

Jean C. Lambert: Covenant Pastor, Theologian, Pioneer

Kelly Johnston, ordained Covenant pastor, Naperville, Illinois

Women today are pioneering in a treacherous wilderness. Whether in the church as treasurer, deacon, adult Bible teacher, elder or council member, minister of Christian education, missionary health professional or missionary evangelist, or as pastor, the fact remains if one is a woman in ministry, one is a pioneer. (Jean Lambert, on behalf of the Board of the Ministry, 1989)

At the 97th Annual Meeting, held in Chicago, 1982, Jean Lambert (1940–2008) became the ninth woman to be ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church. Lambert would go on to serve in a variety of diverse contexts, alternating between parish and academy. Beginning as professor of theology at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri (1976–1985), Lambert took her first pastoral call at Bethesda Covenant Church in New York City (1985–1989). From Bethesda she reentered the academy as senior lecturer of religious studies at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare (1989–1991). After a second call to parish ministry as pastor of the International Fellowship Immanuelskyrkan in Stockholm, Sweden (1992–1998), she returned to the classroom in Zimbabwe, as associate professor of theology and ethics at Africa University in Mutare (1998–2004). Reflecting on her ministry at the end of her life, Lambert wrote, “I have been a boundary-straddler, my churches and communities crossing sociological, denominational, national, linguistic lines.”¹ This article surveys Jean Lambert’s life of

1. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, July 26, 2004. Jean Lambert Ministry File, Record Series 6/1/2/1, Box 85, Folder 67, Covenant Archives and Historical Library (CAHL), Chicago, Illinois.

faithful ministry as pioneer, advocate, pastor, and theologian.

Path to Ordination

Even prior to her ordination, Lambert had earned master's and doctoral degrees from Union Theological Seminary and taught seminarians at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. She had served on the Committee for Revision of Book of Worship (1974–1981) and the Board of Publications (1977–1982).² In 1980 Lambert was the first woman to preach at the annual meeting of the Covenant Ministerium. In spite of this wealth of experience, several internal obstacles stood between her and ordination.

Like many of her time, Lambert grew up assuming women could serve as missionaries and teachers but not as pastors. She graduated in 1962 from North Park College with a bachelor's degree in history and minor in French and began work at Covenant Press as a staff assistant for the *Covenant Companion*. After two years in this position, Lambert left to pursue seminary studies at Union Theological Seminary—not with pastoral ministry in mind but rather to enrich her sensed-vocation as a Christian journalist.³ Through her studies she discovered a passion for Alfred North Whitehead, whose process theology provided a framework for her to “think about the theological puzzles that had tormented [her],” particularly “the relation of God's will and human will, freedom and destiny, God's goodness and power in relation to human rebellion and sin.”⁴ Upon graduation Lambert returned to Covenant Press as managing editor of the *Covenant Companion*. After three years in this position she resumed her studies, returning to Union to pursue a PhD in philosophy of religion, continuing her research on Whitehead under process theologian Daniel Day Williams.

Lambert credited the women's movement for her later ability to “recognize the call of God for what it was”⁵ and accept that women could be called to pastoral ministry. At the same time, her desire for a less

2. Covenant Minister's Profile Form, January 31, 1987. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

3. Covenant Minister's Profile Form, January 29, 1991. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

4. Jean Lambert, “Toward Covenant Ordination: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Board of Ministry of the Evangelical Covenant Church,” 2–3. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

5. Covenant Minister's Profile Form, July 26, 2004. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

hierarchical church generated ongoing resistance to ordination. She was deeply convinced that the ministry to which every Christian was called could rightly be considered an ordained ministry. Lambert had outlined her conviction about ordination in a 1974 article, “Un-Fettering the Word: A Call for Coarcial Interpretation of the Bible.”⁶ In her discussion of biblical interpretation and the locus of human authority, she directly linked clericalism and sexism. She called for a “coarcial ordering”⁷ where the “emphasis is on a community’s sharing its diverse gifts and thereby finding sufficient order to maintain humane and liberating structure.”⁸ She reads Jesus’s own teaching, such as Matthew 20:25–27, as establishing this coarcial vision, embraced for a time in the early church until it reverted to a more worldly distinction between men and women, contributing to the clericalism still dominant in the church.⁹ Lambert’s main argument in “Un-Fettering the Word” is that the interpretation of Scripture should be available to all Christians regardless of their standing in the official leadership structures of the church. The article reflects Lambert’s passion for the priesthood of all believers.

In time Lambert came to realize that despite her desire to maintain lay status, functionally she had already passed from laity to clergy by virtue of her vocation as a seminary professor. While teaching theology at St. Paul School of Theology (1976–1985), she offered courses and workshops at her home church in Olathe, Kansas, and in Covenant congregations and conferences around the Midwest.¹⁰ “I have lost my credibility as a lay person,” she wrote in her ordination paper. “I keep being called upon by people to do actions we recognize as the province of the ordained: celebration of the Lord’s Supper, baptizing, preaching, pastoral counseling.”¹¹ She would later articulate her pastoral call as com-

6. Jean Lambert, “Un-Fettering the Word: A Call for Coarcial Interpretation of the Bible,” *Covenant Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1974): 3–26.

7. “Coarcial” is a word Lambert created for the purposes of her argument: “I derive coarcial from the Greek *koinoneo* (to share) and *arkeo* (to be sufficient); I distinguish it from hierarchical, based on *hieros* (sacred) and *archo* (to rule over),” “Un-Fettering the Word,” 16.

8. *Ibid.*

9. “Does it not seem likely, at least, that the churches’ revalidating of sexually-defined hierarchies facilitated the hardening of other functional distinctions into hierarchies of authority and status?” “Un-Fettering the Word,” 17.

10. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, January 29, 1991. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

11. Lambert, “Toward Covenant Ordination,” 10.

ing from “students who accepted me as pastor and asked me to perform various pastoral functions”¹² and would identify her ministry of teaching theology as both call and fulfillment of that call.¹³

Recognizing that the call to ordained ministry came not only from one’s own internal struggle or intuition, but also from God through the people of God, Lambert submitted her ordination application, opening the discernment process to the structures of the church. On August 18, 1981, she wrote to Earl VanDerVeer, executive secretary of the ministry, “After long consideration—sometimes thoughtful, sometimes prayerful, and sometimes just ‘stewing’—I have decided to apply for ordination to the Christian ministry in the Evangelical Covenant Church.”¹⁴

Lambert’s ordination essays are masterfully conceived and written. Indeed, the report on her ordination interview reads, “We found the paper hard to interpret. Some of the questions she raised we felt were beyond us”; “We were aware of an interview with a gifted person who was dealing with questions in a manner we normally do not follow ourselves. We do not question her faith or place in Covenant life.”¹⁵ And so Lambert was ordained, June 10, 1982, with Isolde Anderson as the eighth and ninth women ordained to ministry in the Evangelical Covenant Church following the 1976 Annual Meeting vote in favor of women’s ordination.

Advocate

Using the power of words as well as her presence in key places, Lambert was an advocate for Covenant women in ministry before and following her ordination. In agreeing to the Covenant’s position on baptism during the ordination process, Lambert had inserted “she or” and “or her” throughout the statement at each instance masculine language was used. She appended a note to the end of the document: “I am glad to agree in the Covenant’s statement on Baptism, here stated, and will commit myself to continuing work to deepen our mutual understanding and improve our language so as to upbuild the body of Christ.”¹⁶ Her archival

12. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, March 18, 1997. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

13. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, June, 18, 2003. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

14. Jean Lambert to Earl VanDerVeer, August 18, 1981. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

15. Paul Sparrman, acting secretary, Report on an Ordination Interview, January 14, 1982. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

16. Signed April 23, 1982. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

file includes correspondence with the Board of the Ministry, advocating for—and being assigned the task of—the elimination of “sexist language” from Covenant documents, including the Covenant Constitution and Bylaws.¹⁷

In 1980, Lambert was the first woman to preach at an annual meeting of the Covenant Ministerium. The Committee for Revision of Book of Worship, on which Lambert served, was responsible for planning the communion service preceding the first business session and chose Lambert to preach.¹⁸ The minutes of the meeting note simply that “a challenging sermon on Mark 5:21–43 was delivered by Jean Lambert.”¹⁹ She herself was conscious of the weight of this pioneering sermon: “Knowing that the committee’s selection of me to preach wasn’t only because I was a woman, I felt I nevertheless ‘represented’ my sister preachers in this task. . . .”²⁰ Her sermon focused on Christ’s healing of the hemorrhaging woman and raising of Jairus’s daughter. She ascribed to the former action Christ’s elimination of obligatory suffering, to the second, his inauguration of a new system of life and liberation: “I believe Jesus is signaling here the releasing of all captives from their pasts filled with bondage—releasing the poor, the black, the sick, the female, the colonized, the disfigured, the unfree from every cause—and calling them, us, to get up and walk.”²¹ Lambert highlighted Christ’s attention to these two women and the fact that all three synoptic gospels record those gathered in Jairus’s home laughing at Jesus (v. 40). Here, Lambert insisted, is where we find the gospel:

God’s good news is not immediately impressive. It comes in contrast with what we are expecting, so much so that it may even seem ridiculous. If you want to hear God’s word, listen

17. Cf. letters to Jean Lambert from Earl VanDerVeer, March 29, 1983, and Donald Njaa, April 2, 1986; July 8, 1987. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

18. Jean Lambert, “Hope for the Daily Dying: Mark 5:21–43,” *Covenant Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (1988): 35, n. 1.

19. *Covenant Yearbook 1980*, 194. Lambert’s 1980 sermon was published in the November 1988 *Covenant Quarterly*—with Mary Miller’s ten-year study of Covenant clergywomen—including substantial footnotes on her process of preparing the sermon and experience preaching it. I highly recommend this sermon both for the great personal insights shared by Lambert in her footnotes as well as the excellent gospel message in the sermon. Lambert, “Hope for the Daily Dying,” 35–43.

20. *Ibid.*, 35, n. 2.

21. *Ibid.*, 43.

to the powerless. If you want to hear God's word, listen to the oppressed. Listen to the men they laugh at, the ones they make ethnic jokes about. You want to hear God's word? Listen to the woman whose idea strikes you funny when she isn't joking. More to the point here, if we are to get the good news from the raising of Jairus's daughter, we must hear it along with the news of the hemorrhaging woman.²²

In preparing this sermon for publication some years later, Lambert recalled a pastor who shared with her his realization that women could bring new insight to the biblical text. She noted the internal process required for women to recognize and validate such insight: "Women don't automatically have special insights just from being women. It took the feminist 'consciousness raising' process to allow me to *use* my 'female knowledge' and not keep repressing it."²³

At the annual meeting of the Covenant Ministerium in 1982, the same year Lambert was ordained, a resolution was presented by Janet Lundblad to "appoint a task force to seek to encourage, by all appropriate means, the calling of women into pastoral ministry."²⁴ The resolution passed, and Lambert joined Lundblad and David Hawkinson in leading the Task Force on Women in Pastoral Ministry. As the chair of that task force, Lambert was able to put her theological convictions into conversation with others in support of women and men sharing fully in the ministry of the church. Among its work, the task force advocated that the Covenant's commitment to women's ordination be made explicit in each ordination interview.²⁵

In 1984, at the request of the Board of the Ministry, Lambert partnered with Klyne Snodgrass, Robert Johnston, and David Scholer to present a paper to the Covenant Ministerium on "A Biblical and Theological Basis

22. *Ibid.*, 41.

23. *Ibid.*, 38–39, n. 8.

24. *Covenant Yearbook 1982*, 224.

25. Jean Lambert to Kent Palmquist, July 21, 1984. "Glenn Palmberg suggested that some special attention be given to the issue, and recognition of the 1976 decision be made explicitly, in each pre-ordination interview with the Board, though he doesn't think a further suggestion [John] Bray made—namely, that affirmation of the 1976 decision be an explicit requirement for ordination—would be a good precedent. I find both these suggestions good (recognize the 1976 decision but don't require acquiescence)." Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

for Women in Ministry.” After some discussion and revision, this paper now stands as a key resource supporting women’s unrestricted ministry for many evangelical denominations.²⁶

Lambert was the first woman to serve on the Board of the Ministry (1985–1989) and was its secretary from 1987 to 1989. In 1989, on behalf of the board, Lambert wrote “an open letter to each woman seeking to obey Christ’s call to ministry in the Covenant Church, both volunteer lay workers in local congregations, and pastors, missionaries, and staff ministers.”²⁷ The letter was a response to the pain and anger revealed in Mary Miller’s survey of Covenant clergywomen, “Ten Years Later,” published in the *Covenant Quarterly*.²⁸ Lambert’s words were both stark, speaking in plain terms about the reality of sexism in the church, and encouraging, expressing solidarity with Covenant women as ministers of the gospel. She admitted that all women in ministry in the Covenant Church were “pioneering in a treacherous wilderness”:

If you choose not to accept a sexist definition from the church and society for what your ministry is to be, then you need to be fully aware that you are accepting more than a vocation, a career, a profession. You are choosing a cross, and you will be lugging it around for the foreseeable future. . . . If you say “yes,” you can take some comfort in the promise that we will—as the Board of the Ministry—help women and men struggle against sexism as best we can, given our own need to grow and struggle too. But we cannot take away the cross. Our common enemy is sexism.²⁹

Lambert herself continued to say “yes,” persevering in her call through the wildernesses she encountered in both parish and academic ministry.

26. Robert Johnston, Jean Lambert, David Scholer, and Klyne Snodgrass, “A Biblical and Theological Basis for Women in Ministry,” <http://www.covchurch.org/resources/files/2010/04/A-Biblical-and-Theological-Basis-for-Women-in-Ministry.pdf>, accessed May 11, 2011.

27. Jean Lambert, for the Board of the Ministry, “An open letter to each woman seeking to obey Christ’s call to ministry in the Covenant Church,” June 12, 1989. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL. Full text of letter appended to this article, pp. 45–49.

28. Mary Miller, “A Decade Later: North Park Theological Seminary Female M.Div. Graduates (1977–1987),” *Covenant Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (1988): 6–26.

29. Lambert, “Open Letter.”

Pastor

In 1985 Lambert took her first pastoral call at Bethesda Covenant Church in New York City, the church she had attended during her years at Union. This was the first of two parish positions she would serve, both of these calls sandwiched between academic appointments. Pastoring presented Lambert a whole new set of challenges—fostering a collaborative church climate of mutual relationships, putting principles of team leadership into practice, and integrating her interests in theology, literature, and art into life and ministry.³⁰ Lambert’s core conviction that all Christians were called to serve God was significant for her pastoral ministry. She articulated her goals for ministry in early 1987 as becoming

more aware of God’s presence so as to lead others into receptivity; to be faithful in use of Scripture so as to lead others into discerning God’s guidance and saying “yes” to God’s unique call to them—as individuals, congregations, Christians institutions, and as workers in secular institutions.³¹

The goal to “lead others into receptivity” compelled Lambert to get involved in activities outside the church as well. Bethesda Covenant Church worshiped in a chapel at the United Nations. In addition to being a regular volunteer in a homeless shelter and singing with a community choir, she participated in the group of Religious Non-Governmental Organizations at the United Nations, serving as its chair for a year.³² In a July 1986 *Covenant Companion* article, Lambert emphasized the importance of Christian presence at the UN and described the tension inherent in navigating the similarities and differences between the aims of the UN and the aims of the church.

Even though Christ is not named as a participant in the discussions, Christians may be sure he is there. Even though no one invokes the Holy Spirit aloud, Christians may trust that even in the United Nations God is not left without a witness. The United Nations needs Christians’ prayers, and our critical support. Bethesda Covenant Church invites our

30. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, January 31, 1987. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

31. Ibid.

32. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, January 29, 1991. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

fellow Covenanters to support us in our mission on behalf of Christ and of the Covenant Church.³³

Lambert served at Bethesda until 1989, when she accepted a two-year teaching contract at the University of Zimbabwe. A hand-written note at the top of her minister's profile form upon her return to the United States reads, "seeking call—to seminary or congregation in fall 1991."³⁴

Lambert hoped to find another teaching appointment, ideally at North Park Theological Seminary. For years, it had been her dream to teach at the Covenant's seminary, but the opportunity never materialized, causing her great grief.³⁵ The opportunity that did present itself was a call to pastoral ministry at the International Fellowship at Immanuelskyrkan in Stockholm, Sweden. Lambert became the first woman to pastor this congregation as well as one of the first Covenant clergywoman to receive a *second* pastoral call, something that has proved to be a significant challenge over the years for women serving in the Evangelical Covenant Church.

Congregational life at Immanuelskyrkan brought Lambert both joys and sorrows. She gave herself fully to her work and was like family to the broad mix of people in her congregation, many of whom were refugees from Africa, a place close to Lambert's heart. She welcomed her congregants into her home, sometimes for extended stays while they searched for housing.³⁶ She also supervised several seminary interns at the International Fellowship, allowing her to use her teaching gifts. The seminarians who worked with her benefited from her skills both as pastor and scholar. Her interns were known to return from Sweden with a much deeper knowledge of the *Covenant Hymnal*, the *Covenant Book of Worship*, and other resources Lambert found valuable for creative worship.³⁷

Lambert noted the significant growth she experienced while serving at Immanuelskyrkan, "both as a person and as a pastor and practicing theologian."³⁸ Even so, she felt an ongoing mismatch between her gifts and the parish setting, acknowledging that "the context still feels alien

33. Jean Lambert, "A Christian's View of the United Nations," *Covenant Companion* (July 1986): 9.

34. Covenant Minister's Profile Form, June 6, 1989. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

35. Carlson, interview by author, April 2011.

36. Anderson, interview by author, April 2011.

37. Carlson, interview by author.

38. Jean Lambert to Donald Njaa, February 22, 1998. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

and uncomfortable even after five years.”³⁹ She felt gifted for ministry in the academy yet could find no opportunity to exercise those gifts:

I am somewhat envious of people in ministry who have more attractive personalities than I do, but have decided that if God wants me to be a pastor with the gifts I’ve been given it is God’s lookout, not mine. I have always thought these gifts were more suited to teaching, but until some school agrees with me I will have to assume I am where I should be.⁴⁰

And still she hoped an opportunity would arise.

I hope I will find some place of ministry (that is, be called to one) in which the requirements of the work “feel” more like myself than the present ones do, and in which I will be better to find/make time to read and write. I still dream of teaching again in Africa . . . God knows and so far is not telling me.⁴¹

That opportunity came in 1998.

Theologian

Covenant historian Philip J. Anderson has described Lambert as the first female theologian in the Covenant Church. Having taught at St. Paul School of Theology and then pastoring at Bethesda Covenant Church, Lambert embraced a new challenge when she accepted a position as senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Zimbabwe in May 1989, teaching courses in theology and ethics.

Of teaching in Africa she wrote, “It’s really different here; there are few resources and no books. It’s like you and the student sit together under a tree and *you* are the book.”⁴² In addition to “being” the book, Lambert wrote many course texts for her students, such as *Invitation to Christian Theology*, a project she labored on throughout her time in Zimbabwe. The pages of a 1990 draft of the text include hand-written notes recording

39. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, March 18, 1997. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

40. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, December 23, 1993. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

41. Ibid.

42. Quoted in Richard W. Carlson’s presentation of honorary doctorate of divinity to Jean Lambert, May 17, 2008, North Park Theological Seminary. Private collection of Richard W. Carlson.

feedback and questions from colleagues and students. A section on the Trinity recounts a student comment: “Esther Zuirawa ’90 says, ‘Shona cultural background. . . juniors are normally sent to do certain duties by elders. It would be a sign of disrespectfulness for a younger person to send his parents or anyone above his age.’ Sees God–Son–Spirit as a subordination pattern.”⁴³ Both the content of these extensive works and the annotations of student feedback demonstrate Lambert’s commitment to the cultural hermeneutics needed to meet the real needs of her students.

Lambert’s second position in Zimbabwe followed her years in Sweden. Acknowledging the growth this ministry had afforded she said, “I hope that my students in Africa will reap some benefit from the ‘new revised standard Jean Lambert.’”⁴⁴ At Africa University (1998–2004) Lambert again dedicated herself to her students, supplementing the library’s small collection with photocopies of books from her personal library, copies of her extensive lecture notes, and textbooks she wrote to meet the specific needs of her students. She described these efforts in a 1999 letter:

[A]ffordable theology books and ethics books are simply impossible. We use photocopied “readers,” the making of which is part of my job. In the long “vacations” I resonate with the Preacher who wrote “of the making of books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.”⁴⁵

One such textbook was *Choose Today! The Unity and Diversity of Biblical Ethics*, in which Lambert surveyed ethical themes throughout Scripture, the complex-but-accessible guide to life with God and for God. For another ethics course, she wrote *We Can Act Ethically! Will We?*, which incorporated some of *Choose Today* and was formatted as a handbook with opportunities for students to reflect personally on the variety of ethical issues raised, including sexual, ecological, financial, and professional ethics. She opens the book by comparing and contrasting what Western and African theologians have named as central to ethics, acknowledg-

43. Jean Lambert, *Invitation to Christian Theology*, draft copy of a textbook in process for students in religious studies at University of Zimbabwe, 1990. Record Series 6/1/2/1/47, Box 4, Folder 10, CAHL.

44. Jean Lambert to Donald Njaa, February 22, 1998. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

45. Jean Lambert to Donn Engebretson, October 10, 1999. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

ing that her students have their feet in two cultures.⁴⁶ Throughout her works, includes *Choose Today*, Lambert incorporated stories from life in Africa and African scholarship as well as Western stories and scholarship. In addition to her own textbooks, Lambert wrote materials for Africa University's spiritual formation program.⁴⁷

In her contribution to Karl Olsson's festschrift, "Befriending in God's Name," Lambert offered what she called "a preliminary sketch of 'a theology' of the friendship of God."⁴⁸ Her work built on feminist theologian Sallie McFague's *Models of God*,⁴⁹ in which McFague joins other feminist and liberation theologians in "dissenting from hierarchical and power-preoccupied models of God... as well as from the theologies developed to warrant them."⁵⁰ Lambert cited approvingly McFague's warning of the danger in a nuclear age of understanding God as "power over" the world. Lambert built on McFague's use of "friend" as an alternate metaphor for speaking of God's non-hierarchical love, connecting this to the Covenant's historical understanding of God as "the Friend of friends."⁵¹ On this basis Lambert articulated a missiology constitutive of a theology of the friendship of God: because God is friend, God is always seeking out new friendships. God wants the good news of his friendship to spread throughout the world through mission friends who establish relationships, express friendship in a variety of ways, and, embodying God's friendship, participate in the conversion process of "finding and being found."⁵² Lambert here defined doctrine as "what faith wants new friends to understand about God, themselves, and the world."⁵³

Lambert's annual ministerial profiles indicate the extent of her global scholarly activity. To name only a few, she presented at an international conference of the Lutheran World Federation on women and faith in Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1991), and attended conferences of the

46. Jean Lambert, *We Can Act Ethically! Will We?* (n.p.: 2003), 9. Record Series 6/1/2/1/47, Box 4, Folder 2, CAHL.

47. E.g., *Making Right Choices: An Ethics Manual for Zimbabwe* (ca. 2000).

48. Jean C. Lambert, "Befriending in God's Name: Preface to a Missionary Theology of God as Friend," in *Amicus Dei: Essays on Faith and Friendship*, ed. Philip J. Anderson (Chicago: Covenant Publications, 1988), 37–68.

49. Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

50. Lambert, "Befriending in God's Name," 43.

51. *Ibid.*, 63.

52. *Ibid.*, 56.

53. *Ibid.*, 49.

Association of International Churches in Europe and the Middle East in Budapest (1995) and Jerusalem (1996).⁵⁴ She helped host a conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians on the theme “Culture, Religion, and Liberation,” where she also presented a paper “on contextualization and incarnation of Christian ministry in the church’s local culture” (1990).⁵⁵ Her description of continuing education pursued in 2004 portrays an impressive range and depth of scholarly interests and output:

In September/October I took a mini-sabbatical in Wales and read extensively in two areas: (a) life and work of St. Augustine (of Hippo), (b) interface of Christian theology and physics.... I have drafted 10 articles on Augustine and submitted two manuscripts for publication. One, a handbook on ethics, is to be published in March by Silvera House, Harare.⁵⁶

Pioneer

In the last years of her life, Lambert was honored by the church as well as the academy. It is fitting that her pioneering work was recognized by both fields she had served over the years. Looking toward retirement age in 2004, Lambert wrote, “I seem to be in good health but realize this can change rapidly.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, her good health did change after she returned to the United States in 2005. She was diagnosed with ALS in 2007, a disease that claimed her life the following year.

In 2006 the Evangelical Covenant Church honored Lambert with the Irving C. Lambert Award, an award recognizing excellence in support of urban and ethnic ministries, named in honor of her father. The plaque presented by then-president Glen Palmberg read,

From the early nurture of a small city congregation, you have shaped a life of ministry and friendship for all of God’s

54. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, March 18, 1997. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

55. Report of Continuing Education, Ministerium of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Report for Calendar Year 1990. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

56. Report of Continuing Education, Ministerium of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Calendar Year 2004. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

57. Covenant Minister’s Profile Form, July 26, 2004. Jean Lambert Ministry File, CAHL.

children. You have dwelt comfortably in the borderlands of the human family, among people of different races, cultural groups, and social classes. All alike have been touched by your ministry. From New York to Zimbabwe, from Kansas City to Stockholm, you have exercised your gifts as teacher, pastor, writer, and friend. In all things you have shown intelligence, wisdom, and generosity. Your life stands as a witness to us all.

Professors Philip Anderson and Richard Carlson, who had enjoyed friendship with Lambert for many years, both felt it important that Lambert receive an honorary doctorate from North Park Theological Seminary, where she had always wanted to teach.⁵⁸ At the 2008 commencement ceremony, Carlson presented Lambert with the honorary degree *in absentia*, as Lambert's quickly declining health prevented her attendance.⁵⁹ Following the ceremony, Anderson, Carlson, Mary Miller, and Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom traveled to Windsor Manor in Carol Stream to present Lambert with the degree. One month later, June 18, 2008, Lambert took her final breath, ending a life of dedicated service to the church.

Jean Lambert was a pioneer who helped pave the way for other Covenant women in ministry, as she wove together practical ministry and academic theology. She was a pastor who contributed significantly to the theological articulation of the Evangelical Covenant Church and a professor who shaped Christians into ministers capable of thinking theologically about life's challenges. Her words continue to challenge us to partner together as mission friends, bringing glory to God as we love and serve "the Friend of friends" together.

58. Before her diagnosis she had taught one course on the Trinity at North Park Seminary, her long-time dream. Her students were awed by her eloquence and intelligence, even when straying from her lecture notes or lesson plan. One student commented that Lambert had "more in her head than most of the rest of this faculty has in their books!" Carlson, interview with author.

59. Carlson, presentation of honorary doctorate of divinity.

Appendix⁶⁰

An open letter to each woman seeking to obey Christ's call to ministry in the Covenant Church, both volunteer lay workers in local congregations, and pastors, missionaries, and staff ministers.

June 12, 1989

From: Jean Lambert, for the Board of the Ministry

We have been thinking together about the situation of women and men in ministry in the Covenant Church, and we want first to affirm some convictions, and then offer some interpretation we think important.

Convictions

1. We are committed to an inclusive ministry in pilgrimage toward a whole church.

2. We care about you. We value your commitment to Christ, respect your willingness to study and prepare for ministry, desire to be your colleagues.

3. We hear your pain and respect your anger, as we heard it expressed by some of you in Mary Miller's report of your responses to her questionnaire, published in the *Covenant Quarterly*.

4. We are distressed by the continuing atmosphere of coolness or hostility encountered by all too many women who hold positions of leadership throughout the Covenant Church.

5. We do not claim complete understanding of the sexism that is one of the dominant evils in our society, yet we are committed to learning what it is, how it affects women and men, how it distorts our common life in Christ; we are committed to repenting of sexism so the Spirit of God can transform us. And,

6. As part of our ongoing work in a church always being reformed by God's Spirit, a church growing more whole as we believe Christ intends, we urge you to join us in considering some "facts of life" we believe affect our common life in church work: the search for a call, the consideration of volunteer possibilities, the selection or interview process, entering into work, how one is received, how one perceives oneself in ministry, how we respond to situations of frustration, conflict, and fulfillment.

60. Reprinted from original letter, available in Jean Lambert Ministry File, Covenant Archives and Historical Library, Chicago, Illinois. Text is reproduced here exactly, with the exception of typographical revisions.

We think putting these facts into open conversation will help us all be stronger, saner, and more faithful.

Facts

Fact 1: *American society is sexist*, specifically masculinist. (It is also racist, ageist, classist . . . but we aren't addressing all of that here!) Though we do not understand it fully, it is clear that sexism is both a psycho/cultural bias and complex of social institutions. It operates largely unconsciously, though its "symptoms" may be observed by the seeing eye. This complex reality—sexism—is based on an ancient intuition that the biological differences between men and women are a natural *and* revealed "message" about superiority/inferiority, value and worthlessness, competence/incompetence, appropriateness/inappropriateness.

To say our society is "sexist" has implications on three levels:

1. The visible *social structures are "set up" to give power and freedom for self-definition and fulfillment to men*, primarily white men. These structures depend on women to support the male power elite—physically, emotionally, spiritually—by working in subordinate and often non-remunerative work, like homemaking and volunteer church work. This "set up" is a presupposition when women who are employed outside the home are blamed (or feel blamed) for "the decline of family life."

2. The tacit *sense of what is real*, that we all share, *is colored by sexism*. Unless we actively "convert" from it and become "disciples" in living and viewing the world in a critical, constructive "Galatians 3:28-way," there will always be a part of us that is really convinced that women are the moral and intellectual inferiors of men. It doesn't matter whether one is a person of good will or not, a man or woman, a follower of Jesus or not, a caring person or not: anyone in our society "is sexist." This is why a male supporter of women's ordination says, "We've got to do more to help these women" (i.e., they are our responsibility, the dears). This is why a woman frustrated by a lack of call says, "To improve the situation, replace five of the nine superintendents with women" (i.e., the men are the problem). Unconsciously we show our sexism.

3. Our personal *senses of our selves are determined in large part by the sexism* of our culture. It encourages women to look to men for their sense of self, of value, of affirmation for work accomplished. It encourages men to feel defensive when they are accused of impeding women in any way. Sexism dwells inside ourselves, and affects our self-image, self-esteem. It speaks within a woman, for example, saying: "I am weak. What can I

do about anything? I am at the mercy of them. If I want a future I need a man (men) to give it to me. Make friends with the males in charge; figure out how to please them, and by all means please them.” Men hear the voice of sexism in their own souls, as well. “Someone needs to be in charge. Men do. This world works better if we take care of business, etc.”

The longer we listen to our inner sexist voice, the less our own, true, inner woman-voice or man-voice is audible in our soul.

Fact II. *The church mirrors the sexism of the society.* Christianity has its own patriarchalism to face. We need to listen to our masculinist language and theology, notice the male dominance of the decision-making in our churches, and notice the subordinate care-taking, maintaining roles that our churches deem appropriate as “women’s work”: teaching children, serving dinners, being decorative at social functions, providing hospitality for the men who meet to plan and strategize, teach Bible studies for women, manage fund raisers and service projects, particularly those without public visibility. We need to look at all this patriarchalism and study Scripture to learn whether any of it is defensible now for Spirit-led people. If we find old patterns that need change, we must start to make the changes. And even all this will merely be polishing the mirror! The sexism the church reflects from the society runs far deeper.

Fact III. *Sexism is a form of evil that is women’s real enemy* as we seek to say “yes” to the Spirit who calls us to ministry. For example, it is sexism that assures the Director of Christian Education will be paid thousands of dollars less than his or her senior pastor, regardless of the CE director’s education, experience, competence, *or sex*, because *whoever* the CE director is, he or she is perceived to be doing “women’s work,” which is not worth as much as men’s in the church budget. And it is sexism when the only job available to a female seminary graduate moving toward ordination is at a rural crossroads 60 miles from the nearest hospital and 5 miles from any paved road. The problem isn’t her superintendent, her grooming, or her reputed emotional instability. All of these might be factors for this person or that, but the major barricade on her professional road (no matter who she is) is sexism, *that psycho-cultural bias and complex of social institutions that operates largely unconsciously, to devalue women.*

Therefore

So, what are we saying to you women readers, and to ourselves as part of both the problem and the solution. Quit? No, no. Don’t quit! Nor is

this letter advice to “be patient,” or to “hang in there.” Rather, we are writing to us all as a kind of prophetic “call to consciousness.”

Women today are pioneering in a treacherous wilderness. Whether in the church as treasurer, deacon, adult Bible teacher, elder or council member, minister of Christian education, missionary health professional or missionary evangelist, or as pastor, the fact remains if one is a woman in ministry, one is a pioneer. Anyone who seeks to be a colleague of women in leadership in the church is pioneering as well. Women have a “right” to be called and supported equally with their Christian brothers, but women are not, and changing the situation will require work. Women must expect the “flies, floods, and fights” a pioneer always undergoes. Women will “pay their dues” like their brothers, and then pay again, and again. It is not fair. Women also must be more careful than their brothers in Christ to be prudent, incorruptible, well-prepared, unsuspected. Nothing women do will be unscrutinized. A therapist with whom I worked in a small group of women once said, “any group of women is potentially threatening, to men and to other women. You may be planning a revolution, or talking about your nail polish. If there are two or more of you with your heads together it is likely to be seen as a subversive group.” Or, as another observer of the human condition has observed, “No good deed will go unpunished.” We must know this, and let it guide our life together, without carrying the knowledge as a chip on our shoulders. Being in solidarity with each other as sisters can give us particular strength. The company of brothers who share this pioneering spirit gives encouragement as well.

Women are choosing to be faithful to Christ in a church that too often wants women to be faithful to *sexist* tradition. Conflict is inevitable. As pioneers, women risk dying on hills toward which brother and sister Christians will be pushing them, without knowing they are doing so. In one sense our fellow Christians are responsible, but even those who want to accept responsibility for their actions are not necessarily *able* to, and this is the result of sexism.

Remember Hebrews 12:2, which calls us to be “looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. . . .” We do have an Exemplar beyond all others. Christ calls the women and men whom he will. You are called? Good. You said “yes”? Wonderful.

Now, though, comes the pioneering challenge. If you *choose not* to accept a *sexist* definition from the church and society for what your ministry is to be, then you need to be fully aware that you are accepting more

than a vocation, a career, a profession. You are choosing a cross, and you will be lugging it around for the foreseeable future. Moreover, in a real sense you are going to be carrying this cross on behalf of the church. Your “career choice” may bring you no benefits, but the long-range benefits for a renewed, transformed, more faithful church will keep you in the struggle. Much of the time it will be a joy and you’ll forget you carry the cross; sometimes it will weigh a ton. Helping us defeat sexism is a part of your ministry. You can say “no.” Whether and how you respond to Christ’s call is a matter for each to work out with the Holy Spirit.

If you say “yes,” you can take some comfort in the promise that we will—as the Board of the Ministry—help women and men struggle against sexism as best we can, given our own need to grow and struggle too. But we cannot take away the cross. Our common enemy is sexism. To personify, the Enemy carries sexism these days as one major piece of a demonic portfolio. It makes the Enemy happy when we attack each other rather than learning to understand and undermine the sexism itself.

We can be evangelical people. Where the world stands for get-and-grab, one-upping, levels of power and status, and degrees of rank and respectability, we can be gospel folks: sharing, helping, standing on the level ground beneath Jesus’s cross. We can stand with each other and, as the Spirit empowers us, we can bear each other’s burdens. We invite you to persevere in ministry.

Women in ministry—lay and clergy—we are your colleagues in the ministry of Jesus’ gospel. We love you.