

5-1-1995

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Recommended Citation

Stairs, M. Jean (1995) "Realities Seen and Unseen: A Perspective on the Canadian Context as it Relates to Women and Men in Theological Education," *Consensus*: Vol. 21 : Iss. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol21/iss1/2>

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Realities Seen and Unseen: A Perspective on the Canadian Context as it Relates to Women and Men in Theological Education

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Introduction

I am honoured to be among so many gifted people offering mutual reflection during this consultation on the situation of women and men in theological education. It seems both timely and significant that this consultation prods us to review, reflect and dream at exactly the half-way point in the ecumenical decade for churches to be in solidarity with women, as commissioned by the World Council of Churches in 1988. Where are we now and what emphases and energies are required of us as we approach the next millennium?

I have been asked "to lay out the current Canadian context, ecclesiastical and societal, so that we can situate the question of women and men as it relates to theological education". Should, per chance, the scope of that assignment seem too limited, it was suggested also that I include a sketch of "what I see as creative possibilities given the current situation and current tensions in both church and society". In forty-five minutes or less? Well, I'm a Baptist, with preaching skills still flourishing, so sit back. What we have here merely equals the length of two Baptist sermons rolled into one, minus the altar call!

Seriously, however, it is impossible in this limited time frame to describe fully the current Canadian context, and so I will delve into the task by pulling out a few specific themes that run through the fabric of our contemporary Canadian situation as I see it. Among the many from which to choose, I will address four looming realities in which the church's ministry and mission are taking place. These four realities are 1) the new pluralism, 2) the effects of uncovering sexism, patriarchy

and heterosexism, 3) shifting epistemologies, and 4) new definitions of resources and leadership based on radical changes in the economy. Some facets of each of these realities easily can be seen, while others remain unseen, still lurking in the shadows of hiddenness and in the places of silence. I will try to point out how women and men are affected and suggest some implications for women and men who are preparing to offer leadership within the church and the world as we move toward the twenty-first century.

The Lukan parable of the lamp serves to guide my thinking about the situation for women and men in ministry. It says something to me about the process that informs creative possibilities for ministry:

No one lights a lamp to cover it with a bowl or to put it under a bed. No, it is put on a lamp-stand so that people may see the light when they come in. For nothing is hidden but it will be made clear, nothing secret but it will be made known and brought to light. So take care how you listen... (Luke 8:16-18a).

1) A Shifting Demography: The New Pluralism

Diversity is now part of everyday life for the majority of Canadians. British economist Barbara Ward has called Canada "the world's first international nation".¹ Eighty-two percent (82%) of us live in neighbourhoods with persons of different ethnic or racial backgrounds.² Since Canada is a pluralistic country, we then must ask, "What will be the church's sense of mission?"

Complex questions are being raised about the impact of pluralism on denominational policies, ethnic congregations, multicultural congregations, rural communities, language and cultural differences. How will we enrich one another with such a variety of gifts of spirit and culture? How will we equip women and men to minister in this new environment? Can we move beyond denial, mere tolerance, not-so-generous accommodation, or seeking the lowest common denominator so as not to exclude anyone? The strong presence of several major religions is a significant and inescapable aspect of the new pluralism. In theological education, how will we prepare men and women to minister not merely in the form of bilateral dialogue but in a colloquy of voices?

Canada's pluralistic vision is full of exciting promise but also tension. Educational systems everywhere are discussing how curricula and classroom systems need to change. Such changes include learning how to value different cultural styles of learning, explore the riches of different traditions and manage the varieties of language. Is it possible to be sensitive to differing historical perceptions and to deal with the tensions inherent in ignorance about one another, both as students and faculty?

The implications of these tensions for women and men in theological education are equally complex. Over the last few decades, feminists involved in theological education have explored a struggle for liberation out of the particular experiences of white, male-dominated colleges and schools of theology. We now know that what we learn is shaped by those with whom we learn. Since women have experienced white males to be the dominant culture, symbol-creators and definers, the struggle has been to challenge androcentrism vigorously, create differentiation, to highlight diversity and disabuse ourselves of the notion that humanity is singular. The situation becomes even more complex for women because we encounter significant dissonance in every category within our own sex. For a woman to say she is native Canadian, heterosexual, middle-aged, black, divorced, middle-class, young, lesbian, white, illiterate, mother, educated or poor is to move between established sources of power and real exclusion from power.

By highlighting differences, a crisis of ambiguity is evoked: a state of cognitive dissonance where clergy, laity, educators, learners, women and men find themselves walking a tightrope between seen and unseen realities. We create safe space where plurality can be explored yet we deal with environments that can dissolve all too quickly into adversarial or therapeutic nightmares. We are, as Nelle Morton describes it, sharing an "aha" experience and "hearing one another into speech".³ The significance of focusing on plurality and diversity is that we are challenged to focus both on the contexts for learning and also on who participates in defining the very content itself that guides the learning process. We are questioning the nature of reality itself, calling that which is unseen to the forefront. Our actual vision of reality, then, is significantly altered.

This increasing plurality is sparking several issues beyond, and including, classroom context and content in theological

education. What kind of institutional backing or denominational support systems ought to be in place for clergy, faculty and students who struggle intentionally to heighten ambiguity and to evoke complexity? Sometimes the responses to both women and men who address such issues are blatantly hostile; at other times they are subtle in form. At Queen's, both students and faculty make intentional efforts to address gender issues in the classroom, board room and chapel, albeit still in a form more cautious than radical. I do believe these efforts are more than tokenism, but there is still an element of compartmentalization about it. The College has inclusive language policies for assignments and worship. Works by various women and authors from Latin America, Asia and Africa are included in our course readings and bibliographies. Gender issues and implications for ministry are explicitly identified within pastoral courses and in several others. We have women full-time and/or tenured on faculty and courses in "Feminist Theology" and "Women in Christianity in North America". These expressions are markers of significant progress. So, why is it then, that over the last two years, whenever gender issues "heated up" in the classroom, and, I might add, usually in the classrooms where women were teaching, several of our single women students and one faculty women regularly received harassing telephone calls?

It comes as no surprise to many of us that women clergy and women faculty still can be the recipients of responses that seem to displace us as real victims of oppression with the anxieties of others. It is true that women generally experience affirming and supportive comments. But they also continue to hear tasteless jokes, patronizing comments, or a dismissal of their concerns. Women report that they have been questioned about their capacity to handle their emotions, stress, or objective critical reflection. This was evident in the hasty resurrection of stability issues and family values in the "K.C. 4 P.M." campaign (Kim Campbell for Prime Minister)! When faced with seemingly irrational verbal assaults, such expressions of hostility can be very painful indeed. Sadly, it is a matter of fact that some of our Canadian women on faculty and in parish ministry still are accused publicly of using the pulpit to promote feminist agenda, or of being enraged victims in need of therapy, heretics, witches, or all the above. Sometimes, I am amazed by the amount of power that is attributed

to women. However, as Shelly Finson once put it, “if fear is the basis of hate, such hate gives permission for behaviour we normally would find unacceptable”.⁴

It is an incredible challenge to open up issues of discrimination such as racism, classism or sexism. Yet these issues are seen and unseen in congregational and institutional forms of ministry. Within our various ministries, we are called upon to “uncover that which is hidden” (Luke 8:17), to prophesy, interpret, explore the power of language and theologize about how the Christian tradition addresses discrimination and diversity. This year, one of my students encountered all three “ism’s” (racism, classism, sexism) during his field education experience. He was placed on a rural farm where a three-generation family had hired, sight unseen, a worker from Agricultural Employment Services. The employee who arrived to work and board on the farm was a young woman from Africa. The student quickly had to face his own surprise and biases. So did the family and surrounding rural community as, together, they identified their reactions, explored their attitudes and theologized about the changing nature of the church, rural and global community.

When considering educational content and contexts, staffing considerations become serious matters indeed. Decisions of our denominational leaders, congregational leaders and search committees of parishes and education institutions face significant dilemmas in issuing calls or making appointments. How will we model gender and racial equality through our leadership? Who is included? Who is excluded? Are we prepared to embrace controversy? What terms will be acceptable when luring prospective candidates? Who decides what criteria will be applied when ascertaining qualifications?

These and other questions emerge when creative possibilities are entertained. They are questions that have grown out of feminist and liberation movements and as a direct consequence of the new pluralism—uncovering the reality of diversity in creation.

2) A Shifting Understanding of Sexuality: Uncovering the Effects of Sexism, Patriarchy and Heterosexism

So, what is it like to be a minister, an educator and a feminist in a society where our understanding of sexuality is shifting? What am I going to say and do when I find out one of our

female students has been sexually harassed within the college community, or that sexist graffiti has mysteriously appeared and disappeared on a washroom wall? How do I respond to a next door neighbour who exhibits symptoms of being battered regularly by her frequently absent husband? What do I say to a male congregant who, as a counsellor to the bereaved, feels paralysed by a "politically correct climate" yet persuaded of the importance of human touch in a sterile society? How will church leaders be equipped to deal with preventing, recognizing and dealing with sexual abuse and misconduct? When a male student flippantly but anxiously comments "the classroom is so feminist, I'm beginning to think I have to grow female breasts to survive", how is this handled? What is a healthy way for faculty to discuss the consequences of failing to hold students accountable when they exhibit sexist behaviour?

Not a single day goes by in which I am not challenged to offer women and men an opportunity to examine their faith in the light of the violence, abuse and oppression that it has rendered on so many. Sexuality continues to have a profound impact on all areas of our lives, both in terms of our sexual identities and the ways we manifest our sexuality in our lives. What is happening within society and the church in general also is found in microcosm in the context of theological education. Some of these sexual realities are visible, some remain hidden.

People of conscience are working to eradicate sexism and the dominance of a heterosexual ideology in Canadian society, but change that goes against the whole history of a culture is profoundly difficult and the backlash is virulent. In the last few decades we have uncovered sexism and, thankfully, in some instances, heterosexism, in advertising, entertainment, business, media, religion, industry, law courts and education. Yet sexism remains clearly expressed in sexual harassment, the feminization of poverty, inadequate day care, unequal pay for work of equal value, date rape, sexual abuse and violence against women. Heterosexism remains clearly entrenched in belief systems, attitudes and behaviours. Lesbian and gay identified women and men continue to experience exclusion, whether intentional or unconscious, in matters of basic rights, employment, and educational curriculum.

Recent research documented by the Alban Institute, based on interviews with thirty ordained women, includes descriptions of how women ordained in the mid-seventies "took whatever positions were offered them upon graduation, never took maternity leaves, never cut back to part-time when children were small and never complained... because they felt 'they had to prove themselves'."⁵ Women in ministry tend to work long hours, often are half-salaried or placed in locations undesired and unaccepted by their male colleagues. Women in ministry in the 90s consistently report difficulties in achieving a change in placement, or placement period! Clergy couples also face multiple challenges in negotiating settlements that address individual and family needs. In a qualitative study just completed and undertaken within the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, it was discovered that over half of the women were earning less than \$30,000 per year and there was considerable unevenness with respect to housing and travel allowances and medical and pension benefits. In each instance, slightly less than half of the women were receiving housing allowances and only half were receiving travel allowances. One third of the women did not have any employment benefits, including a lack of medical coverage.⁶ Furthermore, women who are lesbian remain torn between following their call to ministry and choosing alternative expressions of their ministry in order to protect themselves and their loved ones from costly, painful public scrutiny. Some realities of sexism and heterosexism, as they relate to employment conditions for women in ministry, certainly can be seen, others have yet to be uncovered.

Many women in the Canadian church and society are struggling to claim a view of themselves that abolishes the dualism inherent in the dominant definition, that woman is virgin or whore, caretaker of emotion or sultry seductress. Recently I came across an article entitled "Poems for Emerging Persons" in which an attempt is made to raise questions about these gender stereotypes as reflected in western nursery rhymes. One of the suggestions for eliminating the sexist bias was to change the words. For example:

Little Ms. Muffet
 Sat on a tuffet
 Eating her tofu and whey;
 Along came a spider,
 And sat down beside her,
 At which point Ms. Muffet
 stomped it in a display
 of self-reliance.⁷

To break out of a dualistic system by expressing a positive self-image and new awareness of worth is difficult for women. Jean Baker Miller describes the consequences this way:

To the extent that subordinates move toward freer expression and action, they will expose the inequality and throw into question the basis for its existence. And they will make the inherent conflict an open conflict. They will then have to bear the burden and take the risks that go with being defined as 'troublemakers'. Since this role flies in the face of their conditioning, subordinates, especially women, do not come to it with ease.⁸

Similarly, in recent years men have begun to question seriously their traditionally held roles and values. Sustaining the reality of male dominance means that the rational is emphasized so that the affective life is truncated or stalled. Men have paid an enormous price to retain control, self-reliance, and goal-oriented behaviour. The emotional harm men experience through the denial of emotions often has emerged in dominating, misogynist, violent and aggressive acts.

Misogyny is especially evident in the response of some men toward women who appear to step beyond the boundaries of stereotyped roles, behaviours and characteristics. Self-reliant women who express strength and confidence and who behave assertively can expect to be perceived or labelled with such perjoratives as aggressive, shrill, militant, or man-hater. In contrast, men who stand up for themselves are called strong, assertive, forthright and honest. "Stoppers", as Anne Wilson Schaef describes them, aim to keep women in their place and retain the status quo.⁹ Stoppers come in a variety of forms, some blatantly physical such as rape, assault or overt sexual harassment.

We are discovering the painful consequences of decades of silence about sexual harassment and abuse and the terrible betrayals to both men and women that have led to the increase

of violent acts against women and children. Author Linda McLeod has concluded that there is no safe place for women, either at home, with friends or family, or outside the home.¹⁰ Findings of a recent national study conducted by sociologists at Carleton University indicate that four of five female undergraduates at Canadian universities say they have been the victims of physical, sexual or psychological abuse by their male partners within the last year. In that same survey, seventy-five percent (75%) of male respondents admitted that they have been psychologically abusive towards their partners. Twenty-five percent (25%) admitted to being either physically or sexually abusive.¹¹ The fear level and "chilly climate" that women endure, whether on the university campus, in the church, or on the street, is a direct result of our society that yet prescribes a pattern of male dominance and female devaluation.

There has been a lot of publicity and controversy over these issues in the last few years, especially since the Montreal Massacre, the high-profile Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas situation and the recent Carlton Masters incident. But, as Beverly Bain of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women has commented, "that hasn't stopped sexual harassment from happening. Many women are still hesitant to come forward—we live in vulnerable times and there are few safeguards in place in the workplace to protect those who make a complaint."¹²

We all know that churches are not exempt. Churches are in turmoil over their increasing awareness of complicity with sexual abuse and years of silence about matters of sexual ethics and sexual orientation. Many churches are slowly re-thinking their stance on the changing roles of women and men in church and society, as well as their positions with regard to sexual orientation. Establishing codes of behaviour and ethics, promulgating fair and sensible investigative procedures and preparing all of God's people to live sexually responsible lives in the nineties are denominational realities and tasks.

How are we addressing these concerns in theological education—concerns which women and men encounter during their preparation as well as in their post-graduation ministries? Are we denying the extent of the problem? Are we addressing sexual matters in ways that help students analyze systems and culture, thereby making connections between theology, economic policy and issues of power? Are faculty members prepared for

and trained to implement sexual harassment and abuse policies when actual cases arise?

Women make up the slightly larger percentage of persons enrolled in theological education in Canada. If women who are studying theology parallel societal patterns, at least one out of every four has a history of sexual abuse. Some of these women recognize that they are survivors of sexual abuse. Others have not yet uncovered the deeply recessed truths of their own stories. Are faculty equipped to see and deal with this reality or to sensitize theological students to the presence of survivors of abuse within their parishes and society?

It is impossible for us to deny that sexual harassment occurs within the church and within theological schools and colleges. Sexual harassment policies may exist and the issues are more publicized, but the situation is not getting any better. Surveys conducted among women ministers in the United Church of Canada found that over one third (35–39%) had been victims of sexual harassment. In the qualitative study to which I referred earlier, in which 60 women were interviewed who had begun procedures to obtain credentials for ministry in the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, *not one woman was exempt* from sexual harassment, either during theological studies, the time of her ordination, or in her ministry. Recently, at a church conference, an ordained woman told me the story of how she had been sexually assaulted in the manse by a man who was chairperson of the board of elders. Another woman in ministry described how safety concerns necessitated the development of a system of “check-in” telephone calls and code words that communicate, if necessary, the need for a timely intervention during a counselling session. Safety and survival are concerns that must be talked about and faced with an edge of realism and a desire to be effective.

To attempt to address the seen and unseen realities of sexual harassment, abuse and personal safety within a programme of theological study is a challenge indeed. In my experience, women and men come to theological education with differing awarenesses of sexism and the effects of patriarchal socialization upon them. Even women who declare themselves “feminist” possess different views. Some are evangelical or traditional, others see feminism as a necessary corrective to the church. Some want to reform the present structures, others

want to deconstruct and reconstruct the present structures. Some arrive unsure as to whether they can live out their call to ministry within the framework of the institutional church at all, let alone accept ordination. Female students with a feminist consciousness live dialectically: at the level of survival and the level of creativity. Women live knowing they are suspicious of reality at the same time they are attempting to fashion a new reality. Some men come to theological education sensitized to the effects of sexism upon women and in their own lives. Others are oblivious to the issues, fail to see what "all the fuss is about", or may actively and aggressively oppose any hint of a feminist critique.

At the College where I work, we are aware of endless possibilities and a number of problems as well. An example of this can be seen in the way my colleague and I, within the Practice of Ministry curriculum, attempt to illuminate the issue of sexual ethics in ministry. We begin to identify this area within the context of a weekend workshop. It is required of all first year students. While it has deepened consciousness around these issues somewhat successfully, it has met with a hostile or resistant reception from a number of students, both male and female. Invariably, a consciousness-raising process about sexism will arouse resistance and anger in both women and men. The period of anger usually contains, or is followed by, a time of asking critical questions. In terms of the sexual ethics workshop, many women subsequently identify anger long suppressed. Then, they struggle with the implications of setting personal boundaries in their ministries. Men often begin to understand how much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. They begin to grasp the importance of recognizing and respecting the personal boundaries of others. Single students, both male and female, question the development of a professional protocol that appears to reinforce loneliness and denies the possibility of friendship with congregants in ministry practice.

Consciousness-raising entails a series of movements that include a fluctuation between remaining at one's current understanding or choosing to explore further dimensions of the issue. Given the range of emotions that can be displayed and the critical questions that are evoked, we must ask how we prepare faculty and clergy alike to awaken thought and deal with the

tension that is evoked. Consciousness-raising strategies such as the sexual ethics workshop, while rightly identifying the issues, also serve to protect the entire faculty, curriculum and student body from working at how to integrate these same issues in all aspects of preparation for ministry. Moreover, while classes can generate discussion about sexual awareness, participants may not challenge one another to confront their individual assumptions or prejudices around matters such as power and privilege played out in gendered form.

So, what keeps any of us able to live in the midst of a church and society where sexism, patriarchy and heterosexism are being brought to light? What enables me to flourish in a contradictory reality? It is the vision of ministry that I see enfleshed every single day. Ministry is about participating in opportunities that liberate ourselves and others to see what has been unseen, thereby illuminating life as complex and interconnected. It is to see that creation in its fullest expression is indeed good. Therefore, challenging sexism and its oppressive expressions is the stuff I encounter in day to day ministry as I respond to the image of God reflected in creation. Living with contradiction is the good news of who we are and what we do. That, so I continue to learn, is not a comfortable place but it is where light and life are found.

3) A Shifting Epistemology: Multiplicity of Meaning

The third reality facing us in church and society is that of a shifting epistemology—encountering a multiplicity of meaning. Pluralism, feminism, post-modernism, technology, globalization, mobility, and the demise of Western Christendom have all given rise to a crisis of ambiguity. We are in radical disorientation. It has become increasingly difficult for us to speak of “timeless truths” or “eternal certainties” that can be expressed in precise doctrinal formulations or absolute moral principles. We have begun to come to terms with the social, patriarchal, political and historical construction of our world and of the cultural relativity of our knowledge and beliefs. We are surrounded by vast increases in knowledge and confronted continually by new discoveries that reinforce the mysteriousness of our universe. Our most fundamental assumptions about God and God’s purposes for human life have been called into question.

In Marc Connelly's play *Green Pastures*, the angel Gabriel is sent to survey the world scene and reports back that "everything nailed down is coming loose!" Both the achievements and the pluralism of our modern life have made us excruciatingly aware of the accurateness of Gabriel's observation. "Everything nailed down" appears to be coming loose. Of course, many fundamentalist politicians or religious types thrive in such looseness by making claims that express even greater certitude or rigid categories of thought. Whether we avoid the challenges of our age, try to modify our beliefs to make them more acceptable, or struggle with substantive ambiguity, our life experiences regularly remind us that life is complex, diverse and full of radically different ways of construing and living it, including holding differing views of God and God's purposes for human life. As life becomes increasingly complex, we are called upon to live in the midst of new discoveries and the struggles that come with increasing change.

The Christian church, in the midst of such an ethos, is challenged to wrestle with truth claims. Who is Christ? How do we proclaim Christ in a society of multiple religions? It is an old mission-field challenge now expressed in the local neighbourhood. The church is recognizing its history of triumphalism yet struggling to claim its distinctive identity and zeal for witness.

What are the implications of this crisis of ambiguity for men and women in the church, professional ministry and in theological education? More than ever before, we need to encourage people to explore their anxieties about expanding boundaries and understandings of what it is to be human and to be connected in our humanity to one another and all of creation. The variety of responses still voiced to the concern for inclusive language perhaps best illustrates the anxiety inherent in boundary expansion!

It seems to me that feminism, at the point of educational method, has much to contribute to fostering an ability to minister authentically in a set of uncertain circumstances. Feminist educational method situates knowledge by helping students identify the multiple discourses, the marginalized and dominant voices and the competing claims that are present in an issue. Rather than treating knowledge as if it is always organized in dualisms or in polarities that reflect certitude, it maps out knowledge as a heterogeneity or multiplicity. How do

we encourage men and women, whether in the church, society or the theological college, to probe the complexity of their responses? To identify meaning in ways other than "either/or"? Are we offering alternatives? It is tempting, of course, as an educator, to engineer a consensus reading or to propose a dominant meaning system. How do our own practices recognize, illuminate and engage the differences among students? What do we impose on others in our own emancipatory educational practices? To what extent do I, when I name my feminist bias, become intrusive, merely adding a further irreconcilable differing claim to the discourse? Can I be self-reflective as an educator, willingly and openly challenging my own assumptions and the values that lie behind them?

Whether one wishes to borrow the slogan of the young Marx, "the relentless criticism of everything that exists", or use the more explicitly theological one of the young Luther, "crux probat omnia" ("the cross probes all things"), the outcome is the same. In this decade and beyond, it is essential to supply adequate tools for racial, cultural and economic analysis, and for women to do analysis of the social and political reality in which they live. Men and women need exposure to analytical methods and questions that help them to name and face the contradictions that exist within themselves and in reality, such as poverty and affluence, power and powerlessness.

Such methods may mean beginning with different content, taking specific situations seriously. What would happen if we released theological education from the confines of the classroom and situated it locally and globally on streets and in communities? Perhaps then we would hear and be altered by the voices of native Canadians, the meaning systems of a variety of religious traditions, stories of poverty, economic hardship, political repression, sexism, racism? To begin with content that is subject-oriented and contextual counters past logic in which truth was an objective, rational deduction. The aim is to place people in the centre of learning, making specificity and relationship as valuable as generality and principle.

This kind of educational method, while still caring about academic knowledge, cares more about the ability to incarnate that knowledge in concrete circumstances where people are suffering. Excellence in scholarship is then judged by depth of passion and experience in the struggle, ability to hear the voices of

the oppressed, coherence of theory and practical work, and by partnerships in learning between faculty, laity, and theological students. Necessary, then, to theological education in Canada are explorations in self-understanding, personal privilege, and unearned power conferred systemically. We need to move beyond the idea that sexism does not affect men, that racism does not affect people who are of the colour white. "Insisting on the universal effects of 'privilege' systems, then, becomes one of our chief tasks, and being more explicit about the particular effects in particular contexts is another. Men need to join women in this work."¹³ Since racism and sexism are not the only advantage systems at work, similarly we need to press the examination in daily experiences of all forms of advantage decreed by society.

Our society presents a notable set of polarized choices, such as traditional family or feminism, absolute truth claims or uncertainty, homogeneity or diversity. To choose between polarities is to succumb to the temptation to escape ambiguity and disorientation. Can we recognize that epistemology is in transition? In a time of deep change, churches and theological centres can become places where varied ways of knowing and expressing 'church' are tried.

4) A Shifting Economy: New Definitions of Resources and Leadership

The fourth looming reality that faces society and the church is a direct consequence of economic shifts, developments in technology, and the decline of institutionalized Christianity. This era of a market-driven economy is coupled with a so-called "jobless recovery". As change occurs with even greater rapidity, the separation between rich and poor increases. Those without positions of power and privilege are faced with diminishing resources. The church shares the same economic realities as the rest of society. We have gone from being a church in a culture of expanding abundance to being the church in a culture of increasing austerity and concern for survival. How can the church learn to do more with less, or, more accurately, *to be more* with less? This is an opportunity for creativity at the local level, for shared leadership and explorations of how bigger may not be better. At every turn, individuals, groups

and institutions are faced with the question of how to manage resources and what kinds of leadership are both needed and available for the next millennium.

Many small churches facing economic stringencies find it difficult to sustain full-time ministry personnel. The necessity of bi-vocationalism, part-time employment, and changing patterns of placing ministry personnel all add to the chaos of definitions for leadership in the twenty-first century. Immigration from Asian, Middle Eastern, African and Latin American countries is changing the social context for ministry. With the exception of some centres and parishes providing indigenous leadership at the initiative of ethnic groups or First Nations peoples, most people preparing for leadership in the church are of European background.

Of undeniable significance is the fact that a strong proportion of those now engaged in theological education are women. However, many years will pass before the ratio of women to men in active ministry is even. Entry into significant pastoral positions remains difficult for women in Canada. A recent ecumenical study of women in ministry found that less than a third of those in church-related work had achieved the position of sole pastor, senior pastor or co-minister. The Baptist study, to which I have referred, documents that of the women who graduated with a Master of Divinity degree, only ten percent (10%) were employed as sole pastors, co-pastors or part-time pastors, yet all are practising ministry in some form, living out their commitments in other ways. Where women were employed in "team ministry" (sometimes, I suggest, a "decorative phrase" or euphemism for congregations who present themselves as accepting of women in paid accountable ministry), there were consistent reports of conflict about styles of ministry, the sexual politics of decisions and of how women were intimidating to their male counterparts. Whether the church will be able to continue to attract women into ministry will depend in part upon its openness to their gifts.

Significant role confusion exists for those preparing for and giving ministry leadership. The shift from a hierarchical style to a mutual style in which power is equally shared among everyone has resulted in an experience of confusion about expectations. Women struggle with the servant model of ministry and concepts of self-sacrifice. Less encumbered with self-doubts

related to gender, men move more quickly to develop images for ministry. They possess a cadre of professional role models from which to derive ministerial identity. Women, on the other hand, in spite of considerable gains, still lack contemporary examples and so are plunged into an obvious struggle. The reality is that, even when women gain numerical strength, it is tenuous at best, for it is only a matter of precious time before one or two of the three or four in an area are faced with a decision to move into yet another position that offers potential to effect significant change for more women. Sara Orem describes what it was like for one woman in ministry to recognize the “freakishness” of being “first” in ministry:

I long for the day when the search committee, and people in the local community, and the person sitting next to me on the plane, won't react with surprise or inappropriate comment to a woman clergy person... I am sick and tired of people thinking it's fair game to ask me questions—everything from ‘so what do I do with my personal time’ to the appropriateness of wearing jewelry when I'm [preaching] to being called the ‘girl minister’. It really gets old. In my first call I was the first woman they'd ever seen ordained. In my second call, I was the first woman they'd ever experienced in the community. And, when I took this call, I forgot that I had to do it again. It took me about ten months to figure out that I was angry because I didn't think I would have to do this again. Now I have a sense that with every new call I go to, there is at least a fifty-fifty chance that I will again be the first woman in leadership the community has known. I just get tired of breaking new ground. That is a very hard place for me to be.¹⁴

Lacking obvious historical and symbolic references, women must depend, then, upon the few contemporary models that can be seen, the wisdom that comes from the laity and their own creative visions.

Clergy and laity both can suffer from uncertainty about the function of ordination and the application of the word “profession” to ministry. Some women maintain that the rejection of ordination by women is a mistake in that it denies women the symbol of the female representing the holy, or as steadfastly able to point to the sacred in life. Of course, our respective religious traditions handle this matter quite differently from one another. Many Roman Catholics raise their own perplexed and anguished concerns that women “religious” cannot perform sacramental acts to recognize their own faith community.

Among those who are entering ministry, there are both women and men who see ordination as a suspicious "separator" of clergy from laity. In particular, women can have grave doubts about associating with an ecclesiastical office that has been the domain of men and that has been associated with hierarchical expressions of power. Most women are reluctant to be put on a pedestal or about having to be an "outstanding woman" to be accepted. In fact, some say that women succeed because of their male characteristics, namely workaholicism, perfectionism and the myth of meritocracy. The loneliness that comes with being "set apart" or on a different weekly schedule from other workers, the mixed signals between clergy and laity that produce tension, can lead to low morale. In my experience, women consistently test the boundaries of current definitions of leadership for ministry. They present their call to ministry within the context of relational commitments and a desire to exercise self-care that is no longer based on what I call "door-mat theology". The needs of families, partners, significant friends neither are sacrificed uncritically nor arbitrarily, merely to fulfil ecclesiastical requirements that can seem outdated.

Certainly a variety of persons and leadership styles will be required in the future, one major quality of which will be the capacity to be flexible. A willingness to grow and change as the situation warrants is foreseen as being necessary. Ministry personnel will be called upon to prepare themselves to work collegially. As parishes and theological institutions face shrinking financial resources, realignment, sharing personnel or clustering with multiple or team resources may be new leadership paradigms. Moreover, given the increased challenges facing society and the church (for example, euthanasia, genetic engineering, an aging population, distribution of scarce health care resources), it seems to me that the need for inter-dependence and professional collaboration is abundantly clear.

What are the implications of this for women and men in theological education? Much more will need to be done to stimulate inter-professional attitudes, ethics and practices. The establishment of networks and collaborative support systems will become important, especially for those situations that have no single solution. So, too, will be the ways in which we settle or locate persons for ministerial practice. Why not settle teams

or triads of persons with a cluster of churches? Theological education has tended to educate by hierarchical methods that presume relevance, foster passivity and reinforce dependencies. Such methods too frequently have led to ministries that are isolated, reactive, protective of power and lacking in critical consciousness. If fostering collaboration is a goal of theological education and the future form of ministry, then learning that practices flexibility, mutuality and relationship-building will be essential.

Women especially, who “struggle to claim the power of their own minds”, will need to have their words heard, believed and engaged. Too often women hide their power, act apologetic or discount their strengths. A very important part of this practice will be to encourage women to name their fears, authenticate their anger, develop skills for dealing with conflict, and to wrestle with overt, healthy forms of expressing their insights and exercising their power. In order to foster true collaboration in ministry, women need to be encouraged first to come together and learn the value of supporting one another. An ability to collaborate emerges from the recognition that what we have experienced silently as private pain is, in fact, a public, structural dynamic. Only in the last fifteen years or so have we been able to ask what it is like to be *women* in ministry rather than *women among men*. Women are discovering that true sisterhood is neither naive nor perfect. We can celebrate diversity and difference among our very selves. As sisters and “woman-identified women”, we then collaborate authentically with our male colleagues.

At the same time, men who are struggling to understand their own sexism need to be encouraged to come together. Can we create opportunities for men to welcome their own vulnerabilities, express their fears and name their sources of individual and systemic advantage and power? Ultimately, Beverly Harrison suggests that the test of men’s commitment is whether they

welcome having those who were previously silent wrest their theory from us, altering and transforming it through their unique appropriation. Genuine solidarity involves not mere subjective identification with oppressed people but concrete answerability to them. Solidarity is accountability and accountability means being vulnerable, capable of being changed by the oppressed.¹⁵

In ministry preparation, then, the challenge to both women and men is to grow beyond fear so that we can be in relationship in a loving way. To achieve collaboration in ministry, we need to risk our securities and silences, and confront squarely our fears of change. Change can only happen when our patterns of relationship shift so that we evolve to new modes of decision-making which reflect consensus, cooperation and shared access to power.

What a paradox! At the same time that we are becoming more aware of our differences and more distant from one another through technology and economic decision-making, the ministry we have is to draw even closer together. In a highly specialized, fractured and intimidating world, we can contribute new definitions of neighbourliness and leadership based on collaborative, inter-dependent models.

Conclusion

These, then, are some of the challenges presented to theological education. Four realities that involve shifts in demography, sexuality, epistemology, and leadership/resources. The church, in partnership with centres of theological education, has the task and the potential to respond in nourishing, persuasive, visionary ways. The revealing light cast by the one we know as God insists that what is unseen be seen and named for what it is, and truth be spoken to power. Perhaps, by modelling here the value of collaboration through consultation, we will find clues "to boldly go" into the second half of the ecumenical decade. And, as we begin our exploration, we do so accompanied by respect for this variety of voices, gifts and alternatives found in the faithful company of our sisters and brothers.

Notes

- ¹ See "Canada's Family Tree: Celebrating our Diversity," *The Royal Bank Reporter* (Spring 1992) 4-9.
- ² "Metro Speak," *The Toronto Star*, Wednesday, September 16, 1992.
- ³ Nelle Morton, *The Journey Is Home* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).
- ⁴ Shelly Finson, *No Name Newsletter*, a publication of the United Church of Canada, Spring/Summer, 1993.
- ⁵ Sara Orem, "Moving the Mountain: Women in Ministry," *Congregations: The Alban Journal*, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (March/April 1993) 15-19.

- ⁶ *Report of the Working Group on Equality in Ministry, 1988-1993*, submitted April 16, 1993 to the Division of Pastoral Resources of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, 31-32.
- ⁷ Mark Patinkin, "Poems for Emerging Persons," *The Whig-Standard Companion Magazine*, Saturday, May 8, 1993, 23.
- ⁸ Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (2nd Edition; Boston: Beacon Press, 1976) 12.
- ⁹ Anne Wilson Schaef, *Women's Reality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981, 1985) 69-96.
- ¹⁰ *FWTAO Newsletter* 4.
- ¹¹ Rob Nicol, "Study Shows Abuse Rampant," *The Queen's Journal*, Vol. 120 No. 31, Friday February 12, 1993, 1.
- ¹² Barbara Aarsteinsen, "Sex Harassment Serious," *The Toronto Star*, Saturday, May 8, 1993, A1.
- ¹³ Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondence through Work in Women's Studies," Wellesley College, Centre for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA, 02181, U.S.A., 1988, 15.
- ¹⁴ Orem, "Moving the Mountain," 16-17.
- ¹⁵ Beverly Harrison, *Making the Connections* (Boston, Beacon Press, 1985) 244.