Women As Clergy And Laity
In The 19th Century
Methodist Protestant Church

by William T. Noll

The Methodist Protestant Church stood somewhat uncertainly at the forefront of the budding movement for the equality of women in the latter half of the nineteenth century. For this church, as for other denominations, there were two distinct but closely related issues to be faced. Should women be granted equal lay rights in the church, including the right to represent the laity at various levels of church government? Should women preach, and be ordained as clergy with rights and responsibilities equal to their male counterparts? Methodist Protestant women, lay and clergy alike, achieved significant advances in their role and status years before their sisters in the two larger branches of American Methodism. In the light of the peculiar circumstances of the birth and development of the Methodist Protestant Church, the liberalism of its attitude toward women in the church is hardly surprising. Yet the advances of Methodist Protestant women in this century were never more than partial. Complete equality remained only a dream.

The original Constitution of the Methodist Protestant Church of 1830 limited suffrage and eligibility to office to "White...males."¹ This church divided over the issue of slavery in 1858, and four years later the Northern wing of the Methodist Protestant Church (then known as the "Methodist Church") eliminated these two words from its Constitution.² When the two branches of the Methodist Protestant Church reunited in

¹. Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church (Baltimore, Md., 1854), Article XII, p. 29.
². Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist [Protestant] Church (Pittsburg, Pa., 1866), Article XII, p. 29.
the early 1870s, the Constitution was again modified to leave all questions regarding suffrage and eligibility to office to the respective annual conferences. Women delegates to annual conferences begin to appear during this decade in a few areas, and are commonly accepted by the first years of the twentieth century.

The issue of women's ordination proved to be a knottier problem. Constitutionally, the debate centered around three legal questions. Although proponents of women's ordination argued that the revised section in the Constitution on eligibility to office left ordination in the hands of annual conferences, the Rev. John J. Murray, writing in the *Methodist Protestant*, stated his belief that "orders" were entirely distinct from "offices." He pointed out that the revision had been made primarily to accommodate the rights of (male) blacks who had long had the right to ordination.

Murray's second argument in the same article was that, since this Constitutional statute did not apply, the decisive disciplinary pronouncement was one which stated that "No person shall be elected to orders except he be a man of unexceptionable moral character...." Naturally, others argued that the word "man" in this case included women as a part of mankind.

The third argument against the ordination of women was

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3. For the complete story of the division and reuniting of the Methodist Protestant Church over the slavery issue, see Edward J. Drinkhouse's standard history of the Methodist Protestant Church, *History of Methodist Reform*, 2 Vol. (Baltimore, 1899). This is the most complete and accurate work on the nineteenth century Methodist Protestant Church, although Drinkhouse often fails to cite his sources and exhibits an understandable bias. A non-practicing M. D. he was a Methodist Protestant clergyman in the Maryland conference, served for eighteen years as editor of the *Methodist Protestant* weekly newspaper, and was a delegate to every General Conference from 1870 to 1902. (Biographical information from *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, Nolan B. Harmon, ed., Nashville, Tenn., 1974).

4. *Constitution and Discipline* (1872), Art. XII, p. 29.

5. J. J. Murray in *Methodist Protestant*, Vol. 54, no. 43 (Oct. 25, 1884), p. 4. John J. Murray and his brother J. T. were both prominent members of the Maryland Conference of Methodist Protestantism, and jointly edited the *Methodist Protestant* for a time. J. J. Murray served as General Conference President of the Southern wing of the church, and as fraternal messenger to the Northern church in 1867 he proposed a resolution which led to the reuniting of these two bodies.

based on an act of the 1884 General "Convention" regarding a woman's ordination as "unauthorized." Since a general convention by definition is empowered to alter the Constitution of the church, some believed that no mere general "conference" without such powers could reverse its decision. Others, such as Edward J. Drinkhouse in his standard history of the Methodist Protestant Church, tried to show that this ruling was not among those made under a limited convention mandate. Since the 1884 General Convention had been called for the purpose of making only specified Constitutional changes, any other rulings it made had only the force of conference decisions, which might be reversed by subsequent conferences.

Naturally, these legal debates were only a part of the controversy. Historical, sociological, political, financial, biological, and theological arguments were made and disputed by both sides in the debate. Numerous articles were produced which focused especially on Scriptural grounds for and against the ordination of women, and one book was later produced on the subject by a Methodist Protestant clergywoman.

The first stirrings of women's rights sentiments in the Methodist Protestant Church are clouded in obscurity. According to Drinkhouse, reformers at the founding of the church may have originally intended to provide women with equal rights, at least as laity. He cites a resolution passed by an 1828 meeting of "The Associated Methodist Reformers" (a forerunner of the Methodist Protestant Church), as follows:

On the admission of females, the female members shall be entitled to a vote.

The meaning of this regulation is rather obscure, and it was in any event eliminated in the subsequent Methodist Protestant Constitution, as we have seen.

Women occasionally served the Methodist Protestant Church as itinerant preachers during the middle years of the nineteenth century, particularly in the Western conferences where preachers were more difficult to obtain. One of the most
famous of the early evangelists was Hannah Pierce Reeves (1800-1868), who began her preaching career in her native England. After emigrating to America, she married the Rev. William Reeves, a prominent member of the Ohio Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church. While accompanying and working with her husband, she apparently became recognized as a successful preacher, for she was offered an appointment of her own. She turned the offer down, preferring to work with her husband. In 1848 William Reeves "published a defense of the ministry of women, at Putnam, Ohio." The Rev. George Brown has written a biography of Mrs. Reeves.

In 1866, after three years of deliberations, the Northern Indiana Conference of the Methodist (Protestant) Church (North) ordained the Rev. Helanor M. Davidson; she was apparently the first ordained woman minister in Methodist Protestant history. A year later this annual conference, still unsure of the legality of its action, resolved to ask the General Conference for a clarification of church policy regarding the ordination of women. In 1871 the General Conference of the Methodist (Protestant) Church (North), replying to this resolution, defeated a motion in favor of the ordination of women by a vote of 46 to 17.

This same General Conference which decided against ordaining women may nonetheless have been the first to permit a woman to address a General Conference. "Sister M. A. Bradford" led a worship service at the conference and spoke on the ordination issue. Who she was and what she said are not recorded.

Although she was not the first woman to be ordained in the

12. George Brown, The Lady Preacher, or The Life and Labors of Mrs. Hannah Reeves (Philadelphia, Pa., 1870). Rev. Brown was a founder and leader of the M. P. C. in the Ohio Valley. In his autobiography (Recollections of Itinerant Life, Cincinnati, 1866) he tells how, as a young Methodist Episcopal preacher in the 1820's, he supported the efforts of a woman preacher despite his bishop's opposition (pp. 183-188).
13. John C. Coons, A Brief History of the Methodist Protestant Church in Indiana, 1839-1939 (1939), pp. 27, 42-43. I am grateful for the research of Rev. Nancy Bahmueller in this area. Rev. Coons was a Methodist Protestant clergyman. Of the career of Rev. Davidson no further record appears to be available.
Methodist Protestant Church,\textsuperscript{16} Anna Howard Shaw was certainly the most famous. Fortunately, the complete story of her struggle for ordination is preserved in her autobiography, \textit{The Story of a Pioneer}.\textsuperscript{17} Born in England, she and her parents, who were Unitarian, moved to the Michigan wilderness while she was still a child. She was first drawn to the ministry at a time when the Methodist Episcopal Church was about to approve the granting of preacher's licenses to women.\textsuperscript{18} She received her license to preach in 1872, and went on in 1877 to graduate from the Boston University School of Theology. However, when she and Anna Oliver, another Boston graduate, applied for ordination to the New England Conference in 1880, Bishop Andrew, who was presiding at the conference, refused even to accept their names in nomination. Later that same spring the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church sustained the bishop's decision and voted to deprive women of the right to hold local preacher's licenses as well.\textsuperscript{19} So she was forced to turn to the Methodist Protestant Church to pursue her calling.

In October, 1880, at the Methodist Protestant Church's New York Annual Conference meeting in Tarrytown, New York, Anna Shaw's name was placed in nomination as a candidate for ordination. In her autobiography she relates how she was asked, as her fellow (male) candidates had been, to step out of the room for a minute or two while a decision on her qualifications was made. Only in her case the few minutes lasted into several days. Finally, late on a Saturday night her opponents revealed that she had neglected to transfer her membership from the Methodist Episcopal Church, and was thus ineligible to apply. So the matter was, for the moment, dropped.

However, the pastor of the host Tarrytown Methodist

\textsuperscript{16} Ralph W. Spencer in "Anna Howard Shaw," \textit{Methodist History}, Vol. 13, No. 2, Jan. 1975, states incorrectly that Rev. Shaw was the first ordained elder in Methodist Protestantism.


\textsuperscript{18} Shaw, pp. 58-64.

Protestant Church, the Rev. Lyman Davis, was an enthusiastic supporter of Shaw's position, and he came to the rescue.

Late as it was (on Saturday), he immediately called together the trustees of his church, and they responded. To them I made my application for church membership, which they accepted within five minutes.

Although she was still ineligible to be ordained at the regular ordination service which took place the following afternoon, the conference took up her case again on Monday. She was called to testify in her own behalf, and after long, arduous, and sometimes humorous questioning, the Conference voted to ordain her in a special ceremony.

Not all Methodist Protestants were so enthusiastic. At the next General Conference in 1884 the matter of her ordination was raised and the Conference voted that “the act (was) unauthorized by the law of the Church, and that she is not entitled to recognition as an Elder in the Methodist Protestant Church.” This same General Conference was, however, the first to invite women to seats within the bar of the conference.

The Women's Foreign Missionary Society of the Methodist Protestant Church had been founded in 1879. Prior to this time local women's groups had been forced to contribute their funds to the overseas work of Methodist Episcopal women. However, the new organization soon had its own missionaries in the field. Two women representing the WFMS were invited to address the 1880 General Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church, and four years later their officers were the first women to be invited to sit with the delegates assembled. The generosity of the men on this occasion did not extend to the sharing of political power, however. In fact, this General Conference voted to put the WFMS under the control of the all male
Board of Missions! The women had no vote and very little voice in this matter, and recognition of the right of women to serve as annual conference delegates to General Conference was still several years away.26

The Methodist Protestant Church continued to experience difficulties with its policies regarding women during subsequent years. The New York Annual Conference, in defiance of the General Conference ruling, continued to recognize Anna Shaw’s ordination as valid. She continued to minister to her East Dennis, Massachusetts, congregation until 1885 when she decided to devote herself fulltime to temperance and suffrage work. She went on to become Susan B. Anthony’s most trusted assistant in the cause of woman’s suffrage. Susan Anthony died shortly before the turn of the century, and Dr. Shaw (who had earned her M.D. degree at Boston University while serving her Cape Cod parish) carried on, from 1902 to 1915, as President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She was the guiding spirit behind the eventually successful effort to pass the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States (which gave women the right to vote). She continued to exercise her ministerial office, preaching in churches throughout the country, and she maintained her membership in the New York Conference.

The 1888 General Conference faced two issues relating to women’s role in their church. Reversing the action of 1884, they voted to restore to the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society its independence. They also submitted an overture, requiring approval by two-thirds of the annual conferences, permitting the licensing of women preachers.27 Apparently several conferences were already in the practice of doing so. (It is notable how much more independent Methodist Protestant annual conferences were than their counterparts in episcopal Methodism.) The decision on this overture was never recorded, and events leading up to the 1892 General Conference rendered it meaningless.

In 1889 the Kansas Conference of the Methodist Protestant Church ordained Eugenia F. St. John, a successful evangelist and lecturer, and the wife of a Methodist Episcopal minister. She had begun her preaching career by filling her husband’s pulpit

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27. Journal (1888), p. 34; Magalis, p. 28; Drinkhouse, p. 639.
during an illness, and had been preaching for eleven years prior to her ordination. She was to go on to become a leader in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and in 1892 she was elected by the Kansas Conference as its ministerial delegate to General Conference.\textsuperscript{28}

Three other annual conferences elected laywomen as delegates to this same conference. Miss M. M. Bonnett from West Virginia was a former missionary to Japan. Mrs. J. M. Murphy was treasurer of the Iowa Conference board of foreign missions. Mrs. M. J. Morgan represented Indiana.\textsuperscript{29} In 1888 the Methodist Episcopal Church had refused to seat Frances Willard and several other regularly elected women delegates to their General Conference,\textsuperscript{30} and it must have seemed to many in the Methodist Protestant Church an ideal opportunity to upstage a "sister" denomination.

As the day approached for the opening of the 1892 General Conference in Westminster, Maryland, feelings on both sides of the woman's issue ran high. It was obvious that all in the church foresaw that this would be the decisive consideration of the role of women as laity and clergy in their denomination. The problem for the delegates was made more complex since there were really two separate issues facing them. Was a laywoman eligible to serve as a regular annual conference delegate to General Conference? And was a woman ordained by an annual conference legally ordained and eligible to represent that conference as a ministerial delegate? Several observers expected that the General Conference would compromise by admitting the three laywomen as delegates while regarding the Rev. Mrs. St. John as illegally ordained and thus ineligible to serve as a delegate.\textsuperscript{31}

That the "woman question" was uppermost in people's minds is obvious from a list of titles of articles and letters printed on the subject in the 1892 issues of the \textit{Methodist Recorder}:

- No. 13, Mar. 26: "An Epicene Episcopate" — Turney, p. 3.
- "A Last Word" — Clarke, p. 4.
- No. 14, Apr. 2: "Women's Place in the Church" — Spence, p. 4.
- "Women Prophesying" — Mrs. M. D. Wellcome, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Methodist Protestant} (May 25, 1892), p. 1.
\textsuperscript{30} Magalis, pp. 119-120.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Methodist Recorder}, Vol. 53, No. 23 (June 4, 1892), p. 1. D. S. Stevens edited this paper of the more liberal Northern and Western areas of the church.
No. 15, Apr. 9: "Are Women Eligible as Representatives?" — J. J. Murray, p. 3.
No. 16, Apr. 16: "Rejoinder to Brother Clarke’s Concluding Word" — Turney, p. 4.
No. 17, Apr. 23: "Men, Persons, Members" Applegate, p. 3.
No. 18, Apr. 30: "Women Eligible, in Answer to Dr. Murray" — Turney, p. 4.
No. 19, May 7: Reply to Rev. T. B. Applegate" — J. J. Murray, p. 3.
"Some Reflections on the Question" — Rev. E. F. St. John
"Your Sons and Your Daughters Shall Prophesy" — Frances Willard
"Neither Male Nor Female in Christ Jesus" — Horton
"A Revival of Pentacostal Privilege" — Hottenstein
"Mutual Rights" — Rouze
"The Woman Question" — Kidd
No. 21, May 21: "Review of Murray’s Reply" — Scott

No other issue before the Conference received such attention in the Methodist Protestant press.

When the conference opened J. T. Murray, brother of John J., was appointed to chair the Credentials Committee which examined the legality of each delegate’s certificate of election to the conference. He was to lead the forces opposed to the women’s presence. Another member of the committee was the Rev. Thomas B. Applegate of New Jersey, leader of the pro-women faction. The committee quickly approved the credentials of each of the male delegates, but the debate and parliamentary maneuvering over admitting the women raged on for two days.

The final majority report of the committee, as submitted by Murray and three other committee members, regarded the election of women as lay delegates “null, because in violation of the constitution and law of the church.” Applegate and two others submitted a minority report reading as follows:

...we find that the credentials of the representatives...are regular; that the election has been constitutionally held and returned, and that all the members of this body as so enrolled are entitled to their seats.33

During the two-day debate various substitute proposals were introduced and rejected.34 When the final vote was at last taken the minority report, favoring equal lay rights for women, was

33. Journal (1892), p. 64.
34. One unintelligible proposal was offered by Drinkhouse.
passed convincingly, 77 to 48.35

This action, however, did not end discussion and action on the role of women at this General Conference. Two days later the conference, perhaps caught up in a revolutionary fervor, struck the word “obey” from the woman’s marriage vow. The vote was 55 to 26.36 St. John commented that she “had always considered it unnecessary in that a woman would obey her husband if she loved him.”37

The following morning J. T. Murray reopened the fray. He and other opponents of women’s rights offered the following overture for submission to the annual conferences:

WHEREAS, The General Conference of 1884, by direction, and the General Conference of 1888, by clear implication, declared female ordination to be contrary to the law of the Methodist Protestant Church; and

WHEREAS, The next General Conference may reverse the action of this General Conference on the subject, leaving the question still in doubt; therefore

RESOLVED, In order to settle the question beyond dispute, that the President and Secretary of this General Conference be and are hereby instructed to send down to the various Annual Conferences before their next session the following overture, to be substituted for the first sentence of item 2, Article VIII of the Constitution:

“The General Conference shall consist of an equal number of ministers, either male or female, and laymen, either men or women.”38

Discussion on this overture was postponed until that afternoon when Appleget offered the following substitute:

RESOLVED, That the General Convention of the Methodist Protestant Church, on May 16, 1877, in order to form a union with the Methodist Church, did adopt a resolution which had been adopted by the General Convention of the Methodist Church, on May 15, 1877, in words following, to wit:

35. Methodist Recorder (June 4, 1892), p. 8. The Conference President ruled that until unseated the four women were entitled to their vote. Thus each had the opportunity to vote for her own admission.
37. Methodist Recorder (June 11, 1892), p. 1. The paper also printed the following:

Mr. Appleget wanted to know if the thing (striking the word “obey” from the marriage ceremony) had any retroactive effect, and would have any action on his case. President Hering assured him that it would take effect from the date of its passage and would effect only contracts made in the future.
RESOLVED, That the matter of suffrage and eligibility to office be left to the Annual Conferences respectively, provided that each Annual Conference shall be entitled to representation in the same ratio in the General Conference, and provided that no rule shall be passed which shall infringe the right of suffrage or eligibility to office.

And the joint Convention of the Methodist Protestant Church did at once adopt this resolution without change as its organic law of suffrage and eligibility, as Article XII of the Constitution, and this sixteenth General Conference (1892), by its deliberate action in refusing to unseat the representatives elected by the Annual Conferences of Kansas, Iowa, Indiana, and West Virginia, has declared that the right of the Annual Conferences respectively to determine the eligibility of any persons for office, as confessed by said article XII, has remained and is now unrestricted and unimpaired, and can only be limited when two-thirds of the Annual Conferences have enacted positively such limitations, and it is thought desirable by many members of this Conference that the Annual Conferences shall be asked to consider such limitation; therefore,

RESOLVED, That these two amendments are submitted by overture to the Annual Conferences:

1. Amend Article XII by adding: "And provide that no Annual Conference shall elect a woman to the office of elder."

2. Amend Article XII by adding: "And provided that no Annual Conference shall elect a woman as representative to the General Conference."

The substitute was overwhelmingly approved.

Because an overture needed approval by two-thirds of the annual conferences to be enacted, both Murray and Appleget knew that they could never hope to advance their own point of view by such means. In addition, they expected that many annual conferences, jealous of their own powers, would support neither of these overtures. Thus each introduced an overture seemingly favorable to the opposition in the expectation that it would be decisively defeated.

In their deliberations on this issue, as with many others, the Methodist Protestants kept at least one eye on what was happening in the Methodist Episcopal Churches, North and South. It is no coincidence that the last twenty years of the nineteenth century also saw a large-scale debate on women's role in the Methodist Episcopal Churches. In 1880 the same General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) that rejected Anna Howard Shaw and Anna Oliver refused even to receive a message from the W.C.T.U. brought by Frances Willard. Eight years later she and three other women were sent by annual conferences as regularly elected delegates to this...
church's General Conference, only to be refused admittance. It was not until 1904 in the Methodist Episcopal Church (North), and 1920 in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South that women were allowed as lay representatives at General Conference. In 1924, fifty-eight years after Helanor Davidson was ordained in Northern Indiana and thirty-two years after Eugenia St. John was recognized by a Methodist Protestant General Conference, the first, highly limited form of ordination for women was approved in the Methodist Episcopal Church (North). 40

In the Methodist Protestant Church the Rev. Mr. Appleget's overtures of 1892 met their expected fate; in fact only one annual conference approved them. 41 Thus, the approach of the General Conference of 1896 in Kansas City, Kansas, brought with it none of the accompanying furor of its predecessor. In the weeks preceding the Conference only two articles and no letters appeared in the pages of the *Methodist Recorder* on the subject of women and General Conference. Three women were elected to attend the conference as delegates. Indiana, for the second consecutive General Conference, sent one laywoman delegate; this year it was Mrs. M. A. Omo. The host Kansas delegation was once again equally divided between men and women, with laywoman Mrs. J. E. Rouze joining the returning Rev. E. F. St. John. 42

But J. T. Murray was also re-elected as a Conference delegate, and he had no intention of abandoning his fight. Accordingly, he introduced the following resolution:

WHEREAS, The General Conference of 1892 sent to the annual conferences an overture touching the eligibility of women to the office of elder and as representatives to the General Conference; and

WHEREAS, The overture has been practically disregarded and ignored in some instances, because of the form in which it was presented, leaving the question of eligibility of women still undetermined: therefore,

RESOLVED, That the women who have been seated in this General Conference be undisturbed in their places, waiving all questions of eligibility in the case.

RESOLVED, In order to settle the question beyond dispute, that the president and secretary of this General Conference be, and they are hereby, instructed to send down to the various annual conferences before their next session the following overture, to be submitted for the first sentence of Item 2, Article VIII, of the Constitution: The General

40. Magalis, pp. 116, 120, 128.
Conference shall consist of an equal number of ministers, either male or female, and laymen, either men or women."

RESOLVED, That women be made eligible to the order of elder in the church. 43

This time the debate lasted less than one day, and this time, surprisingly enough, Murray’s resolutions passed by a margin of 69 to 57. 44 Despite the grammar and punctuation, Murray’s final resolution (concerning women as elders) was considered a part of the overture. One local paper commented:

It was argued by those working in the interests of the women that the constitution had been interpreted already to permit the women to hold offices, and they wanted the question dropped. The fight against dropping the question at this time was led by Maryland representatives. Four years ago Dr. Appleget of New Jersey led the fight for the women, and he outgeneraled the opponents and won. Dr. Appleget is not present at the conference to engineer their fight again, and the Marylanders won. 45

This overture of Murray’s almost backfired. By the time of the General Conference of 1900 well over half of the annual conferences had voted in favor of the overture. 46 However, since the necessary two-thirds majority was not reached, the overture was defeated, and the lone woman elected to the General Conference that year, the Rev. Lee Anna Starr of Northern Illinois, was concerned enough about her status to prepare a pamphlet entitled “The Ministry of Women,” which supported her claims as a minister and a delegate. 47 Starr had been a successful pastor in Michigan and Illinois, and was to become a popular lecturer for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. She also retained a strong interest in women’s rights issues, and in 1926 she published The Bible Status of Woman. 48 In this book she exhaustively exeges, from a fundamentalist-feminist point of view, every scriptural passage relevant to woman’s place in society. It is a well written and thought provoking work.

47. Reviewed in Methodist Recorder, Vol. 61, No. 25 (June 23, 1900), pp. 3-4. There are no existing copies in the libraries of Drew or Wesley Theological Schools or reported in the Methodist Union Catalogue.
Starr's anxiety over her status at the General Conference of 1900 proved to be unfounded, for no challenge to her credentials was offered.\textsuperscript{49} As D. S. Stevens had forecast four years earlier, defeat of the overture left the decision as to the lay and clergy rights of women where it had been all along, in the hands of the annual conferences.\textsuperscript{50}

In one sense this solution was a forerunner of that enacted by the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) in 1924. Women could be granted elders' orders by an annual conference, but recognition of these orders by more conservative annual conferences was not guaranteed, should a woman wish to change her conference. This was an essential concession to those who sought to uphold the right of annual conferences to govern themselves, and those who, like the Murrays, opposed giving equal clergy and lay rights to women could claim that their real interest was in upholding annual conference rights. However, women clergy in the Methodist Protestant Church were, unlike their Methodist Episcopal counterparts, given appointment, pension, and annual conference membership rights equal to male clergy. In 1939 at the Uniting Conference of the three major branches of Methodism, full conference membership for female clergy was defeated by a narrow margin.\textsuperscript{51} In light of this decision, the membership of several ordained women in Methodist Protestant annual conferences proved to be somewhat embarrassing.

What to do with the Methodist Protestant women members at the time of union perplexed the appointing powers, but since they were in full and regular standing in the Methodist Protestant Church, there was nothing else to do but to keep their enrollment in the new church and provide work for them.\textsuperscript{52}

But for other women, including those in former Methodist Protestant congregations, the possibilities for ministry in the new Methodist church were as bleak as they had been for Anna Howard Shaw and Eugenia St. John fifty years earlier.

The Methodist Protestant Church understood itself and its

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Methodist Recorder} (June 23, 1900), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Methodist Recorder} (May 30, 1896), p. 4.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Daily Christian Advocate}, May 11, 1939, pp. 454-458. After first passing by voice vote full clergy rights for women was defeated 371 to 384.
place in American Methodism in a way which might best be described as the role of Cinderella, the poor, mistreated, somehow the not quite legitimate child of the family who nonetheless remained righteous, visionary, and pure as the driven snow. In all that the Methodist Protestants did they were compared by others and, indeed, they compared themselves to their larger and more prosperous Methodist Episcopal relations. Their literature and their corporate actions were characterized by a prophetic determination to stand by the reforms upon which they were founded, a somewhat bitter defensiveness as to the rightness of their cause despite their comparative lack of success, and an overwhelming desire to rejoin the Methodist Episcopal Church while “saving face.” Thus, while some Methodist Protestants saw the matter of equal lay and clergy rights for women as an opportunity to witness to and influence the Methodist Episcopal churches, while publicizing their own denomination, many others, no doubt like many Anglicans today, feared that such reform might endanger the tenuous yet vital ties between the stepchild and the mother church.

During its life as a separate denomination the Methodist Protestant Church was a significant influence for reform upon Methodism, nudging other denominations toward lay rights for both men and women. In 1939 compromisers in the church were willing to sacrifice full clergy rights for women for the sake of union. But its influence as a reform tradition in the church lived on. The Uniting Conference of 1939 marked the beginning of major new efforts to obtain full clergy rights for women and at the 1956 General Conference of The Methodist Church that movement met with success. Women were granted clergy rights fully equal with men's, and the sisters of Anna Howard Shaw could at long last come home.