I am not incompetent to carry the same problems and cross the same boundaries.”²³ Pearson thus equated her friend Jack’s exile with women’s exile at the seminary. The radical students at Boston University, she implied, should care just as much about the injustices done to seminary women as to Jack. (There is no evidence they got the message. The student newspaper, edited by Jack, never once mentioned the “women’s demands”).

By the early 1970s, women at seminary had advanced beyond sit-ins of bathrooms and opinion pieces in student papers. Newly-founded women’s centers and women’s caucuses began to be the channels of resistance organizing. Women credited the dramatic changes at Yale Divinity in the early 1970s with the activities of the Women’s Center, which was founded in 1971. Similar organizations began in the 1970s all over the nation, as theological schools and their women students sought to reconcile each to the other. Harvard Divinity School founded a Women’s Caucus in 1971. Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia began one in 1974. Women’s offices sprouted at places as diverse as Princeton Theological Seminary, Perkins School of Theology, and the Interdenominational Theological Center, among numerous others.²⁴ In addition, coalitions of theological schools also ran women’s offices. A coalition of local

²³Carolyn Pearson, “Are Women People Too???? Do We Have the Right to Vote???” *Up Against the Cross* (Boston University School of Theology), no. 1 (Jan 28, 1969).

²⁴Other theological schools that began women’s centers or coalitions in the 1970s include Scarritt School of Christian Workers, Claremont School of Theology, Candler School of Theology, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Boston College School of Theology, Duke School of Theology, Union Theological Seminary in New York, New York Theological Seminary, United Theological Seminary (Dayton, Ohio), Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, and Brite Divinity School. See Seminary Quarter at Grailville and the Commission on Women in Ministry of the NCC, “Resource Guide for Women in Seminary”, Box 8, Anna Howard Shaw Center Papers, Boston University School of Theology.

theological schools called the Boston Theological Institute (BTI) founded a Women's Theological Coalition in 1974. In California, Bay Area theological schools organized an Office of Women's Affairs in 1970, which eventually became the women's caucus of Graduate Theological Union (GTU).²⁵ These coalition-based women's groups often represented several hundred women, spread over multiple theological schools.

Women seminarians organized with the urgency of persons who realized that their legal protections were slim. In 1972, the question of whether Title VII of the Civil Rights Act would protect against sex discrimination in hiring in religious organizations was put to the test. Billie McClure was a Salvation Army officer, the equivalent of an ordained minister, who discovered her male colleagues had higher pay and better benefits. When she complained, the Salvation Army fired her, and she took the wrongful termination case to court. Her case, *McClure v. Salvation Army*, was resolved at the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The 5th Circuit found that Title VII did not prohibit her firing, and that religious organizations, because of the Free Exercise clause, had the liberty to make decisions about their ministerial staffing without government oversight. This precedent became known as the "ministerial exception." Women ministers lived and worked in this state of exception.

The numbers of women pouring into theological schools gave issues of women's ministry a sense of pressing urgency for the schools. Women were no longer enrolling in religious education programs and other alternative theological degrees; they were enrolling in Master of Divinity programs—the professional degree required to enter ministry. Nationally, the enrollment of women in Master and Doctor of Divinity degrees nearly doubled between 1972

²⁵Renamed the Center for Women and Religion in 1977.

and 1975.²⁶ At Yale Divinity, in a single year, 1972, a third of the women students enrolled in the Master of Arts in Religion program transferred to the Master of Divinity degree.²⁷

Theological schools thus not only had a responsibility to educate, house, and support their new women students (not to mention provide them facilities like bathrooms)²⁸, they also had some responsibility to place them in local parishes, coordinate with their denominations to assure they met ordination requirements, and give them opportunities to improve their ministerial skills. This was no small task. By the 1970s, many mainline denominations had no direct prohibitions against women in ministry and women's ordination. Yet even denominations that had ordained women for a century were struggling to place them in parishes, especially large and well-funded parishes.²⁹ Though women were more likely than men to choose a ministry outside the parish—for instance, in hospital or college chaplaincy (see chapter 4)—women ministers found job opportunities after ordination, parish or otherwise, hard to come by. Declining church attendance and shrinking budgets in the mainline, nationwide, compounded the problem. In 1974, the director of the Boston Theological Institute, a colloquium of 8 theological schools near Boston, called the placement of women in parishes “an emergency issue”³⁰ for the local schools. When the resources were reallocated at BTI that year, the funding reflected that emergency. The influx of women even overrode other social issues. The Women's Theological Coalition received more

²⁶Anne C. Roark, “Enrollment of Women Soars in Theology Schools,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Oct. 18, 1976.

²⁷Joan Bates Forsberg, “Consciousness ‘72,” *Reflection: A Journal of Opinion at Yale Divinity School and Berkeley Divinity School* 69, no. 4, (May 1972).

²⁸One BTI Women's Theological Coalition director reported that, when she arrived in Boston in 1976, many of the member schools of BTI had no women's bathrooms. Barbara Wheeler, interview with Beth Hessel and Elizabeth Wittrig, Union Theological Seminary, New York, November 29, 2018, Presbyterian Historical Society, Pearl Digital Collections, Philadelphia, PA.

²⁹In 1971, in the United Church of Christ, only 37 of 242 ordained women worked in parishes. The United Presbyterian Church placed only 39 of their 103 women ministers in parishes that same year. “Labor Letter” *Wall Street Journal*, July 1971.

³⁰Kay Longcope, “8-seminary group to keep operating” *Boston Globe*, June 1974.

funding than any other sub-department in BTI, about 25% more in funding that year than the Black Studies program received. “They (blacks) have never had the numbers that are going to give women the clout,” the director of the BTI told the *Boston Globe* bluntly when pressed on the issue.³¹

For sheer size, Women’s Theological Coalition of the BTI is historically notable. Founded in 1974, it claimed to represent 400 to 500 female seminarians.³² BTI “probably has more women than any other theological center in the world,” the director of the Women’s Coalition reported to *Christian Century* in 1975.³³ The Coalition had several part-time staff persons, a newsletter, a budget of over \$20,000 in 1974, and an office. Through its newsletter, it collected information about courses and events concerning women and religion in the Boston area. It also provided books and pamphlets to seminarians in need. The Coalition also ran its own programs to advocate for women in ministry specifically. In 1975, the Coalition received \$20,000 from the Rockefeller Foundation to run a “Placement of Women in Parish Ministry” program for two years. The program made educational efforts in local Baptist, Methodist, and Congregationalist parishes, teaching members of hiring committees about the delicate topic of employing women ministers.³⁴ The Coalition also administered a course at Andover-Newton Theological Seminary,

³¹Kay Longcope, “8-seminary group to keep operating” *Boston Globe*, June 1974. Black women seminarians were, of course, invisible on these terms. In 1975, the Women’s Theological Coalition claimed that out of 400 women in BTI member schools, 15 were black women.

³²There is some disagreement over the founding date of the Coalition. Alice Hageman in *Sexist Religion and the Churches: No More Silence!* cites it as 1970 (11). But most press coverage of the Coalition puts it at 1974. There is also some disagreement about how many women BTI held by the mid-1970s: estimates range from 400 to 500. Today, the member schools of BTI include Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Boston College Theology Department, Boston University School of Theology, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Hartford Seminary, Harvard Divinity, Hebrew College, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Saint John’s Seminary and Theological Institute. In the 1970s, the institute would have included Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Episcopal Divinity School, and Weston Jesuit School of Theology (later incorporated into Boston College).

³³Barbara Gerlach, “Women in the Seminaries: A Progress Report” *Christian Century* 92, no. 5 (Feb 1, 1975).

³⁴Barbara Gerlach and Margaret Hennessey, “Proposal for Placement of Women in Parish Ministries: Submitted to Rockefeller Family Fund,” August, 1975. Series 6, Box 6, Folder 7, Beverly Wildung Harrison Papers, Burke Library and Archives, Columbia Universities Libraries at Union Theological School.

“Preparing Women for Ministry”, in which three local women ministers mentored fifteen women seminarians for academic credit. The course placed students in funded parish internships during the summer.

Women seminarians on the opposite coast were also getting organized. The Californian equivalent of Boston’s Women’s Theological Coalition had its roots in campus ministry and the New Left. In 1970, twenty women with ministerial degrees met at University Christian Church in Berkeley, California. They were brought together by Joanne Nash Eakin, a campus minister at U.C. Berkeley. Eakin had ministered to student radicals during the Berkeley free speech protests of 1968-1969, and was an organizer for Campus Ministry Women (see chapter 4). She noticed that women seminarians in the Bay area needed an advocacy group, so she organized a gathering of women from local seminaries. The twenty women, when assembled, realized that only one of them was actually working as a minister, the others shunned by their denominations or unable to find work. From this disquieting meeting, the women organized an Office of Women’s Affairs, initially headquartered and funded through Berkeley’s campus ministry. In 1974, shortly after the founding of the Graduate Theological Union, a colloquium of ten theological schools near Berkeley, the women’s office was transferred to GTU as the Center on Women and Religion.³⁵

The Center on Women and Religion offered classes, counseling, a newsletter, a library, and worship services—all for the women of GTU seminaries, about 350 women, or 20% of the total seminarians in the Bay area in the mid-1970s.³⁶ The Center advocated for mandatory women’s studies courses and affirmative action in faculty hiring in the member schools of GTU. For women seminarians, the Center brokered introductions to established women ministers, gave

³⁵“Q. How long has CWR been around? What are its future plans and directions?” *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 4, no. 4 (Summer 1978).

³⁶“GTU Statistics,” *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 2, no. 2 (Jan 1976).

students spaces for feminist liturgy and worship, a community for consciousness-raising, and social and emotional support. The Center's services for seminarians included sponsoring an annual course on "Women in the Ministry" in which participants attended parish services of women ministers, met with women ministers, read Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible*. At a weekly "Woman's Chapel" seminarians discussed worship patterns modeled on their experiences as women. At a Women in Ministry Conference in 1976, women could meet with denominational representatives to gain clarity on expectations and requirements for entering the clergy.³⁷ In funding and human resources, if not in demographic size, the Center outstripped BTI's Women's Coalition. Although the Center only had an office "the size of a walk-in closet" it was frequently packed with staff members and volunteers³⁸. In the mid-1970s, the circulation of the Center's *Newsletter* exceeded 3,000.³⁹ One woman even suggested that Berkeley, through the efforts of the Center, might become the "theological analogue" to Seneca Falls and Houston, the landmark women's conferences of 1848 and 1977.⁴⁰

Though black women seminarians participated in these women's groups, by the late 1970s they were expressing dissatisfaction with their roles within them, and in their direction. Black women did not enter theological schools in the 1970s at the same clip as white women: the Boston Theological Institute counted only 15 black women among its 400 female students in 1975.⁴¹ One recent graduate of Gammon Theological Seminary concluded, after attending a

³⁷Maren Hansen and Debby Streeter, "GTU Women's Chapels," *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 4, no. 1 (Fall 1977).

³⁸"Staff Report," *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 3, no. 1 (Summer-Fall 1976).

³⁹"From the OWA," *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 2, no. 4 (May 1976).

⁴⁰Mary Hunt, "Addressing a New Reality," *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 4, no. 2 (Winter 1978).

⁴¹Barbara Gerlach and Margaret Hennessey, "Proposal for Placement of Women in Parish Ministries: Submitted to Rockefeller Family Fund," August, 1975, Series 6, Box 6, Folder 7, Beverly Wildung Harrison Papers, Burke Library and Archives, Columbia Universities Libraries at Union Theological School.

conference on women in theological education at GTU in 1977, that the question of black women's role in the women's seminary movement was yet unanswered. White women seminarians, she wrote, tend to overlook the specific struggles of black women ministers and seminarians.⁴² At Union Theological Seminary in New York, black women found both the Women's Center and the Black Caucus problematic. One seminarian recalled that the Black Caucus in the 1970s had "no shame in behavioral attitudes about male supremacy." When she attended her first meeting of the Caucus, she was asked to defend the idea that God had called a woman to ministry. For this woman, the Women's Center was a little better in the early 1970s, but became inhospitable in the later 1970s. "The white Women's Caucus was very strong in '74," she remembered. "The women in '74 were still hurting enough not to say I don't have a right to my struggle. You were welcome but it was clearly their agenda." In 1978, giving up on both caucuses, black women at Union founded a Black Woman's Caucus to better support each other.⁴³ Joan Martin, a black seminarian at Princeton in the mid-1970s, was a member of both the Women's Center and the Black Student Alliance, but recalled that this was a difficult territory to occupy. When the Black Student Alliance invited her to preach in Princeton's chapel, she decided to speak about women in the Bible, irritating the Black Student Alliance because, she recalled, "I should have been preaching about black issues."⁴⁴

As they built coalitions and women's centers, seminarians were also being exposed to cutting-edge feminist and liberation theologies. Liberation theology, a new theological movement rising out of Catholicism in Latin America, began with the premise that Christ was on

⁴²Joyce Jackson, "Black Women in this Movement?" *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 4, no. 2 (Winter, 1978).

⁴³As quoted in Anna Taylor, "A History of the Black Women's Caucus of Union Theological Seminary" (MDiv Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 1983).

⁴⁴Joan Martin, interview with Sherry E. Jordan, Nov 16, 2015, Re-Imagining Collection, Digital Repository, Duke University.

the side of the poor and oppressed, and the church should be active in combatting oppression in this life, in the political domain. Christ's promise, in other words, was not merely eschatological, but was a promise of redemption in the here-and-now. In the United States, liberation theology percolated into theologies of black liberation, chicano theologies, women's liberation, and womanism. Feminist theology, as one historian has noted, was "a bit of a late-comer" in the liberation field.⁴⁵ No distinctly feminist theology infused the spirit of the ministerial reformation in the 1950s or the 1960s. A basic argument from equality had, in general, sufficed. But in the late 1960s, and with increasing voice in the 1970s, an academic feminist theology emerged, taking its lessons from liberation theology. Feminist theology's originary insight was that theology itself might look different if it was attentive to women's experience, as distinct from men's. Valerie Saiving, a student at Union Theological Seminary and devotee of Margaret Mead, published an article in 1960, "The Human Situation: A Feminist View" that is now considered a founding document of the field. Saiving argued that the Christian realist understanding of human sin—as self-interest and will to power—was a particularly male formulation. Women, Saiving argued, do not suffer from an excess of self, but from constant self-negation.⁴⁶ Building on the insight, theologians such as Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Delores Williams, Jaqueline Grant, and Katie Cannon began to insist, in the 1970s, that the church had an obligation to release womankind from her historic subservience. This liberation that they envisioned had a political sense, but also an existential sense. The church

⁴⁵Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity, 1950-2005* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 174.

⁴⁶Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View" as quoted in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992)

must free women to discover themselves and to build a theology of their own experience.⁴⁷

Publishing in feminist theology began in earnest the late 1960s. Theologian and feminist theorist Mary Daly was a particularly central figure in the feminist critique of the church. Daly, a Roman Catholic, had a feminist awakening when she attended Vatican II as an observer in the 1960s and looked out upon a sea of male clerics. Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968) laid out several thousand years of misogyny on the part of the church fathers and pointed out the hypocrisy of Catholic visions of human equality and the church's treatment of women. The book made Daly a household name. Daly's fame was only heightened when the book led to her dismissal from Boston College, and subsequent reinstatement after a public outcry.⁴⁸ *Beyond God the Father* (1973) went further—arguing that the church had not only a misogynist history, but a structural misogyny that rendered it irredeemable. Other women theologians built upon Daly's breakout success. Rosemary Radford Ruether, another Catholic theologian, began to develop a theology that included women's liberation in *The Radical Kingdom* (1970) and *Liberation Theology* (1972). The Woman's Caucus at Harvard Divinity succeeded in getting a lecture series published as *Sexist Religion and the Women in the Church: No More Silence!* (1974), setting a precedent for edited volumes on the subject. Sheila D. Collins's *A Different Heaven and Earth* (1974), weighed in from the point of view of the laity.⁴⁹

Theological schools fared little better than the church in the feminist analysis.

Overwhelmingly male faculty, some of whom were not in favor of women in ministry, made

⁴⁷On feminist theology, see Lilian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), especially chapter nine; Gary Dorrien, *Crisis, Irony, and Postmodernity*, 133-189.

⁴⁸Ann Braude, *Sisters and Saints: Women and American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 97.

⁴⁹For a nice overview of feminist theologizing in the 1970s, see Lillian Calles Barger, "'Pray to God, She Will Hear Us': Women Reimagining Religion and Politics in the 1970s," in *The Religious Left in Modern America: Doorkeepers of a Radical Faith*, ed. Leilah Danielson, Maria Mollin, and Doug Rossinow (London: Palgrave, 2018).

women seminarians feel unsupported. Theological trends in the late 1960s, including a revival of Freudian analysis and the last gasps of neo-orthodoxy, had strong masculine edges. In addition, women faced stereotyping from their peers and from the administration. “Mr. administration,” one woman wrote anonymously in the Boston University student paper, “I do not want to join theology wives. I AM NOT A WIFE.”⁵⁰ Another Boston University student, Lynn Rhodes, recalled that she had to take a psychiatric exam upon entrance to the seminary. The analyst told her she had unusually masculine tendencies, which plunged her into self-doubt. The situation at theological school, for some women, was dire enough to instigate self-harm. At Boston University in the mid-1960s, Rhodes recalled that two of her seven female classmates were institutionalized for mental health problems—one, after she broke a window in the seminary out of anger towards it.⁵¹ Tragically, several black women seminarians at Union Theological School in New York attempted suicide in the mid-1970s.⁵² Beverly Wildung Harrison, a theologian at Union, told seminarians at GTU in 1977 that “the abiding, haunting question I live with daily is whether the ongoing enterprise of theological education really can be made to be good for any woman’s health.”⁵³ Even after several years of organized campus presence, women seminarians were equally unsure.

Women theologians and seminarians were beginning to explore a new kind of harm, an existential harm, that the church had inflicted upon its women. Many women seminarians and theologians concluded that the ultimate effect of the church on women, theological education included, had been one of *alienation* from their authentic selves as women. The idea that women

⁵⁰Anonymous, poem, *Up Against the Cross* (Boston University School of Theology) 7, undated (circa 1969).

⁵¹Lynn Rhodes, “Living With the Issues”, paper given as part of Theological Opportunities Program, Harvard Divinity School, 1975, Box 8, Anna Howard Shaw Collection.

⁵²Taylor, “History of the Black Women’s Caucus”, 49.

⁵³Beverly Harrison and Bob Martin, “Is Theological Education Good for Any Woman’s Health?” *Newsletter* (GTU Center on Women and Religion) 4, no. 2, (Winter 1978).

of the church were separated by the church from their true selves became an essential idea for the ministerial reformation in the 1970s. “The first task for the woman who seeks a professional relationship within the church is to discover herself,” two professors at Boston University concluded in 1965.⁵⁴ Alienation from an authentic self, and the quest to retrieve that self, as historian Doug Rossinow put it, “lay at the heart of the New Left.” Other philosophers have identified authenticity as an essential idea of late modernity.⁵⁵ As Rossinow’s work shows, authenticity in America had liberal Christian roots. College students in the Student Christian Movement in the 1950s and 1960s connected authenticity to salvation, and alienation to sin. But as a moral discourse, authenticity spread quickly beyond these walls. Leaders in Students for a Democratic Society described authenticity as a motivational force, and wrote it into the Port Huron Statement in 1962.⁵⁶ The Black Power movement of the 1970s sought to reunite black Americans with authentic blackness. Second-wave feminism (especially the white, middle-class variety) argued that women were repressing other, truer selves when they accommodated to domestic life.⁵⁷ The idea of authenticity thrived at theological schools. As historian David Cline has argued, the search for authenticity—in themselves, and in their theological education—fueled dissatisfaction among many seminarians, male and female, in the late 1960s.⁵⁸ Feminist critique continued to press these issues in the 1970s. In the 1950s and 1960s, the church’s gravest

⁵⁴Doris Hunter and Howard Hunter, “Neither Male nor Female” *Christian Century* 82, no. 17 (April 28, 1965).

⁵⁵Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012). Alessandro Ferrara, *Reflective Authenticity: Rethinking the Project of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁶As Jim Miller recounts the Port Huron Statement addressed authenticity directly: “The goal of man and society should be human independence:...finding a meaning of life that is personally authentic.” Jim Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 14. See also 206.

⁵⁷Authenticity was a particularly useful tool for communities with ambiguous cultural markers. Black Catholics, for instance, caught between their blackness and their Catholicism, sought ways to be “authentically” both. Matthew J. Cressler, *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic: The Rise of Black Catholicism in the Great Migration*, (New York: NYU Press, 2017).

⁵⁸Cline, *From Reconciliation to Revolution: How the Student Interracial Ministry Took Up the Cause of Civil Rights*, 161-2.

sin, according to ministerial reformers, was that it often denied women opportunities to fulfill their potential as leaders in the church. In the 1970s, the church's gravest sin, according to ministerial reformers, was far more grievous: it alienated them from their authentic selves as women and as ministers.

Women's centers at seminaries gave women seminarians—especially white women seminarians—the space and community to consider questions of their identity as women of the church, and as future ministers of the church. Cutting-edge feminist theology was as of yet unlikely to be required reading in theological coursework, but women's centers kept libraries of books devoted to women's church issues and facilitated reading groups. Though there were still only a few professional feminist theologians in the academy, women seminarians absorbed their critiques about authenticity and alienation, and the church's role in encouraging women's self-negation. At a weekly “Woman's Chapel” one night at GTU in Berkeley, assembled women read excerpts from Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father*. The text urged women to “confront the horrifying fact of her alienation from her authentic self.” One seminarian spoke of being “deeply frightened, and angry, and hurt” by this alienation, and her attempts to repair it. Though the church was, in Daly's argument, the cause of their misery, seminarians saw their attempts to recover their selves as a spiritual imperative. Another woman put it bluntly: “My religious quest is to live authentically and holistically.”⁵⁹

Women seminarians made similar connections at a summer-long event, Seminary Quarter at Grailville.⁶⁰ In the 1970s, Grailville was to women's church activism what the Esalen Institute

⁵⁹Maren Hansen and Debby Streeter, “GTU Women's Chapels” *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 4, no. 1 (Fall 1977).

⁶⁰An annual Women's Interseminary Conference began in early 1973 that drew participation from seminaries on the entire east coast. The first one was held at Yale Divinity. It called women seminarians for a weekend to Yale to discuss the “new issues” facing women as their enrollment at theological schools increased. Subsequent conferences met in Pittsburgh and Louisville. “Eight Decades of Women at Yale Divinity”, Yale Divinity Library, Dec 4, 2018.

was to the human potential movement. A retreat center in Loveland, Ohio, Grailville had hosted women's ministry programs since the 1960s. The center was affiliated with The Grail—a Roman Catholic women's movement—but was adamantly ecumenical. Seminary Quarter at Grailville ran during the summers of 1974-1978, during which twenty-five women seminarians from across the nation resided at the ranch in the countryside for six weeks. At Grailville, women seminarians were allowed to poke their toes in more radical waters without scrutiny. Grailville was a religious world filled only with women, and it did not require the kinds of juggling women seminarians had to do outside its walls. It was, explicitly, a separatist model, an attempt to isolate women's religious training from traditional theological schools. Seminary Quarter, wrote one staff member (without any apparent historical irony) is “a foretaste of what a women's seminary might be like.”⁶¹ Grailville encouraged its students to theologize out of their experiences as women. Participants split their time between self-directed learning, group projects, and contemplative practices such as yoga. Women ministers and theologians from across the country visited to provide resources to the seminarians. One participant recalled that she had allowed her theological education in the past to “cut me off from the mystery of life, dull my sight, program and limit my ideas, deny my own experience. I found space (at Grailville) for beginning a reintegration process.” Many women similarly found Grailville inspiring.⁶²

Women's centers at theological schools, events like Woman's Chapel nights, and Seminary Quarter at Graiville were clearly refuges from often hostile seminary environments. Yet these venues could also be deeply uncomfortable for ministerial reformers, a place for encounter with

<http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/Exhibits/>.

⁶¹Janet Kalven, "An Alternative to Traditional Seminaries" *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 4, no. 2 (Winter 1978).

⁶²See articles on Seminary Quarter at Grailville in *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 1, no.3 (July-August, 1975?); *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 2, no. 4, (May 1976); *Newsletter* (GTU Center for Women and Religion) 4, no.1 Fall (1977); “Faculty Profiles”, *Affirmations* (Boston Theological Institute Women's Theological Coalition), 3, no. 2 (October 15, 1975).

their critics from the more radical left of the church and from secular feminism. Though the centers advocated for women in ministry, they also were forums for discussion about whether women should enter ministry at all. “Why ordain anybody...for a while?” one woman wrote provocatively in GTU’s Center for Women and Religion *Newsletter*. The clergy, the author pointed out, has an ugly history with women. As an order, they have historically been organized as an abstinent sexual elite, to whom women were considered corrupting. “Yet blithely each June whole classes of seminarians are ordained,” the author bemoaned. Were these women ignorant or intentionally blind to the history of the institution they were entering? The author suggested that even cultivating awareness may not be adequate to scrub clerical history clean. “Is ‘ordination’ still a viable, theological-liturgical expression of what a community-church does when it celebrates a member’s gifts in a rite called a sacrament?” she wrote. “Is there an “Order” (ordo) still for such people to move into?” The Latin root at the heart of *ordination*—row, line, rank, command, setting in order—revealed a subliminal undemocratic spirit in the rite. The author suggested women in the church turn their focus instead to empowering the laity. The laity, she concluded, were the true victims of neglect in the church.⁶³

The idea that women ministers pursued their orders blithely, or without due consideration of the politics, was an ambient fear among women seminarians. As church insiders, they were often faced with challenges to their status as liberal reformers. Some women, especially those in parish ministry, argued that their existence as women ministers was evidence enough of their politics, and that their mere presence was a help to the feminist cause, whether or not they advocated for women in other ways. Sara Payne, a Presbyterian minister in Crozet, Virginia, and a recent seminary graduate, wrote that her congregation did not support women’s liberation, so she could

⁶³Dody Donnelly, “Why Ordain Anybody...For a While?” *Newsletter* (GTU Center on Women and Religion) 4, no. 3 (Spring 1978).

hardly proclaim it from the pulpit. Yet, “I wonder about the necessity of verbalizing a philosophy you are living,” she wrote in 1975. “Don’t our lives speak louder anyway?”⁶⁴ Women with parishes often agreed that the tension between their feminist politics and their congregation’s politics meant that their best weapon was their visible existence as women ministers. Reverend Mary M. Moore wrote in 1976, “By our mere existing as women in our chosen calling we continually raise consciousnesses and issues by fulfilling our role.”⁶⁵ Others agreed, even as they wished they could do more. One Methodist minister reported on a survey: “I know one woman says she does not come to church because I preach women’s liberation, which I do not. I don’t know how to approach people about this thing. I felt for a while it was enough for me just to be a woman minister. That in itself is going to change people’s images. But I think more can be done, too.”⁶⁶ Many feminists, especially young seminarians without parishes, were beginning to agree that more had to be done. Being a woman minister was a start, but not an end, not sufficient in itself. One Jewish seminarian struck at the heart of these fears when she wrote resignedly in BTI’s Women’s Coalition’s paper, “What does it mean to have another woman minister? Especially when she defines herself as not this or not that...” Were women ministers really revolutionary figures if they failed to take up women’s liberation and other social issues in the church, such as anti-Semitism? She closed with words that must have cut the Protestant women to the quick: “I haven’t seen too many women ministers trying to change society.”⁶⁷

Although women seminarians jumped at the chance to experience Grailville and to convene in women’s centers, traditional theological schools did make efforts to welcome their women

⁶⁴Sara A. Payne, “Welcome, Sisters,” *The Christian Minister* 6, no.7 (May 1975).

⁶⁵Diane Miller, ed. “What is Distinctive About Being a Woman Minister?” *Kairos* (Autumn 1976).

⁶⁶“Placement of Women in Parish Ministry Report”, 1978, Box 7, Anna Howard Shaw Collection.

⁶⁷Diane Winston, “Open Letter: Joan Little, Jews, Christians, and Society” *Affirmations* (Boston Theological Institute Women’s Theological Coalition) 3, no.3 (November 15, 1975).

students, and to advance the cause of women in ministry. Harvard Divinity's Dean Krister Stendhal was a staunch and early advocate for women in the ministry. He proved a vital ally, earning the nickname "Sister Krister."⁶⁸ Stendhal facilitated the beginnings of the Women's Caucus at HDS. "We wanted to change the school," one caucus member recalled, "and he let us."⁶⁹ Stendhal once told a member of the caucus that he was grateful so many women had come to HDS when they did. There had been talk of closing the school, but the influx of women students brought tuition revenue and attracted external grants.⁷⁰ Stendhal also hired a woman minister, Patricia Budd Kepler, to run an Office of Ministry Studies at the school, to improve graduates' professional preparation. Kepler recalls doing all she could to make the program as inclusive to women as possible, including refusing to hire a male seminarian who, in his application for a post with the office, stipulated that he did not support the ordination of women.⁷¹ In addition, some theological schools "recommended" its graduates for ordination, as a way of letting denominations know that that the seminarian had taken all of the coursework the seminary considered requisite for a career in the ministry. This put additional pressure on denominations, as women graduates earned their recommendations, and could pressure their churches with these credentials.⁷²

⁶⁸Ann Braude, "A Shift in the Created Order: 50 Years of Women and Transformation at Harvard Divinity School" *Harvard Magazine* (May-June 2006).

⁶⁹Elizabeth Rice-Smith, interview with author, Feb 21, 2019.

⁷⁰Elizabeth Rice-Smith, interview with author, Feb 21, 2019.

⁷¹Patricia Budd Kepler, interview with author, Feb 15, 2019.

⁷²By the end of the 1960s, women seminarians were leveraging their status *as seminarians* into activism for ordination. When the Lutheran Church in America met in 1970 to debate women's ordination at their annual assembly, three seminarians—Karen Pedersen and Donna Schaper, both of University of Chicago Divinity School, and Louise Phalen of Lutheran School of Theology—tried to make a small splash at the convention. They sported name tags that identified themselves as candidates for ministry, and tried to talk to as many of the 691 delegates as they could about their future. The motion to ordain women passed. (Karen Pedersen, "We Have Just Begun", *Event* 10, no. 11 [1970]) In at least two other instances, the mere presence of ministerial-track women was a spark in the fuse that led denominations to change their rules regarding women's ordination. When the president of the American Lutheran Church, Frederick Schiotz, found out in 1967 that two women were in residence at a Lutheran seminary, at least one of whom was aiming for ordination, Schiotz initiated the commissions that would eventually encourage a rule change in the denomination in 1970.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, theological schools proved, as historian David Cline put it, “vulnerable to attack from within.”⁷³ Once they admitted women into ministerial programs, theological schools had professional obligations to them. The reputation of their schools required they attempt to make those women the best, most successful ministers they could be. At the same time, women seminarians had unprecedented organizational energy, numbers, and funding. At theological schools in the 1970s, women were, as the director of BTI put it, the “chic minority.”⁷⁴ At theological schools, women were also introduced to a more radical religious feminism. The radicals argued that no matter how much acceptance and job security women could attain the church, they were moving in a system that was inextricably and irredeemably patriarchal. Women ministers increasingly felt moved to contend with their own belonging in the clergy, in what one theologian called a “male caste system.” In response, some ministerial reformers turned to ritual.

Feminist Ordinations

In 1974, Riverside Church in Manhattan hosted a service in celebration of women’s ministry. The event was intended to be triumphant, joyful. But it did not escape the concerns that were plaguing ministerial reformers at the time. Jeanne Audrey Powers, a Methodist minister, gave a witness testimony to the crowd:

Many wonder why we even bother. If the Church continues to keep us on the periphery, insulted or ignored, why do we choose to seek to exercise our priesthood within it? Equally, if the Church continues to separate, through its structures, those who are called to a wider ministry, why do we want to perpetuate such hierarchal distinctions? All women wrestle with these questions, and we each answer them in our own way.⁷⁵

⁷³Cline, *Reconciliation to Revolution*, 164.

⁷⁴Kay Longcope, “8-seminary group to keep operating” *Boston Globe*, June 1974.

⁷⁵Jeanne Audrey Powers, “A Witness”, given at a Service of Celebration of Women in Ministry, Riverside Church, October 27, 1974, Box 7, Anna Howard Shaw Collection.

In the early 1970s, Powers' question was becoming a common refrain: *Why even bother?* Was the intuition of the clergy so undemocratic, so sexist, that women's entrance into it was unlikely to make any substantial impact?

Few were more articulate on the subject as Letty Mandeville Russell. Russell was an early ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church, one of the first to receive the honor in 1958, and a theologian at Yale Divinity School. But, by the 1970s, Russell was coming to perceive some problems with women's entrance into the ministry, problems that had to do not with women or equality, but with the ministry itself. In 1974, she penned a book manuscript, *Flight From Ministry: A Theology of Vocation* that took these problems into consideration. The essential issue, for Russell, was that the institution of the clergy was a flawed one—clergy were, in some sense, minority oppressors of the lay majority of the church. To be a clergy-member was to be complicit in this structural power. Yet Russell saw hope for internal change, and, despite her manuscript's title, she would not resolve the issue about whether women should pursue ministry either way. "Whether or not we seek clerical ordination, in my opinion, this should be for the purpose of subverting the clergy line and changing the structures of the church," she wrote. If women were called to be ordained, they should do so, Russell argued. But they should do so with the purpose of disrupting power structures and empowering the laity.⁷⁶ Other reformers agreed. Nelle Morton, a professor of Christian Education at the Theological School of Drew University, cautioned women entering ministry to remember Audre Lorde's admonition

⁷⁶Letty Mandeville Russell, "Flight from Ministry: A Theology of Vocation", book manuscript, April 1974, Box 53, Folder 14, Constance Parvey Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Though "Flight from Ministry" does not seem to have ever made it to the press, parts of the manuscript, including the argument that the ministry is a "male caste system", appear in *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective: A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

that one cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools.⁷⁷ Cynthia Wedel, the first female president of the National Council of Churches, encouraged women in 1971 to "change the fact that ordination means power."⁷⁸ Likewise, two Catholic college chaplains at Harvard and at Boston University, Ann Kelley and Anne Walsh, wrote in 1974 that ordination was a questionable goal for women. The priesthood was so cultic, they argued, that any significant change to it would have to come from outside its numbers. "The question women need to resolve, then, as they work for equality and full sharing in the Church is this: Is the power and privilege of the ordained an abuse and corruption of the office, or is it inherent in the office itself?"⁷⁹ The simple entrance of women into the ministerial field, these reformers argued, was not adequate to breach the trenchant injustice built into the clergy. Women had to break it, or, at least bend it, from the inside. Yet, how to break it? And how much? And how to communicate that it was being broken?⁸⁰

Some women were also finding that remaining in the church at all was unfeasible, and a feminist separatist movement grew ever more vocal. In 1971, Mary Daly gave a sermon at Memorial Church at Harvard University, the first woman to do so from that pulpit. At its conclusion, she encouraged the men and women present to join her in an "exodus"—to walk out of the sanctuary, through the front doors, into the fresh air of Harvard Yard, and out of the

⁷⁷"If women cannot bring something of unique value because they are women—as opposed to copying an exclusive male pattern of living, of thinking, of ministry—they had better get out," she wrote. Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), xxiv.

⁷⁸As quoted in Marietta Mansfield, "Women Who Minister," *Woman's Pulpit* (Oct-Dec 1971).

⁷⁹Ann Kelley and Anne Walsh, "Ordination: A Questionable Goal for Women," in *Women and Orders*, ed. Robert Heyer (New York: Paulist Press, 1974).

⁸⁰These critiques have even been reflected in the scholarship on women's ministry. Jacqueline Field-Bibb, a sociologist, argued as late as 1991 that women's entrance into ministry was not a true expression of women's historical attempts to imitate and identify with Christ. The ministerial reformation, she argued, was a somewhat unfortunate routinization of women's historically charismatic religiosity. Jacqueline Field-Bibb, *Women towards Priesthood: Ministerial Politics and Feminist Praxis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

“centuries of darkness” women had experienced at the hands of the church.⁸¹ For some women, including Daly, this marked their break with the institutional church altogether. But many women joined Daly in walking out of Memorial Church, breathing in that fresh air, but then walked right back in again. Ministerial reformers were among those who walked back in, figuratively and literally. (For instance, Daly’s liturgist at the service that day was a Congregational woman minister, Liz Rice-Smith, who did not choose this occasion to leave her orders behind.) But this was not, necessarily, an easy walk to make in the climate of the 1970s. The women who did so had to explain themselves.⁸²

This act of explanation, ministerial reformers found, could be a ritual act. In the 1970s, ritual and worship settings became important locales for working out these tensions. Women’s seminary groups sponsored women’s-only worship events. The National Organization of Women’s Task Force on Women and Religion initiated a “SisterCelebration” Sunday in 1972 and a Reformation Sunday protest in 1974, in which women were encouraged to nail their own theses to church doors.⁸³ Catholic women were even more active in liturgical activism, as a Catholic women’s ordination movement grew. In a “Pink and Ash” ceremony in 1970, Catholic women made a burnt offering of canon laws that discriminated against women. In a “Bonnet Rebellion” in 1969, women were encouraged to go bareheaded to Easter mass.⁸⁴

For Protestant women entering ministry, ordination ceremonies themselves became a site

⁸¹Barbara Flanagan, “Mary Daly leads exodus after historic sermon” *The Heights*, Boston College, 62, no. 11 (November 22, 1971)

⁸²Elizabeth Rice-Smith, interview with author, Feb 21, 2019. On Mary Daly’s “walk-out” see Ann Braude, “A Shift in the Created Order: 50 Years of Women and Transformation at Harvard Divinity School,” *Harvard Magazine*, June 2006; Ann Braude, “A Short Half Century: Fifty Years of Women at Harvard Divinity School” (Address, September 19, 2005), <https://hds.harvard.edu/news/2005/09/19/short-half-century-fifty-years-women-harvard-divinity-school#>.

⁸³Henold, *Catholic and Feminist*, 81.

⁸⁴“Press Release: Pink and Ash Protest”, Box 31, Folder 9, Elizabeth Farians Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (hereafter Farians Papers). “Press Release: Easter Bonnet Rebellion”, Box 31, Folder 1, Farians Papers. See also Henold, *Catholic and Feminist* and Daigler, *Incompatible With God’s Design*.

of personal expression in the 1970s. This expression was not for direct protest—women were, after all, gaining entrance into a historically male body, and saw these moments as principally celebrative—but rather for articulating the relationship between their ministry and their feminism. Sometimes this tension was deep enough to inspire rather dour services. At the ordination of a woman student in 1976, Yale Divinity professor Margaret Farley gave a sermon that voiced these mixed emotions. She described women in ministry as experiencing “homelessness, of alienation from so much in the culture and so much in the church and so much in the political life of the nation.” She compared the identity of the woman minister with that of Christ. Both, she argued, bear signs of contradiction in their very persons. In a remarkably remorseful sermon, Farley argued that the ordained woman “forfeits, as it were, by her ordination, the opportunity to stand outside the church”.⁸⁵ Ordination was not simply an endowment—of authority, prestige, or ability—but also a loss.

Sometimes this ambivalence about the ministry was expressed with an emphasis on belonging to a community—or clerical line—of other women. In 1977 three seminarians at Pacific School of Religion—Stacy Cusulos, Jody Parsons, and Loey Powell—were struggling with whether or not to be ordained. Each felt immense trepidation. They recognized the institutional church as essential to the development of their faith, yet they felt, “the church itself has alienated us.” It had not only ignored the experiences of women, but negated them. As the three women talked, they experienced what they called a moment of grace, and came to a conclusion about how they could reconcile ordination with their feminist commitments. In April 1978, they underwent the ordination rite—together. In this way, they argued, they could remain symbolically in covenant with other women who had shared their struggles. “It is a paradox that

⁸⁵Margaret Farley, “Ministry: Homeless and Ordained; Sermon at the Ordination of Marie M. Fortune” *Reflection* (Yale Divinity School) 74, no. 1 (November 1976).

we chose to remain in the same church which has oppressed us and our foremothers as women,” they noted in their ordination paper, which they wrote collectively. Yet it is in the “contradictions, the paradoxes, and the mystikos” that they experienced God. This tension was, as Bednarowski has argued tends to be the case, a creative tension for the seminarians. Yet it was a tension that they felt needed some ritual expression, some way of affirming that they remained spiritually aligned with women, even as they entered a historically male caste. A “collective” ordination, with other women, could carry some of that burden.⁸⁶

Others sought to articulate their ongoing community with women by deploying other women in their ordinations. Davida Foy Crabtree was ordained in 1972 at a service composed entirely of women. Crabtree was a Congregationalist campus minister in Connecticut and a graduate of Andover Newton Theological Seminary. She had been involved in peace and women’s church activism for several years before her ordination. Crabtree had felt called by God to the ministry since seventh grade, and entered seminary in 1967. It was her seminary experience that drew her attention to the plight of women in the church and in the larger world. In seminary, she was for the first time in an environment dominated by men. “Every registration we filled out forms which asked us for our selective service numbers and our wives’ names,” she recalled. Her male colleagues assumed she was there to find a husband. In her field work, churches insisted she teach nursery classes instead of preach. The experience honed her desire to work for women’s liberation in the church. While a student at Andover Newton, Crabtree brought a copy of Mary Daly’s *The Church and the Second Sex* to the president of the seminary and recommended he read it. (He did, and found it enlightening.⁸⁷) Crabtree’s activism quickly burst beyond seminary

⁸⁶Stacy Cusulos, Jody Parsons, and Loey Powell, “Collective Covenantal Ordination,” *Newsletter* (GTU Center on Women and Religion) 4, no. 3 (Spring 1978).

⁸⁷Roy Pearson to Davida Foy Crabtree, April 22, 1969, Box 1, Davida Foy Crabtree Papers, Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA. (Hereafter, Crabtree Papers).

walls. In 1969, Crabtree was among the “Jonathan’s Wake” radicals that protested the National Council of Churches’ general assembly. She attended a *Women Exploring Theology* conference at Grailville in 1972, and she joined her denomination’s task force on women.

At Crabtree’s ordination, three women ministers presided. Rev. Nelle Morton, Rev. Emily Preston, and Rev. Phyllis Tribble delivered the sermon, gave the charge, and read scripture, respectively. The tone of the service was one of solidarity with women, and one that placed Crabtree firmly in the circles of liberal activism. In her sermon, Nelle Morton conducted an exegesis of Galatians 3:28, in which Paul writes to the churches of Galatia that, in Christ, there is neither male and female. Morton concluded that the verse was evidence that Christ had “interrupted” the order of creation. Like Christ, Morton analogized, Crabtree was also an interrupter. “Among the preponderance of male preachers in the United Church of Christ, the one you would ordain today is your interruption,” Morton said. “She is the awkward insertion into the church’s otherwise unruffled life.” Crabtree’s mother presented her with a stole that she had made herself. It was embroidered with wildflowers, symbols of peace, and social action signs. Newspaper coverage suggested that the all-women’s ordination might be the first of its kind. The media relations arm of United Church of Christ agreed. But Crabtree insisted she knew of three such services that preceded hers.⁸⁸

Crabtree’s ordination made an impression on participants and observers, even garnering coverage in the *New York Times*. One observer wrote to Crabtree after the service, saying it had “a very profound effect upon me, particularly in terms of seeking ordination myself. Without Grailville and without your service I seriously doubt that I would have the guts to be in the

⁸⁸“Crabtree Ordained at All-Woman Service,” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Oct-Dec 1972); George Dugan, “Women in All Key Roles During Ordination Rites,” *New York Times*, Sept 18, 1972.

process for it now.”⁸⁹ Other women who read about the service in the *Times* expressed some degree of jealousy. A woman minister wrote to Crabtree lauding the service but noting resignedly that, for her own ordination, “I wasn’t able to do anything quite so clear-cut because I wasn’t completely free to plan it myself...” She made do with a litany written by seminarians at Union Theological Seminary, which, she noted, she had revised a little herself.⁹⁰

Crabtree also used four women in the laying-on-of-hands. Women ordinands often placed women at this, the central heart of the ceremony.⁹¹ In this part of the ordination ceremony, towards its conclusion, other clergy members, and sometimes lay persons, gather at the front of the church and surround the ordinand, who kneels (in some cases facing the congregation, in some cases facing the altar). Hands are laid upon the ordinand’s head and an ordination prayer recited by those gathered. For those of more catholic theological persuasions, the laying-on-of-hands is an endowment of grace, through other members in the ministry, to the new member. The significance of this connection—between new minister and old minister—is not lost on liberal Protestants either, who require ministerial participation in the laying-on-of-hands. Thus, though historically other elements of the ordination rite have been seen as more pivotal, in the modern era the laying-on-of-hands has tended to be the climax—the most often photographed and remembered moment.⁹² Along with four women ministers, Crabtree included four laymen for the laying-on-of-hands, the only major role men played in the ceremony. As Crabtree knelt, a

⁸⁹Nancy Bahmueller-Gard to Davida Foy Crabtree, undated, Box 1, Crabtree Papers.

⁹⁰Helene Pollock to Davida Foy Crabtree, Sept 18, 1972, Box 1, Crabtree Papers.

⁹¹In similar fashion to Crabtree, Arabella Meadows-Rogers was ordained a Presbyterian elder in 1975 at a service that likewise exaggerated women’s participation. Eight of thirteen official participants in her service were women. Pam Proctor and William Proctor, *Women in the Pulpit: Is God an Equal Opportunity Employer?* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 41-42.

⁹²In the Catholic context, however, the essential element in an ordination ritual has historically been cause for much debate. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, thought the essential action was the handing of the chalice and paten from the ordaining bishop to the new priest, the *traditional instrumentorum*. It was not until 1947 that Pius XII settled this debate by concluding that the essential action is, indeed, the laying-on-of-hands. See Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women’s Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

laywoman, Barbara McCall, gave the ordination prayer: “We would remember the long line of those who have gone before us in ministry,” she said. “Especially on this day we would remember Antoinette Brown, the first of our sisters in this tradition to receive ordination. We follow in her footsteps.”⁹³

As McCall’s prayer suggests, feminist ordination ceremonies sometimes invoked the women ministers, like Antoinette Brown, who had come before, thereby placing the ordinand in a chain of women in ministry. Understanding the ministry as a multi-generational kinship structure—a chain of connected clergy-members—has long history. Ritual theorist Nancy Jay has hypothesized that certain patterns of male religious leadership can be understood as means of constructing patrilineal kinship structures. Paternity, of course, is invisible to the human eye, so, as Jay puts it, “to create social and religious paternity is precisely to transcend a natural relation.”⁹⁴ In the context of the Roman Catholic Church, Jay sees apostolic succession, the unbroken clerical line proceeding from the apostles, as an all-male lineage, and ordination as “the power to generate descendants in this genealogical line.”⁹⁵ Although most Protestants, with the important exception of those in the Anglican communion and some Lutherans, deny the existence of such a perfect, unbroken chain of descent, there are still strong undercurrents in Protestantism, here and there, of understanding the clergy as a kinship structure.⁹⁶ Ministerial reformers sometimes explicitly transformed this traditionally male genealogy into a female genealogy. Betty Bone Schiess, an Episcopal woman who had received a much-disputed

⁹³Ordination service, September 17, 1972, Box 1, Crabtree Papers.

⁹⁴Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), xiii.

⁹⁵Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, 118. Or, as a Vatican II document described it, the passing on of the “apostolic seed.” *Lumen Gentium*, 20.

⁹⁶See, for instance, the United Methodist practice of maintaining an ordination chain of their bishops, dating back to Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke (Coke was ordained to the episcopate by the Church of England). General Commission on Archives and History, United Methodist Church, “Bishops Ordination Chain, 1784-2012”, 2012, <http://www.gcah.org/history/bishops-ordination-chain>.

irregular ordination in 1974, begged her bishop to regularize her early in a planned service so that she could participate in the ordination of another woman later that same day. If he did not, she wrote, “continuity *vis a vis* women in the church would be broken.”⁹⁷ This continuity could take on the language of kinship. After her ordination in 1956, Presbyterian Margaret Towner was approached by Lillian Hurt Alexander, an important churchwoman who had helped advocate for women’s ordination in PCUSA. “You are my daughter,” Alexander told Towner. “Those who follow you will be your daughters.” One of these daughters, Deborah Block, whom Towner laid hands on to ordain in the 1970s, described the experience of ordination as birth through a woman’s body. Having hands laid on her head felt like “womblike warmth and darkness,” and she recalled feeling her “elder-parents” around her, and could smell her mother’s perfume.⁹⁸ To construct a lineage of women ministers was, in part, to re-write the history of the clergy, to make it compatible with women’s liberation.

Not all women ministers, of course, initiated explicitly feminist ordination ceremonies. Many negotiated the tension between their clerical robes and their feminism in other terms. In particular, a resurgence of emphasis on the call to ministry provided a foothold from which women ministers could stand in the midst of critique. The call to ministry, once a neglected subject in the ministerial reformation in the mainline, experienced a revival in the late 1960s and 1970s that offered women ministers another opportunity to reconcile—or dodge—conflicts between their ministry and second-wave feminism.

The Call to Ministry

⁹⁷Betty Bone Schiess to Ned Cole, Dec. 15, 1976, Series 2C, Box 2, Folder 3, Suzanne Hiatt Papers, Burke Library and Archives, Columbia University Libraries at Union Theological Seminary.

⁹⁸Deborah Block, “Wearing the Robe,” in *Celebrating Our Call: Ordination Stories of Presbyterian Women*, ed. Patricia Lloyd-Sidle (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2006): 25, 27.

In 1932, Lillian H. Chapman, a Presbyterian pastor from Big Flats, New York, recalled that her experience in ministry began with a call—on the telephone. It was a Saturday night, her pastor was ill, and someone rung her husband, Mr. Chapman, to ask if he could fill in for the pastor on Sunday morning. Mr. Chapman was not available. “But when asked if he knew any one upon whom they might call, I heard him say, ‘Yes, Mrs. Chapman could fill my place splendidly, if you persuade her to do it.’”⁹⁹ Pastoral absences, and husbands otherwise occupied—these, more than any emotional experience, typified the beginnings of ministry for most white, mainline women between 1920 and 1965. Infused in these ministerial origin narratives was a deep sense of humility. Most mainline reformers before the 1960s portrayed their ministry as accidental and service-driven. For most members of the Association of Woman-Preachers, the largest conglomerate of women ministers before the 1960s, their call to ministry was not a radical, transformative, sudden experience, but a gradual realization, a growing feeling that most said continued for their entire lives. Call narratives in *Woman’s Pulpit*, their periodical, tended to have a shrunken quality in its first forty years. They used “vocation” and “commission” more often than “call.”¹⁰⁰

If happenstance was not the instigation for ministry, a kind of providential history would also suffice. “I admit I was not ‘called’, but rather driven,” into ministry, wrote Margaret Blair Johnstone, a Congregationalist minister, in an autobiography in 1954. The *New York Times* chose this line—“Not called, but driven”—as the title for their review of Johnstone’s memoir. Johnstone was careful not to portray this “drivenness” as a matter of identity, destiny, or self-expression. She never heard any voice nor received any call, she hastened to say. Nor had she ever believed in her childhood that she was going to be a minister. Johnstone’s autobiography

⁹⁹Lillian H. Chapman, “A Presbyterian Pastor,” *Woman’s Pulpit* 10, no. 4, (March-April 1932).

¹⁰⁰“Activities of Our Membership” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Nov - Dec. 1924).

was titled *When God Says 'No'*. Her beginnings in ministry, as she narrated them, had nothing to do with an affirmative position that she should be a minister, and everything to do with God saying 'no' to other careers, including social work and teaching. Eventually, with "utmost rebellion and dread" she was forced into ministry.¹⁰¹

This distance from the call did important cultural work for ministerial reformers in the mid-century. It painted them as dutiful, institutional women, drawn into a career they never sought out or expected. But, just as essentially, it distinguished them from evangelical, Pentecostal, and holiness ministers such as Aimee Semple McPherson, Maria Woodworth-Etter, Uldine Utley, Alma White, and Sinclair Lewis's fictional Sister Sharon Falconer, in *Elmer Gantry*. As one biographer of a Congregationalist minister put it, in this minister's decision to enter ministry, "there was no sudden moment of truth, no piercing light, no still small voice."¹⁰² Skepticism towards the call also distanced mainline women, implicitly, from most black women ministers as well. The call, historian E. Brooks Holifield writes, has historically been the most important qualifier for the ministry for those of evangelical persuasions.¹⁰³ Black women, in particular, have relied on a direct, experiential call from God as the basis for their ministries. The tradition stretches back to the antebellum era, and continued into the Victorian. Black women of such renown as Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Sojourner Truth published memoirs in the early nineteenth century that recounted these calls to the ministry.¹⁰⁴ (Lee had a vision of a pulpit,

¹⁰¹Margaret Blair Johnstone, *When God Says 'No': Faith's Starting Point* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), 3, 29.; Ben Bradford, "Not Called, But Driven" *New York Times*, June 27, 1954. Johnstone published her memoir with Simon and Schuster, who may have been hoping for a success the likes of Houghton Mifflin. Houghton Mifflin had published a bestselling autobiography of a woman minister, Margaret Henrichsen, the year prior.

¹⁰²Rosemary Coffin, *A Ministry of Grace: An Account of the Life of the Reverend Frederica Mitchell* (Published by the author in association with Phillips Exeter Academy Press, 1983), 18.

¹⁰³Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 2.

¹⁰⁴Jarena Lee, *The Life and Experience of Jarena Lee, a Colored Lady: Giving an Account of the Call to Preach the Gospel* (Cincinnati, 1839). Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs Zilpha Elaw, Together with Some Account of the Great Religious Revivals in America* (London: T. Dudley, 1846). Sojourner Truth, *Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave, Emancipated from Bodily Servitude by the State of New*

from the back, as if welcoming her to it.) And in the next generation, women like Julia Foote and Harriet Baker recounted theirs as well.¹⁰⁵ (Foote had a vision in which Christ presented her with a “letter of authority” to preach, written in gold ink. When Foote awoke from her vision, the letter was gone. She realized the letter was written, not on paper, but on her heart.)¹⁰⁶ An experiential call from God remained important to black women’s ministry into the twentieth century, perhaps because the majority of black women preachers and pastors operated in more evangelically-inclined, spirit-filled, institutions.¹⁰⁷

Yet after decades of evasive attitudes towards the call to ministry, mainline ministerial reformers rediscovered the call in the late 1960s. Women’s calls to ministry had personal and political valences, and this was what made them such effective tools in the reformation as it made its way through the 1970s. Against the accusation, from liberals, that women ministers were passive insiders to a patriarchal tradition, the called woman could answer with a discourse that the left also respected—that of authenticity. Insider she may be, but how could she help it? This was her essential self. And against claims, from conservatives, that she was concerned only with women’s lib, she could answer with a language Protestants had recognized for centuries, albeit to varying extents—her call to ministry qualified her, lifted her beyond her gender, beyond

York, in 1828 (Boston : J.B. Yerrinton and Son, Printers, 1850.).

¹⁰⁵Julia A Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* (Cleveland: Lauer & Yost, 1886); John H Acornley, *The Colored Lady Evangelist: Being the Life, Labors and Experiences of Mrs. Harriet A. Baker* (Brooklyn, NY: 1892) as reprinted in *Women in American Protestant Religion, 1800-1930*, ed. Carolyn De Swarte Gifford and Donald W Dayton (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).

¹⁰⁶Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, 70-71.

¹⁰⁷To claim that women’s calls to ministry (or their lack of them) served a rhetorical purpose and did important cultural work is not to imply that this is the only or most essential way to understand these phenomena. Calls were often deeply felt, occasionally experiential, and all women ministers would say their ultimate source was God or the Spirit. My point is not that calls were materially produced; merely that calls to ministry did not occur in a cultural vacuum, and were, regardless of origins, deployed for political purposes. In his critique of existentialism, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, published originally in 1964, Theodor Adorno notes that authenticity, “is just as standardized as the world that it officially negates; the reason for this lies partly in its mass success, partly in the fact that it posits its message automatically, through its mere nature.” Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 6.

its politics, and into the realm of the spirit. Like Julia Foote, mainline women ministers in the 1970s described their calls as written on their hearts.¹⁰⁸

In the early 1960s, mainline women began experimenting with the term. A young member of Association of Women Ministers, Beth Rhude, asked theologian Georgia Harkness in an interview in 1963: What defined a call? Harkness's answer could stand for many mainline ministerial reformers of the time in its timid diplomacy towards the idea. "A call, to me," Harkness said, "is a sense of need, a capacity to fulfill the need, and an opportunity to practice."¹⁰⁹ Many women ministers agreed. In 1965, an article in *Woman's Pulpit* solicited responses from AAWM members on what did they considered a call. Some described a "feeling" or "some sort of compulsion". A few recognized that a spiritual experience or vision might be involved. But most recommended, like Harkness, careful introspection, Bible reading, and a kind of pragmatic reason. Wrote one woman, "How can a person know she is called to the ministry unless she first studies, and after such preparation still may not know until she is experienced?" A sense of call, this minister suggested, should post-date, not pre-date, a successful career in ministry. Similarly, in summarizing its findings, the article in *Woman's Pulpit* in 1965 made the call sound like an exercise in inductive reasoning. How does a woman know she is called? First, she must begin by seeking solitude to concentrate on deep thoughts. Second, she must conclude Jesus Christ is the answer to the needs of the world. Third, she must educate herself on the needs

¹⁰⁸The call to ministry has a varied Protestant history. Max Weber, in his opus *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, wrote that the idea of "calling", in the sense of a life-task imbued with the highest form of moral purpose, had several theological variations. According to Lutheran thought, a calling was principally a directive from God. If God said, "be a minister", you were to be a minister. This was an existential understanding of a calling: you adapted yourself to what God called you to. In Calvinist thought, however, the idea of a calling became more expansive and pragmatic, and far less direct. To Calvin, more important than the type of your work was the method and success of your work. You would know your work was a calling from God if you worked with certain moral qualities and the fruits of your labors were plentiful and good. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner, 1930).

¹⁰⁹Lenore Hughes, "The Lady is a Theologian" *Woman's Pulpit* 43, no.1, (Jan- Mar 1965).

of the world. And finally, a woman should exercise some post-facto judgment: “If you find joy in the opportunities which are continually presenting themselves, and you are reasonably successful, you must have a call.”¹¹⁰ A combination of hard work, study, personal satisfaction, and success added up to a calling. Calls were not prerequisites to entrance to the ministry. And calls were rarely, if ever, reflective of an authentic self or an inner truth that predated ministry. Instead, they needed to be sought after, pursued, discerned.

In the 1970s, ministerial reformers began to emphasize their calls in a more existential mode—as movements of the Holy Spirit in the world which they could not help but respond to. Limitations on those calls, they argued, were undue interference with a divine command. Yet this new existential sense of callings did not necessarily have a feminist politics right from the start. As ministerial reformers became more comfortable with the language of the existential call, they found they could deploy it as a soft shield against accusations of feminism or ‘women’s lib’ when they found it necessary. Margaret Johnstone made sure to note, in the first paragraph of her autobiography, that she “had never ground any feminist axes.” Many women ministers feared feminism’s association with radicalism and anti-institutionalism, combined with a sense that their ministries were provocation enough to their churches and parishes. To imply that one’s ministry was a feminist symbol was, some believed, to endanger it. “Never, for whatever provocation, take up the cause of women’s rights,” one woman minister responded in 1970, when asked if ordination was a rights issue. “To do so is to lose friends and influence.”¹¹¹ Others feared that secular feminism might eclipse the women’s church organizations that had led women’s movements for so long. The Association of Women Ministers wrote to the newly-

¹¹⁰“Serendipity and ‘The Call’” *Woman’s Pulpit* 44, no.1 (Jan-March 1966).

¹¹¹Johnstone, *When God Says ‘No’*, 3; Elsie Gibson, *When the Minister Is a Woman* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1970), 70.

formed National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1969 to let them know they were watching NOW with, as they put it, “interest and concern.”¹¹² They outlined, for NOW, their history of advocacy for women—*much* longer than NOW’s, they implied—and insisted their president be appointed to NOW’s board.

Amongst the skeptics, or those hesitant to count themselves in the feminist number, a call to the ministry emerged as a soft veil of protection against the politics of women’s ordination. A call, some women ministers argued, came directly from God, a force external to the self. To make the ordination of women an issue of personal politics—of woman’s rights, say—was to transgress dangerously on this divine action. Elsie Gibson, a Congregationalist minister of an older generation, insisted in her study, *When the Minister is a Woman*, that ordination could not possibly be an issue of rights because of the nature of the call. “If ordination is the action of the church in response to God’s call to individuals, it can scarcely be treated as a right by either sex, can it?”¹¹³ she wrote. The upshot, of course, of ordination not being an issue of rights, was that it became hardly an issue of politics at all, but of God’s inalienable action. In 1966, *American Lutheran* ran a story by a woman minister, LaVonne Althouse, who argued that women’s ordination was “not merely to further the emancipation of modern woman. More important is the desire that no artificial or unrealistic expectations be placed upon the Christian woman’s call to minister.”¹¹⁴ If the call itself was sacred, these reformers argued, the churches, nor anyone for that matter, could not dare interfere. A common refrain emerged amongst ministerial reformers: I believe in the ordination of women, *if* they are called. Some women ministers even went so far as to caution against women entering ministry, *unless* she had a call. “I can’t advise any woman to

¹¹²Mary Alice Daughtry to NOW, Sept 12, 1969, Box 21 Folder 1, Farians Papers.

¹¹³Gibson, *When the Minister is a Woman*, 70-72.

¹¹⁴LaVonne Althouse. “Ordain Women?” *American Lutheran* (October 1966).

go into it except as God calls her,” one minister informed *Woman’s Pulpit* in 1962. “But after she is called, I’d advise her to take her calling and stand up for equal rights as one who is called to the ministry.” Women’s ministry, the writer implied, must be purely a response to God’s action.¹¹⁵ Any other reason for the pursuit was insufficient. Others feared that the meaning of ordination itself might be eclipsed in service of the feminist cause if women’s ordination was presented to the world as a rights issues. Elizabeth Platz, an early Lutheran ordinand, told a reporter that it was a mistake “to see women’s ordination as an act for women’s equality.”¹¹⁶ One should ask oneself, Platz continued, whether the ministry was the right career, whether one could serve faithfully and well, before one accepted ordination. Platz’s concern seemed to be that politicizing the rite might efface the professional responsibilities it carried with it, or encourage women ill-prepared for ministry to enter it anyway.

But by the early 1970s, most reformers, especially the younger generation that had attended seminary in the late 1960s or early 1970s, abandoned the strategy of using their callings to mitigate against feminism. By then, the rising generation considered themselves feminists, and, though they exhibited tact in their application of the term, were generally reluctant to distance themselves from it explicitly. Changes in theological education also contributed to this growing appreciation of callings across the mainline, not merely amongst women ministers. As theological education became a requirement for ministry, prospective ministers had more time to consider—and more pressure to articulate—why they were there in the first place. In the 1950s, theological schools began to encourage their students to consider seminary an experience of discernment. The Rockefeller Foundation began a Theological Fellowship program in 1954, with

¹¹⁵Mary Ellen LaRue, “Who’s Who in the AAWM: Three Sisters are Pastors”, *Woman’s Pulpit* 39, no. 2 (April May-June, 1962).

¹¹⁶“Women Seeking Bigger Role in Churches”, *US News and World Report*, Jan 18, 1971.

the idea of improving the quality of students entering theological schools. The grants specifically enabled students who were not yet committed to the ministry to attend theological school anyway. Walter Wagoner, the director of the Rockefeller program, writing in *Christian Century* in 1960, described theological students as “confused about the nature of the call to ministry” and recommended theological schools follow the model of the Rockefeller grants. Theological schools, he suggested, would be improved by a more introspective model, one structured around the possibility of ministry for its graduates, instead of the presupposition of it.¹¹⁷ The Rockefeller approach took root in American theological education. By the 1970s, *how does God call you?* had become an essential question to all seminarians.

A small revival of concern with the Holy Spirit also contributed to the resurgence of the call in the mainline. In the 1970s, a charismatic revival movement was making its way through Episcopalian, Baptist, and Lutheran congregations in particular. Increased visibility of evangelical Christians on the national stage in the 1970s also set mainline Protestants to thinking about their personal relationships with Jesus, and the movement of the Holy Spirit. “I think people did not want to give evangelical power only to the people who were anti-progressive,” one woman minister recalled. “We didn’t want *them* to be the only one to claim the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁸ The call to ministry was an alternative, sudden, and radical experience of God for mainline Protestants with no interest in being born again.

It is no small irony that many women began training in a professional capacity for a career in ministry just as professionalization itself came under intense scrutiny. The 1970s, historian Edward Berkowitz has argued, were characterized by a “crisis in competence,” a shaken belief in

¹¹⁷Walter Wagoner, “The Ministry: Image and Reality” *Christian Century* 77, no. 16 (April 1, 1960). Wagoner would later become the director of the Boston Theological Institute. See Wolfgang Saxon, “Rev. Walter Wagoner, Sr., 79, Theology Educator” *New York Times*, May 18, 1998.

¹¹⁸Elizabeth Rice-Smith, interview with author, Feb 21, 2019.

professional expertise and in our professional leaders. High-level failures of professionals and experts—from Watergate to stagflation to the oil crisis—induced suspicion of the value of expertise.¹¹⁹ The academy joined the fray, especially with Magali Larson’s *The Rise of Professionalism* (1977), which argued that professions were agents of social control and domination. Sociologists Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Nancy Tomes describe the relationship between modern feminism and the professions as having “all the characteristics of a love-hate relationship.”¹²⁰ The ministry did not escape this judgment. The call to ministry, as E. Brooks Holifield has pointed out, exists in quite a bit of tension with professional credentialing in the ministry. As criticisms of professionalism rose, new arguments about ministerial authority would arise to take their place. Women ministers were particularly quick to embrace a new conception of ministerial authority. Theologian Beverly Wildung Harrison observed, in a speech in 1977, that women seminarians resisted, more than men, the professionalizing nature of theological schools. Women, she observed, tended to prefer vocabularies of “vocation” or “summons.” Unlike professional credentials, which are controlled by human institutions, this “sense of summons,” Harrison noted, “allows no person, group, organization or institution to strip it away.”¹²¹ Resistance to professionalization was, in some sense, a protective measure. Women ministers, even less secure in their careers than women lawyers and women doctors, were unlikely to hinge their authority on their theological education, their ministerial exams, or even their ordinations. None of these things felt like sure footing to ministerial reformers in the 1970s. What *did* feel secure was an argument for their ministerial authority based on an affirmative call

¹¹⁹Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2007), 6.

¹²⁰Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Nancy Tomes, “Women in the Professions: A Research Agenda for American Historians,” *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 3 (June 1982): 275–96.

¹²¹Harrison and Martin, “Is Theological Education Good for Any Women's Health?”

from God. “As a woman in ministry,” one Unitarian-Universalist woman wrote in 1975, “I offer to my colleagues and to every person a witness that the ministry is a calling as well as a profession. The ministry is not calmly and calculatingly chosen as a profession for economic and status reasons by any rational woman. It is the vocation to which one is called despite the high hurdles of established patterns of expectation.” Beverly Wildung Harrison’s suspicion that women preferred the language of the call to that of professionalism was borne out in surveys. Though the mainline as a whole became more attentive to callings in the 1960s and 1970s, women ministers cited their calls as formative to their career choices at a higher incidence than men did. Sociologists Jackson Carroll, Barbara Hargrove, and Adair Lummis found, in their survey of women ministers in 1981, that 77% of women considered their calling by God quite important in their decision to enter ministry, compared to 67% of men.¹²²

Childhood aspirations were a common narrative tool for the expression of a call located in an authentic self. “I never preached to my dolls when I was a girl,” Margaret Blair Johnstone had defensively insisted in 1954. But by the mid-1960s, more mainline women ministers were claiming that they had. Mary Welch, a Methodist minister from Texas, recalled in 1967 that she had used a plum tree as a pulpit at her childhood home, and preached to her friends, ages 4 to 12. In *Woman’s Pulpit*, one young seminarian testified to wanting to work in ministry since she was eleven. Another insisted that she had always had an inclination to be a minister, as long as she could remember.¹²³ In another instance, a 16-year old girl wrote to *Woman’s Pulpit* in 1967 asking for guidance. She was sure, without a doubt, that she had been called into the ministry or missionary work. Myrtle Saylor Speer, a Methodist minister, remembered her calling at the age

¹²²Carroll, et al., *Women of the Cloth*, 94-95.

¹²³Lenore Hughes, “IAWM Seminarian Members Voice Hopes, Views, Protests” *Woman’s Pulpit* (April-June 1972).

of 10 when, during Communion service, an angelic voice told her, “Little girl, I want you to be a minister for me some day and say those beautiful words” [of the Communion liturgy]. Uverna Hubbell, a Disciples of Christ minister, told *Woman’s Pulpit* she had been called at age 9.¹²⁴ Jeanette Piccard, an early Episcopalian ordinand, had told her mother as a child that she wanted to be a priest when she grew up.¹²⁵ Narratives of childhood calls to ministry had a way of scripting women’s entrance into ministry as the fulfilment of a destiny or a deep, inner truth.

Episcopalian women were especially likely to express distinct and deeply-felt callings in the 1970s. This was, in part, because a fierce debate in their church raged over the ordination of women to the priesthood until 1976, and remained controversial in many communities afterward. Susanne Hiatt and Emily Hewitt, two Episcopalian deacons hoping to be ordained priests, wrote in 1973 that the fundamental issue in the Episcopal context was whether or not the church was willing to test the working of the Holy Spirit. “There are Episcopal women who claim to be called to the office and ministry of priesthood...To forbid women the opportunity to test their vocations in the same way [as men] comes perilously close to denying the possibility of the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of these women.”¹²⁶ Another Episcopal reformer, Carter Heyward, framed her call as an expression of her authentic personhood. “A movement is in process,” she wrote in her journal, “—from ‘May I please be who I am?’ to ‘Dammit, let me be who I am!’ to ‘I am who I am.’”¹²⁷

¹²⁴Lenore Hughes, “Methodist Myrtle Saylor Speer Paves Way for Women’s Ordination” *Woman’s Pulpit* (July-Sept 1977); Patricia J. Thompson, *Courageous Past Bold Future: The Journey Towards Full Clergy Rights for Women in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, United Methodist Church, 2006), 34.; Lenore Hughes, “Retired Minister Continues Serving Needs of Others” *Woman’s Pulpit* (July-Sept 1974); “Inquiry Concerning the Ministry Comes from a High School Student” *Woman’s Pulpit* (July-Sept, 1967).

¹²⁵Darlene O’Dell, *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven* (New York: Seabury Books, 2014), 59.

¹²⁶Emily C. Hewitt and Suzanne Hiatt, *Women Priests Yes or No?*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), 101.

¹²⁷As quoted in Pamela W Darling, *New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church* (Cambridge: Cowley Publ., 1994), 131.

Much of the renewed emphasis on callings came from the younger generation of ministerial reformers, who articulated their callings as inescapable—as central to their identity as any other part of them. “I myself did not *choose* to be a woman minister,” one testified in 1970, “This is something that happened in spite of me...”¹²⁸ Dawn Proux, a student at Luther Seminary, built her argument for ordination on authenticity. “Who should I be if not me?”, she began an article in 1970. “What is in a name that would change what I already am, what God has called me to be and to do? I want to be me.”¹²⁹ Women of slightly more evangelical persuasions also leaned into the call. A Southern Baptist woman, Linda Jordan, made her argument for ordination entirely in terms of her calling, in an open letter to her denomination in 1972 titled “What Limits Women’s Calls?” Jordan, a graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, felt called to ministry, but was having no luck finding placement, even as a campus minister. “Are you saying my call just can’t be valid?” She asked, addressing her church at large, “You preached to me that I should never limit the Holy Spirit. Does that apply only to me and not to you?”¹³⁰

In some ways, these calls to ministry, to an authentic self, reflect what historian Robert Self calls the *sine qua non* of the 1970s: “coming out.” To come out was, Self notes, a personal and a political statement. It expressed an authentic self, but simultaneously critiqued the social order that encouraged concealing that self in the first place.¹³¹ Women’s calls to ministry did precisely that: they were both expressive and political. Though less frequently articulated than more general appeals to callings, the idea of coming out did ring gently in the background of the reformation in the 1970s. Mrs. William Mead for one, the wife of a late Episcopal bishop, found

¹²⁸Gibson, *When the Minister Is a Woman*, 49.

¹²⁹Dawn Proux, “Should Women be Ordained? Yes!” *Scope* (April, 1970): 6-9.

¹³⁰Linda Jordan, “What Limits Women’s Calls?: Open Letter Asks Southern Baptists” *Woman’s Pulpit* (Oct-Dec 1972).

¹³¹Self, *All in the Family*, 220.

the model useful. Mead confessed, after her husband's death, that she had always wanted to be in the ministry. She was tired of her church's repeated deferment and debate over women in the priesthood, and felt she had to make clear to her church that she was called. "I felt like a homosexual still in the closet and nobody knew me," she told a newspaper. She enrolled at Episcopal Divinity School in the mid-1970s, a kind of clerical coming-out.

Homosexuality was gaining acceptance in the 1970s, and many churches in the mainline quickly turned a concerned eye on the clergy. In part because they often inhabited church-owned parish houses, the sexual lives of mainline clergy had traditionally received scrutiny from their congregations. A minister—male or female—could quickly stir up controversy if he or she appeared to be having an extra-marital relationship in the parish house, or living, un-wed, with a member of the opposite sex. (For women ministers, who were more likely to be single than the average minister, living with another woman in a parish house was not uncommon.) Gay men and women began trying to enter the ministry of their churches in an open fashion in the late 1970s. In 1972, the United Church of Christ ordained the first openly gay clergyman in a major denomination, William R. Johnson. In that context, the emphasis on both the call and the metaphor of "coming out" *as gay clergy* were vital tools. Many women ministers, such as Jeanne Audrey Powers, Pauli Murray, and Carter Heyward, having fought for ordination as women in their churches in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, turned in their later years to advocacy for gay clergy in their churches. The ordination of openly gay clergy remains, to this day, an unresolved issue in several denominations in the mainline.

As women ministers were developing a language of authenticity, they were also developing a new label for themselves: *clergywomen*. Though the term is commonplace today, it was relatively rare before the 1970s. When the word made an appearance in newspapers before

1970, it tended to be met with indecision and uncertainty, hyphens and scare quotes. When the *Washington Post* reported on the Presbyterian Church's debate about ordaining women in 1947, they spoke of "clergy-women, as they presumably would be called."¹³² The word appeared once in the *New York Times* in 1913, in quotes, and then not again until 1975. In *Christian Century*, "clergywoman" appeared once in 1950, and then not again until 1970. A survey of eleven major national papers shows a dramatic increase in the use of the word after 1970, while usage of "woman minister" declined.¹³³ The change in language may relate to the kinds of work ordained women were pursuing during this period. Specialized ministries increased in the 1970s, as sociologist Paula Nesbitt has pointed out.¹³⁴ Women, for various reasons, were more likely to pursue these alternative paths than men.¹³⁵ Using *clergywoman* instead of *woman minister* may have suited women whose roles fell outside the parish-and-liturgy implications of "minister." But the linguistic change may also be attributable to an attempt to reconcile the ambiguity wrapped up in the identity of a woman minister after the second-wave feminist movement and the rise of the New Left. As the decade wore on, women ministers were more convinced that their womanhood was not auxiliary to their identities as ministers, but essential to it. Constance Parvey, a Lutheran minister, wrote in *Lutheran Woman* in 1975, "My own feeling about women in ministry is that it is as important that I am a *woman* as it is that I am a *pastor*."¹³⁶ The term

¹³²"Women in Pulpits," *Washington Post*, 14, March 1947.

¹³³ ProQuest Historical Newspapers, plus the Boston Globe. In the collection of Proquest Historical Newspapers, the frequency of "clergywoman" increased five-fold after 1970. In comparison, the incidence of "woman minister" showed virtually no change between 1950 and 1980. "Clergywoman" appeared on average in the *Boston Globe* less than once a decade between 1890 and 1970, and then four times between 1970-1980. (In the same time period, mentions of "woman minister" decreased overall in the *Globe*.) A Google Books NGram search also show a dramatic increase in "clergywoman" and "clergywomen" in the mid-1970s.

¹³⁴Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, MI: Cary Oxford University Press, 1997), 115-123.

¹³⁵George Vecsey, "Growing Numbers of Clergy Turn to Outside Work" *New York Times*, Dec 26, 1978. Vecsey notes that a recent survey found only 25% of women entering ministry aspire to a traditional parish placement.

¹³⁶Constance Parvey, "Women's Attitude towards Women Pastors" *Lutheran Woman*, Oct 1975.

clergywomen implied that *woman* was not merely an adjective in their role (as in “woman minister”), but essential to their role and personhood. “Would someone please define—LADY MINISTER?”, two women seminarians wrote with exasperation in their school paper in 1972.¹³⁷ Many young seminarians had had enough with the implied slight of adjectives. *Clergywoman*, a full, round noun, was more suited to their sense of selves as integrated wholes, belonging fully to both categories.

The clergywomen of the 1970s occupied, in some ways, a more ambiguous cultural terrain than had the woman minister of the mid-century. The impact of the New Left and second-wave feminism on the ministerial reformation was much greater than merely driving women into the ministerial field. It introduced a new complexity to the terms of being a woman minister—a complexity at the axis of feminist pressure to work outside the home, the inability of feminism to legally insulate religious workers from sexism, and of criticism of the church, of professionalism, and ministry from the left. The newly-minted clergywoman struggled—in ritual, in language, in theories of authority—to manage this storm. The 1970s also witnessed the most public and vitriolic denominational debate about women’s ordination—that within the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. As this chapter looked outward towards the impact of the New Left and feminism on the ministerial reformation, the following chapter looks inward on this particular denominational struggle. Again, in the Episcopal context, the impact of feminism is assumed by historians and some contemporaries to be definitional, prerequisite, and decisive. Yet a closer reading shows a more spotted legacy for feminism in the making of Episcopal women priests.

¹³⁷Diane Lobody and Sharon Freeto, “Editorial Thoughts: A Sociological and Structural Reconsideration of the Female Role in a Theological Seminary, or, ‘What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?’” *Thee Paper* (Boston University School of Theology) 2, no. 5 (n.d.).

Chapter VII. Priests, Not Priestesses:

Sacramentality and the Episcopal Ordination Conflict, 1970-1980

On a scorching hot day in Philadelphia in 1974, a few thousand people packed into the Church of the Advocate on Diamond Street. The local and national press swarmed outside. A busload of police officers arrived for security. Television cameras flashed on the street and inside the church. Every major network was represented curbside, even BBC. Between the heat, the media attention, the security detail, and the unprecedented event they were about to witness, participants in the Advocate feared for their safety. Two of them searched the crypt of the church for a rumored secret exit, just in case.¹ An outbreak of violence seemed, if not probable, at least possible. There were bomb threats. Some counseled their families not to attend.² On that afternoon in the church, three retired Episcopalian bishops lay their hands on the heads of eleven female deacons and, in so doing, ordained them to the Episcopal priesthood. The bishops did so without the approval of the governing bodies of the church, without the approval of the ecumenical communions in which the church took part, and without the approval of many lay members. At the time, women were prohibited from the priest's office, and many thought they should remain so.

The women ordained that day would come to be known as the Philadelphia Eleven. Within the Episcopal Church, the ordination ceremony and its ordinands have since attained something just shy of celebrity status.³ They have inspired sermons, books, videos, and

¹Katrina Swanson, oral history interview with Sally Bush, October 8, 2001, Box 2, Folder 1, Katrina Swanson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. Hereafter "Swanson Papers."

²Darlene O'Dell, *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven* (New York: Seabury Books, 2014), 1; Alla Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest: A Personal Odyssey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 129.

³Though the Episcopal Church of the early 1970s was officially named the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, it later dropped the "Protestant". I use just "the Episcopal Church", which reflects how

commemorations on the event's anniversary. Four of the eleven women, one of the bishops, the rector of the Church of the Advocate, as well as a proximate bishop who refused to participate, have written autobiographies or had their writings collected and published.⁴ The ordinations are widely considered today to be a triumph of social justice and are seen as directly impacting the Episcopal Church's decision, two years later, to allow women to the priesthood and the episcopate.⁵ The Episcopalian conflict over women's ordination in the 1970s was undoubtedly the most vitriolic, dramatic, public battle over women's ordination that the ministerial reformation had witnessed in its history. It is estimated that 20,000 congregants left the Episcopal Church because of the conflict, many organizing themselves in a new denomination, the Anglican Church in North America.⁶ The ordinations in Philadelphia and the events following were covered by *Time*, *Life*, *Ms.*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, and numerous other outlets. The ordinations themselves were broadcast by local television news stations in Philadelphia. The story made the front page of the *New York Times*, next to articles about impeachment proceedings for President Richard Nixon. In 1976, the Religion Newswriters Association deemed the Episcopal battle over women's ordination, with the eventual triumph of the Eleven and their supporters, the top news story of the year.⁷

most members would have referred to it casually in the 1970s, and to indicate the church's continuity with its contemporary form.

⁴The Philadelphia Eleven are also to be commemorated in a forthcoming documentary feature, "The Philadelphia Eleven" by Time Travel Productions.

⁵Auto/biographies and collected writings by participants in the ordination controversy include Alla Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest: A Personal Odyssey* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Suzanne Hiatt, *The Spirit of the Lord Is Upon Me: The Writings of Suzanne Hiatt*, ed. Carter Heyward and Janine Lehane (New York: Seabury Books, 2014); Paul Moore, *Presences: A Bishop's Life in the City* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1997); Paul M Washington and David McGracie, "*Other Sheep I Have*": *The Autobiography of Father Paul M. Washington* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Carter Heyward, *A Priest Forever: One Woman's Controversial Ordination in the Episcopal Church* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 1999); Betty Bone Schiess, *Why Me, Lord?: One Woman's Ordination to the Priesthood with Commentary and Complaint* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

⁶Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, MI: Cary Oxford University Press, 1997), 37-38.

⁷O'Dell, *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 3.

The Episcopalians no doubt attracted more public attention than any ordination conflict before them, and as such came to stand in for the larger movement.⁸ In her survey of American religious history, Catherine Albanese notes that the Episcopal ordination conflict, in particular, came to be “symbolic of the ministerial question” in the United States.⁹ Several religion reporters at national newspapers, including Kay Longscope at the *Boston Globe* and Marjorie Heyer at the *Washington Post*, followed the story of women’s ordination in the 1970s with devotion. The extraordinary media coverage of the Philadelphia event tended to feed the notion that the conflict was an outgrowth of second-wave feminism. The press generally portrayed women’s church advocacy as derivative of secular feminism.¹⁰ As scholars of media have long known, the image of a movement in the news can quickly become the definitive vision of the movement to those with no other frame of reference.¹¹ The result is that historians understand the Episcopal conflict somewhat lazily—as principally a product of second-wave feminism—a reading that we then tend to import onto the whole of the ministerial reformation’s twentieth-century history.

In contrast to the contemporary media portrait and most historical narratives, this chapter argues that the Episcopal ministerial reformation had as much to do with particular Episcopal theologies of sacrament as it did about a general social movement (feminism) that was sweeping the nation. Though feminism was certainly background color for the Episcopal movement, and,

⁸J. Terry Todd argues that coverage of women’s ordination increased precipitously after the Philadelphia Eleven ordinations in 1974. J. Terry Todd, “Mainline Protestants and News Narratives of Declension” in Diane Winston, ed. *Oxford Handbook of Religion and American News Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 185-198.

⁹Catherine L. Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, Calif: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1992), 145.

¹⁰For instance: “Women’s Lib Gets Going in Churches” *Oakland Post* (Oakland, Calif), Oct 22, 1970; Ann-Mary Currier, “Liberationists Demanding Larger Role in Churches,” *Boston Globe*, Aug 15, 1970; Edward Fiske, “Women’s ‘Lib’ On the March in the Churches,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1970; “Faith of Our Feminists,” *Newsweek*, Nov 2, 1970; “Churches Feel Pressure of Women’s Rights Drive,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1970. “Women’s Liberation Spreads Into United States Churches,” *Religion News Service*, as printed in *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Sunday, Aug 8, 1971.

¹¹Bonnie J Dow, *Watching Women’s Liberation, 1970: Feminism’s Pivotal Year on the Network News* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014).; Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

as one of the Eleven remembered, the Eleven were “all feminists,” they and their followers generally avoided many specifically feminist arguments. Instead they painted their case with the bright tones of the sacramental power that had made them priests and outlined sacramental motivations for their priesthoods.¹²

To scholars of women’s ordination, the sacramental focus of this debate may surprise. It is a truism in the history of women’s ordination that the more sacramental a Christian community, the less likely they are to ordain women.¹³ In this case, however, the sacramental nature of the ordination rite constituted the women ordinands’ strongest case that they were now, irrevocably, priests. When the eleven women were ordained in Philadelphia, they forced the church at large to choose between the sacramental efficacy of their ordinations and assumptions that the priesthood should be limited only to men. In particular, they forced the high-church factions of their denomination—the men and women who would strongly affirm sacramental power *and* strongly disapprove of women’s ordination—to choose between their loyalties. They forced the church to decide, in effect, not whether women could or should be priests, but whether or not they *already were* priests. Likewise, the sacraments weighed on the women as a reason to pursue ordination in the first place. A liturgical renewal movement in the 1950s helped place the sacraments at the center of Episcopal life, setting the stage for the conflict. The Eleven already possessed deacon’s orders, which allowed them to perform many functions in a parish. But a deacon’s orders did not permit them, critically, to offer blessings, offer absolution in confession, or serve as celebrant in Holy Communion. Their desire to perform these rites for their

¹²Suzanne Hiatt, “Women’s Ordination in the Anglican Communion: Can This Church Be Saved?,” in *Religious Institutions and Women’s Leadership*, ed. Catherine Wessinger, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, South Carolina: Univeristy of South Carolina Press, 1996), 217.

¹³ Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 84-130.

communities was an essential element of their motivations towards priesthood. This chapter suggests that sacramentality must be understood, not merely as a constant opponent in the history of women's ordination, but as a contingent factor, dependent upon the importance attributed to it, and attempts to leverage it, at any point in history. We might think of sacramentality, then, more as we think of gifts of the spirit and sanctification in other Protestant communities. At certain times and in certain ages, these forces—which exist independently, to an extent, from the institutional church—have enabled women to inhabit leadership roles.¹⁴ At other times, however, holiness and sanctification seem only to preserve the gender order.¹⁵ Similarly, the sacraments—which have a power disambiguated from the institutional church—have sometimes motivated, sometimes assisted, and sometimes inhibited the ministerial reformation.

In addition to being a conflict not fought principally on terms of women's equality, the Episcopal ordination controversy also elevated certain kinds of feminist principles over other kinds—it did not embrace the full range and spectrum of the feminist project in the churches. The vision of structural equality in the priesthood eroded resources and energy from other visions of women's church flourishing. On the more radical end of the feminist spectrum, gender-neutral liturgical language took a back seat to women's ordination. And on the more conservative end, pre-existing denominational lay-women's groups saw substantial losses of power and participation. By the end of the 1970s, the existence and prevalence of clergywomen would come to be the symbol of a church's feminist, progressive credentials, at the expense of

¹⁴See, for instance, Anthea D Butler, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Catherine A Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, N.C.; London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, *Aimee Semple McPherson: Everybody's Sister* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).

¹⁵See, for instance, Andrew M Eason, *Women in God's Army: Gender and Equality in the Early Salvation Army* (Waterloo, Ont: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 2002); Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

these other possible symbols, particularly gender-neutral liturgical language and thriving lay-women's church groups. The Episcopal conflict over ordination is also a window into the historical shift of the ministerial reformation—from the margins of mainline women's activism, to its very center.

The Symbol Would be Real

Katrina Swanson, born Katrina Van Alsten Welles in 1935, one of the eleven women ordained in Philadelphia, had the priesthood in her veins. Her father, Edward Welles, became the bishop of West Missouri in 1950, when Swanson was in high school. Swanson's grandfather had also been a priest, and her great-grandfather the bishop of Milwaukee. It was around the time of her father's election to the episcopate that Swanson began to think she might be a priest herself, had she been born a man. She decided she would be a social worker instead, "the closest thing I can do to serving God's people, even though it's not sacramental," she concluded. From her earliest years, Swanson was drawn to the sacramental elements of the church. As a young adult, she sought out the Eucharist. Although her Episcopal high school required her attendance at a particular Sunday service, she would attend an earlier service in addition, because it offered Holy Communion every Sunday.¹⁶

The sacraments, particularly Holy Communion, grew in importance in the Episcopal Church as Swanson grew older. Episcopalians had long been divided—and continue to be divided—as to the nature of their rites and sacraments. The church, which until shortly after the American Revolution was the Anglican Church, and remains to this day in communion with Anglican churches worldwide, sometimes portrays itself as a "middle way," a "mediating

¹⁶Katrina Swanson, oral history interview with Sally Bush, October 8, 2001, Box 2, Folder 1, Swanson Papers.

church,” a “bridge church,” or a “broad church.” It embraces both its Reformation history and its Anglo-Catholic heritage, and portrays itself as a wide tent under which many Christian creeds can find a home.¹⁷ Some Episcopalians recognize seven sacraments, some recognize two.¹⁸ Given the Episcopalians’ tendency to “cling together through fracture,” as one scholar put it, it is always difficult to say what the church as a whole might profess.¹⁹ Yet, without doubt, the sacramental orientation of the Episcopal Church increased in the mid-twentieth century. Although Episcopal churches today celebrate Holy Communion weekly, a monthly schedule was more common until the late 1950s. Anglican churches were also deeply impacted by Vatican II in the early 1960s. They embraced contemporary language, simplified their Eucharistic rite, and in general looked to the early church, instead of the medieval church, as a source of liturgical inspiration.²⁰

Swanson witnessed first-hand the liturgical renewal in the church. Though her father, a priest, was flexible in his approach to liturgy, Swanson always insisted she came from Anglo-Catholic roots. In the 1950s, Swanson attended Radcliffe College, where she was drawn to attend daily mass, not at the Episcopal church in Cambridge, but at a Roman Catholic monastery nearby. In 1958 she married a Harvard man who had worked as an acolyte at the monastery, George Swanson.²¹ George was ordained and Katrina Swanson became, not a social worker after

¹⁷Emily C. Hewitt and Suzanne Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* (New York: Seabury Books, 1973); Robert W. Prichard, *A History of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2014); Pamela W. Darling, *New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church* (Cambridge: Cowley Publ., 1994), 177; Heather Warren, interview with author, Charlottesville, Virginia, April 24, 2017.

¹⁸Heather Warren, interview with author, April 24, 2017. Typifying this collective diversity, the church officially recognizes Holy Communion and Baptism as “sacraments” and the other five rites as “sacramental.”

¹⁹Heather Warren, interview with author, April 24, 2017.

²⁰James White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 114; Urban Holmes, “Education for Liturgy: An Unfinished Symphony in Four Movements,” in *Worship Points the Way: A Celebration of the Life and Work of Massey Hamilton Shepherd, Jr.*, ed. Massey Hamilton Shepherd and Malcolm C. Burson (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 116–41.

²¹Katrina Swanson, oral history interview with Sally Bush, October 8, 2001, Box 2, Folder 1, Swanson Papers.

all, but the wife of an Episcopal priest. The Swansons served a parish in Coalinga, California, through most of the 1960s. The Bishop of California at the time, James A. Pike, was a controversial figure. In 1965, Pike recognized and vested a deaconess in his diocese, Phyllis Edwards, as a deacon. This may sound redundant. It was not at all. The Episcopal Church has three levels of ordained clergy: deacons (collectively, the diaconate), priests (the presbytery or priesthood) and bishops (the episcopate). In general, each of the former is a prerequisite for the latter.²² These clerical offices are marked and conferred by ordination rites particular to each office. Yet, since the 1880s, the Episcopal diaconate had been divided by gender. Men were ordained as deacons, the lowest order on the clerical rung, and a necessary step to further orders. Women, however, were “set apart” or “installed”—not ordered—as deaconesses, technically a lay order with no implications of passage on to the priesthood. Their orders were theologically and ecclesiastically subaltern to the male diaconate. Jane Cleveland Bloodgood, who became a priest in 1978, considered entering the order of deaconesses after her seminary education. But, one day, at a “setting-apart” ceremony for new deaconesses, a young priest blew into the chapel and declared he was there for the “setting-aside” ceremony. Bloodgood realized she did not want to be set aside.²³ Unlike male deacons, deaconesses were not allowed to be deputies to the General Conventions. They were held to different educational standards than male deacons and practiced requisite celibacy. They were not set apart for life but had to quit their post when they married. Unlike male deacons, they could not distribute Holy Communion.²⁴ The Episcopal Church had recognized for several years that deaconesses were a sticky issue—were they or were

²²There two tracks for Episcopal deacons, a vocational path and a transitional track. Those deacons anticipating moving on to the priesthood pursue a transitional diaconate; those who intend to remain a deacon alone pursue the vocational path. Reverend Dr. Heather Warren, interview with author, Charlottesville, Virginia, April 24, 2017

²³*Our Calls*, Frances Trott, ed. Sheba Press, 1973, Box 18, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

²⁴Hiatt, *The Spirit of the Lord*, 100; William A Norgren, “Ecumenical Relations and Ordination of Women to the Priesthood of the Episcopal Church,” *Midstream* 16, no. 4 (October 1977): 374–92.

they not in possession of holy orders? In 1964, with little ado, the church changed the deaconess canons to clarify the issue. Deaconesses were no longer “set apart,” they were “ordered.” Pike’s recognition of Edwards as a deacon was in response to this canonical change. If deacons and deaconesses were ordained to the same order, Pike argued in effect, what was the difference between them?²⁵ When Bishop Pike recognized Phyllis Edwards, Katrina Swanson was scandalized. “Women can’t be ordained!” she vented to a friend. But shortly thereafter, Swanson’s opinion began to shift. In 1967, the Swansons spent a year in Botswana on a mission trip, where they connected with Anglican churches, many of them led and attended solely by women. The women of these churches had to hire men to lead prayers—quite a hassle, and, according to Swanson, the churchwomen often had to compromise on the quality of such men. Swanson began to think about the waste of women’s talents in the church.²⁶ When the Swansons returned to California in 1968, they relocated to St. George’s Parish, in Kansas City, under the purview of Katrina’s father, Edward Welles, the Bishop of West Missouri.

Bishop Pike’s interpretation of the canons on deaconesses would eventually be confirmed. The Lambeth Conference, the international body of global Anglicanism, declared in 1968 that indeed, deaconesses were members of the ordered diaconate. The General Convention of the Episcopal church in 1970—though it declined to permit women to the priesthood—complied with the Lambeth decision, and allowed women to the diaconate, on par with men. With that, Katrina Swanson made up her mind. To her father’s surprise, she requested a formal appointment with him to discuss her vocation. You hardly need an appointment to see your father, he said. But Swanson insisted. She had a calling to be a priest, she told him, but for now,

²⁵Pamela W. Darling, *New Wine: The Story of Women Transforming Leadership and Power in the Episcopal Church* (Cambridge: Cowley Publ., 1994), 110.

²⁶Katrina Swanson, oral history interview with Sally Bush, October 8, 2001, Box 2, Folder 1, Swanson Papers.

she would settle for the diaconate. After a year of study, Swanson was ordained a deacon in 1971, at 36 years old, and began assisting formally in her husband's parish. Her father was supportive but cautioned her: there was no guarantee she would ever be able to fulfill her priesthood vocation.²⁷

For the Episcopal church in particular, the opening of the ordained diaconate to women was a slippery theological slope. Among all parties to the ordination dispute that would play out in the 1970s, some ground-rules of what constituted an ordination were generally agreed upon. For the conferring of orders to be effective, the rite had to be done with *right intention*, *right form*, and *right matter*. For the right intention requirement to be met, the bishop and the ordinand alike had to be aware of what they were doing and be intentional in their actions. The form of the ordination had to be proper: participants had to move through the liturgy in the Book of Common Prayer and perform the actions required, including the laying on of hands. Finally, to satisfy the right matter requirement, the ordinand had to be an appropriate, qualified person upon whom to confer the orders. It was this last requirement, naturally, that caused the most bickering. Could women be “right matter”?²⁸ If an ordination with right form and right intention was performed upon a woman, would that woman be a priest? Or would it be, as one priest suggested to Katrina Swanson, like “baptizing a canary”?²⁹ The entrance of women to the ordained diaconate seemed to be an answer. Ordaining a woman was clearly not the equivalent of baptizing a canary, since they could indeed receive deacon's orders. Suzanne Hiatt, one of the Philadelphia Eleven and a longtime advocate for women's ordination in the church, saw the news about the extension of the

²⁷Katrina Swanson, oral history interview with Sally Bush, October 8, 2001, Box 2, Folder 1, Swanson Papers.

²⁸Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest*, 108.

²⁹Rev. Gerald L. Claudius to Katrina Swanson, September 3, 1974, Box 23, Folder 6, Swanson Papers. Claudius wrote to Swanson, “Someone may desire to baptize their canary, but it is literally impossible; someone may wish to ordain females as a Priestess, but it is literally impossible—until such time as the Church says otherwise!!!”

diaconate to women on par with men on a bulletin board. “Well,” she remembers thinking, “That’s the ballgame. We’ve won and women will be ordained to all orders within five years.” Hiatt’s insight was astute: a divided ministry would not easily stand. It would be theologically difficult for the church to maintain women were proper matter for the diaconate but not the priesthood.³⁰

The entrance of women into the Episcopal diaconate did not immediately raise the church’s hackles, however. The diaconate, as one historian describes it, is a “servant ministry,” and many members of the church could look upon women deacons and see women in their rightful place as assistants, marginal to the seat of church power.³¹ Though some bishops remained wary of ordaining women to the diaconate, resistance was fairly limited.³² By summer of 1973, there were 97 women deacons in the Episcopal church, with another 59 in postulancy.³³ Episcopal women had entered the ordered diaconate. Yet some were not satisfied with the diaconate as their vocational end. Many women deacons expressed particularly sacramental reasons for this dissatisfaction. In the Episcopal Church, priests are distinguished from deacons by, among other things, the ability to consecrate the materials of Holy Communion (to serve as the “celebrant” or “preside” over the rite), to give blessings, and to offer absolution during confession.³⁴ Marjory Keith Quinn recalled that as she practiced as a deacon, the sacraments

³⁰Hiatt, *The Spirit of the Lord*, 101.

³¹Darling, *New Wine*, 114.

³²The American Church Union, a coalition of Catholic-leaning Episcopalians, opposed women’s ordination to the diaconate, as did at least five diocesan bishops. Bishop Harold Robinson of Western New York responded to a question from *The Episcopalian* about whether he would ordain women deacons with a note card that read: “1. No! 2. No!! 3. No!!!” See, “Poll of Bishops” Series 2, Subseries 2A, Box 1, Hiatt Papers. Harold Robinson to *The Episcopalian*, May 10, 1971, Series 2, Subseries 2A, Box 1, Hiatt Papers.

³³Suzanne Hiatt, “Addendum: Women in the Priesthood. Updating of Chronology, August, 1973.” Series 2, Subseries 2A, Box 1, Suzanne Hiatt Papers, Burke Library, Columbia University Libraries at Union Theological Seminary. (Hereafter Hiatt Papers).

³⁴Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 40. There are other duties only priests can fulfil, including serving as a rector of a parish and offering God’s blessings or forgiveness from sin.

became more important to her, and she felt them calling her. “I want to be able to celebrate the Mass, perform the priest’s blessing, and to hear a confession and pass God’s absolution on to lift the weight of guilt from the souls and minds of some troubled counselees,” she wrote in 1973.³⁵ Katrina Swanson wrote to her bishop Arthur Vogel in 1972—her father had since retired—that her calling to the priesthood rested in her “sacramental devotion” and her desire to bring the sacraments to persons who could not usually access them.³⁶ Phyllis Edwards, the deaconess that James Pike recognized as a deacon in California, wrote that she was “constantly frustrated by the fact I cannot consecrate the sacrament nor pronounce absolution.”³⁷ Lee McGee, a chaplain at American University, testified that her sacramental disabilities—her inability to perform a marriage, or give last rites—hurt her university communion. Her congregation, she wrote, like good Episcopalians, feel the Eucharist is central to their worship. But because McGee could not preside, the congregation felt always torn between affirming her ministry or affirming the importance of the Eucharistic sacrament in their lives. “If I preside,” McGee wrote in 1973, “the bread and wine become part of a ‘fellowship meal’ or ‘agape feast’ or euphemisms for Holy communion.”³⁸ This tension over the Eucharist, she recalled, was the greatest source of pain in her congregation’s life.

Young seminarians, and the seminaries that educated them, were important early forces in the push to open the next clerical level, the priesthood, to women.³⁹ Episcopal seminaries began admitting women to Bachelor of Divinity programs in the late 1950s, and their numbers

³⁵*Our Calls*, Frances Trott, ed., Sheba Press, 1973, Box 18, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

³⁶Katrina Swanson to Arthur Vogel, Feb 18, 1973, Box 25, Folder 2, Swanson Papers.

³⁷Phyllis Edwards, “An Open Letter to Bishop Allin” to John Allin, August 14, 1974, Box 25, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

³⁸*Our Calls*, Frances Trott, ed., Sheba Press, 1973, Box 18, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

³⁹See Judith Maxwell McDaniel, *Grace in Motion: The Intersection of Women’s Ordination and Virginia Theological Seminary* (Brainerd, Minn: RiverPlace Communication Arts, 2010).

doubled each year between 1970 and 1974.⁴⁰ In the early 1970s, Episcopal seminaries were fertile soil for the ministerial reformation. Suzanne Hiatt spent the two years between 1972 and 1974 working for the Episcopal Board of Theological Education, interviewing and organizing women seminarians at Episcopal seminaries. Of the women who eventually participated in irregular ordinations, the majority were under 30 years old. Most were only a few years removed from theological school, where some had been introduced to direct action. One of the Eleven, Merrill Bittner, had founded a woman's caucus at her seminary, Bexley Hall/Colgate Rochester/Crozer Theological School. With the caucus, Bittner led an occupation of the President's office, demanding the school hire a woman professor.⁴¹ Carter Heyward, another member of the Eleven, had discovered a feminist consciousness-raising group at Union Theological School in New York. And Diane Tickell, who would eventually be ordained irregularly in Washington, D.C., in 1975, joined an anti-war protest during her time at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge and spent the night in jail.⁴² In 1971, Nancy Hatch Wittig, a middler at Virginia Theological Seminary, and later an ordinand in Philadelphia, thought she might attempt to gather Episcopal women seminarians to talk about the future of their vocations. The proposed meeting mushroomed, and Wittig, along with fellow seminarians, sent a letter to as many Episcopal women deacons, church-workers, lay-leaders, and seminarians as they could find. With the help of Suzanne Hiatt, they called a meeting at Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS) on the subject of professional ministry of women in the Episcopal Church. The Board of Theological Education agreed to sponsor the VTS gathering. Sixty women, including Katrina

⁴⁰In 1958, Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Mass., opened the Bachelor of Divinity degree to women. Virginia Theological Seminary followed suit in 1963, Church Divinity School of the Pacific in 1964, and Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest in 1964. See Darling, *New Wine*, 116.; Suzanne Hiatt, "Project Report on 'Women in Theological Education'" May, 1974, Box 44, Folder 8, Swanson Papers.

⁴¹Merrill Bittner, interview with Margo Guernsey, March 18, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

⁴²Alison Palmer and Lee McGee, interview with Margo Guernsey, April 27, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

Swanson, came to Virginia for the event. Nearly half of the women present were seminarians.⁴³

The group that convened at VTS named themselves the Episcopal Women's Caucus. For the next several years, the Episcopal Women's Caucus organized about fifty women in letter-writing campaigns and brought them together for conferences. They petitioned their bishops and diocesan delegates to support the cause of women's ordination at the next General Convention—the governing body of the church which meets triennially—in October of 1973.

At the House of Bishops meeting, Myers recommended a commission of theologians study the issue. His fellow bishops agreed to appoint one. Representatives from the Board of Theological Education arrived at the women's meeting in Alexandria with this news from the bishops in tow. The women were furious, and saw the study commission as an excuse to delay genuine action. They issued a biting resolution: none of them would serve on such a commission, even if asked. It was the first sign of more direct action.⁴⁴

As was typical in the 1970s, the formation of women's clerical groups tended to coincide with the decline of denominational lay women's groups. In the Episcopal Church, the formation of the Episcopal Women's Caucus was roughly coterminous with the national dismantling of the General Division of Women's Work, locally called Episcopal Church Women. In 1970, when the General Convention had opened the diaconate to women, they had also guaranteed women voting seats at future conventions, and Episcopal Church Women took this as a sign that women could safely abandon gender-specific work in favor of the larger project of denominational governance.⁴⁵ The Women's Division was abolished on the national level in 1968, and the

⁴³"Looking Ahead to '73", *Epistola 1: Newsletter of the Episcopal Women's Caucus*, November 19, 1971.

⁴⁴Statement adopted unanimously by the Episcopal Women's Caucus Meeting at Alexandria, Virginia, October 30, 1971", Box 17, Folder 8, Swanson Papers.

⁴⁵Griffith, R. Marie, "The Generous Side of Christian Faith," in *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Press, 2002). 84.

remaining women's organizations downgraded in the Episcopal bureaucracy. The United Thank Offering, which coordinated women's charitable giving to the church, was likewise in the midst of dismantlement.⁴⁶ A classic image of the ministerial reformation as a whole recurred here, painted in Episcopal colors. As women advanced into positions of church power held previously by men, such as the diaconate, their independent church organizations—as one historian put it, their “parallel” churches—faded into irrelevancy or were eliminated.⁴⁷ This pattern, as R. Marie Griffiths put it, was “replicated in virtually all denominational women's organizations.”⁴⁸ What remained of the Episcopal parallel church by the early 1970s inclined strongly towards the ordination cause, but did not support the effort of the Episcopal Women's Caucus, which it found too radical.⁴⁹ United Thank Offering helped sponsor Suzanne Hiatt's work with women seminarians in the early 1970s. But after the formation of Episcopal Women's Caucus, they issued a public statement clarifying that United Thank Offering had nothing to do with the Caucus.⁵⁰ But it hardly mattered. The skeletal remains of the Women's Division and United Thank Offering lacked the organizational or financial capacity to be the center of the ordination movement, even if they had wanted to be.⁵¹ Even in name, Episcopal Church Women was outdated by the mid-1970s. The “churchwoman,” an institutional loyalist, lost much of her cultural cache as the nation came to see activism and progressive politics as inherently anti-institutional.

⁴⁶Darling, *New Wine*, 95-97.

⁴⁷Joan R. Gunderson, “Women and the Parallel Church: A View from Congregations” in *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination*, ed. Catherine M. Prelinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁴⁸Griffiths, R. Marie, “The Generous Side of Christian Faith,” 85.

⁴⁹In 1970, the Triennial meeting of Episcopal Church Women voted in favor of women's ordination 222 to 445. However, further support from ECW was meager and far between. Betty Gray, “Women Preists Now?” *Christianity and Crisis* (July 23, 1973).

⁵⁰Alice Emery, “To Whom It May Concern”, June 18, 1972, Box 44, Folder 8, Swanson Papers.

⁵¹A national division of Episcopal Church Women was resurrected in the mid-1970s, and recommenced publication of their journal in 1988.

The diminishing power of women at the national level of the Episcopal Church may have heightened the concern of the ministerial reformers to assure women had some place in the church's denominational operation. But at first, for the nascent Episcopal Women's Caucus, things only got worse. A speech by the Bishop of California, C. Kilmer Meyers—in which Meyers argued that the priesthood is “generative, initiating, giving,” and that “the generative function is plainly a masculine kind of imagery, making priesthood a masculine conception”—circulated widely, and was debated in *Christianity and Crisis* and *The Episcopalian*.⁵² When activists from the National Organization of Women wrote to Presiding Bishop John Hines, a supporter of women's ordination, asking him to censure Myers, he refused and defended Myers vigorously.⁵³ The temperature of the conflict continued to rise throughout 1972 and 1973. In January of 1973, Carter Heyward, a young graduate of Union Theological Seminary serving as a deacon in New York City, offered the chalice of Holy Communion to a priest attending service. (As a deacon, Heyward could not consecrate the host, but she could help distribute it.) The visiting priest drank from the cup she was holding, and then dug his fingernails into her hand until it bled.⁵⁴ When Katrina Swanson wrote to her bishop Arthur Vogel, to inform him of her call to the priesthood, he wrote back that vocations to the ministry must always be judged by the church, and Swanson would have to wait for that judgement.⁵⁵ Although the Episcopal Women's Caucus had some success in 1972 and 1973, convincing twenty-five dioceses (out of 112) and

⁵²As reprinted in *Christianity and Crisis*. “...but the bishop's not convinced.” *Christianity and Crisis* 31, no. 21 (Dec. 13, 1971): 275-276.); C. Kilmer Myers, “Should Women be Ordained?” *The Episcopalian* (February, 1972). C. Kilmer Meyers succeeded James A. Pike to the post of bishop of California in 1967.

⁵³Elizabeth Farians to John E. Hines, December 30, 1971, Box 31, Folder 11, Elizabeth Farians Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (hereafter Farians Papers); John E. Hines to Elizabeth Farians, Feb. 1, 1972, Box 31, Folder 11, Farians Papers.

⁵⁴“Who's afraid of Women Priests?” *Ms.* (Dec 1974).

⁵⁵Katrina Swanson to Arthur Vogel, Feb. 18, 1973 and Arthur Vogel to Katrina Swanson, Feb. 20, 1973, Box 25 Folder 2, Swanson Papers.

the majority of the House of Bishops to support the cause, the General Convention of 1973 once again voted against ordination.⁵⁶

Heyward, Swanson and many of their friends in the Episcopal Women's Caucus began to believe they were losing the fight. Supportive bishops had assured them 1973 would be the year. But the vote, in the final count, was worse for the women than it had been in 1970. "That left us wondering," Alison Palmer, a deacon at the time and later an irregular ordinand, remembered, "What on earth can we trust as far as predictions of the future?"⁵⁷ Although sympathetic bishops continued to assure them it was only a matter of time, the momentum, they sensed, rested entirely on the side of their opponents. Undoubtedly, this felt true in a larger cultural sense as well. By 1974, backlash against second-wave feminism was in crescendo. Phyllis Schlafly had successfully framed the national debate about the Equal Rights Amendment as a debate about traditional gender roles, and the ERA stalled in its movement through state legislatures. Women's ordination, Carter Heyward recalled, seemed likely to go the way of the ERA.⁵⁸ The ministerial reformers began to incline towards the idea that General Convention had, in fact, limited authority over whether or not they could be priests. "More and more people were saying the convention has nothing to do with ordinations," recalled Palmer. "It is not their responsibility. Bishops ordain people."⁵⁹ This realization—that bishops, absent the approval of

⁵⁶Betty Gray, "Women Priests Now?" *Christianity and Crisis* (July 23, 1973). Adding to the frustration of the women's ordination proponents, an unusual voting method was used at General Convention that produced this result, a "vote by orders." Each diocese sends eight representatives (four clergy, four laity) to the House of Deputies—which is to the House of Bishops roughly what the House of Representatives is to the United States Senate. Each delegation usually gets one clergy vote and one laity vote, forcing the delegates to work out amongst themselves how their delegation will vote. In a vote by orders, however, the clergy and laity votes can be counted as "divided" if the delegates are split on the issue, and a divided vote is counted as a vote against the proposal at hand. Thus, a large majority of the deputies can individually support a measure, and that measure can still fail, which is what occurred in this case.

⁵⁷Alison Palmer, interviewed by Margo Guernsey, April 27, 2016 personal collection of Margo Guernsey, 10.

⁵⁸Heather White, Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward: Oral History, 2018, LGBTQ Religious Archives Network, <https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/carter-heyward>.

⁵⁹Alison Palmer, interviewed by Margo Guernsey, April 27, 2016 personal collection of Margo Guernsey, 10.

the larger church—could ordain of their own volition, was the initial theological insight of the Philadelphia ordinations. Our response to God’s call, the Episcopal Women’s Caucus wrote in a resolution after the 1973 convention, “is not a ‘right’. It is not a debatable option. It is not in fact something a House of Deputies, or Bishops, can ultimately legislate. Our response to God’s call (like anyone’s response to God) is an imperative.”⁶⁰ Some of them decided to begin acting on that imperative.

With the idea that the case of women’s ordination could be resolved, not by the legislative body of the church, but by a few willing bishops alone, several women began confronting bishops with the issue, sometimes in ritual settings. Five deacons in the New York diocese asked their bishop, Paul Moore, to ordain them alongside five other male deacons in December, 1973. A liberal bishop with a civil rights background, Bishop Moore had proven, thus far, an ally to women’s ordination. But Moore was ambivalent. He was unsure he could ordain the women to the priesthood, for personal and professional reasons. Carter Heyward, one of the female deacons (and, eventually, one of the Eleven) met with Bishop Moore a few days before the ceremony. Moore assured Heyward of his sympathies, but when Heyward suggested that the bishop could do more to help the cause, if he was so sympathetic, he insisted he could not. Heyward was persistent: “You could *ordain* us, Paul.” Again, Moore responded in the negative. “Of course [you] could!” Heyward said, “We’re ready to be ordained priests. We’ll be presented and taking the vows. Paul could lay his hands on our heads and ordain us. He *could* but he *won’t*.”⁶¹

⁶⁰Press release, Louisville, Oct. 3, 1973, Episcopal Women’s Caucus, Box 17, Folder 10, Swanson Papers.

⁶¹Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 56.

The meeting remained inconclusive, and some of the five women held out hope that, when they knelt at the altar, they would arise priests.⁶² The women agreed: If Moore turned them down, they would make a demonstration at the altar. They would present themselves for ordination, walk up the aisle at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, say the vows, and kneel before him. If they were declined, the church's refusal to ordain women would move from the shadowy realm of diocesan rejection letters and General Conference vote-tallies to the public domain of the sanctuary.⁶³ Heyward, reflecting on the demonstration, wrote, "We were not intending to make simply a witness. We were intending to be ordained to the priesthood. True to catholic theology, the symbol would be real."⁶⁴

Bishop Moore did not ordain them. When the time came, the five women were presented by other members of the clergy and laity. They said the vows and prostrated themselves in the sanctuary. Moore gave a pleading sermon, torn between his duties to the church and his love for the women and their cause. The women recalled that, when Moore stretched out his arms towards the male deacons, then to the female deacons, he "looked like a man crucified."⁶⁵ Moore placed his hands on each of the five male deacons in turn. From her knees, Heyward looked up at Moore imploringly. But the bishop did not lay his hands on the five women and the ordination was incomplete. The women, along with a third of the audience, walked out of the sanctuary.

⁶²Five women participated in the demonstrations: Emily Hewitt, Carter Heyward, Barbara Schlachter, Carol Anderson, and Julia Sibley. Marie Moorefield, later one of the Eleven, intended to participate as well but was ill. Heyward's account of the ordination attempt makes clear that she held out hope that Moore would ordain them. Schlachter's account implies that she did not share this hope. Darlene O'Dell's account of the events suggests that all parties knew there would be no ordination, but that the women deacons went off script when they knelt before Moore. O'Dell, *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 32.

⁶³Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 55.

⁶⁴Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 57.

⁶⁵Barbara Schlachter, "An Account of the Events of December 15, 1973 at Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City", Box 17, Folder 10, Swanson Papers.

They gathered across the street, at Union Theological Seminary's Women's Center, for a communal meal. Heyward would recall later that her heart was broken.⁶⁶

Yet Heyward and her fellow deacons' insistence, to themselves and to their superiors, that, if the ceremony was complete, they *would* have been priests—that “the symbol would be real”—would come to matter immensely in the months ahead. What Heyward intuited was the power of ritual possibility. In her insistence that Paul Moore could make them priests, that the rite alone was effective in conferring the divine grace of indelible marks, she was speaking a language of sacramentality—one in which it is the rite itself, not the ecclesiastical sanctioning of that rite, or the qualities of the administrator of that rite, that makes it efficacious. She intuited that if the women had been ordained, opponents of women's ordination would have to wrestle, not just with whether women were suitable for the priesthood, but whether there had been a real presence, a movement of the Holy Spirit, in their ordinations.⁶⁷

The Episcopal church, true to its mixed Catholic-and-Reformed history, evinces a variety of opinions on the nature of sacramental action. For instance, when it comes to ordination, some Episcopalians emphasize the pure symbolism of the act. Nothing is happening in the rite, they'll insist, except a recognition or reflection of an internal state of the believer in their relation to the divine; the rite as an exterior sign of interior grace. Some even embrace the “priesthood of all believers” language of Martin Luther, and insist that clerical orders constitute merely a delegation of duties within church life. But others lean in more Anglo-Catholic directions, and argue that there is preternatural action in any given sacrament, and that the clergy are endowed thereby with “indelible marks,” ontologically changed, and set apart. Ordination, for these more

⁶⁶Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 60.

⁶⁷The possible sacramentality of the sacraments for the Episcopal Church is also supported by Article 26 of the 39 Anglican canons, which is the Anglican version of the *opus operatum*, which I discuss at length below.

sacramental or high-church Episcopalians, is not only a symbolic recognition of a power relationship between the church and the ordinand, but a rite that blesses the ordinand with a particular spiritual capacity and identity that they did not have before. For these Episcopalians, sacraments do not just symbolize divine order, but invoke divine action.⁶⁸

As luck would have it, it was precisely the most sacramental, high-church of Episcopalians that the female deacons needed to convince. The more Anglo-Catholic side of the church opposed women's ordination mostly on the grounds that the churches of the Anglican Communion, like the Roman Catholic church, retained the apostolic succession—that the clergy of the modern church could be traced, in an unbroken line of the laying-on-of-hands, all the way back to the apostles of the early church. At the heart of apostolic succession lies the notion that the ordination rite is a sacramental *handing down* of a particular capacity, a particular kernel of grace, from the Apostle Peter onwards. According to many in the church, there had been no female apostles and no female ordinands in the apostles' lineage for all of Christian history. To ordain women would therefore be to break this lineage and to endanger the Episcopalians' ecumenical relationships with the Roman Catholic Church as well as other members of the Anglican Communion.⁶⁹ But the Anglo-Catholic side of the church was also more inclined

⁶⁸The Episcopal catechism on sacraments supports this dueling vision. The sacraments are, according to the Book of Common Prayer, "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace." Likewise, "Ordination is the rite in which God gives authority and the grace of the Holy Spirit to those being made bishops, priests and deacons, through prayer and the laying on of hands by bishops." Notice the symbolic *and* sacramental nature of the ordination and of sacraments generally here. These are symbolic celebrations of pre-existing spiritual states, as in "outward and visible signs", but also a means of *conferring* something: Grace is given by these means. The individual is endowed by God with authority. The rituals are sure and certain means for achieving these endowments. Episcopal Church., *The Book of Common Prayer: And Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1979), 585, 586. The Book of Common Prayer that would have been in widespread use at the time of the ordinations was the 1928 edition, which included no catechism about sacraments generally or about ordination. However, the 1979 version, from which these quotes are drawn, was in trial use at the time, and may regardless be a better indication of the theological proclivities of the church at the time, given that it was being drafted and debated conterminously with women's ordination.

⁶⁹William A. Norgren, "Ecumenical Relations and the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood in the Episcopal Church" *Midstream* 16, no.4 (Oct 1977): 374-392.

towards instrumental theologies of sacrament—towards the idea that sacramental action, such as ordination, produces an indelible and unrepeatable change.

As Carter Heyward remembers it, Suzanne Hiatt came to believe that the church would refuse to ordain women until it was harder *not to* ordain them than it was *to* ordain them.⁷⁰ Heyward's demonstration in Paul Moore's cathedral had not quite done the trick. Alla Bozarth-Campbell, another deacon and later one of the Eleven, had staged a similar protest at the ordination of her husband four months after Heyward's demonstration with Moore. As her husband was ordained to the priesthood, Bozarth-Campbell stood at the back of the chapel. When her husband was asked the examining questions, she responded. When he said the vows, she repeated them. And when hands were laid on her husband's head, four laywomen, a male deacon, and a priest joined Bozarth-Campbell at the back of the church, and laid hands on her head too.⁷¹ These demonstrations, though affecting to the bishops and witnesses, were beginning to feel insufficient. Something had to force the church's hand. An irregular ordination of women was the next step.⁷²

The decision to shift the grounds of the debate onto sacramental terms also offered a chance to escape from persistent accusations that Episcopal reformers were concerned principally with feminism or women's rights. Women's ordination, one Episcopal reverend wrote testily, is "an essentially *political* question."⁷³ Others accused the women of being slaves to the cultural zeitgeist, or of fighting a battle about "rights" when, of course, ordination to the

⁷⁰White, Rev. Dr. Carter Heyward: Oral History.

⁷¹Alla Bozarth-Campbell to Katrina Swanson, March 23, 1974, Box 42 Folder 1, Swanson Papers; Bozarth-Campbell to "Sisters", form letter, April 16, 1974, Box 42, Folder 1, Swanson Papers; Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest*, 98-100. Bozarth-Campbell's book recounts a much larger crowd for the laying-on of hands, but her letter of April 16 is a more proximate recollection.

⁷²Katrina Swanson, oral history interview with Sally Bush, October 8, 2001, Box 2, Folder 1, Swanson Papers.

⁷³Paul Boyer, "The 'Open Mind' and the Mind of Christ" in H. Karl. Lutge, ed. *Sexuality, Theology, Priesthood: Reflections on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood* (San Gabriel, Calif.: Concerned Fellow Episcopalians, 1973).

priesthood was no “right” for anyone.⁷⁴ An irregular ordination would allow the Eleven to argue for their priesthood in sacramental or call-based terms, instead of on strict equality grounds. Though all of the Eleven identified as feminists to one degree or another, their arguments for women’s belonging in the priesthood generally shied away from mention of women’s liberation. Emily Hewitt and Suzanne Hiatt’s influential book, *Women Priests: Yes or No?* (1973), acknowledged that the women’s liberation movement was often accused of being the sole source of women’s priesthood strivings. The remainder of the book managed to avoid mention of feminism entirely.⁷⁵ “I am not a priest because I am a feminist,” Alla Bozarth-Campbell put it in 1978, “I am a feminist because I am called to the priesthood in a male-oriented institution that refused to celebrate that calling.”⁷⁶ Their case, they recognized, was much stronger as a sacramental claim or a claim about their callings than as a debate about the merits of gender equality.

The Reverend Mother Fucker

In the lead-up to the Philadelphia ceremony the eleven women and the three bishops planned the service carefully. The ordinations had to be done by the book. No ounce of peculiarity (other than the quite obviously unavoidable peculiarities) would be tolerated. The whole affair should be as traditional as possible, they agreed. They would use the Book of Common Prayer that had been in use in the church since the 1920s with its Elizabethan English, instead of a new updated edition that was, at the time, in a trial period.⁷⁷ They would not allow

⁷⁴Jean-Jacques von Allmen, “Is the Ordination of Women to the Pastoral Ministry Justifiable?” and Alexander Schemenn, “Concerning Women’s Ordination” in H. Karl. Lutge, ed. *Sexuality, Theology, Priesthood: Reflections on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood* (San Gabriel, Calif.: Concerned Fellow Episcopalians, 1973).

⁷⁵Hewitt and Hiatt, *Women Priests: Yes or No?*, 24.

⁷⁶Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest: A Personal Odyssey*, 174.

⁷⁷Darling, *New Wine*, 127.

guitar during the hymns.⁷⁸ There should be no question: this was not a demonstration, this was an ordination. On the evening before the ceremony, the ordinands and their presenters gathered for a meal. Katrina Swanson's father, Edward Welles, easily the most Anglo-Catholic of the participating bishops, was suffering reservations. He had received pleading letters and calls from Presiding Bishop Allin, and promised Allin he would reconsider ordaining his daughter. At the gathering, before 30 or 40 people, Katrina Swanson's son, William, age 10, gave a spontaneous speech. He hoped, tomorrow, his mother would become a priest, he told the party, and that his grandfather would be the one to do it. Under such charming pressure, Welles relented.⁷⁹

The day of the ordinations in Philadelphia, July 29, 1974, was by most accounts joyous, if tense. The Church of the Advocate was so full to bursting that the women could barely get up the aisle. Barbara Harris, the crucifer for the ceremony, and later the first female bishop in the church, led the procession of women through the chancel by the shortest route possible, to avoid exposing the women to the crowd.⁸⁰ The who's-who of the ministerial reformation attended, including Alice Hageman, Beverly Harrison, Pauli Murray, and Letty Russell.⁸¹ At one point in the ceremony, a metallic bang rang through the chapel, and Alla Bozarth-Campbell thought immediately that someone must have been shot. She checked her white alb for blood. But no one was injured, and the source of the noise remained a mystery.⁸² At the time during the ceremony when members of the audience are allowed to express doubts about whether the orders should be given, several men rose to make statements in opposition, but the vast majority of the audience

⁷⁸O'Dell, *Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 62.

⁷⁹Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 83.

⁸⁰Barbara Harris, "Pentecost Revisited" *The Witness*, special issue (1984): 10-11.

⁸¹List of attendees who entered their names in the alms basin at Church of the Advocate on July 29, 1974, in support of the ordinations, Box 25, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

⁸²Alla Bozarth-Campbell interviewed by Margo Guernsey, nd., personal collection of Margo Guernsey, 14.

seemed to be there in support.⁸³ The opposition, Barbara Harris remembered, was like “a two-hand touch football squad about to go up against a Superbowl team.”⁸⁴

In the aftermath of the ordination, an avalanche of letters and calls came pouring in to members of the Eleven, the bishops who had ordained them, and other participants. Some of the feedback was supportive, some condemnatory, some threatening. Much of it addressed the central theological (and sacramental) question: Were the women priests now? “Of course you are a priest,” one Episcopal nun wrote to Carter Heyward, “unless there have never been any, can never be any, and the whole category is meaningless.” Members of many denominations—even a few Jewish women—wrote to Heyward after the ordinations. Sacramentality was a point of note. “For all my low church tendencies,” wrote one United Church of Christ clergywoman, “and despite my renunciation of my Catholic traditions, being a witness to the events surrounding your ordinations has been a smashing, powerful experience for me.”⁸⁵ The ordinands, naturally, agreed. “I am a priest,” the eldest ordinand, Jeanette Piccard, told *Ms. Magazine*. “The bishops can recognize me or not, but they can’t do anything to invalidate the sacrament.”⁸⁶ The women used to be deacons; now they *were* priests. “I have no doubt I am a priest,” Katrina Swanson wrote in her journal.⁸⁷ In a collective letter several of the Eleven released, they minced no words: “We are people and we are priests—not a hypothesis, but a reality.”⁸⁸ Or, as one of the ordaining bishops put it poetically in 1975, “It has been done. *Consummatum est*.”⁸⁹

⁸³Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest*, 140.

⁸⁴Barbara Harris, “Pentecost Revisited.”

⁸⁵Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 6, 12.

⁸⁶“Who’s Afraid of Women Priests?” *Ms.* (Dec. 1974).

⁸⁷Katrina Swanson, journal entry, August 15, 1974, Box 22, Folder 3, Swanson Papers.

⁸⁸Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 108.

⁸⁹Daniel Corrigan, “Why I Ordained Women in Philadelphia” in *The Ordination of Women: Pro and Con*, ed. Michael P Hamilton and Nancy S Montgomery (Morehouse Barlow, 1975), 56-68.

The Eleven maintained that womanhood was mostly irrelevant to their particular priesthoods. Women, Bozarth-Campbell wrote, “bring no uniquely female attributes to the priesthood.”⁹⁰ Perhaps because the sacramental question was so ripe in the air, the Eleven were particularly sensitive about accusations that their femininity had any direct relationship to their religious practice. Paul Moore wrote in the *New York Times* that the word “priestess” carries even more freight than “women priests”—associations with “temple prostitution, pagan fertility cults, vestal virgins.”⁹¹ Carter Heyward informed *Ms.* magazine: “I’m a priest, not a priestess. Priestess implies mumbo jumbo and all sorts of pagan goings-on. Those who would oppose us would love to call us priestesses.”⁹² Indeed, those who opposed them did. C.S. Lewis set the precedent for such language in an essay from 1948, “Priestesses in the Church,” in which he cautioned against women’s ordination in the Anglican Communion. An Episcopal rector, George Rutler, followed Lewis’s example with a monograph in 1973, *Priest and Priestess*, an argument against women’s ordination.⁹³

Despite the women’s diaconate orders, the issue of right matter remained a perennial objection amongst members of the church who disagreed that the ordinations in Philadelphia had been valid. Women cannot be ordained, one rector told the *Kansas City Times* “any more than you can validly consecrate Coca-Cola and potato chips in place of bread and wine.”⁹⁴ The same rector was so incensed at the ordinations that he flew the Episcopal flag upside-down outside his parish. (The idea that the ordinations were both ultimately meaningless and yet trenchantly subversive was a prevalent theme). Alison Palmer, a deacon at the time, was told by her rector

⁹⁰Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest*, 168.

⁹¹Paul Moore Jr., “Accepting Women in the Priesthood” *New York Times*, November 23, 1974.

⁹²“Who’s Afraid of Women Priests?” *Ms.* (Dec. 1974).

⁹³George Rutler, *Priest and Priestess* (Ambler, Penn: Trinity Press, 1973); C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1970).

⁹⁴Carol Conrow, “Flag Signals Rector’s Protest,” *Kansas City Times*, July 31, 1974.

that it was no more possible to ordain a woman than to ordain a table.⁹⁵ Presiding Bishop John Allin, though he made an attempt at neutrality as the conflict unfolded, eventually confessed he did not believe women could be priests “any more than they can become fathers or husbands.”⁹⁶ A narrative of law-breaking also held sway with the general Episcopal public. On August 9, 1974, less than two weeks after the Philadelphia ordinations, Richard Nixon resigned the presidency under threat of impeachment after fallout from a coordinated theft of political data from the Watergate Hotel in D.C. The Eleven and the three bishops were quickly tarred with the Watergate brush. The bishops were President Nixon, failing to uphold the canons and constitution of the church. The women were the thieves in the Watergate, taking what was never theirs to take.⁹⁷ Supporters, however, compared the national conflict between the rule of one man and the rule of law with the Episcopal conflict between the rule of the canons and the rule of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁸

Yet some in the church felt moved, much to their dismay, to recognize that the sacrament had been valid, even if unusual. Several priests wrote to Carter Heyward decrying the ordinations as defiant and dangerous, yet theologically sound. Despite his strong opposition to the ordinations, one priest from Georgia wrote to Heyward, “Personally, I believe you have the ‘character of the priesthood’ as a result of your ordination by a bishop in Apostolic Orders.”⁹⁹ Another similarly disagreed with the Philadelphia decision, but conceded, “My own feeling at

⁹⁵Alison Palmer interview with Margo Guernsey, April 27, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

⁹⁶“A Case of Woman Trouble” *Time*, October 17, 1977.

⁹⁷Ruth Manford Munn to the Reverend and Mrs. George G. Swanson, August 18, 1974, Box 23, Folder 6, Swanson Papers; Charles B. Persell, Jr. to Miss. Varian Cassat, August 8, 1974, Box 23, Folder 6, Swanson Papers.

⁹⁸“Outline of presentation made by Bishop McGehee to the Bishops of the V Province and to the Resolution Committee at the Meeting of the House of Bishops in Chicago August 14 and 15, 1974 on the ordination of eleven women”, August 13, 1974, Box 25, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

⁹⁹Jack (last name absent) of St. John’s Episcopal in College Park, Georgia, to Carter Heyward, October 17, 1974. Box 4, Carter Heyward Papers, Archive of Women in Theological Scholarship, Burke Library, Columbia University Libraries at Union Theological Seminary. (Hereafter, Heyward Papers).

this time is that the Philadelphia ordination was irregular and illegal yet probably valid.”¹⁰⁰ A priest in the diocese of Dallas perhaps best articulated the frustrating conclusion some church members had come to accept:

I have thought and prayed over the matter of whether or not I, as an individual, will consider these ordinations valid. I find them shaky, but my own theology demands that I recognize them as valid. Therefore, when next we meet, I will truly be able to vent my anger with you by addressing you as ‘The Reverend Mother Fucker!’”¹⁰¹

The Eleven had put the Church in quite an annoying spot: though the ordinations were ecclesiastically unsanctioned, they appeared to be sacramentally sound. Many in the church found it necessary, as much as they resented it, to accept that the ordinations had fulfilled the requirements of right form, right intention, and right matter. As the priest from Dallas suggested, their theology demanded it, whether they liked it or not.

Those that continued to deny the validity of the ordinations sometimes leaned in low-church directions to do so. One priest gave a sermon a few weeks after the ordinations insisting that what had happened in Philadelphia, “appears to make magic out of the ceremonial action of the church...by making it an essentially individualistic affair,” invoking an old Protestant trope about the nature of Catholic rites.¹⁰² Another prominent layman in D.C. objected that it was not the issue of right matter but of right intent that was in play. The only way to see the ordinations as valid was to embrace “the doctrine of intent which prevails in Roman Catholic circles,” in which it is the intention of the individual bishop and ordinand which matters. Conversely, he

¹⁰⁰Mathew Borden to Carter Heyward, November 26, 1974, Box 4, Heyward Papers.

¹⁰¹James Lee Williams to Carter Heyward, July 23, 1974, Box 4, Heyward Papers. Also quoted in Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 101.

¹⁰²Hunt Williams, sermon, Aug 18, 1974, Box 4, Heyward Papers.

argued, the true Anglican doctrine of intent implicates the entire church's intent, not just one bishop's.¹⁰³

Meanwhile, the House of Bishops, the collection of all of the bishops of the church both active and retired, declared an emergency meeting in Chicago for August 15, 1974, about two weeks after the Philadelphia ordinations. By all accounts it was a chaotic affair. The House of Bishops is one-half of the bicameral General Convention that governs the church; the other half, the House of Deputies, consists of lay and priest representatives. The House of Bishops was limited in what they could do in response to the ordinations on their own. They could not bring formal disciplinary charges against the women involved, nor could they make any theological changes to the existing canons. Over the course of a two days in a conference room, the bishops debated and drafted resolutions. According to Presiding Bishop John Allin, they could rule most importantly on one question: Were the women ordained in Philadelphia? Or, as he put it, they were there to determine, "When is a vow not a vow?"¹⁰⁴

Though the Eleven had done things by the book to the best of their ability, the ordinations were clearly irregular—a word with canonical meaning here—in several respects. An ordination that is regular is performed with the permission of the bishop of the diocese in which a deacon is canonically residing, by an active bishop, and in a church located within the ordinand's resident diocese.¹⁰⁵ This was not the case for any of the women, who were all ordained by retired bishops, without the permission of their diocesan bishops, outside of the diocese of their belonging. Yet irregularity is not invalidity, as we shall see, and in the gaps between this distinction one gets a glimmer of the sacramental character of an Episcopal ordination. Bishop Paul Moore recalled an

¹⁰³Emil Oberholzer to Suzanne Hiatt, Quinquagesima Sunday, 1977, Series 2, Subseries 2c, Box 2, Hiatt Papers.

¹⁰⁴As quoted in O'Dell, *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 88.

¹⁰⁵Darling, *New Wine*, 133; O'Dell, *Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 55.

exchange between several bishops at the meeting in Chicago, who had broken up into groups for discussion. A conversation about what to do about the bishops who had participated at Philadelphia devolved into the question of whether the ordinations were valid.

“I do not see how we can discuss what to do with the bishops or the women unless we decide whether they were really ordained or not,” offered one bishop.

“I think they were ordained,” said another. “All the elements were there—apostolically consecrated bishops, a valid liturgy, and the intent to ordain. What more does *your* theology require?”

“To ordain you need an adult male,” another responded.

“You mean it doesn’t ‘take’ unless the recipient is male?”

“To put it crudely, that’s exactly what I mean.”

“Boy, let’s unpack *that* one.”¹⁰⁶

The ritual act as sacramentally effective, a hallmark of the Catholic end of Episcopal theology, was suddenly grounds for affirming the Eleven’s priesthood. The idea that the ordination may not have ‘taken’ because of the women’s sex was beginning to sound theologically indefensible, given that women were already suitable matter for ordination to the diaconate. To deny the Philadelphia ordination’s validity was, to an extent, to deny the sacramental potency of the rite in and of itself.

To better understand this claim, it becomes necessary to get into some theological weeds. Bishop Arthur Vogel of West Missouri—Katrina Swanson’s bishop—produced the most compelling case for the invalidity of the ordinations at the bishops’ meeting in Chicago. We can all agree, he said to the room, that these ordinations are irregular. “Now the slippery word, the difficult word—“ he said, “because it is used in two senses, and sometimes the senses are not made clear—is the word valid.” The two senses of validity that Vogel identified mapped rather well onto the sacramental debates Episcopalians have had for decades. The first, Vogel said, is that we have a familiar concept of validity as tied to the *opus operatum*. The *opus operatum*,

¹⁰⁶As narrated in O’Dell, *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 90.

meaning, roughly, “the work done,” refers traditionally to the efficacy of the sacraments, independent of any other variables besides right form, right matter, and right intention.

Sacraments can do their work (to save, to forgive, to make a priest) not because of the power of humans or human institutions but because of Christ’s ministry. Thus, for instance, if you receive a sacrament from an unholy or sinful person, or an unholy or sinful human institution, this would have no impact on the validity of the rite.¹⁰⁷ This theological concept is, as Vogel’s speech implies, no stranger to the Episcopal Church, and indeed it is found in article 26 of the 39 *Articles of the Anglican Canon*.¹⁰⁸

However, Vogel went on, there is another definition of validity in our theological water that we may, in this instance, want to sip from. Said Vogel, “There is a newer use of the word valid which has found great currency in ecumenical theology...that validity means ecclesiastical recognition...Does a given church as a communion juridically recognize a ministry? If so, it is valid.”¹⁰⁹ Vogel’s second definition lends no credence to the *opus operatum* as functional in and of itself, through the ministry of Christ. Nor does it give any space to the idea that, with their apostolic holy orders, bishops might be endowed as individuals with the power to pass on orders. Rather, it makes church polity alone the medium for sacramental potency. It confuses, as one commentator would put it, “the power to ordain and the authorization to ordain.”¹¹⁰ Thus, Vogel

¹⁰⁷This theological principle was forced into articulation in the fourth century when a schismatic group of early Christians, the Donatists, began teaching that for sacraments to be effective, they had to be performed by a perfect clergyman. Their error came to be known as the Donatist heresy.

¹⁰⁸Frans Jozef van Beeck, “Invalid or Merely Irregular: Comments by a Reluctant Witness” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 11, no. 3 (1974): 385. It is also interesting to note that the idea of ritual validity, even when *contra* religious governance, has broader applicability outside the Christian context. The Talmud, for instance, maintains distinctions between rabbinical law and the efficacy of ritual action. For example, kosher sacrifices are still valid sacrifices that produce consumable flesh, even if they are performed on the Sabbath, when such action is forbidden and punishable by death. Barry Scott Wimpfheimer, *The Talmud: A Biography* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 2018), 61, 96.

¹⁰⁹Beeck, “Invalid or Merely Irregular?”, 386.

¹¹⁰ Beeck, “Invalid or Merely Irregular?”, 381.

nulled the distinction between irregularity and invalidity. If the governance of the church has not condoned it, it has not happened. The Roman Catholic theologian Vogel drew from for this “new definition of validity,” Frans Josef Van Beeck, later wrote that Vogel had misunderstood him. Validity as ecclesiastical recognition was supposed to be a definition for ecumenical relations—a way in which churches might recognize another church’s sacraments as valid. Not, as Vogel would have it, a way in which a church could decide the validity of its own sacramental acts. Obviously, Van Beeck elaborated, “the *opus operatum*, better called the *opus operantis Christi*, is not tied down to the actual deeds and intentions of the community.”¹¹¹

On the whole, and rather understandably, the bishops seemed confused. As they voted on a final resolution a few bishops indicated they needed further clarification: Was this resolution going to declare the ordinations invalid? Yes, Presiding Bishop Allin answered, probably a bit cagily at this point, given that this was much of the purpose for the gathering. At this, however, several bishops changed their votes from affirm to deny, and several others decided to abstain. Observers and historians have been unsure about what caused the confusion, though I submit one: suddenly faced with the words “invalid,” something was theologically terrifying to several bishops about such a vote. They were stuck between a rock and a hard place. For most of the bishops’ theological upbringing, irregularity had not been synonymous with invalidity, and the theological distinction between the two continued to mean something for many of them. Irregularity was a claim about church polity and ecclesiastical procedure. Invalidity was a claim about the movement of the Holy Spirit in ritual action. Vogel’s attempt to tie validity entirely to ecclesiastical recognition was to deny the *opus operatum*, to deny the sacramental efficacy of the rite in-and-of itself. Even with the last-minute desertions, the resolution passed. The Eleven were

¹¹¹ Beeck, “Invalid or Merely Irregular?”, 384.

furious. The reason given for the ordination's invalidity had been that the women were not ordained in the communities where they practiced their ministry. Thus, as Alla Bozworth-Campbell noted, "a canonical irregularity was in this case, and for purely political reasons, confused with sacramental validity."¹¹²

It quickly became clear that the decision of the Bishops in Chicago was not going to stand up to serious theological scrutiny. In addition to the rebuke from Van Beeck, several Episcopal theology professors called foul. Professor Robert J. Page wrote a scathing editorial arguing that, though he opposed the Philadelphia ordinations, the response of the House of Bishops in Chicago was "unsatisfactory on theological, moral, and pastoral grounds."¹¹³ Another professor of theology, William J. Wolf, resigned from an ecumenical commission in protest, writing that the bishops botched "the historic catholic norms for distinguishing between sacraments that are irregular and those that are invalid."¹¹⁴ The co-dean of the Episcopal Divinity School, Ed Harris, wrote an article in disagreement with the House of Bishop's findings.¹¹⁵ Charles Willie, the president of the House of Deputies who had given the sermon during the Philadelphia ordinations, resigned his post in the House in protest. Yet the stage had been set for the ensuing battle, with the sacramental question still ripe in the air. The bishops had been deeply divided as to whether or not the women had been ordained, and the church at large, as evidenced in their letters, were likewise flummoxed—it seemed the women were now priests.

¹¹²Bozarth-Campbell, *Womanpriest*, 145.

¹¹³Robert J. Page, "Editorial for the Diocese of Rochester Newspaper, September issue", Box 25, Folder 5, Swanson Papers.

¹¹⁴William J. Wolf, "Statement of Resignation", August 16, 1974, Box 25, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

¹¹⁵O'Dell, *Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 145-146.

Make Eucharist, Not Coffee

The Eleven were immediately asked by John Allin and their bishops to abstain from practicing their (uncertain, theoretical, non-) priesthoods and their legitimate diaconates in addition. Many of them did, including Katrina Swanson, whose father supported the armistice. Swanson also agreed not to wear clerical garb in public for three months, hoping that giving the church time to heal would ease her eventual acceptance. Her husband's parish, St. George's in Kansas City, was strongly divided on the issue of Swanson's irregular ordination, and she also ceased her service to the church as a deacon. The suspension of all her parish and priestly activities was incredibly hard for Swanson. She felt "immobilized" and was also the target of a canon law suit, which was eventually dropped. She took communion from Bishop Vogel on one occasion and felt physically cold afterwards.¹¹⁶ Swanson suffered in respectful silence, but she scribbled "Make Eucharist, Not Coffee" on meeting notes, and, as the summer turned to fall, more of her fellow ordinands began to do so.¹¹⁷ Wrestling with whether or not to practice their priesthoods was a decision that rested on the women's sense of themselves as priests independent of the church's formal approval. Many had hoped that abstaining from practicing would convince the House of Bishops to regularize the ordinations. When the House declared the ordinations invalid instead, it was a turning point for several of the women. Merrill Bittner, one of the Eleven, had a particularly sympathetic bishop who concluded, with a bit of snark, that if indeed the ordinations were invalid, Bittner should be able to continue her function as a deacon. But she refused. "For me to begin functioning as a deacon now, would be to suggest nothing happened on July 29th, and that is an impossible position to accept," she wrote.¹¹⁸ Several of the

¹¹⁶Katrina Swanson, journal entry, Feb 16, 1975, Box 22, Folder 5, Swanson Papers.

¹¹⁷Katrina Swanson, notes on the Metropolitan Inter-Church Agency Meeting, October 16, 1974, Box 17, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

¹¹⁸Merrill Bittner, statement, Sept 27, 1974, Box 41, Folder 9, Swanson Papers.

Eleven agreed that no compromise in clerical practice was possible. In a sermon, Alison Cheek insisted that to delay practice of her ministry would be to deny its reality—a sacrifice she could not make.¹¹⁹ Carter Heyward acquired a protest button that read “Women Priests Have Real Presence.”¹²⁰ By late September, three of the Eleven agreed: “the time had come for some of us to publicly proclaim the validity of the Philadelphia ordinations.”¹²¹

In October of 1974, Alison Cheek, Carter Heyward, and Jeanette Piccard celebrated the Eucharist, for the first time since their ordinations, at Riverside Church in New York City. Presiding Bishop Allin and the Bishop of New York, Paul Moore, begged them not to act in their sacramental capacity as priests, and publicly denounced the event afterwards. The service was intended as a public outpouring of support for the Eleven, and it was massive. Thirteen women ministers from many denominations participated, as did another two dozen prominent laywomen.¹²² The Riverside service, titled a “Service in Celebration of Women’s Ministry,” was a storm of symbolic importance for the ministerial reformation in the 1970s. The service was held on Reformation Sunday, a day of commemoration, for Protestants, of rightful protest. The Commission on Women in Ministry (COWIM) of the National Council of Churches, a new and growing branch of the ecumenical agency, sponsored and envisioned the service. The service’s location at Riverside Church, the most prestigious liberal pastorate in the nation, put it at the heart of power in the mainline. The tone of the ceremony was triumphant. Though the Eleven remained on uncertain ground with the Episcopal Church, the service was intended to show their

¹¹⁹Alison Cheek, sermon, August 11, 1974, Box 25, Folder 4, Swanson Papers.

¹²⁰Button, Box 43, Carter Heyward Papers.

¹²¹Alison Cheek, Carter Heyward, Jeanette Piccard, “Statement by three Episcopal priests who will be celebrants at the Service in Celebration of Women in Ministry, 7:30 pm Sunday, October 27, 1974, at Riverside Church”, Box 18, Folder 11, Swanson Papers.

¹²²Participants included Constance Parvey, Beverly Harrison, Charles Willie, Jeanne Audrey Powers, Carol Anderson, Rosemary Ruether, and Peggy Billings. “Service in Celebration of Women in Ministry: Riverside Church, Reformation Sunday, October 27, 1974”, Box 4, Folder 20, Anna Howard Shaw Collection, Boston University School of Theology.

confidence in the validity of their priestly orders. Heyward, Cheek, and Piccard marched into the chapel at the beginning of the service singing “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” The hymn, a Martin Luther classic, fit the mood: assertive, confident in God’s strength to prevail on their side. As the hymn put it, “He must win the battle.”

The service also made a larger, implicit argument: that the ministry of women was the central battle in the larger war for women’s liberation in the churches. Sponsors of the service wrote in a press release: “The controversy surrounding the ordination of eleven Episcopal women to the priesthood highlights the dilemma of all women in all churches. When we are present, we are ignored. When we speak, we are not heard.”¹²³ Heyward, Piccard, and Cheek wrote likewise, that the problem surrounding the Eleven, “is not peculiarly an Episcopal problem. It is a problem facing the whole Christian church.”¹²⁴ Yet the service, oriented as it was to the triumph of women in ministry in particular, thought little about other feminist concerns in the church. Upon hearing “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” one woman who had come to watch the service, Carol Christ, quietly rose and left the chapel. The profound maleness on display in the hymn—with its gendered language for God, and its portrayal of God as a military commander, unsettled her greatly. She could not believe that these women, whose activism for the priesthood of women knew few bounds, would sing something “affirming a military and male God as their savior.”¹²⁵ Christ’s experience at the Riverside service, remembered by so many as a moment of great triumph for the ministerial reformation, reminds of the directions that the women’s church movement could have taken, and did not. Christ’s concern with liturgical language and the

¹²³ “Statement by Ecumenical Co-Sponsors of the Service in Celebration of Women in Ministry” Box 18, Folder 11, Swanson Papers.

¹²⁴ Alison Cheek, Carter Heyward, Jeannette Piccard, “Statement by the three Episcopal priests who will be celebrants at the Service in Celebration of Women in Ministry,” Box 18, Folder 11, Swanson Papers.

¹²⁵ Carol P. Christ, “Carol P. Christ” in Ann Braude, ed. *Transforming the Faith of Our Fathers: The Women Who Changed American Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 102.

gender of God received some interest from women's church reformists in the early 1970s. But as the ministerial reformation grew in its success, women's ordination, and the existence of women priests in denominations and churches, came to stand in for the mainline's feminist credentials. Feminist concerns about liturgical language and the gender of God moved increasingly to the liberal margins of the mainline.

The history of the Commission on Women in Ministry (COWIM), the organizing force behind the Riverside ceremony, presents a similar narrative: women's ordination rising like cream to the top of women's church concerns in the 1970s. COWIM, founded in 1974, was the closest the National Council of Churches came to a replacement for Church Women United (CWU), which left the council in 1970.¹²⁶ COWIM focused almost exclusively on issues of women's employment in the churches. In their founding documents they pledged to raise consciousness of discrimination against church-employed women, to facilitate fair pay and benefits, to develop innovative styles of ministry, and to form a network of women in ministry.¹²⁷ COWIM began holding semi-annual meetings in September of 1974. Church Women United, now a separate entity from NCC, sent representatives to these meetings and helped COWIM get off the ground with a donation. Though the organizations were on friendly terms, it did not escape CWU that COWIM's efforts were focused only on women *employed* by the church, not, as CWU had historically been, on women's volunteer efforts. There was some concern within CWU that this omission was a flaw in COWIM's structure. "The idea of

¹²⁶Other women's groups also emerged in NCC in the wake of Church Women United, but they could not match COWIM's institutional success or funding. A Justice for Women group, for instance, which addressed secular women's issues such as abortion, struggled to attain permanent status within NCC and never received funding from NCC directly. COWIM, in contrast, grew steadily throughout the 1970s, and drew donations from half of NCC member denominations. Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 115-122.

¹²⁷"A Proposal for a Commission on Women in Ministry", Commission on Women in Ministry/NCC Folder, Church Women United Papers, United Methodist Church Archives, GCAH, Madison, New Jersey (hereafter CWU Papers).

including lay volunteers in its focus is inoperative,” one CWU observer reported in 1977, “since this goes beyond COWIM’s mandate to concern itself with women involved in professional ministry.”¹²⁸ A year later, another representative from CWU noted that a particular vision of women’s ministry drove COWIM’s work:

Although I would estimate that the group was about half ordained and half lay profession, I think it’s interesting to note that there was no one present who staffs ‘traditional women’s work.’ I think that says something about how ‘women in ministry’ is defined by the latter group of women, and/or denominations.¹²⁹

Traditional women’s work—the work of Sunday schools, mission societies, fundraising, choir, coffee hours, and women’s lay volunteer efforts—had no clear place in COWIM. Though Church Women United would have considered these occupations “ministry” in a broad sense, COWIM did not. A professional definition of women’s ministry ruled the day at COWIM.

The immense press coverage of the Eleven only helped to make women’s ordination seem the be-all-end-all of women’s church activism. The Eleven did not give the press any reason to fade away. As 1974 became 1975, several of the Eleven found ways to celebrate the Eucharist, sometimes in private settings, sometimes with sympathetic rectors. Frequently, these events received coverage in the local press. In December, Carter Heyward celebrated the Eucharist in Oberlin, Ohio, again at the United Nations a few weeks later, then at a symposium on women and the church in February, 1975.¹³⁰ In 1975, Heyward and Suzanne Hiatt were appointed, with sacerdotal responsibilities, to professorates at Episcopal Divinity School. Alison Cheek began celebrating the Eucharist monthly at St. Stephens and the Incarnation, in Washington, D.C. Alla Bozarth-Campbell was forbidden by her bishop from setting foot on

¹²⁸Winsome Munro to CWU, report of March 4-6, 1977 COWIM meeting, Commission on Women in Ministry/NCC Folder, CWU Papers.

¹²⁹Gail Hinand to Marth Edens, memo, October 31, 1978, Commission on Women in Ministry/NCC Folder, CWU Papers.

¹³⁰Heyward, *A Priest Forever*, 112-115.

Episcopal Church property, yet still found a way to practice her priesthood. When she celebrated mass in the Catholic chapel at the University of Wisconsin at the invitation of the campus ministry there, it made national Catholic news.¹³¹ If anything, these Eucharistic celebrations infuriated the bishops of the church even more than the original ordinations had. William Wendt, the rector who hosted Alison Cheek's celebration of Holy communion, was charged with a canon law violation, sat through an ecclesiastical trial, and was reprimanded by his bishop. Cheek wrote in response, "He is punished because I am a priest."¹³² Peter Beebe, who had hosted Carter Heyward in Oberlin, underwent a similar trial. None of the women ordinands were ever brought to ecclesiastical court. (Historians have generally argued canon lawyers sensed that such proceedings were likely only to ratify the validity of their ordinations.) The women's practice of their priesthoods had created an even knottier problem for the church than the Philadelphia ordinations. Now, there were thousands of congregants who had received communion, blessings, and absolution from the Eleven. One layman who received the Eucharist at Riverside wrote to Carter Heyward that, though he had his doubts about her decision to practice her priesthood, he believed firmly in its efficacy. "When I received the bread and wine from you at Riverside," he wrote, "I understood them to be the Body and Blood of Our Lord."¹³³ By winter of 1974, to rule definitively on the Philadelphia ordinations would have been to throw these ministrations into doubt. The Eleven's priesthoods were no longer merely theirs to lose, but many parishioners' to lose, as well.

In September of 1975, four more women—Alison Palmer, Lee McGee, Betty Rosenberg, and Diane Tickell—were ordained by another retired bishop in Washington, D.C. Several of the

¹³¹O'Dell, *Story of the Philadelphia Eleven*, 104.

¹³²Marjorie Heyer, "Wendt Reprimanded for Defying Bishop," *Washington Post*, January 11, 1976.

¹³³Mathew Borden to Carter Heyward, Nov. 26, 1974, Box 4, Heyward Papers.

women had considered participating in the Philadelphia ordinations, but declined or could not at the time. Lee McGee had been a chaplain at American University since 1971. In the summer of 1974 she had been sure that the Philadelphia ordinations were the wrong strategy for the ordination movement. But as she interacted with the ordinands afterwards and hosted Eucharistic celebrations in her home, she saw the power of the irregular ordinations. By November of 1974 she had changed her mind, and decided to pursue an irregular ordination herself.¹³⁴ McGee's position as a campus minister provided her with the security to go through with such a risky ordeal. Though the Episcopal Church owned her home, McGee was technically employed by the university, not the church, and knew she would not lose her job.¹³⁵ Much as the deacons of New York had done before the ordinations in Philadelphia, McGee, Rosenberg, and Palmer staged demonstrations in the lead-up to their irregular ordinations. On three or four occasions, at the ordinations of men in their diocese, they stood in line next to the male ordinands, forcing their bishop to walk past them.¹³⁶ In the days before the illegal ordinations in Washington, D.C., the host church received bomb threats. Like other women ministers throughout American history, Palmer and McGee also struggled sartorially. Palmer recalls that C.M. Almy, a major clergy outfitting company founded in 1892 in New York City, still offered no clerical vestments for women in the 1970s, and she had to shorten everything she ordered from them. Before their ordinations, Palmer and McGee bought vestments and accessories from a Catholic bookstore in D.C., much to the surprise of the clerk.¹³⁷ If the Eucharistic celebrations

¹³⁴Lee McGee, interview with Margo Guernsey, April 26, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

¹³⁵Lee McGee, interview with Margo Guernsey, April 26, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey. This was, as McGee notes, an unusually advantageous arrangement. Many of the other ordinands were unable to continue in their parish positions after their irregular ordinations, though for quite a few their church careers were second careers (Alison Palmer, Jeannette Piccard), or they had a second income in the family (Katrina Swanson, Alla Bozarth-Campbell).

¹³⁶Lee McGee, interview with Margo Guernsey, April 26, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

¹³⁷Alison Palmer and Lee McGee, interview with Margo Guernsey, April 27, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

in 1974 and 1975 had extended the conflict over women in the priesthood, the ordinations of the Washington Four indicated it was here to stay. Just as most of the Eleven had begun practicing their disputed priestoods, so did the Washington Four. Alison Palmer began traveling so much for celebrations that she carried around a portable Eucharist kit with a paten and chalice, contained in a burlap sack.¹³⁸ Palmer, Lee McGee, Alison Cheek, and Betty Rosenberg, the irregular priests local to the D.C. area, began celebrating communion on Sunday evenings at Dumbarton Methodist Church in Georgetown, drawing a couple dozen participants to what they called their “Episcopal Church in Exodus.”¹³⁹ Though many critics claimed, at the time, that the irregular ordinations in Philadelphia and D.C. would hurt the cause of women in the priesthood, much of the historical evidence inclines to the contrary. Diane Tickell recalled that she always felt the Washington Four underlined and reinforced the Philadelphia Eleven, assuring the church that the issue would not go away with time.¹⁴⁰ Barbara Harris, the first female bishop in the church, insists that the church might still be debating the issue today, if not for the Philadelphia and Washington ordinands.¹⁴¹ More frightening to the church than women in the priesthood—and even the schism that may result if women were allowed to these orders—was the threat of sacramental chaos that the Eleven—now Fifteen—were spreading.

As the General Convention of 1976 approached, the Fifteen remained committed to the validity of their vows, even over and above the cause of canonical change in the church. In January of 1976, Carter Heyward attended a strategy meeting of women’s ordination groups in advance of the Minneapolis convention in October. It was strange, she noted, to be politicking

¹³⁸Alison Palmer, notes, Box 1, Folder 20, Alison Palmer Papers, Burke Library and Archives, Columbia University Libraries at Union Theological School.

¹³⁹Marlene Cimon, “Women Priests’ Church in Exodus” *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1976

¹⁴⁰Alison Palmer and Lee McGee, interview with Margo Guernsey, April 27, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

¹⁴¹Barbara Harris interview with Margo Guernsey, n.d., personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

about a cause that was already, in her opinion, a *fait accompli*. “It is possible,” she wrote to the Fifteen, “for me to say simultaneously that I don’t give a damn about Minneapolis and that I do care a lot about what happens to my sister deacons, seminarians, and lay sisters before, during and after Minneapolis.”¹⁴² The canonical opening of the priesthood to women was, for the Fifteen, something of a null point. Heyward’s frustrations at strategy meetings for Minneapolis were likely only made greater by the concessions that advocates were willing to make. Heyward, who had been in romantic relationships with women since 1970, had to watch as the planning committee insisted that the issue of women’s ordination be kept separate from the issue of homosexuality, which was also sure to come up at the convention.

In October of 1976, when the General Convention met, everyone hoped the issue would be resolved. And it was, partly. At long last, the Convention approved the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate after January 1, 1977. But that still left the question: How could the fifteen irregularly ordained women be brought into the fold? The question was particularly sticky because of the prior conclusion, by the House of Bishops, that the women’s ordinations had been invalid. Had they been merely irregular, recognizing their priesthood was a fairly straightforward, bureaucratic task. Had the ordinations in fact been valid—which, it seems, many of the bishops had come to believe, as did many theologians in the church—the ceremony could not be performed again. Sacraments, by their nature, can only be done once. Once again, the sticky subject of the validity of the ordinations consumed the church. The House of Bishops recommended the fifteen women undergo “conditional ordinations,” which would involve an entire reperformance of the rite, but in the conditional tense. (“*If* this person has not yet been ordained to the priesthood, ordain her now.”) The Eleven were furious with the suggestion. It

¹⁴²Carter Heyward to the other 14 priests, Jan 31, 1976, Series 2, Sub-series 2c, Box 2, Hiatt Papers.

implied that their priesthoods were in existential doubt—a doubt they did not share. Such a ceremony, Jeannette Piccard wrote, “would be a mockery of the Sacrament.”¹⁴³ When Alison Palmer’s ordaining bishop implied that she would surely not mind participating in such a ceremony, she sharply corrected him.¹⁴⁴ Katrina Swanson, who had refrained from practicing her priesthood for more than two years out of concern for the church, tentatively agreed to such a ceremony. But when she approached Bishop Antonio Ramos of Costa Rica, who had been present in Philadelphia, to ask him to perform the rite, he refused. “I don’t think it should be done, I don’t think it’s necessary, and no, I won’t do it,” he told her.¹⁴⁵ Because the House of Bishops had only recommended conditional ordination, not required it, the ordinands were eventually “recognized” or “accepted” in simple ceremonies, most during January and February of 1977. Negotiations of the terms of these ceremonies were extremely fraught, as bishops sought to please church members on all sides of the dispute. The Fifteen worried, with varying degrees of intensity, about the appearance that they were being re-ordained.¹⁴⁶ Alison Palmer wrote, “There should be nothing in the service which copies part of the ordination service...Therefore: no presenters; no oath; no reference to ecclesial intention completing the ordination process.”¹⁴⁷ Most of the Fifteen were not able to stipulate all of those conditions in their ceremonies, however. Betty Bone Schiess’s service announced that ecclesiastical “intent,” previously missing in her ordination, was now being supplied.¹⁴⁸ Alla Bozarth-Campbell and

¹⁴³Jeannette Piccard to Rev. Alexander Stewart, Nov 26, 1976, Series 2c, Box 2, Folder 3, Hiatt Papers.

¹⁴⁴Alison Palmer and Lee McGee interview with Margo Guernsey, April 27, 2016, personal collection of Margo Guernsey.

¹⁴⁵Katrina Swanson, oral history interview with Sally Bush, October 8, 2001, Box 2, Folder 1, Swanson Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

¹⁴⁶Misleading news coverage contributed to the worry. The *New York Times* reported that Betty Bone Scheiss was going to be ordained. Betty Bone Schiess to Ned Cole, December 15, 1976, Series 2, Subseries 2c, Hiatt Papers; “An Episcopal Bishop Will Ordain the Woman Who Sparked Debate” *New York Times*, Nov 14, 1976.

¹⁴⁷Alison Palmer, “Recognition, Reconciliation, and Rejoicing” no date, Series 2C, Box 2, Folder 3, Hiatt Papers.

¹⁴⁸“Form for Acceptance of the Priesthood of the Reverend Betty Bone Schiess”, Feb 4, 1977, Subseries 2C, Box 2, Hiatt Papers.

Jeannette Piccard, who were recognized together, had to reperform much of the initial ordination rite. The two women were led through the processions, examinations, and oaths of conformity. The bishop even laid hands on their heads, but clarified that he was endowing them with only a blessing.¹⁴⁹ Nancy Wittig's ceremony also re-enacted the presentation and the examination, though the bishop shook her hand at the conclusion of the liturgy instead of blessing her.¹⁵⁰ Bozarth-Campbell had to petition her bishop not to hold her ceremony on the same occasion as another woman's ordination to the priesthood: she worried it would imply she was being ordained as well.¹⁵¹ Alison Cheek, Betty Bone Schiess, Carter Heyward, Emily Hewitt, and Diane Tickell were ultimately recognized at the ordination of other women, though their ability to participate in the laying-on-of-hands of the new ordinands seemed to mitigate some of their concern for the optics.¹⁵² Suzanne Hiatt, perhaps the most insistent that such recognition ceremonies bordered on a deep sacramental offence, insisted on a private ceremony in her bishop's office. The reconciliation of the church with the fifteen women priests was accomplished, though not without, once again, sacramental dispute.

Between the opening of the priesthood on January 1 and January 10, 1977, twenty-seven women were ordained or accepted into the priesthood.¹⁵³ One of these ordinands was Pauli Murray, a civil rights lawyer who had abandoned a professorate to enter seminary, and who became the first black woman priest in the church on January 8. Also among the early ordinands

¹⁴⁹Alla Bozarth-Campbell to Katrina Swanson, Oct 8, 1976, Box 42, Folder 1, Swanson Papers; Service program from the recognition ceremony of Alla Bozarth-Campbell and Jeannette Piccard, Box 42, Folder 1, Swanson Papers.

¹⁵⁰Program of "Recognition and Reception" for Nancy Wittig, Jan 2, 1977, Suzanne Hiatt Papers.

¹⁵¹Alla Bozarth-Campbell to Katrina Swanson, Oct 8, 1976, Box 42, Folder 1, Swanson Papers.

¹⁵²"Form for Acceptance of the Priesthood of the Reverend Betty Bone Schiess", Feb 4, 1977, Series 2, Subseries 2c, Box 2, Hiatt Papers; Liturgy of the Recognition Ceremony for Alison Creek, Feb 12, 1977, Series 2, Subseries 2c, Box 2, Hiatt Papers; Diane Tickell to Suzanne Hiatt and Carter Heyward, Nov 7, 1976, Series 2c, Box 2, Folder 3, Hiatt Papers; Liturgy, The Ordination of Mary Michael Simpson, OSH, to the Priesthood/The Recognition of the Rev. Emily C. Hewitt and the Rev. Carter Heyward as Priests in the Episcopal Church, Jan 9, 1977, St. John the Divine, NYC, Box 1, Folder 49, Hiatt Papers.

¹⁵³Richard M Harley, "Women priests: effects are far-reaching" *Christian Science Monitor*, Jan 10, 1977.

was Ellen Marie Barrett, ordained January 4, which marked the first time in five years that a mainline denomination had ordained an openly gay person.¹⁵⁴ Carter Heyward and Emily Hewitt wrote a letter in support of Barrett. And despite the Episcopal Women's Caucus's earlier insistence that homosexuality be kept a separate issue from women's ordination, the women priests began to turn their attention to advocacy for gay clergy.¹⁵⁵

Though this chapter has argued that sacramental debate was in many ways the fulcrum of the Episcopal ordination controversy in the 1970s, the historical interpretation of the Eleven and of the ministerial reformation more generally has typically been that each was a product of second-wave feminism. Feminism and women's ordination became linked, not only in the minds of moderates and liberals in the mainline, but of more conservative Protestants as well. As Elizabeth Flowers argues, by the 1960s women's ordination "no matter what the tradition, was interpreted through the lens of feminism and seen to represent a bid towards gender equality."¹⁵⁶ There is of course much truth to this connection. The Episcopal women, along with most ministerial reformers after the mid-1960s, personally embraced the feminist movement and much of what it entailed. But such a facile connection between the ministerial reformation and feminism is misleading. Many reformers, including the Eleven, recognized that equality feminism was not entirely adequate as a framework upon which to argue for their inclusion in the ministry and they publicly shepherded their arguments away from it. In a retrospective on the Episcopal ordination movement, Suzanne Hiatt lamented the fact that women's ordination, "this

¹⁵⁴"Next: A lesbian Episcopal priest" *New York Post*, Jan 5, 1977.

¹⁵⁵Carter Heyward to other 14 women priests, Jan 31, 1976, Series 2, Subseries 2c, Box 2, Hiatt Papers; Carter Heyward to Sue, Columba, Pat, Alison, Mary, Barbara, Martha, and Flora, June 16, 1977, Series 2, Subseries 2C, Box 2, Folder 2, Hiatt Papers; Carter Heyward and Emily Hewitt to Rectors and Vestries in the Diocese of New York, July 1, 1977, Series 2, Subseries 2C, Box 2, Folder 2, Hiatt Papers.

¹⁵⁶Elizabeth Flowers, *Into the Pulpit: Southern Baptist Women and Power Since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 44-45.

great triumph of feminism, has almost universally been won at the expense of feminism.”¹⁵⁷ This irony that Hiatt describes lives on in the historiography of the ministerial reformation, but reflected in a funhouse mirror. The ministerial reformation’s alignment with feminism is presumed so strongly by historians that the reformation itself fails to take on any contours individual of feminism. Lost in this association is the complexity of the relationship reformers had with the women’s movement, and other factors—such as sacramental theology—that deeply informed the reformation’s conflicts. Lost are the arguments that women were priests not priestesses.

¹⁵⁷Hiatt, “Women’s Ordination in the Anglican Communion: Can This Church Be Saved?”, 220

Conclusion

In the spring of 1974, a young man applied for ordination in the Presbyterian Church, USA. Walter “Wynn” Kenyon was the son and grandson of Presbyterian pastors. He graduated with honors from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 1973. He was serving a small congregation in Pennsylvania and was by all accounts on the road to becoming a minister. Until, that is, Kenyon was asked about women’s ordination. During his interview with Pittsburgh presbytery’s ministerial selection committee, Kenyon confessed that he did not believe the ordination of women was biblical, that in fact women should not have leadership over men in the church, and that he would not participate in the ordination of woman. But he would not interfere in such an ordination, he clarified, and would happily work with women ministers in his ministry. Despite these qualifications, the committee declined to recommend Kenyon for ordination. When the Pittsburgh presbytery decided to move forward on Kenyon’s ordination regardless of the committee’s recommendation, several ministers brought a case against the presbytery to the judicial courts of the denomination. Kenyon’s trial went national. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* covered the story. At the 1975 General Convention of PCUSA, the Kenyon situation was the hot topic. When the dust had settled, the highest court of Presbyterian justice ruled that Kenyon could not be ordained; his position on women’s ordination was unacceptable for an elder.¹

The Kenyon case proved an important turning point for Presbyterians in America. In the immediate aftermath, several congregations left PCUSA to join the new Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)—a more conservative, geographically southern offshoot founded a few years prior. In the aftermath of the Kenyon case, another Presbyterian minister, Mansfield Kaseman, stirred controversy with his own answers during a presbytery examination. When asked if Jesus was God, Kaseman replied, “No, God is God”—an answer many conservatives took to mean Kaseman did not believe in the divinity

¹Jeffrey S. MacDonald, *John Gerstner and the Renewal of Presbyterian and Reformed Evangelicalism in Modern America* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017), 116-119; George Dugan, “Ordaining Women Upheld on Appeal: A Dissenting Presbyterian is Barred from Office,” *New York Times*, May 20, 1975; Marjorie Heyer, “Church Cites Sex Bias in Ordination Refusal,” *Washington Post*, December 6, 1974.

of Christ. When Kaseman was accepted into his presbytery's ministry, the contrast with the Kenyon case was infuriating for conservatives and fueled further defections from PCUSA to PCA.²

The Kenyon case also marked quite a moment for the ministerial reformation. Kenyon and his supporters argued that women's ordination was not an essential aspect of Presbyterian policy, and so a diversity of opinions on the matter should be tolerated within PCUSA. Directly to the contrary, those that opposed Kenyon's ordination argued that "the issue of the ordination of women is of such magnitude that it has been recognized as a structure-determining principle of Presbyterianism."³ The church courts agreed—women's ordination *was* a central feature of the identity and polity of PCUSA. Kenyon, and others like him, would no longer be ordained in PCUSA. The ordination of women would be a gatekeeping issue for the future ministry of the church. Kenyon's ordination trial anticipated several developments that would come to engulf the ministerial reformation in the following decades. It indicated, first, that women's ordination was in the mainline to stay, and that it would assume pride of place in the constellation of social values in the mainline. Second, it helped give birth to a media narrative that connected women's ordination to mainline institutional decline and to the reduced numbers of young men entering the clergy. This conclusion briefly considers these twin legacies.

Women Do the Preaching, People Do the Leaving

The Kenyon case helped begat a media narrative that tied women's ordination to mainline decline. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the mainline underwent transformation. Membership numbers, financial resources, presence in the political arena, and cultural influence all fell dramatically.⁴ Although

²Marjorie Heyer, "Rockville Pastor Finally Accepted by Presbyterians," *Washington Post*, March 21, 1980.

³Jack Maxwell as quoted in Jack Rogers, "The Kenyon Case," in *Women and Men in Ministry*, ed. Roberta Hestenes (Pasadena, Calif: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985), 325.

⁴Jason Lantzer, *The Protestant Mainline; The Past and Future Shape of Christianity in America*. (New York University Press, 2012), 49-64.; Jeff Manza and Clem Brooks, "The Changing Political Fortunes of Mainline Protestants" in *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) ; David Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); N. Jay Demerath III, "Cultural Victory and

scholars have since contextualized many of these changes, the overwhelming thesis about this “decline” is that it was a product of cultural adaptation. The mainline liberalized through the turbulent 1960s and, in doing so, lost its moderate and conservative members *and* ceased to offer much to liberals, who could now pursue mainline values in other organizations. The positive spin on this story, as narrated by scholars like Matthew Hedstrom and David Hollinger, is that liberal Protestants incorporated their values into the larger American culture so successfully that their institutions ultimately became redundant. The average American, these scholars argue, no longer belongs to a liberal Protestant church, but they live in a liberal Protestant culture. The negative spin on this decline—often from the political and theological right—is that the mainline, as one scholar put it memorably, put themselves on “a slippery slope leading to institutional death, greased by compromises with liberalism.”⁵

Women’s ordination has repeatedly been cited as evidence of mainline liberalization, and therefore as an element in declension narratives. For conservatives, Wynn Kenyon was a martyr and symbol. In an article titled “United Presbyterians, Unsettling Trends,” *Christianity Today*, a major evangelical publication, connected Kenyon’s case and the election of a woman moderator, Thelma Adair, to membership decline in the Presbyterian church. A graph of dramatically falling Presbyterian membership rates was counterposed with a photo of Adair.⁶ Other theological conservatives joined in. Richard John Neuhaus connected mainline decline to women’s ordination in the Catholic journal *First Things*.⁷ “Frequently heard and often attested:” one evangelical theologian opined in 1989, “‘Put the women in charge...the men simply stop attending.’”⁸ The mainstream media also jumped aboard ship: *Time* implicated the adoption of women’s rights and ordination as causes of mainline decline in pieces

Organizational Defeat in the Paradoxical Decline of Liberal Protestantism,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 4 (1995): 458–69.

⁵Mark Hulsether, “The Mainline Protestant Press and the Idea of ‘Declining’ Liberal Religion” in Diane Winston, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the American News Media*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012): 523–4.

⁶“United Presbyterians, Unsettling Trends,” *Christianity Today*, June 18, 1976.

⁷Richard John Neuhaus, “A Closed Question and Ecumenism Now,” *First Things*, Oct 1, 1992.

⁸Robert Culver, “A Traditional View: Let Your Women Keep Silence,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views* ed. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1989), 47.

from 1989 and 1993.⁹ *Newsweek* inferred a causal connection between women's entrance into seminary and men's disinclination towards it in 1989. Even those sympathetic to the ministerial reformation replicated the narrative. The director of development at Episcopal Divinity School told *Newsweek* that, as women entered the ministry, pay was declining, prestige was falling, and men were fleeing.¹⁰ The presumed association between decline and women's ordination shows no signs of fading in recent years, especially amongst conservative commentators. In 2019, Albert Mohler, the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a leading evangelical intellectual, fielded a question about women preaching and pastoring in the church. "If you look at the denominations where women do the preaching, they're also the denominations where people do the leaving," he quipped. The quote was picked up by National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* and projected across the national airways.¹¹

The implications of the decline argument have often been stark, especially for denominations weighing the idea of women's ordination. In 1984, the Southern Baptist Convention, which began ordaining women in the 1960s, reneged on the policy, leaving nearly 200 women pastors in ecclesiastical limbo. The Convention reaffirmed the decision against women pastors in 2000, prompting former president Jimmy Carter to break ties with the denomination.¹² Among the many factors contributing to SBC's decision was the perceived risk of institutional declension that seemed to come along with liberalization, including women's ministry.¹³ Fears of institutional decline remain perennial concerns in

⁹Richard N. Ostling, "Those Mainline Blues," *Time*, May 22, 1989; Richard N. Ostling and Jordan Bonfante, "The Second Reformation," *Time*, Nov 23, 1992. Mark Hulsether has pointed convincingly to the way the mainstream media mostly replicated the conservative narrative on this front. Hulsether, "The Mainline Protestant Press".

¹⁰"Feminism and the Churches," *Newsweek*, Feb 13, 1989. Also quoted in Constance H Buchanan, "The Anthropology of Vitality and Decline: The Episcopal Church in a Changing Society" in *Episcopal Women: Gender, Spirituality and Commitment in an American Mainline Denomination* ed. Catherine Prelinger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992): 312.

¹¹Tom Gjelten, "Southern Baptists to Confront Sexual Abuse and the Role of Women in the Church," *Morning Edition* (National Public Radio, June 11, 2019).

¹²Somini Sengupta, "Carter Sadly Turns Back on National Baptist Body," *New York Times*, Oct 21, 2000.

¹³Judith Anne Bledsoe Bailey, "'Strength for the Journey': Feminist Theology and Baptist Women Pastors" (Ph.D. diss, The College of William and Mary, 2014), 69, 77.

other American churches still mulling women's ordination, including Seventh-Day Adventists, Roman Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.¹⁴

Women's ordination has been particularly tied to one barometer of church decline: the decrease of young men entering the clergy. But scholars who have endeavored to prove the causal claim have come up short. Sociologist Paula Nesbitt found no causal relationship between the entry of women into the mainline clergy and declines in Protestant clerical prestige, compensation, and youth. Constance Buchanan concluded the same about the shortage of young, Episcopal men entering ministry.¹⁵ Both scholars found that these demographic changes predated women's entrance in large numbers into the clerical field. Further, as Buchanan points out, declension is in the eye of the beholder. "The decline of male participation and male authority in the tradition, however little openly discussed, is being taken to mean the decline of the tradition itself. Why should this be so?"¹⁶ Buchanan's question is arguably more important than the question of whether or not women's entrance into ministry caused various kinds of institutional malaise. As Ann Braude noted in a seminal essay in 1992, historians of American religion have been far too quick to equate male absence with religious declension. Much American religious history, Braude points out, presupposes "that the health and integrity of a religious group are seriously threatened by any increase in the visibility or influence of its female members." Instead, Braude argues, historians should learn to see—and narrate—female presence in American religion in positive terms. Narratives of twentieth-century secularization and religious declension, Braude suggests, might be re-written as "the rise of female clergy and a re-orientation of liturgy and theology based on women's experience."¹⁷

¹⁴See, for instance, Aidan J. Kavanagh, "Ask the Episcopal Church about Women Priests," *New York Times*, December 25, 1992.

¹⁵Paula Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational and Organizational Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, MI: Cary Oxford University Press, 1997); Buchanan, "The Anthropology of Vitality and Decline."

¹⁶Buchanan, "Anthropology of Vitality and Decline," 315.

¹⁷Ann Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 97. Joan Wallach Scott has also recently drawn attention to the way the association between women and religion was an invention of secular discourse, a rhetorical strategy for secular reformers in the nineteenth century. Joan Wallach Scott, *Sex and Secularism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

This dissertation follows Braude's admonishment and focuses on presence. It is notable, however, that this project turns a critical eye on the assumption—made by conservatives and liberals alike—that the ministerial reformation was purely a product of liberalizing forces on mainline denominations in the 1960s and 1970s. Most mainline churches made decisions about the permissibility of women's ordination in the mid-century or prior, out of positions of perceived cultural strength, not due to pressures from movements exogenous to them. Further, this project has taken pains to complicate the perceived symbiosis between the reformation and second-wave feminism in particular. This history has tried to re-narrative the ministerial reformation as an internal development—as much a product of liturgical, organizational, and professional change within these churches as it was a product of pressure from women's movements. If the ministerial reformation can be understood in this broader historical context, the presumed causal connection between women's leadership and church decline loses some of its teeth.

Women's Ordination, Mainline Darling

Despite its alleged connection to institutional decline, in most mainline churches women's ordination came to be a mandatory tenet of faith. The Episcopal Church, which initially allowed for conscientious abstention for bishops who did not want to ordain women, eliminated that possibility in 1997.¹⁸ The Lutheran Church in Sweden ended a similar policy in 1982.¹⁹ "If someone was against the ordination of women they wouldn't say it around here," Harvard Divinity theologian Harvey Cox told the *Boston Globe* in 1976, perhaps with Wynn Kenyon in mind.²⁰ In 2011, one survey found that 93% of mainline members said their denominations should allow women's ordination in all circumstances, or

¹⁸Paula Nesbitt, "Women's Ordination: Problems and Possibilities; Five Lessons from Episcopal Women Clergy," plenary talk, Women's Ordination Conference, 2000, http://www.womensordination.org/archive/pages/art_pages/Nesbitt.htm

¹⁹Nesbitt, *Feminization of the Clergy*, 111.

²⁰Kay Longcope, "500 women in nine Boston-area seminaries are making their presence felt," *Boston Globe*, Feb 29, 1976.

when certain conditions were met.²¹ Against all historical odds, women's ministry had become an essential creed of the mainline.

Successes stacked up for the ministerial reformation in subsequent decades. The Reformed Church in America formally accepted women's ordination in 1979. After a vicious debate, the Anglican Church of England began ordaining women to their priesthood in 1994. Inspired by movement in global Anglicanism, a shockingly confident ordination movement gained steam in American Catholicism. In 1979, when Pope John Paul II visited Washington, D.C., Sister Theresa Kane, the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, confronted the pope directly on the issue in her welcome address. Women should be included in "all ministries of our Church," she said, and urged the Vatican to be open to the voices of women who wanted to be so.²² In 2002, seven women—including one American—were ordained to the Catholic priesthood by a renegade bishop on a boat in the Danube river. (The women, following the Episcopal model, became known as the Danube Seven.²³) After the ordinations on the Danube, a tiny yet organized Catholic Womanpriest movement was born. In the 1990s, women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began asking questions about women's leadership in their church. In 2013, several women founded Ordain Women, which became the standard-bearer for the ministerial reformation in the Mormon context. At the same time, American Protestant women were moving into the episcopate and to positions of denominational authority in the mainline. Barbara Harris was consecrated to the Episcopal bishopric in 1989; Marjorie Matthews to the United Methodist bishopric in 1980. Between 2007 and 2016, PCUSA ordained more women than men.²⁴ As

²¹Joelle Kopacz, "Women's Ordination: Support and Opposition," US Congregational Life Survey, October 18, 2011, <https://presbyterian.typepad.com/beyondordinary/2011/10/womens-ordination-support-and-opposition.html>.

²²Mary Jeremy Daigler, *Incompatible with God's Design: A History of the Women's Ordination Movement in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 66.

²³"History of the International Roman Catholic Womenpriest Movement," Roman Catholic Women Priests, 2019, <https://www.romancatholicwomenpriests.org/history/>. See also Julie Byrne, *The Other Catholics: Remaking America's Largest Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

²⁴Lee Hinson-Hasty, "More Presbyterian Women Ordained Ministers than Men 2007-2016" Theological Education Matters Blog, Presbyterian Foundation, August 3, 2018, <https://www.presbyterianfoundation.org/more-presbyterian-women-ordained-ministers-than-men-2007-2016/>.

Kate Bowler has pointed out, six of the seven classically mainline denominations were led by women at some point during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.²⁵

Even as women moved into these previously unattainable positions, no event shook up the mainline on women's issues quite like the Re-Imagining Conference in Minneapolis in 1993. Re-Imagining was a large ecumenical Christian women's conference, drawing over 2000 participants from 49 states and 27 countries. A third of the women attendees were ordained ministers.²⁶ The conference had received funding and support from several mainline institutions, including the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church in the USA, and the World Council of Churches.²⁷ The conference was intended as a celebration of feminist theology, and it included discussion about female images of God, feminist liturgical reform, female sexuality, and lesbianism. Several times during the conference, the assembled women and men lifted prayers to Sophia—a figure drawn from the Christian wisdom tradition who some feminist theologians had suggested might be a female element of God. For participants, these discussions and prayers were not unexpected. But for outside observers, including the press, the conference set off a backlash. Quickly, the invocations of Sophia were construed as Goddess worship, the discussion of female sexuality was seen as a promotion of lesbianism, and a “milk and honey” ritual lambasted as a perverse replacement for Holy Communion. Heresy, people cried.²⁸ Forty daily newspapers and several national television and radio programs covered the event, and *Christian Century* deemed the controversy one of the most important Christian news stories of 1994.²⁹

²⁵Kate Bowler, *The Preacher's Wife: The Precarious Power of Evangelical Women Celebrities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 43. Bowler lists these as: Disciples of Christ (Sharon Watkins, 2005), United Methodist (Janice Huie, 2005), Evangelical Lutheran (Elizabeth Eaton, 2013), American Baptist (Susan Gillies, 2015), Episcopal Church (Katherine Jefferts Schori), Presbyterian Church in the USA (Denise Anderson and Jan Edmiston, 2016).

²⁶“Report on Re-Imagining Conference,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 11, no. 1 (Spr 1995): 137–38.

²⁷Lilian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (New York, 2018), 258.

²⁸Lynn Schofield Clark and Stewart M. Hoover, “Controversy and Cultural Symbolism: Press Relations and the Formation of Public Discourse in the Case of the RE-Imagining Event” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 14 (1997): 312–313.

²⁹Clark and Hoover, “Controversy and Cultural Symbolism,” 310.

Several women ministers were targeted by Re-Imagining's critics. Mary Ann Lundy, a Presbyterian elder, former campus minister, and director of the Women's Ministry Unit of PCUSA during the planning of the conference, lost her job in the fallout. The Women's Ministry Unit itself disbanded in her wake.³⁰ Eunice Poethig, a minister and director of the Congregational Ministries Division of PCUSA, was also released from her position after her participation in Re-Imagining.³¹ Other women ministers were important organizers for the event.³² Yet, despite the central role of ordained women at the event, the backlash to Re-Imagining was more stifling on feminist reforms in liturgical language than it was to women's ministry *per se*.³³ For several decades before Re-Imagining, clergywomen had stood in as the central feminist symbol of the church. With Re-Imagining, some women were proposing another front: liturgical language and images of the divine. Re-Imagining, one participant remembered, was an effort at the "democratization of feminist theology"—an attempt to bring it to the wider church.³⁴ The response to Re-Imagining suggested that this democratization was not going to go over easily.³⁵ In the wake of Re-Imagining, women's ordination emerged as the alternative—a safe, traditional symbol for the mainline's social values about women.

Even the most conservative members of the mainline, those whom the Re-Imagining conference greatly disturbed, declined to cite women's ordination as a symptom of the Re-Imagining malaise. As R. Marie Griffith has argued, the Re-Imagining controversy had the unexpected result of alienating mainline

³⁰Bill Broadway, "After 'Re-Imagining' God, the Reality of Job Loss," *Washington Post*, July 2, 1994.

³¹"Eunice Poethig, A Champion for Women," Presbyterian Historical Society, March 1, 2019, <https://www.history.pcusa.org/blog/2019/03/eunice-poethig-champion-women>.

³²Such as Rev. Mary Kay Suater (UCC), Rev. Sally Hill (PCUSA). Bill Broadway, "'Re-Imagining' Foments Uproar Among Presbyterians," *Washington Post*, June 4, 1994.

³³Rebecca Todd Peters, a professor of Christian Ethics at Elon University, told journalist Sarah Stankorb that the backlash to Re-Imagining had stunted the push for inclusive liturgical language of the 1990s. Sarah Stankorb, "When A Radically Progressive Christian Feminist Movement was Sabotaged," *Vice*, April 25, 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en-us/article/597baa/christian-feminism-theology-re-imagining-conference>.

³⁴Rebecca Todd Peters, as quoted in Stankorb, "Radically Progressive Christian Feminist Movement".

³⁵As Douglas E. Cowan has noted, "A bedrock principle of conservative reform and renewal movements is that the traditionally masculine language for God has been (and ought to be) interpreted as the only authentically biblical (and by extension liturgical) language." Douglas E. Cowan, *The Remnant Spirit: Conservative Reform in Mainline Protestantism* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003), 92.

women's groups from feminist theology and the feminist spirituality movement.³⁶ But it also complicated relations between the moderates and the conservatives—mainline women's groups and evangelical women within mainline denominations. In the 1990s, conservative renewal and orthodoxy movements in the mainline developed women's branches, such as Voices of Orthodox Women (PCUSA), the Renew Network (UMC), and the Ecumenical Coalition on Women and Society (a project of the Institute for Religion and Democracy, a conservative mainline thinktank in Washington, D.C.).³⁷ These groups led the charge against Re-Imagining. The Renew Network, an organization of evangelical Methodist women, worked to “expose the radical political agenda” of the national United Methodist Women organization and offer Methodist women alternative channels for service. In 1993, Renew raised early alarm bells about the plan for the Re-Imagining conference, and sent conservative women to document and report on the event, including Susan Cyre, who broke the story with the *Presbyterian Layman*.³⁸ Voices of Orthodox Women sent their president, Sylvia Dooling, to Re-Imagining. Dooling was so disturbed by what she experienced that she found she could not write about the event publicly, but described it in a personal letter as “evil.”³⁹

The issue conservative mainline women took with Re-Imagining was, as one wrote, that Re-Imagining went “well beyond commonplace themes of women's equality.”⁴⁰ Conservative women saw Re-Imagining as an effort to invent a “new religion with a new god,” and argued that radical feminism was incompatible with biblical Christianity.⁴¹ Notably *not* included in these criticisms, however, were any arguments about the invalidity of women's ministry. VOW and Renew were not opposed to women in ordained ministry and actively worked with ordained women.⁴² Dooling herself, the president of VOW,

³⁶R. Marie Griffith, “The Generous Side of Christian Faith,” in *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, ed. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley Press, 2002), 87.

³⁷Cowan, *Remnant Spirit*, 9-10, 15.

³⁸“Our History,” Renew Network, 2019, <http://renewnetwork.org/about-renew/history/>.

³⁹Sylvia Dooling, “The Emotional Impact of Re-Imagining,” Voices of Orthodox Women, Feb 4, 1999, <http://web.archive.org/web/19990224165840/http://www.vow.org/ri.html>.

⁴⁰Broadway, “‘Re-Imagining’ Foments Uproar.”

⁴¹Susan Cyre, “PCUSA funds effort to re-create god,” *Presbyterian Layman* 27, no. 1 (Jan-Feb 1994).

⁴²Today, two of the three principle directors of RENEW are ordained women. “Who We Are: Team RENEW”, Renew Network, 2019 <http://renewnetwork.org/about-renew/who-we-are/>.

was a ruling elder in PCUSA. Some PCUSA clergywomen likewise felt moved to form an independent network in order to express their disagreement with the ideas of Re-Imagining.⁴³ Women's ministry, apparently, was not to these women an element of radical feminism, but fell instead under the banner of "commonplace" women's equality. After Re-Imagining, what mainline women of all stripes could agree upon was the right of women to serve in ordained, ministerial capacities—even as they disagreed about feminism, affirmative action for women in the church, liturgical language, and images of God.⁴⁴ As one Presbyterian clergywoman recently told me, one used to be able to assume women ministers had liberal theological postures. This is no longer the case.⁴⁵

Much of the fervor over women's ordination has been displaced into new denominational battles over gay clergy and gay marriage. Since the 1990s, conservative renewal groups in the mainline, including women's groups such as VOW and Renew, have been driven primarily by their sensitivity to LBGTQ+ issues, especially the ordination of openly gay men and women. In the schisms over gay ministers that peppered the mainline in the 2000s, conservative schismatics generally continued the practice of women's ordination, at least nominally. The Anglican Church in North America, which left the Episcopal Church in 2003 over the issue of gay clergy, did not prohibit women's ordination to the priesthood in their new denomination, though they did forbid women from the bishopric. The Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ and the North American Lutheran Church, which left the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 2001 and 2010 respectively, also continued ordaining women. ECO: Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians was formed in 2012, becoming a denominational option for conservative Presbyterians who did not want to ordain gay clergy but who did want to continue the practice of ordaining women.

⁴³Lois Boyd and R Douglas Brackenridge, *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983), 63.

⁴⁴"Women of Renewal: A Statement" *First Things*, Feb 1998. This statement, first released by the Ecumenical Coalition of Women and Society was initially circulated in 1997. The statement, signed by many evangelical-mainline women, including several ordained ministers, chastised "the movement to 're-imagine' two thousand years of Christian faith." It affirmed, however, the equality of women and men, and women's responsibilities to "embrace our calling" in service to the church.

⁴⁵Patricia Budd Kepler, interview with author, Feb 15, 2019.

For the mainline, the time of controversy for women's ordination—at least, for the ordination of heterosexual, cis-gendered women—has mostly passed. Through the twentieth century, women's ordination rose slowly in the mainline from anomalous to intrinsic. As the ministerial reformation passed through major transitions of the mainline in the twentieth century—ministerial professionalism, alternative ministerial tracks, the end of missions and the rise of churchwomen's organizations, liturgical renewal—reformers leveraged and worked within these changes. Arguably, women's ordination became not just an important symbol for the mainline's self-identity but constitutive of it. Support for women's ordination in the twenty-first century cuts through other divisions within the mainline faithful. Women's ordination has about as much consensus today in the mainline (93%) as belief in God (91%). It has far more consensus than belief in heaven (80%) or that scripture is the word of God (66%).⁴⁶ Given that the definition of the “mainline” has been a topic of consideration for scholars of late, it is worth asking whether support for women's ordination may deserve addition to our definition. Some conservative commentators have noted the confessional centrality of women's ordination with wariness, if not alarm. “You may have a case of mainline myopia” – one conservative United Methodist commentator wrote recently—“if you would find it more shocking, unacceptable, and wrong if a leader of your denomination declared he did not support women's ordination than if he refused unambiguously to affirm the historic, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ Women's ordination, he implies (in an argument highly reminiscent of the Kenyon case) is currently more central to the mainline outlook than elements of the Nicene Creed. Yet the moderate and liberal ends of the mainline have a relatively unflustered response to these concerns. Women's equality before God and women's ability to participate in God's ministry are simply *as* theological, *as* central to the modern mainline's understanding of what it means to be Christian as is the

⁴⁶Kopacz, “Women's Ordination,” “Mainline Protestants,” Pew Religious Landscape Survey, 2014, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/mainline-protestant/#beliefs-and-practices>. The percentage for “belief in God” are those that responded they were absolutely or fairly certain of God's existence. The survey question on heaven had no alternatives besides ‘yes’ and ‘no’. The inspiration of scripture percentage are those that answered that scripture was the “word of God”, despite differing perspectives on interpretation.

⁴⁷John Lomperis, “You Might Have a Case of Mainline Myopia If...,” The Institute on Religion & Democracy, Jan 8, 2018, <https://juicyecumenism.com/2018/01/08/might-case-mainline-myopia/>.

bodily resurrection of Christ. They point to Galatians 3:28. Women's ministry, they argue, is merely the culmination of a long-held dream that in Christ—and therefore in Christian community—there is no male and female.

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