

A Calling to Fulfill: Women in 19th Century American Methodism
Janie S. Noble

In Luke's account of the resurrection, it is women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women who take the message of the empty tomb to the apostles (24:10).¹ The Old and New Testaments provide other witnesses to women's involvement in a variety of ministries; the roles for women in the church through time have been equally as varied. Regardless of the official position of the church regarding their roles, women have remained integral to continuation of our faith. Historical restrictions on the involvement of women have been justified both scripturally and theologically; arguments supporting their involvement find the same bases. Even women who stand out in history often did not challenge the practices of their times that confined women to home, family, or the convent. For example, Hildegard of Bingen is considered a model of piety and while she demonstrated courage in her refusal to bend to the demands of clergy, she was not an advocate of change or of elevation of women's authority in the church. Patristic attitudes have deep roots in the Judeo-Christian traditions and continue to affect contemporary avenues of ministry available to women. Barriers for women in America began falling in the nineteenth century as women moved to increasingly visible activities outside the home. However, women's ascent into leadership roles in the church that matched the roles of men was much slower than in secular areas. Following an overview of the history of Methodism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, leadership roles for women in nineteenth century American

¹ All references from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

Methodism will be described, including women as Mothers in Israel, preachers' wives, evangelists, deaconesses, and preachers.²

Historical Overview

The idea of female preaching was highly controversial during the eighteenth century, yet John Wesley takes the major step of cautiously validating a women's call to preach when he tells Sarah Crosby, "Even in public...intermix short exhortations with prayer. But keep as far from what is called preaching as you can."³ Wesley warns Crosby never to preach from a text, to take short breaks regularly, and to call these times prayer meetings. It is apparent that Wesley did not want Crosby or her listeners to consider her a preacher. Twelve months later, Wesley did give permission for a woman to preach, when he authorized Mary Bosanquet Fletcher to preach due to her "extraordinary call."⁴ Overstating the influence of his mother, Susanna on Wesley's opinion of women and religion would be all but impossible. Paul Chilcote goes so far as to describe her as the "precursor of the early Methodist women preachers."⁵ One of the best-known stories about Susanna tells of the time when Samuel was away from the Epworth parish for an extended time and she held evening prayer meetings for the families. Soon, attendance was so great that a local curate complained to Samuel. When Samuel attempted to have her stop her work, she suggested that the guilt would be on him for the souls of the people. Chilcote notes that Samuel "wisely backed off."⁶ Susanna's

² Role descriptions come from Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism 1760 – 1939*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).

³ "Letter of John Wesley to Sarah Crosby, 18 March 1769," on *Mr. Wesley's Preachers* (9 June 2003) <http://rylibweb.man.ac.uk/data1/dg/methodist/crosby.html>

⁴ "Letter of John Wesley to Mary Bosanquet, June 13, 1771," on *John Wesley Exhibition* (5 July 2003) <http://rylibweb.man.ac.uk/data1/dg/methodist/jw8.html>

⁵ Paul W. Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ: The Legacy of Women Preachers in Early Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

legacy to later women in the Methodist movement through her influence on her son is important to remember. They filled many roles, especially as class leaders, exhorters, preachers, school leaders, and visitors to the sick and imprisoned. Although Wesley may appear to have been too conservative and cautious, he was attacked both from within the Methodist movement and from outside it for his permissive attitude toward women.

As the Methodist movement spread to the colonies in America, two laypersons are given credit for its beginnings, one a woman, Barbara Heck.⁷ In 1766, Robert Strawbridge began Methodist societies in Maryland; at the same time Heck was active in starting societies in New York. Keller calls Heck the “Mother of American Methodism” and the “architect of the earliest extant Methodist society in North America, what is now the John Street United Methodist Church....”⁸ Men such as Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke are names most often associated with the early spread of Methodism in the colonies; however, evidence suggests that women were quietly doing their part to support the growing movement. In Georgia, two nameless women are said to have met at some point in the woods between their homes to pray and praise. One day, in the Georgia wilderness, a hunter overheard their religious exercises and began gathering his neighbors to listen to them, resulting in many conversions.⁹ Rev. Coles relates the story of Mrs. Leah Ivons, who before the Revolutionary War, supported itinerant preachers by carding and spinning wool to make suits for them; he refers to her as a “modern Dorcas.”¹⁰ These women and others like them, fill the memoirs of early Methodist preachers. It was these

⁷ Rosemary S. Keller, “Women in Ministry: The Journey of Women in the United Methodist Tradition,” in *Freedom Under Grace*, ed. John C. English (Baldwin, KS: Baker University, 1985), 66.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹ George Coles, *Heroines of Methodism* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 320 – 324.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 327.

praying women that helped hold together the fledgling societies in early American Methodism.

Mothers of Israel

As the culture changed in the nineteenth century, so did the sphere of influence for women. Historians note that as American society moved from a subsistence economy, men and women no longer worked side-by-side in self-sufficient households. Men took wage-earning jobs outside the home, while women were expected to remain in the home, raising children and taking care of the household.¹¹ Throughout the century, women struggled with how they could be faithful to the demand placed on them by God and the demands placed on them by societal conventions. It appears that as the Methodist movement became increasingly middle class, women as public preachers were less welcomed and encouraged than they had been in previous years, further limiting their leadership roles to less obvious, less public arenas. In his address, “What Methodism Owes to Women” at the Centennial meeting of the General Conference in 1884, James M. Buckley notes, “women are the supporters of religion.” He continues to describe the frail nature of women, the ease with which they are affected emotionally, and their natural inclinations to be wives and mothers. For these reasons, he concludes, it is “indisputable fact that in all ages and parts of the world women are the supporters of religion.”¹² Tellingly, in his review of the contributions of women to Methodism, Buckley refers to Susanna Wesley and Sarah Crosby rather than naming any American women.

¹¹ Catherine A. Brekus, “Female Evangelism in the Early Methodist Movement,” in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 139.

¹² James M. Buckley, *What Methodism Owes to Women* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1885), Text-fiche.

“Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). Schmidt adopts the term Mothers in Israel to describe roles filled by women in nineteenth century American Methodism, a time during which women were discouraged from being publicly visible.¹³ During this time, women were recognized for being pious and holy, responsible in large part for the faith of husband and children. In the category, Mothers in Israel, Schmidt includes the person-to-person evangelizing done by many women. Methodist tradition is replete with stories of women who became Methodists without their husbands, then evangelized them – bringing husband, children, parents, and other family members into Methodism. Often, their homes became major centers for Methodist gatherings and early worship centers. An example is Eleanor Dorsey, whose home was not only a place for itinerant preachers to stay, but was also the site for three sessions of the Genesee Annual Conference.¹⁴ Often, these Mothers in Israel were not only evangelists to their families and friends and hosts to itinerant preachers; they were class leaders as well. Schmidt notes that in organizing and leading class meetings, these women often preceded the circuit riders in establishing Methodism in an area. She cites Mary Wells, Ruth Hall, and a Mrs. Risley as organizers of the first class in all of New England, Mrs. Peckett in Vermont, and Sarah Roszel in Virginia.¹⁵ Furnishing homes away from home for itinerant preachers meant more to these women than just providing food and lodging; they were motherly figures, often exhorting and encouraging them in their ministry. Elizabeth Henry Russell’s home in the Holston River valley included a large room and portable pulpit, becoming a place where people

¹³ Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism 1760 - 1939* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 35

¹⁴ Abel Stevens. *The Women of Methodism* (New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1869. reprinted: New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), 249.

¹⁵ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 60.

gathered for worship. In addition to providing the itinerant preachers a place to stay and hold worship, Russell “prayed with them and encouraged them, often outlining courses of religious reading for them.”¹⁶ As the Methodist movement evolved in later years into a more institutionalized church, these informal leadership roles were less available to women. Itinerant circuit riders dismounted, becoming preachers located in one place and class meetings died out, leaving those avenues of influence no longer open to women in the nineteenth century.

Women figured prominently in praying, testifying, and exhorting in prayer meetings, class meetings, and love feasts in the early days of Methodism in America. However, these were acceptable, more private means than public preaching would have been. Therefore, women who felt called to serve often chose this path, which Lobody calls “a ministry of public domesticity.”¹⁷ Lobody describes Garrettson’s ministry as one in which she presided over worship services, taught Bible and theology, and conducted prayer groups; no less than a man, she was a preacher and teacher. Catherine Livingston Garrettson was born into a wealthy, aristocratic Calvinist family who owned slaves. She describes her conversion at which she was made “unspeakably happy...all things were become new.”¹⁸ She later married Freeborn Garrettson, a Methodist preacher and began a ministry that was acceptable to the world at the time. She refers to the “woman’s sphere” in a letter to a friend in which she describes her ministry once married.¹⁹

¹⁶ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 62.

¹⁷ Diane H. Lobody, “A Wren Just Bursting Its Shell,” in *Spirituality & Social Responsibility*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 19.

¹⁸ Catherine Livingston Garrettson, “Catherine Livingston Narrates her Conversion in Exemplary Methodist Style,” in *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook*, v. II, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000).

¹⁹ Catherine Livingston Garrettson, “Letter to Catherine Rutson,” in *Spirituality & Social Responsibility*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 35.

Elizabeth Lyon Roe writes of her experiences as a laywoman in starting and shaping new churches on the American frontier.²⁰ She was taken to the Methodist Episcopal Church by her mother, where she was baptized by Peter Cartwright; she also attended class meetings with her mother from a young age. She and her husband, John Roe, a class leader, moved throughout several locations in Illinois where they organized class meetings as a way of helping the circuit preachers. Later, they moved to Nebraska and continued their organizing work there.

Itinerant Preachers' Wives

In her study of women in American Methodism, Schmidt notes that it was during the 1830s to the 1860s that a new area of religious service for women emerged, that of itinerant preacher's wife.²¹ According to Schmidt, marriage to a frontier itinerant preacher was a way to do evangelical work and serve God in useful ways. George Ashley was one such circuit rider who writes about itinerant ministry in Louisiana and Missouri.²² In his firsthand account of 56 years of ministry, he describes his wife's ordeals of dealing with bears, snakes, swamps, and constant moves. She seems to have served by his side willingly and faithfully supporting him, often traveling his circuit with him. He describes her as a partner in decision making as well as the keeper of their home and children, often receiving strangers at meals as a means of Christian witness.

So important was the role of minister's wife that advice books began to appear to help women prepare for and assume their duties. One such manual, published in 1851

²⁰ Elizabeth A. Roe, *Recollections of Frontier Life* (Manchester, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, 1980).

²¹ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 114.

²² George T. Ashley, *Reminiscences of a Circuit Rider* (Hollywood: published by the author, 1941).

lists in its table of contents qualifications, duties, trials, and rewards.²³ Eaton says she should be a woman of common sense, be more widely read, have basic Biblical knowledge, and be pious, cheerful, and benevolent. Above all, Eaton says she must “love the itinerancy.”²⁴ Further, Eaton reminds women that their primary duties are to pray for and encourage their husbands and to form the character of her children, apparently to squelch any evangelical ambitions of the women.

Mary Orne (Mrs. Thomas) Tucker was the wife of an itinerant Methodist preacher; they ministered together for more than fifty years in New England. In her writings, she noted that when she first married Rev. Tucker, she thought a great deal about the requirements for being an itinerant preacher’s wife, noting that she wished she knew more about the Bible and felt more comfortable talking with people about their religion.²⁵ She claimed that she “could hardly open my mouth in class, much less in the prayer-meeting.” She said she thought that she was expected to do even more as a preacher’s wife lessened her self-confidence and she “strove assiduously to do my duty according to my knowledge.”²⁶ Tucker describes how she came to ride her husband’s circuit with him, saying that friends around the circuit wanted her to visit and that she wanted to go with her husband rather than stay home alone. With only one horse, she joined her husband on his circuit – and on his horse, both riding on the same animal. In her papers, Tucker writes of uncomfortable lodgings, wilderness assignments, dangerous travel, and many times when there was no money to pay the preacher. She writes

²³ H.M. Eaton, *The Itinerant’s Wife: Qualifications, Duties, Trials, and Rewards* (New York: Lane Society, 1851, reprinted in *The Nineteenth Century American Methodist Itinerant Preacher’s Wife*, New York: Garland, 1987).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁵ Mary Orne Tucker, *Itinerant Preaching in the Early Days of Methodism: By a Pioneer Preacher’s Wife* (Boston: B.B. Russell, 1872, reprinted in *The Nineteenth Century American Methodist Itinerant Preacher’s Wife*, New York: Garland, 1987).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

poignantly of incessant partings and having to move to new places, noting that her years of experience had not totally reconciled her to her itinerant life. Reflecting on her life, she said that she determined early on that if she could not work in public ministry like her husband, then she would “devote all my energies to smooth his rough paths, and strengthen his hands for the great work of saving immortal souls.”²⁷ Throughout her papers, Tucker mentions her work in teaching Sunday school classes, in the Female Benevolence Society, and in forming societies. She exemplified the vocation and true calling of the itinerant preacher’s wife.

Other women wore the mantle of support for their itinerant preacher-husbands. Anna Maria Pittman began religious service as a young missionary to the Flathead Indians in Oregon. Once there, she met Reverend Jason Lee and they soon married. Soon after their wedding, while she was expecting their first child, Reverend Lee returned to request additional missionaries from the Methodist Mission Board. While he was gone, both mother and child died. Schmidt says that although Pittman received her own call as a missionary, she put her needs secondary to his to become his helpmate among the Flathead Indians.²⁸

William Taylor and his new bride, Anne Kimberlin Taylor were sent by Bishop Beverly Waugh to California in 1849. When her husband asked her if she was willing to go, Anne writes that she “went upstairs and kneeled down and said...I don’t want to go...but if it is Thy will...give me the desire. In a second or two he filled and thrilled my

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁸ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 122.

whole being with a desire to go to California.”²⁹ When Taylor preached, his wife would accompany him, singing hymns and helping to gather the crowds.

Holiness Evangelists

In the nineteenth century, Methodism gave rise the Holiness Movement, which in turn gave rise to many female evangelists. It was not a common occurrence for women to speak publicly for religious purposes, with most Protestant denominations prohibiting it. In this regard, female evangelists in the Methodist Holiness movement were unique.³⁰ Given the stance of Methodists regarding ordination of women, it may seem unusual that they encouraged female evangelists; however, the Holiness Movement struck at the very heart of Methodism, “to reform the Continent, and to spread scriptural Holiness.”³¹ Due to a scarcity of ordained ministers and the fast growing nature of the Holiness Movement, both women and laity were allowed to participate as informal evangelists. Two female evangelists are noteworthy for their ministries during this time, Phoebe Palmer, a wealthy white woman, and Amanda Smith, a poor African-American woman.

In 1840, Phoebe Palmer began hosting “Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Holiness” in her home in New York City. Palmer was the daughter of devout members of the Methodist Episcopal Church who felt she had been a Christian since a young age; however, she agonized over not being able to point to a particular time when she had a conversion experience.³² The death of two of children, one in a nursery fire, caused Palmer to determine that she would commit the time she would have spent caring for her child to saving souls. Her daughter’s death also prompted her to continue her search for a

²⁹ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 123.

³⁰ Catherine A. Brekus, “Female Evangelism...” 145.

³¹ *Ibid.* 146.

³² Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 133.

deeper religious experience. She taught a Young Ladies' Bible class in the Allen Street Church and participated in the Tuesday Meetings, asking members of both groups to pray for her to receive full salvation. She received her assurance of salvation and surrendered her life and everything in it to God.³³ Schmidt says that it seems that from that day on, Palmer feared she would lose her spiritual gift if she failed to offer her testimony publicly. The Tuesday Meetings included men and women, clergy and lay. According to Schmidt, the theology that men and women were equal as recipients of the Holy Spirit gave women opportunities for leadership that were not otherwise available. Palmer was a prodigious author, publishing several books on the subject of Holiness. In *The Way of Holiness*, she gives the account of her sanctification experience and provides the framework for the theology of the holiness movement.³⁴ Palmer answers her own question "Is there a shorter way?" with the requirements for sanctification. She wrote that entire sanctification (holiness) could be attained by anyone ready to meet the requirements of scripture: consecrating everything to God and believing in God's promises. Further, she emphasized that public witness was essential in retaining holiness, which became a characteristic of the movement. Palmer's influence continued through her work as a traveling holiness evangelist, a career that expanded her ministry from New York City, throughout the nation, and even overseas. Schmidt notes that in her public ministry, Palmer heard from other women about not being allowed to speak of their experiences in public, which led her to write *Promise of the Father* (1859), a defense of

³³ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 135.

³⁴ Phoebe Palmer, *The Devotional Writings of Phoebe Palmer* (New York: Palmer & Hughes, 1867, reprinted: New York: Garland Publishing, 1985).

women's right to preach based on the Pentecost experience in which both men and women received the gift of the Spirit.³⁵

The circumstances of Amanda Smith's sanctification experience and public ministry are much different than Palmer's. Amanda Smith, an African-American ex-slave and washerwoman traveled four continents telling her story and preaching sanctification and holiness. In her autobiography, Smith talks of the influence of her grandmother from whom she learned to pray. In fact, she says she believes it was her grandmother's prayers that led her mother's owner to grant them freedom.³⁶ Smith was a camp meeting preacher and teacher, revivalist, vocalist, and temperance worker. In her story about seeking her sanctification, it is apparent that Smith felt the cosmic struggle between good and evil, between the Devil and God to be real. She describes a Sunday morning trip to church, "I felt a Satanic influence walking by my side and whispering, 'now, you know....'"³⁷ In her autobiography, Smith gives a description of her sanctification experience in 1868 at a worship service in which she was the only non-white person. She relates that when she received sanctification, she wanted to shout, yet was afraid to because the white people might eject her. Her stories are indicative of her ministry, in which she constantly preached warnings against the Devil and his very real presence in the lives of her listeners. Additionally, she mentions attending meetings of the Tuesday Meetings for the Promotion of Social Holiness. Smith's influence was not

³⁵ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 142.

³⁶ Nancy A. Hardesty and Adrienne Israel, "A Downright, Outright Christian," in *Spirituality & Social Responsibility*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 65.

³⁷ Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord's Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith* (1893) at http://digilib.nypl.org:80/dynaweb/digs/wwm97264@Generic_BookView

merely among African-Americans; in camp meetings and revivals, she preached to white audiences as well.³⁸

Deaconesses

The 1888 General Conference established the office of deaconess to “minister to the poor, visit the sick, pray with the dying, care for the orphans, seek the wandering, comfort the sorrowing, save the sinning, and, relinquishing wholly all other pursuits, devote themselves, in a general way, to such forms of Christian labor as may be suited to their abilities.”³⁹ However, the movement itself and the idea of training women for specialized, public religious service began much earlier. Lucy Rider Meyer, widowed at an early age, served as field secretary of the Illinois State Sunday School Association, during which time she recognized the need for a school to train young women for “leadership in Christian work.”⁴⁰ Largely through donations from Methodist women, Meyer opened the Chicago Training School for City, Home, and Foreign Missions (CTS) in 1885. The young women studied Bible, “hygiene, citizenship, social and family relationships, everything that could help or hinder in the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.”⁴¹ Two of the students, Isabelle Reeves (later became the first licensed deaconess) and Mary Hilton formed the nucleus of what became the first home for deaconesses. While the role of deaconess appears to have been a progressive step for women in Methodism, critics have suggested that it was a move to detract women from their goal of attaining equal rights in the church. To some it appeared that the church was

³⁸ Nancy A. Hardesty and Adrienne Israel, “A Downright, Outright Christian,” in *Spirituality & Social Responsibility*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 65.

³⁹ “Deaconess Conference Sets Rules for Deaconess Homes,” in *The Methodist Experience in America*, ed. Russell Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 432-433.

⁴⁰ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 198.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 199.

defining a separate sphere of work that was appropriate for women and did not involve equality with men in the church.⁴² Lucy Rider is said to have considered the deaconess as the “Mother of the Church” a description and role that were in keeping with the natural instincts of women. Nursing was later added to the scope of practice of deaconesses, leading to two tracks, one a nurse deaconess and the other a missionary deaconess. ¶1313 -- ¶1316 in the 2000 *Book of Discipline* describes the contemporary office of deaconess, as ones who are consecrated by the bishops. The description of the office differs in its wording, yet the spirit of service to those who are suffering remains at the core of the order.

Preachers

As noted previously, early in the Methodist movement in England, John Wesley recognized that some women might experience an extraordinary call to preach, and although he encouraged them to refrain from preaching, there are instances in which he allowed them to do so. The same situation existed in American Methodism in which women were allowed to preach in some situations without official sanction and recognition by the church. For example, women evangelists preached publicly and effectively. However, for the most part, Methodist women were encouraged to remain quiet in public and to limit their participation and leadership to more private, social situations. Regardless of official proscriptions on female preachers by the church, it appears that God place no such limitations on them as several women felt and responded to a call to preach.

Fanny Butterfield Newell describes her call to preach, in 1809, as part of a dream. She says she dreamed of Reverend Martin, then deceased, the man under whose

⁴² *Ibid.*, 201.

preaching she was converted. In her dream, a woman comes with a message from Martin that she is to “take his gown and wear it.”⁴³ Later, Fanny records that she feels others have been entrusted to her care, that it is her duty to tell them of their danger and “warn them to flee from the wrath to come.”⁴⁴ Yet, she notes that she feels that she is weak and lacks the ability to speak publicly; she wrote that she wished she could speak as well awake as she did in her dreams. However, her memoirs testify that she continued to preach and to speak throughout her life.

Twice, beginning in 1811, African-American woman Jarena Lee sought a license to preach from Reverend Richard Allen bishop of the AME Church in Philadelphia. Writing of her call to preach the gospel, Jarena says she seemed to hear a voice saying, “Go preach the Gospel!” She responded that no one would believe her and the voice repeated the exhortation.⁴⁵ Lee goes on to describe, “Immediately I went into a secret place, and called upon the Lord to know if he had called me to preach...appeared to my view the form and figure of a pulpit, with a Bible lying thereon, the back of which was presented to me plainly as if it had been a literal fact.”⁴⁶ She recalls later going to see Reverend Richard Allen and telling him that she believed it her duty to preach. Allen told her that she should consider exhortation since the Discipline of the church did not allow for women preachers. Tellingly, Lee writes, “O how careful ought we to be, lest through our by-laws of church government and discipline, we bring into disrepute even the word of life.”⁴⁷ Then, Lee reminds that Christ died for both men and women and that those who would not allow women to preach would seem to deny half the Savior. The

⁴³ Fanny Newell, *Memoirs of Fanny Newell* (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam, 1833), 64.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁵ Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1836) Text-fiche.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

deep anxieties and concerns about her failure to be obedient to her calling are reflected throughout Lee's story, including another request to Allen, which he denied. Finally, she describes being in a church service in which the preacher seemed to lose his spirit; when "in the same instant I sprang, as by altogether supernatural impulse, to my feet, when I was aided from above to give an exhortation...."⁴⁸ Bishop Allen was present at that service and announced that although he had refused to allow Lee to preach for eight years, he knew now that she was called to preach and ought to do so. Lee reports traveling throughout the North and South where she preached to both white and "colored" congregations.

In 1869, Maggie Newton Van Cott received a license to preach in the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴⁹ Like others before, her call came in the form of a dream. In her dream, she was told that she must preach, she went to the pulpit and preached to a "dear old gentleman" and was amazed to find out it was John Wesley.⁵⁰ Initially, she taught Sunday school classes and did evangelistic work in the Five Points area of New York City. She reports that after attending an ordination service, she cried "O God, why could I not have been a man, that I could be ordained for this great work of preaching the blessed gospel of my dear redeemer?"⁵¹ She engaged in full time evangelist work, then was granted an exhorters license until, in 1869, she was granted a license to preach in New York. The 1869 session of the New York Conference referred the licensing of women to committee and did not revoke Van Cott's license. In 1870, she preached in Springfield, MA, site of the New England Conference and several ministers were in the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Maggie Newton Van Cott, *The Harvest and the Reaper: Reminiscences of revival Work of Mrs. Maggie N. Van Cott* (New York: N. Tibbals, 1876), Text-fiche.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

audience. The reaction was so favorable that it was rumored that action would be taken to admit Van Cott as a probationer; however, no action was taken. Van Cott continued to preach throughout New England, in New Orleans, and in California without ever gaining recognition by an annual conference.

In 1880, the lives of two women intersected as they sought ordination from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Anna Howard Shaw, a graduate of Boston University School of Theology had been licensed as a local preacher since 1873.⁵² In 1880, she applied to the New England Conference of the MEC for ordination and was refused. She left the MEC, applied to the Methodist Protestant Church and was ordained by that denomination later in 1880. When Bishop Andrews refused to consider the names of two women (one being Shaw) to the Conference for ordination, Shaw said, “I will get out. I am called to preach the gospel; and if I cannot preach it in my own Church, I will certainly preach it in some other Church.”⁵³

Anna Oliver is the second woman who sought ordination in the New England Conference in 1880 and was refused. Oliver, also a graduate of Boston University School of Theology, is credited with being the first woman in America to receive a B.D. degree.⁵⁴ She too had been granted a license to preach and had demonstrated great success at her first pastorate in Passaic, New Jersey, where for a time Amanda Smith, the African-American female evangelist was her assistant.⁵⁵ In 1880, Oliver knew that her (and Shaw’s) application for ordination from the New England Conference would be a test case. In her petition, she writes, “it presses me also, and the Church and myself must

⁵² Anna Howard Shaw, *Women in the Ministry* (Meadville, PA: T.L. Flood, 1898). Text-fiche.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient*, 188.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

decide something. I am so thoroughly convinced that the Lord has laid commands upon me in this direction, that it becomes with me really a question of my own soul's salvation."⁵⁶ In her speech to the conference, she notes that when she is called to preach, the Lord always calls people to hear and wishes that she could be convinced that she is mistaken in her call. She recounts her sacrifices, including giving up her family, to do what she believes to be God's will. In her plea to the conference, she asks, "Tell me, what would you wish the Church to do toward you were you in my place? Please only apply the Golden Rule and vote in Conference accordingly."⁵⁷ In the end, the Bishop refused to present either Oliver's or Shaw's names for ordination. They were told bluntly that there was no place for them in the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Oliver continued to pastor her church and work with the Women's Christian Temperance Union throughout her life.

Hundreds more women could be included in this paper; women who believed they, too, were called by God to serve – many of them are nameless and their stories untold. Others are noted for their work in other spheres, such as Francis Willard and her work in the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the suffrage movement. Whether they were Mothers in Israel, preachers' wives, evangelists, deaconesses, or preachers, what unites all of these women is their call – their unfailing belief that they were called to serve by God. Despite their circumstances, they strove to fulfill the calling they were denied for a simple reason: that they were women.

⁵⁶ Anna Oliver, *Test Case on the Ordination of Women* (New York: W.N .Jennings, 1880), Text-fiche.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

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