“Democracy is the very essence of human life; it is the essence of the development of the human soul; the right of every human soul to be and become all that it is possible for each human soul to become.”¹ So said Anna Howard Shaw, one of the great women in the history of the United States. This was her life’s great theme, the position she espoused from her youth until her death at the age of seventy-two.

What this paper will do is trace the religious and historical roots of Anna Howard Shaw, the first woman ordained in the Methodist Protestant Church. Then it will set forth her theological position. It will be argued in this paper that Shaw was a clear exponent of the Social Gospel Movement.

Anna Howard Shaw is best known for her leadership of the woman suffrage movement. She was instrumental in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, the Woman’s Rights Amendment. For nearly twelve years she was President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. This organization included important women such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Jane Addams, and Carrie Chapman Catt. Shaw motivated American women and men to fight for equal rights of women. She stood as the fiery-tongued speaker who moved audiences to tears with her oratory, challenged them to unite behind the woman’s cause, and ridiculed and verbally demolished opponents to the cause of woman suffrage.

Another significant piece of work in Shaw’s life was the Chairmanship of the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense. This organization was directly responsible to President Woodrow Wilson during World War I. Its assignment was to motivate and coordinate the work of women to win the war for the Allies. When President Wilson established this committee in 1917, he insisted on only one thing, that Anna Howard Shaw would be its chairman. After the war, with only a few months left before she was struck with a fatal illness, Shaw went on an exhausting speaking tour in support of the League of Nations.

Shaw was born on Valentine Day, 1847, in England. She emigrated to the United States with her family when she was four

¹Speech by Anna Howard Shaw to the National Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Convention. 1910, Radcliffe Woman’s Archives, Shaw Papers #514. (Hereafter this reference will be abbreviated RWA-S and the number of the folder.)
years of age, and lived a number of years in the Boston area. When a young teenager she moved to the wilderness of the Michigan frontier. This was a traumatic experience for her and her mother and will be discussed subsequently. She decided there in Michigan that she was going to enter the ministry. To fulfill this personal goal, she needed to have formal education. Thus, she entered high school in Big Rapids, Michigan, at the age of twenty-four. She left high school after only two years and entered Albion College, a school supported by the Methodist Episcopal Church. Again after only two years she returned to the east and entered Boston University School of Theology. She graduated in 1878, the second woman graduate of that school. In the 1880's she enrolled again in Boston University, but this time in the School of Medicine. She graduated from this school in 1886, becoming one of the first women in America to have both a theological and a medical degree.

Anna Shaw's father and mother were important persons in her life. They need to be studied in some detail to understand their contribution to the thinking of Shaw as an adult. Her father was an idealist, who had a mental concept of a better world which he wanted to create and be a part of. This caused a restless streak in him. He was never satisfied with life as it was and was always moving on to another location hoping that the new would be better than the old. He left England and emigrated to America, hoping to find in America the fulfillment of his dreams. When he became dissatisfied with his home in New Bedford he moved his family to Lawrence, Massachusetts. This move did not satisfy him, so he went out to the western frontier and built a log cabin, one hundred miles from the nearest railway station. A further manifestation of this idealism was the liberal newspaper from New York which he read regularly. He shared this with his daughter, Anna, who also read it eagerly. During the Civil War he left home and went to fight with the northern army because he believed strongly in the abolitionist cause. The only record we have of his contributing to a humanitarian cause was his support of the abolitionist movement.

Another important factor was that Mr. Shaw was away from his home a great deal of the time while Anna was growing up. He preceded his wife and children to America. He left them in England and came to New England to raise enough money to pay for their passage. He again left them in New England to go to the frontier in Michigan to build the log cabin in which they were to live. He then returned to Lawrence to tell them the cabin was ready, but he stayed behind so that he could pay off his bills. Then when the Civil War came, he left his family again to fight in the war although he was older than the average soldier and was not compelled to go. This fact of his being away from home meant that the Shaw children
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had to carry the load within the household normally filled by the father. Anna Shaw, more than her sisters and brothers, felt responsible for doing her father's work. Thus, out in Michigan she cut the wood for the fireplace, dug a well and did other chores normally associated with men. Mr. Shaw encouraged this by giving Anna a hammer, saw and nails as toys. He may not have been a good father or husband in the traditional sense, but his independence, free-thinking and idealism were instilled in his daughter Anna. This was his major contribution to her development.

Anna's mother provided another dimension to Anna's life. Anna saw her as a frail woman who was greatly oppressed by her lot in life. Nothing supports this idea more than what happened when Mrs. Shaw and her family arrived for the first time at their cabin on the Michigan frontier. Mrs. Shaw looked at this home in the middle of the forest in total disbelief. She fell to the ground and covered her face with her hands for hours. When she finally lifted her face from her hands to look again at the windowless hut with dirt floors, she had aged perceptibly. Shaw said later that her mother picked up living again, but she was never the same, and the daughter remembered in later years the frail hands and the lovely white hair of her head. This image of her oppressed mother challenged Anna to be concerned with woman's position. One of the dominant themes of her adult life was to equalize the rights of women who were oppressed in the home. She discovered after many experiences that it was through political equality that woman's position and condition would improve.

Anna determined as a youth that she would not find herself in the same situation as her mother. She would get an education and be a success. This decision did not come easily to Anna Shaw, but once it was made she never faltered from her goal. In later years she remembered the day very well on which she decided that she was going to defy tradition. She went out into the Michigan wilderness completely alone. As she examined her reflection in a pool of water, searching her heart about her future, she said to herself, "I WILL. I will get an education." She went home to tell her parents what she had decided. They chided her for her foolish ideas, but this reaction only sealed her resolve more completely.

She then took steps to achieve her goal. She left her home in the wilderness and moved to Big Rapids, Michigan, a larger community with a school system. No sooner had she arrived in town than at the local church a woman minister appeared as a guest lecturer, the Rev. Marianna Thompson. After the lecture Miss Shaw poured out her ambitions to be a minister, too. Shaw, now twenty-four, was told by Thompson to get an education as quickly as possible. Thus, Shaw the next day enrolled in the local high school. She was most
fortunate to meet a woman counselor there, Lucy Foot, a college graduate, who befriended her. Miss Foot understood Shaw’s motivations and advised her on the proper course to take.

This advice included a dinner engagement one evening with the Rev. Dr. H. C. Peck, a Methodist Episcopal minister, who was Presiding Elder of the Big Rapids District. After dinner Dr. Peck proposed that Miss Shaw become a local preacher and preach on his district. This took her by surprise and she was flattered that he would ask her to do this. She objected, however, that she could not preach for the Methodists for she was a Unitarian, the religion of her father, and had never been converted. Miss Foot said that she would work with her on this difficulty. For the next several days Miss Shaw and Miss Foot met regularly. After one all-night session with long and fervent prayer, Anna had her conversion experience.

She accepted the invitation to preach for Dr. Peck, and worked for hours preparing her first sermon. The big day arrived and she journeyed to Ashton, Michigan, where a large crowd waited eagerly to see a woman minister. Anna shook so violently because of nervousness that oil in a lamp at her elbow nearly spilled out. Dr. Peck, who was there to hear the sermon, assured her afterwards that the sermon was better than his own maiden effort had been.

Anna preached thirty-six times that year for Dr. Peck in different churches around the district, each time using the same sermon. In August her name came before the District Conference as an applicant for a Local Preacher’s license. She was licensed on August 26, 1873, and the license was renewed in 1874 and 1875.

These experiences were encouraging to Miss Shaw, but at the same time there were many persons, including her parents, who discouraged her from becoming a minister. Their comments depressed Anna, but again a woman lecturer came to town who changed her life. Mrs. Mary Livermore, one of the leading voices on the public platform, spoke in Big Rapids. After the meeting Anna Shaw poured out her heart, indicating how much she wanted to go into the ministry, in spite of her friends who thought this notion was foolish. Aware of the internal strife within the young girl, Mrs. Livermore said, “My dear, . . . if you want to preach, go on and preach. Don’t let anybody stop you.”2 Shaw took these words as a tonic of support and resolved again to achieve her goal.

With the help of her friend, Lucy Foot, who was a graduate of Albion College, Anna Shaw entered that school. Her parents were not in sympathy with her goals and thus gave her no financial support, so she had to support herself by preaching and public

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temperance speaking. Between her first and second year of college she visited her brother in Vermont. He had arranged for her to preach every Sunday during her visit. It was at this time that she became acquainted with Boston University School of Theology.

After two years at Albion College, Anna Shaw enrolled in Boston University, as its second woman student. Her parents were still unsympathetic to the course that she had decided for her life and continued to give her no assistance financially. This placed her in a very difficult situation and subjected her to one of the many discriminations against women students. Men were able to enjoy the benefits of low-cost housing and group food plans which kept their expense to a minimum, but this was not the case for women students. She had to find her own quarters in the Back Bay section of Boston. A further problem she encountered was the lack of employment for women. Whereas she had easily found speaking engagements and preaching assignments in Michigan, such was not the case in Boston. The School of Theology discouraged first-year students from working, and further competition for available jobs was so intense that upper classmen got most of them. Thus, Anna Shaw during the first winter in the school faced starvation as a real possibility. One week she had nothing but a small box of crackers to eat, and she was cold from living in an unheated apartment. She decided that if God wanted her to be a preacher then something favorable would happen, and she described the situation this way:

I mentally resolved to let that week decide my fate. My shoes had burst open at the sides; for lack of car-fare I had to walk to and from the scene of my meetings of the revival I was conducting.... If my week of work brought me enough to buy a pair of cheap shoes and feed me for a few days I would, I decided, continue my theological course. If it did not, I would give up the fight.\(^3\)

She worked hard at the revival for the entire week, giving all she had.

... not until the last night did I realize how much of me had gone into this final desperate charge of mine. Then, the service over and the people departed, I sank, weak and trembling, into a chair, trying to pull myself together before hearing my fate in the good-night words of the minister I had assisted.\(^4\)

The minister said that her work was worth $50, but the expenses had been high and the collection low and thus there was to be no pay. Anna got to her feet and stumbled blindly down the aisle and


out into the night, passing a woman who stood on the street near the church entrance.

“Oh, Miss Shaw,” she said, “I’m the happiest woman in the world and I owe my happiness to you. To-night you have converted my grandson. He’s all I have left, but he has been a wild boy, and I’ve prayed over him for years. Hereafter he is going to lead a different life.” . . . Her hand fumbled in her purse.

“I am a poor woman,” she went on, “but I have enough, and I want to make you a little present. I know how hard life is for you young students.”

She pressed a bill into my fingers. “It’s very little,” she said humbly, “it is only five dollars.”

I laughed, and in that exultant moment I seemed to hear life laughing with me. ⁵

Although feeling that God had provided for her, Anna Howard Shaw still had many trying moments ahead of her—moments filled with hunger, cold and rejection. Her situation was improved later in the first year when an unknown benefactor offered to pay her $3.50 per week through the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society in Boston. The financial burden removed from her shoulders, she was never as troubled again about money. During the summer after her first year in seminary, Shaw worked on Cape Cod doing substitute preaching. While there she met an older woman who was widowed and very lonely, and the two struck up a friendship and decided to live together in Boston. Mrs. Persis Addy was a woman of means who gave Shaw financial freedom for the first time in her student life.

Anna Shaw was employed during her third year in seminary at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Hingham, Massachusetts, as an approved supply. She faced discrimination from some faculty members who were opposed to opening up the school to women. She also faced hostility from some of her fellow students. On one occasion a male student asked her why she kept her hair cut so short, assuring her that there must be a very good reason. After a moment’s hesitation, she answered, “Yes, I have a very good reason but it is a very personal one and I hesitate to tell you—but as you ask me in seemingly good faith—I’ll tell you it is a birth mark—I was born that way.” ⁶

In the School of Theology Shaw was an average student, but considering the handicaps under which she labored she did remarkably well. In 1878 she graduated with her class, receiving her certificate with pride and appreciation.

⁵ Ibid., p. 87.
⁶ Undated anecdote, RWA-S #482.
After graduation she went to Europe, thanks to a generous gift of Mrs. Addy, who had passed away in the winter of 1877-1878. Upon her return home she secured a job as minister of First Wesleyan Methodist Society of East Dennis and Brewster. This church, formerly part of the Free Methodist Church denomination but now independent, had gotten to know Miss Shaw when she worked on the Cape during one summer. In fact, Mrs. Addy’s relatives were in this parish. Anna Shaw began her work there in October, 1878, and terminated it in December, 1884, when she entered full-time lecture work.

In her autobiography, Anna Howard Shaw claimed that there was a split in the Wesleyan Church between two factions, the source of which she was never able to find out. She would permit no quarreling between these factions, but she suggested that the two parties put their grievances into writing, and she would take them before the board. Neither side was willing to do this. They soon found a way to get around Miss Shaw’s limitations on quarreling. They prayed very explicit prayers at the Thursday night prayer meetings. By the third week Anna Shaw announced that she would expect prayers which would be in good taste or the person who prayed prayers containing personal criticism would be denied admission to the meetings. Disputes immediately sprang up and continued until the meeting was dismissed. This announcement shook the complacency of the community and the church, and its minister became the talk of the area. The next Sunday the sanctuary was filled to capacity. Anna Shaw preached her prepared sermon that had nothing to do with the controversy, which greatly disappointed the crowd. In the evening the dispute came out in the open again. Captain Sears, a leader of one faction, stood up and criticized Miss Shaw for telling him how to pray. He would pray his way when he wanted to. Part of the congregation told Captain Sears to be quiet and sit down, but Anna Shaw told them that the Captain had the floor and that he had better say all he was going to say for that was the last speech he was going to make. She was master of the ship, and since Captain Sears was mutinous he had to be put off. With the singing of the Doxology she dismissed the meeting.

This became the first in a series of disagreements with her parishioners. Shortly after this encounter, Shaw created a furor at the annual Christmas Fair. The church had a policy of no dancing and the Trustees insisted upon its enforcement. An organization called the Free Religious Group planned to have a dance at the fair. Anna Shaw heard of this movement and prepared to counter them. At the Christmas Fair things did not go well from the start: the Free Religious Group applauded loudly the Lord’s Prayer; a
kitten was hung from the top of a Christmas tree, where it squalled mournfully; and some young men threw cake at each other across the hall. When the Free Religious Group began to make preparations for their dance, Anna Shaw stopped them. She said that if anyone did dance she would have him or her arrested. This prevented the dance and Shaw personally locked the doors at midnight.

Shaw continued to exert her own feelings and ideas upon her congregation. Other disputes arose over a pulpit exchange with a Unitarian minister and Shaw’s opposition to the town taverns. She frequently used to advantage the threat of resignation. She placed her job on the line, but there were enough who approved of her work and stance that they insisted she stay on as pastor.

This is the report given by Anna Shaw of her first two years in East Dennis. A check of the church records indicates that during the annual meetings, at least in the balloting for various offices and in the financial arrangements, there were no divisions. For example, the election of Church Moderator was unanimous for Constant Sears in 1879, the first annual meeting in which Anna Howard Shaw was involved. This was the case also in 1880 for the election of Moderator, when all votes cast were for David S. Chapman.

The silence of the record on the controversies, which Miss Shaw elaborates at substantial length, seems rather strange. If her opponents were some of the church leaders, their silence at Board meetings is remarkable. On the other hand, it is not unheard of for secretaries of church meetings to “clean up” the records. Our respect for Miss Shaw’s probity, as demonstrated from her other recollections, makes it impossible to reject her testimony out of hand. In conclusion we can only say that whatever the nature of the conflicts, they were resolved in the pastor’s favor and without destroying her leadership in church and community.

Anna Howard Shaw’s reputation as a preacher and a controversial figure spread throughout the area. A Congregational church in Dennis wished her to be their pastor also. She agreed to preach on Sunday afternoon for them the same sermon she used in the morning in East Dennis. This was approved in March, 1879, and the arrangement worked out each Sunday until Miss Shaw left in 1884. She carried a full line of pastoral responsibilities connected with her ministry in East Dennis. She conducted funerals and wedding ceremonies. She visited the sick and gave pastoral leadership to her people.

Anna Shaw was qualified to carry out all the functions of the local parish with the exception of administering the two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. She and Anna Oliver, another graduate of Boston University School of Theology, decided to apply to the New England Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal
Church for this privilege. No woman had ever been ordained in the M. E. Church. The presiding bishop of the New England Annual Conference in 1880, Bishop Edward G. Andrews, refused to consider the request despite the fact that the Examining Committee of the New England Conference had sent the following evaluation concerning Miss Shaw to the Annual Conference Session. "... She passed a very Satisfactory Examination. ..." Bishop Andrews indicated that the canons of the Church did not permit ordination of women and the only way to change this was to go directly to the General Conference. Miss Oliver and Miss Shaw took their case for ordination to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church which met in Cincinnati in 1880. They were rejected by this final authority of the church.

The two women saw the situation differently at this point. Miss Oliver thought it important enough to stay in the Methodist Episcopal Church and fight for ordination. Miss Shaw, who had had her share of episcopal narrow-mindedness, felt that it would be better for her to leave the M. E. Church.

... it is all a man can do to fight the world, the flesh, and the devil, without fighting his Church as well. ... 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!

It was not long before one of Miss Shaw's friends, who was a member of the Methodist Protestant Church, suggested to her that she seek ordination in his denomination. Thus, in October, 1880, Anna Howard Shaw's name was presented in Tarrytown, New York for ordination. The situation at this annual meeting of the denomination was little more favorable than had been the case at the Annual and General Conferences of the M. E. Church, except that she had more men on her side than previously. A great debate ensued on the floor of the conference as to her desirability for ordination. Late Saturday evening the opponents of her ordination brought

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9 The Itinerancy Committee considered the ordination request. The Journal of the General Conference reported: "They have considered the several papers referred to them in relation to the licensing of women as exhorters and local preachers, their ordination, admission to the traveling connection, and eligibility to all offices of the Church; and, inasmuch as women are by general consent of the Church accorded all the privileges which are necessary to their usefulness the committee recommended that in the respects named no change be made in the Discipline as it regards the status of women in the Church." Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1880, p. 264. Quoted by Jeannette E. Newhall, "There Were Giants in Those Days," Nexus, VII, No. 1 (November, 1963), p. 20.
10 Shaw, op. cit., p. 123.
forth their top argument against her: Shaw was not even a member of the Methodist Protestant Church. Lyman Davis, the pastor of the host church, was not dismayed and despite the late hour called a special session of his trustees for the sole purpose of making Miss Shaw a member of his church. It was, however, too late for her to be approved with the others who were seeking deacon’s and elder’s papers the next day. Thus, on Sunday morning the men were ordained and she was left out. On Monday, the final day of business, her case was reopened and ultimately she was asked to appear before the conference to answer questions, which she did with her quick wit and debater’s skill. She was under a great deal of pressure and tension, but with her observant eyes noted one interesting aspect of the whole affair. The leader of the opposition

... was greatly excited, and he led the opposition by racing up and down the aisles, quoting from the Scriptures to prove his case against women ministers. As he ran about he had a trick of putting his arms under the back of his coat, making his coattails stand out like wings and incidentally revealing two long white tape-strings belonging to a flannel undergarment. Even in the painful stress of those hours I observed with interest how beautifully those tape-strings were ironed.11

After lengthy questioning the vote was taken and Anna Howard Shaw was approved for ordination, becoming the first woman in the Methodist Protestant Church to be ordained. The ceremony of ordination was set for the evening of October 12, 1880. A large crowd jammed the church in order to see this historic event.12 Some of those who were most opposed to her ordination were quick to realize that a large offering could be taken to support the pension program of the church.

Miss Shaw was deeply moved by the service and nearly overcome by emotion until that portion of the ceremony in which she had to promise that she would refrain from the use of tobacco. As this vow fell from her lips a ripple of laughter spread over the congregation. Those who had worked so diligently for her ordination were deeply pleased at this wonderful night. They had argued for days that what they were doing was not a reversal of the historic precedents of excluding women from ordination, but that Miss Shaw was eminently qualified to be a preacher and minister and thus should be ordained. Around this one argument Miss Shaw was accepted and received into membership as an elder in the Methodist Protestant Church.13

11 Ibid., p. 126.
12 Later in this church a commemorative window was dedicated to remember this historic event.
13 Editorial, Lyman Davis, The Methodist Recorder, RWAS #566.
A check of the records of the Minutes of the New York Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church shows that the Rev. Miss Shaw was appointed “supply” to East Dennis from 1880 to 1885. In the latter year she moved from East Dennis into Boston and in 1886 she was left without appointment at her own request. For the next few years she remained in good standing with her Conference, but without specific appointment. In 1893 she moved to Philadelphia and was appointed to “special work”. This relation continued on through 1911, when no further record appears. In other words, Miss Shaw maintained her full conference affiliation and received special appointment after 1885, when she took up her career as a full-time lecturer and leader in the woman’s fight for suffrage and equal rights.14

After her ordination, Miss Shaw returned to her parish in East Dennis, arriving on Saturday evening. On Sunday she went to church and the congregation presented her with a lovely silver communion set inscribed with her name and they celebrated communion for the first time under Anna Shaw.15

Throughout the rest of her distinguished career Miss Shaw proudly bore the title of Reverend which she had received in the Methodist Protestant Church.

How then might we evaluate Miss Shaw’s understanding of the local church’s ministry? First, she ran her churches with an authoritarian hand. She believed that it was her church and she had the right to run it the way she felt it ought to be run. From documentary evidence, there was not the severe split in the church that Miss Shaw later described. If this were the case, then probably there were only elements or pockets of power vying for influence and control. This conclusion could possibly be surmised from the fact that the people told Captain Sears to sit down when he was making his big speech about free prayer. Miss Shaw silenced him and by taking this action moved too swiftly into the situation. She failed to permit any meaningful dialogue among the people, but chose the alternative pattern of ruling and running the church her way. Further evidence for this hypothesis can be found in a quotation by one of the parishioners, Captain Doane: “When you fust [sic] come to us . . . you had a lot of crooked places; and we kind of run into each other, all of us. But before you left, Sister Shaw, why, all the crooked places was wore off and everything was smooth as silk.”16

14 Minutes of the New York Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1880-1911, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D. C.
15 This communion set is still displayed in a special cabinet in the sanctuary of the church in East Dennis, now known as the Community Church.
16 Shaw, op. cit., p. 150.
A second observation can be made on the Rev. Miss Shaw's concept of the local church. She wanted the physical plant in top notch shape. In both Hingham and in East Dennis she worked at improving the appearance of the interior and exterior of the buildings. Shaw wanted the proper atmosphere for worship.

A third observation is her support of the ecumenical movement. She held very liberal views on the acceptance of other denominations. She was even willing to place her position as pastor of Wesleyan Methodist Church on the line for her beliefs. This pressure forced the more conservative congregation into accepting into their pulpit not only the Unitarian minister of South Yarmouth, the Rev. Mr. C. A. Bradley, but also many of Miss Shaw's friends representing some of the most liberal men and women in New England, including Mary Livermore and Lucy Stone. The roots of this liberalism stem from her own background in the Unitarian church and her father's influence. It was further developed by her theological training at Boston University School of Theology. Three professors in particular held these liberal views: Professor Sheldon of the Church History department, Dean Warren in his courses on world religions, and Borden Parker Bowne of the Theology department.

A further observation on Shaw's ministry is that she believed the church should be a social center as well as a place of worship. She wrote her secretary, Lucy Anthony, "... the kind of church I wanted to be rich enough to build . . . would not be too good for use and would be open seven days in the week." 17

She saw the role of the clergyman as characterized by truth, frankness and forthrightness, but also by a certain sensitivity to the needs of her parishioners. After the ruckus over the dance at the Christmas Fair, the following Sunday morning, Miss Shaw first read her resignation and then the riot act. "What I am saying hurts you, but in your hearts you know you deserve every word of it. It is high time you saw yourself as you are—a disgrace to the religion you profess and to the community you live in." Principles came before personalities. Honesty came before helping and supporting a person with doubts. With stringent demands on herself she followed the high idealism which she preached.

And yet to paint a one-dimensional picture of Miss Shaw would be inaccurate. There is no question but that she spoke her mind forthrightly from the pulpit, but she also was sensitive to the needs of her congregation. In her autobiography she relates how she ministered to a blind woman in her parish. She was sensitive to the dynamics of couples getting married and would insist upon the

17 Letter, Anna Howard Shaw to Lucy E. Anthony, Oct. 24, 1892, RWAS S #420.
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couple writing their own vows so that they were personal. She handled funeral services with an awareness of the grief of the family. During her student days at medical school (which coincided with her pastorate at East Dennis), she worked as a paramedic and social worker in South Boston, ministering to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the women streetwalkers in particular.

Women, according to Anna Shaw, deserved a place of leadership in the church. It was their God-given right. The ordination of women was therefore important to her. She continued her interest in the fight for ordination for women, especially with the Methodist Episcopal Church. She was proud of her ministerial credentials and felt a certain kinship with those others, a select corps of women, who too were ordained. When living and working in the Boston area, Shaw joined an organization of women ministers under the direction of Julia Ward Howe.

What was Anna Howard Shaw's theological position? To answer this we will first examine her central doctrines and then show that she was a consistent exponent of the Social Gospel Movement. The Bible for Anna Shaw contained the way to truth for a fully human life. Although she was aware of contemporary scholarship in the area of Bible studies, especially the work being done in Germany with form criticism, she was not a biblical scholar herself. She used the Bible as a springboard for her sermons and her speeches.

As a girl she read the Bible through, looking for the characters with whom she might identify. Out of the thousands of persons mentioned she chose two obscure figures. She chose Vashti because she defied her husband when her principles were called into question, and Caleb because he was identified by God as God's servant.

Man for her was a sinner. Man falls victim to temptations in this world. The more he does, the easier it is for him to fall victim to temptation again, because the heart is hardened against doing right. "The sinner is a slave; he is not free who cannot govern himself." 18

What men and women needed, according to Anna Shaw, to overcome the chaos of our world was a vision of something greater than themselves. She defined it as a "Christian vision of Jesus Christ as his Master and his own life as completed and perfected . . . No man or woman ever succeeded in this life who was not a follower of this vision." 19 Shaw cited the Apostle Paul as one outstanding example of someone who had had this heavenly vision. She contended that the more holy and grand this vision, the better the person.

18 Anna Howard Shaw, "First Sermon," RWAS #497.
19 Newspaper article, Atlanta Constitution, Feb. 4, 1895, Susan B. Anthony Scrapbook 1895, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (Hereafter this source will be abbreviated SBA and the year.)
The content of the vision had to be Jesus Christ. In her youth she once remarked that Jesus Christ seemed too exalted an ideal; but as she matured she began to understand him and to know him. "In Him, the Man, were blended perfectly the ideal characteristics of man and woman." According to Shaw:

... they who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior shall not perish, but have eternal life for he has promised eternal life to as many as believe on him. ... How can we refuse to accept such an invitation when we think of the blessed Jesus, who left the glory of heaven and descended [sic] to earth clothed in our humanity, suffering shame and poverty for he had not where to lay his head, and leading a life of persecution, put to the ignoble death of the cross, that we through his sufferings and death might receive eternal life.

The cross in Shaw's theology was important. It was central to Jesus' message. "Men who follow in the footsteps of the Christ and would lift men up, must themselves be lifted up by the crucifixion of self." It was up to the individual person to respond to the Vision of God which God gave to each. The strong person is the one who can obey the orders of God. The way a person knew the orders was by attuning his heart to God to hear what God had to say and then acting on the orders. "To be a Christian is not merely to be a member of a church, to believe a creed. It is not merely to be born in a Christian land. It is not to believe, it is not an action, it is not an emotion. It is a life." One way she illustrated this point was the vision of Jacob. "Jacob of old saw the vision of God's messenger ascending and descending, but none of them standing still."

Miss Shaw considered, of course, that women were human beings and that they were part of God's plan and purpose. "Men have no right to define for us our limitations. Who shall interpret to a woman the divine element in her being?"

But for women to be free meant that there had to be a significant reversal of traditions long ingrained in society. From her study of the Bible she recognized how throughout much of it women had been discriminated against, how at the same time women were pivotal persons in the unfolding drama of the Judeo-Christian tradition. She wrote a paper for her study in seminary in which she traced the importance of women in the revelation of God's

20 Speech by Anna Howard Shaw, April 16, 1915, RWAS #540.
21 Anna Howard Shaw, "First Sermon", RWAS #497.
22 Newspaper article, San Francisco Chronicle, May 27, 1895, SBA 1895.
23 Newspaper article, Atlanta Constitution, February 4, 1895, SBA 1895.
25 Ibid., p. 361.
purpose in Jesus Christ. From the annunciation on through the discovery of the empty tomb on Easter Day, women played an important role in Jesus’ life.

Since the time of Jesus, however, women had been oppressed, but now all that had been changed. Mankind had learned that woman was created not from the side of man, but rather by his side. “Oh daughter of Jerusalem, raise the yoke from thy neck. The worst oppression comes to thee not from without, but from within. The woman who has a free soul must in time become free.” 26

The new man and the new woman combined, blended together—these were for Miss Shaw the driving point of theology. She never tired of speaking about this new humanity and believed very strongly that it would come into being. Underlying this confidence in the new humanity was a conviction that God was alive and very real. “. . . Underneath and through all the passion and strife of the selfishness [sic] and misery, all the love and beauty, there is a constant working force bringing order out of confusion, peace out of discord, joy and hope out of despair. . . .” 27

For Anna Shaw, God was a personal God. She prayed in a prayer once, “our father, our mother and our friend.” 28 God could personally enter into a person’s life and “fill your heart and life with the sunshine of His spirit that you may continue to shead [sic] it abroad.” 29

For her, with all of her theological training and study, life was a mystery which she had trouble understanding. “I never could understand why I was born. That is the greatest mystery I have ever had to study over and I have been at the problem ever since I can remember, and it is no nearer solution today than when I was a little girl, and in my misery used to ask God why He ever let me live.” 30

In the winter of 1915-1916, Miss Shaw was critically ill. After recovering she wrote: “My experience in this illness showed me that death is not the thing to fear; it is life that tests one’s courage and the willingness to live.” 31

Work for Anna Shaw was a panacea to the drudgery of this life. “. . . What a blessing it is to have a work day and we are well enough to work.” 32
One of Miss Shaw's closest friends and a co-minister of the Gospel, the Rev. Miss Caroline Crane, said after Miss Shaw's death that Shaw was "always preaching the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, . . ." always seeking to improve the conditions under which women lived and worked.\textsuperscript{33}

We turn now to the issue of establishing Shaw as an exponent of the Social Gospel Movement. We begin by defining this significant movement in American church history. In *A Dictionary of Religion and Ethics*, edited by Shailer Mathews and Gerald Birney Smith, three factors are isolated as characteristics of the Social Gospel Movement. The first is that God is active in human history. Within human lives individually and socially God acts to make his will known. What does Shaw say which illustrates this concern in her own theological position? The key word for her was the word "democracy." This was the word she used to convey the great living principle of God. "Democracy is the living spirit of the Most High. That is the force which is impelling it and will for ever impel it until some time or another we will be able to crystalize into a government that thing which we call democracy."\textsuperscript{34} Or again she said:

Democracy is not merely a form of government; it is a great spiritual force emanating from the heart of the Infinite, permeating the universe and transforming the lives of men until the day comes when it shall take possession of them, and shall govern their lives. Then will men be fitted to lift their faces to the Source from whence the spirit of democracy flows, and answer back in the spirit in their recognition of that fundamental principle of democracy "One is our father, even God, and we are members one of another."\textsuperscript{35}

Shaw believed in an active force, an Infinite Power, which participated in the on-going process of life both for the individual and for society as a whole.

A second aspect of the Social Gospel is that Jesus Christ is the ideal human being who taught and showed man what God's will is for life. Jesus encompassed within his own personality the divine nature, i.e. God's love. Shaw held this theological idea as central to her belief. For her there was blended together in Jesus Christ those characteristics which made Jesus the ideal man and woman. He was courageous and strong of body and mind—good qualities in men—and gentle, loving and understanding—good qualities in women. Jesus left the glory of heaven and descended to earth


\textsuperscript{34} Anna Howard Shaw, "Is Democracy a Failure?", March 2, 1911, RW-A-S #516.

clothed in human form, experiencing the pain and ignominy of the cross to bring eternal life to this world.

A third idea which emerges from the article on the Social Gospel Movement concerns the Kingdom of God. For the Social Gospeler, it is possible that the Kingdom of God can become fully manifested on earth. Salvation is a social process. The arena of God's saving action is the world. Again we might inquire how Shaw fit into this aspect of the Social Gospel Movement. As before, the crucial word in Shaw's vocabulary was the word "democracy." This word was used to express the ideal of society—what the ideal society was to become. "Democracy is a spirit, and existed before any government existed, and will exist after governments cease to exist. It is the very essence of human life; it is the essence of the development of the human soul; the right of every human soul to be and become all that it is possible for each human soul to become." 36

The world was greatly in need of the greatest power in the world, love. "In the long run there is no power in the world comparable to love. It is the strongest force in all human life. Some day the world will awaken to the truth of the teaching of justice and good will." 37 Shaw, discussing the woman minister, said:

... let her teach that the Kingdom of Heaven is set up here and now; let her show by example that service is the sum of human excellence; let her declare that love is the fulfillment of the perfect law, that it alone is the dynamic force in human lives which is to redeem the world from its greed, its injustice and its barbarism; let love be the keynote of all her thinking and acting, for out of it alone can come the great social, moral and religious harmony which shall usher in "the new Heaven and the new Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." 38

The Kingdom was not going to come unless men and women worked to make it come. Mankind needs to give itself to the betterment of the social order for the Kingdom ever to come. The ideal woman was one who was "influenced by lofty motives, stimulated by the will of humanity and the glory of God," and then went forth "into any field of usefulness that opens up before her." 39 Shaw believed that "human life is becoming broader and more godlike." All that was needed was to forget the chains which bound it to the

36 Speech, Anna Howard Shaw to the National Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1910, RWA-S #514.
37 Letter, Anna Howard Shaw to Mrs. James Lee Laidlaw, January 23, 1917, Radcliffe Woman's Archives, Laidlaw Papers #137.
38 Anna Howard Shaw, "Women in the Ministry", unpublished manuscript, RWA-S #498.
39 Anna Howard Shaw, excerpt from newspaper article, Philadelphia Public Ledger, November 4, 1915, RWA-S #453.
past customs. The time of God's Kingdom depended upon the loyalty and service of those who believed in it.\textsuperscript{40}

In conclusion it can be said that Shaw advocated in unmistakable terms throughout her entire public life the principles of the Social Gospel Movement. She believed that God was active in human history not only on the individual basis but also on the level of society. She further concurred with the leading Social Gospelers in her understanding of Jesus Christ. Third, she believed that the Kingdom of God was a realizeable goal within society.

But Shaw was not a thinker who worked from the seclusion of a research library. She rather was a woman who spent the majority of her adult life as a public lecturer. Shaw was an activist who totally immersed herself in the causes she professed so boldly. This cannot be stressed too strongly, for she lived what she preached. It was part of the fiber from which she was made. She forced herself to maintain an exhausting schedule of speaking engagements regardless of the conditions. No obstacle was too great for her to continue the work which she had undertaken to do.\textsuperscript{41}

It is important to remember also that her active involvement in the improvement of social conditions and her speaking for social causes pre-dates Walter Rauschenbusch, the leading exponent of the Social Gospel Movement, by more than ten years. Immediately after the Civil War Shaw was participating in social issues. Temperance was the first great concern she advocated, but shortly after she broadened her interests to include all the causes important to women, especially woman suffrage. This date places her as an early American leader in the Social Gospel Movement.

A third consideration that needs remembering when considering Shaw's social gospel theology is that Anna Shaw was a woman. A formal theological education for women was a rarity in the 1870's. Shaw faced the hardships connected with getting the training and then took advantage of her education by becoming a vocal spokesman for social justice. There are undoubtedly men who at least in writing advocated the social gospel more penetratingly than Shaw, but there surely are not many who did it with such consistent clarity. There were few of Shaw's contemporaries who spoke publicly with greater vigor and preciseness than Shaw, who distinguished herself as one of the golden tongues on the platform in her day. There were even fewer who lived a life so consistently with the principles professed.

\textsuperscript{40} Speech by Anna Howard Shaw, n.d., RWAS #482.
\textsuperscript{41} See Ralph W. Spencer, "Dr. Anna Howard Shaw: The Evangelical Feminist", unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1972, for a full discussion of Shaw's years as lecturer and also her work with the poor in the South Boston slums.
Anna Howard Shaw is truly one of the outstanding women in United States history. Underlying her commitment to solving social problems of her day was her theological position. Shaw's life was a working out in concrete realities the ideals and principles she held as central doctrines of her life.