

BOOK REVIEW

William L. Andrews, ed. *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. 245 pp. \$18.95.

In *Sisters of the Spirit*, William Andrews, Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin: Madison has brought together the autobiographies of three remarkable black female evangelists of the Methodist tradition. In addition to these documents, Andrews has provided an excellent introduction and valuable footnotes which help the reader better understand the context in which these women lived.

The overall theme of the book is "the growth of authentic, individually authorized selfhood." The reader is able to follow this development in Jarena Lee's *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, as she recounts her experiences in ministry. In *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw*, we are able to see Elaw's courage as the pursuit of her call took her into the south, and eventually, to England. In *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch by Mrs. Julia A. J. Foote*, we see Foote's perseverance despite resistance to her message of sanctification. Undaunted by lack of education and resistance to females in the pulpit, these women, convinced of their call to preach, pursued effective itinerant ministries.

The primary concern of these writers is their religious pilgrimages as they sought to be faithful to God's call. Given the era in which they lived, this led them to distance themselves from the traditional roles assigned to women. Thus, the three "lived experimental lives, exploring the possibilities of a deliberately chosen marginal identity that morally and spiritually engaged the world without being socially engulfed by it" (12). This book is rewarding reading for those interested in religious autobiography, Methodist history, feminist issues, as well as black religious history.

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