

Ministry Research Notes

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Changing Age and Gender Profiles Among Entering Seminary Students: 1975-1989

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Highlights

- 80,000 records describing Protestant, Catholic and Jewish seminarians for time periods of up to 40 years have been collected and computerized.
- Women seminarians, *on average*, come from more affluent families, have higher current income, more home equity, and higher GRE scores than their male counterparts.
- As a rule of thumb, the older a woman is when she enters seminary, the more likely it is that she will be divorced. This is not true of male seminarians.
- Women are entering the ranks of the clergy at a much slower rate than they have entered law and medicine.
- The median debt load of third-year seminarians in 1989-90 was \$7,809, approximately \$1,300 more than in 1987-88.
- The Roman Catholic Church is the only major denomination with an acute shortage of clergy. The number of those preparing for the priesthood dropped from 42,000 in 1966 to 8,394 in 1989-90.

INTRODUCTION

From the very first days of the English colonies in America, the quality of the community's future clergy was a matter of public concern. The founders of Harvard created their college "to advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust." (Morrison, 1935)

Some 350 years later concern for the quality of the North American clergy is with us still. Today, maturity, integrity, and commitment are at least equal partners with learning in that catalogue of virtues we ascribe to the ideal priest, minister, or rabbi. Though these qualities of the heart are more difficult to measure than those of the mind, this series of occasional papers will attempt to limn a profile of the entering seminarian that will include measures not only of academic achievement but of psychological maturity and spiritual attitudes as well.

This issue of *Ministry Research Notes* will focus on the changing demographics of entering seminarians and how these changes have modified traditional public perceptions about the ideal characteristics of a candidate for ordination. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the demographic profile of the North American seminarian has changed more in the twenty years since 1970 than in the prior two hundred years. The two decisive factors in this changing profile are gender and age. Never before have so many women presented themselves for ordination. Never before have so many men and women entered the ranks of the clergy after the

age of thirty. As the demographic profile of the seminary student body changes, other background characteristics — social, academic, and professional — change as well, raising serious issues both for seminaries and denominational policy makers.

- As the seminary student body grows older, are seminarians today more likely to be married, single, or divorced than those in the past?
- Are they more likely to bring children with them as they begin their study of theology?
- As more women enter ordained ministry, do their educational and occupational backgrounds differ from those of male clergy?
- Do women candidates have more liberal attitudes than men on theological and social issues?
- Do younger students have different academic interests and backgrounds than older ones?

The model for our research is Alexander Astin's study (1987) of the American freshman. Each year since 1966, Astin has surveyed some 200,000 young people just entering college about their goals, interests, and attitudes. His work has revealed a variety of changes in the culture of the American college student during the past quarter century. Unfortunately, we cannot travel back in time and survey entering seminarians since 1966. We have had to rely on archival sources to reconstruct a profile of seminarians — Protestant, Catholic and Jewish — to determine how they have changed over the past 25 years.

process of collecting some 80,000 records that, in the aggregate, provide a reasonably well-rounded picture of seminarians, especially during the period 1975-1989. These databases are described in the appendix and were collected from the following sources:

Source	Number of Records	Time Period
Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)	12,000	1981-1988
Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GAPSEAS)	15,000	1985-1989
Theological School Inventory (TSI)	26,100	1975-1989
Readiness/Profiles of Ministry (POM)	18,500	1978-1988
Seminaries and Career Counseling Centers (SCCC)	15,800	1944-1988

Archival sources, however, are not ideal instruments for social science research. Yesterday's records give us answers to yesterday's questions. We have, for example, some 35,000 files on birth order, not because it was part of our research agenda, but because the data were there. And for today's questions, whose answers do concern us, we often find that the several instruments we rely upon have gathered information in nonuniform ways. Though we have more than 50,000 files that report on the marital status of seminarians, each of the major datasets worded their questions about divorce differently enough that our findings about the population of one dataset may not be

exactly comparable to our findings in others.

Despite the limitations of archival research, and despite the fact that no one of our databases, taken alone, is representative of the seminary student body as a whole, the aggregated data are reasonably comprehensive. All but 15 of the 173 seminaries in the United States¹ accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) are represented in one or more databases. Each year, from 1975 to the present, we have collected an average of 4,500 records describing that year's entering class of some 8,000 to 9,000 Master of Divinity candidates. The data are not a systematic sample, but we are unaware of any dataset that is more comprehensive.

WOMEN AND ORDAINED MINISTRY

From Biblical times to our own, women have always been active and influential in the ministry of Church and Synagogue. However, this activity and influence, as pervasive and important as it was, did not gain for women a place in the hierarchy of the ordained clergy until the second half of the 20th century. The very few exceptions to this rule occurred in those denominations where the power of ordination lies with the congregation. Among Congregationalists and Disciples of Christ, for example, a few women were ordained as early as the 19th century. But in those denominations in which the power to ordain is reserved to a bishop or to a group of clergy, such as a presbytery or an association, women were barred from ordination until a decade or so after World War II.

Among the first to ordain women were the Methodists and northern Presbyterians (United Presbyterian Church) beginning in 1956. Presbyterians in the south (Presbyterian Church in the US) followed their northern colleagues in 1964; then two branches of the Lutheran Church in 1970; and the Episcopal Church in 1976. In American Judaism, where the seminary ordains, Hebrew Union College began to ordain women rabbis for the Reform movement in 1972; Jewish Theological Seminary, the major seminary for the Conservative movement, followed in 1985.

Between 1972 and 1987 the number of women preparing for ordination in institutions accredited by the ATS rose from 1,077 to 6,108, a five-fold increase (Association of Theological Schools, 1987). During the same period the total number

¹At the moment we have little data on African American and Canadian seminarians. We hope to devote a separate occasional paper to each group.

THE RETROSPECTIVE

With major support from the Lilly Endowment, a research team at Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton, New Jersey, is compiling a series of databases that will describe entering seminarians for periods of up to 40 years. As of fall 1990 when this report was written, the ETS team had collected or was in the

of male Master of Divinity candidates declined slightly from 22,031 in 1972 to 21,251 in 1987. These enrollment increases for women seminarians reflect trends in higher education at large. In 1978, for the first time in American history, slightly more women were enrolled in college than men. By the 1989-90 academic year, a million more women than men were earning a college degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990).

The early cohorts of women Master of Divinity candidates were generally perceived as academically outstanding. If the data we have collected from the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) are any indication, women candidates continue to be outstanding as measured by this test of academic promise. In reviewing the files of 1.5 million GRE test-takers during the period 1981 to 1988, we identified some 12,000 "prospective"² Master of Divinity students. In every one of the eight years surveyed, the average verbal score of "prospective" women seminarians was higher than that of average GRE test-takers, most of whom are preparing for doctoral programs. During the same eight-year period, the women "prospectives" also consistently averaged 23 to 30 points higher on the GRE verbal test than male "prospective" candidates. In 1988, one-third of women Master of Divinity "prospectives" obtained verbal scores of 600 or more; only one-fifth of male "prospectives" did as well (Grandy, 1990).

One interesting example of the academic achievement of women candidates was found in the 1988 GRE quantitative scores. Ordinarily the average quantitative scores for women lag those of men by some 80 points, almost a full standard deviation. But women, age 20-24, who were planning to study theology not only averaged 20 points higher on the quantitative test than male theologians of the same age, they had the same average quantitative scores as males in general.

The high academic achievement of women students may not be enough, however, to overcome a lingering resistance to women in the clergy. There are some indications that women clergy with equal seniority are not advancing at the

same rate as their male counterparts. In a recent study by Reformed Judaism's Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), none of the 153 women ordained at Hebrew Union College since 1972 has become the senior rabbi in a UAHC congregation larger than 350 families (Winer, 1990). And when comparing salaries for pulpits of similar size and responsibility, women rabbis receive lower compensation than their male counterparts.

A 1989 study of Presbyterian clergy shows a similar resistance to the employment of women clergy. On a "typical" day, 2,100 Presbyterian ministers are vying for 600 openings in the church. But congregations show a "clear preference for pastors who are male, able-bodied, married (but not part of a clergy couple), and relatively young" (Research Division, 1989). It is not surprising that the clergywomen surveyed believe they will have a more difficult time finding positions because of their gender.

If congregations are reluctant to accept women as pastors, we might expect that eventually fewer women will be willing to prepare themselves for ordination. One indication of such a reaction might be the 1989-90 enrollment decline in the eleven seminaries of the Episcopal Church. This decline is entirely attributable to a drop in the number of entering women students.

In informal gatherings it is not unusual to hear male clergy express concern that too many women in the ministry will cause both compensation and the prestige of the profession to decline. These concerns may have a subtle effect on the way male pastors nurture a call to ministry. A 1990 study by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) shows that while 69 percent of white male candidates said that their pastors were a formative influence that led them to ministry, only 20 percent of white female candidates felt that their pastors were equally influential.³

Resistance to the entry of women, while it may exist in other professions, does not seem to have slowed the flow of women into medicine and law as much as it has into the ranks of the clergy. Women are becoming doctors and lawyers at a much

faster rate than they are becoming ministers, priests, and rabbis. In fact, as the following table shows, the percentage of women enrolled in ordination-track Master of Divinity programs in 1986-87 resembles that of the enrollment of women in medicine and law a decade earlier.

It should be noted, however, that these enrollment lags are largely the result of denominational policy and vary greatly from denomination to denomination. Roman Catholics and Missouri Synod Lutherans bar the ordination of women on doctrinal grounds. In other denominations, the United Church of Christ for example, women account for more than half of the Master of Divinity enrollment.

	Enrollment in Schools of Medicine, Law, and Theology			
	1976-77		1986-87	
	M	F	M	F
Medicine	45,145	12,940(22.3)	43,680	21,782(33.3)
Law	88,647	30,902(25.8)	62,789	43,176(40.7)
Divinity	22,256	2,905(11.5)	22,106	6,103(21.6)

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 1989

WOMEN SEMINARIANS AND DIVORCE

Prior to the 1960s, divorce was often equated with moral failure. The common wisdom held that a divorced man could not successfully run for a major public office much less think of presenting himself for ordination. Divorce among the clergy was relatively rare but, when it did occur, was considered damaging enough to warrant a minister's resignation. In the past 30 years, a sharp increase in the incidence of divorce has resulted in more tolerant attitudes toward those, even among the clergy, whose marriages have been dissolved.

It is difficult to compare the divorce rate among seminarians with that of the general public. The U.S. Census Bureau counts the number of divorces granted in any given year. In our databases, seminarians report the incidence of divorce in a given lifetime. Even though these two sets of data are not comparable, it is still useful to look at trends in both populations.

Since 1960, the divorce rate in the general population has more than doubled, rising from 9.2 per 1000 females over 15 years of age to a high of 22.6 per 1000 in 1980. After 1980, however, the divorce rate began to back off its highs and has been stable to slightly declining since then.

In 1986, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate was 21.2 per thousand (Bureau of the Census, 1990).

Our data show similar trends, especially among women seminarians. A fairly common anecdote in theological education is that a high proportion of the women entering ministry do so as a result of some trauma, especially the loss of a spouse through divorce or death. Data from our retrospective databases do indeed show that women candidates at any given age are more likely than the men to be widowed or divorced.

For the 3,349 Protestant women seminarians who completed the Readiness/Profiles of Ministry (POM)⁴ instrument between 1977-1989, the older they were when they entered seminary, the greater the likelihood that they were divorced. This was not true of male Protestant seminarians. As the chart below (Figure 1) shows, of those men who entered seminary between ages 30 to 50, the number reporting themselves to be divorced remained constant at 4.1 to 5.4 percent of the male POM population across that 20-year age span. The rate for women, however, continued to rise in step with their age. For women seminarians ages 26 to 30, the divorce rate was 7.4 percent. For those who entered between ages 46 to 50, more than one in four was divorced.

⁴The Readiness/Profiles of Ministry database was prepared by David Schuller of the Association of Theological Schools and Mark Brekke of Search Institute.

²The GRE background questionnaire does not currently list the Master of Divinity as one of the available degree choices. We defined "prospective" Master of Divinity candidates as those who had their scores sent to ATS institutions, and planned to study religion or theology at the Master's level.

³In this report, the pattern of influence is reversed for African American candidates where 53 percent of the males but 83 percent of the females say that their pastor was a formative influence that led them to ministry.

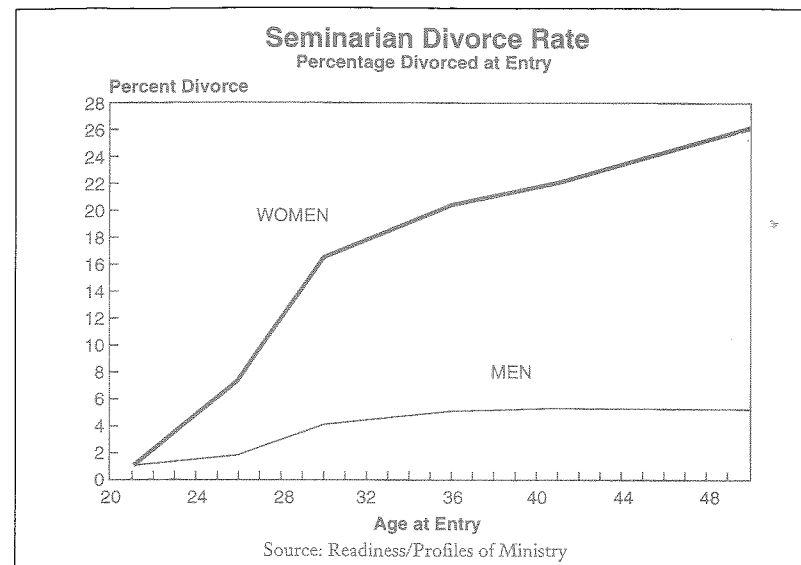


Fig. 1

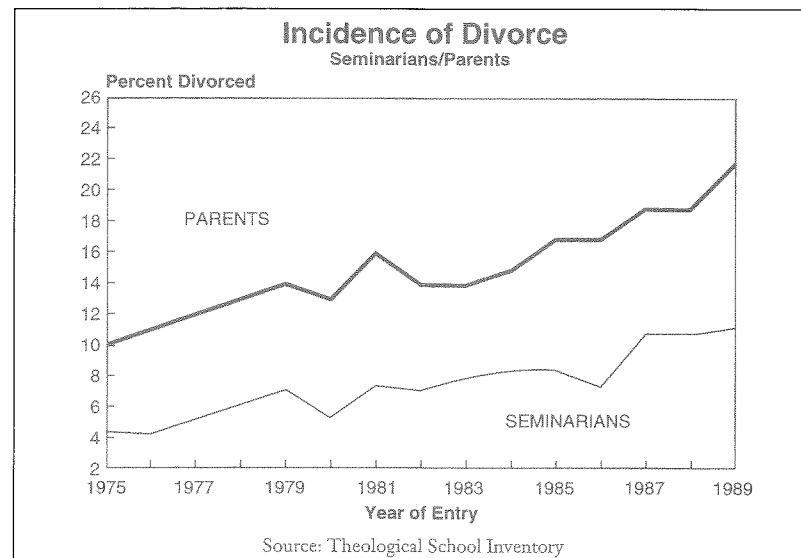


Fig. 2

FINANCIAL CONDITION OF WOMEN SEMINARY STUDENTS

One of the more common barriers to pursuing a call to ministry is a lack of the necessary financial resources. Depending on the denomination, a Master of Divinity program may require from three to five years of study. Seminarians with children, especially those who are single heads of households, may find even subsidized tuition difficult to afford for that length of time. It has also been noted that almost one-third of the women candidates who have not had a career outside the home have significant problems adjusting to seminary life (Brushwyler, 1990).

As a corollary, the marriage rate for male seminarians is also consistently higher than for the women. And at all ages, women seminarians are more likely than men to report that they have never been married.

A second source of information about the marital status of seminarians is found in the Theological School Inventory (TSI)⁵. Of the 26,151 male and female seminarians who completed the TSI background questionnaire between 1975 and 1989, the percentage who stated that they are currently divorced rose from 2 percent in 1975 to 6 percent in 1989, a figure roughly comparable to that reported for male seminarians in the Profiles of Ministry database. However, the TSI also asks, though the POM does not, whether the person is in a second marriage. When the two TSI responses of "currently divorced" and "in second marriage" are combined, the percentage of TSI seminarians who have experienced a divorce grew from 4 percent in 1975 to 12 percent in 1989.

The percentage who reported that their parents were divorced when they entered seminary more than doubled in the 15-year period. Today in the TSI population, as Figure 2 shows, almost one seminarian in four has parents who are divorced compared to one in ten in 1975.

An examination of the 1989-90 Graduate and Professional Student Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS) identified 5,700 Master of Divinity candidates among the 118,497 students who filed a GAPSFAS form that year. A comparison of that data with the prior two years suggests that fewer Master of Divinity candidates are making use of Guaranteed Student Loans and that their debt burden, in terms of constant dollars, is stable. The median accumulated debt of beginning third-year theology students increased from \$7,777 in 1988-89 to \$7,809 in 1989-90. And a quarter of them had debts of \$14,000 or more (Benson, 1990).

Accumulated Debt of Theology Students Entering Third Year					
Year	Number	Selected Percentiles			
		90th	75th	50th	25th
1987-88	1228	\$17,000	\$11,200	\$6,500	\$1,120
1988-89	1080	\$9,972	12,978	7,777	2,500
1989-90	1126	20,162	14,000	7,809	2,400

Source: Educational Testing Service

In most of the GAPSFAS categories women candidates for ministry show themselves to be somewhat better off financially than their male counterparts. They have somewhat higher adjusted gross incomes and somewhat more debt than male seminarians. Women candidates, however, are far better off in terms of capital assets

than their male counterparts. As the chart below (Figure 3) points out, when the balance of the mortgage on one's home is subtracted from the current market value of the home, the value of women seminarians' home equity is almost twice that of the men's. Why the difference? In general, asset accumulation tends to increase with age, especially in a time of inflation. Not only are women Master of Divinity candidates older than male candidates but those who are married are likely to have reported their joint marital assets as well.

Despite being no worse off than men in terms of current income and clearly better off in terms of real assets, women were more likely than men (50 percent to 36 percent) to say on their GRE form that they would not be able to continue their studies without financial aid. Female candidates are less likely than their male counterparts to list work as a way to finance their education. This may reflect the child-rearing responsibilities that are more likely to be borne by women than by men.

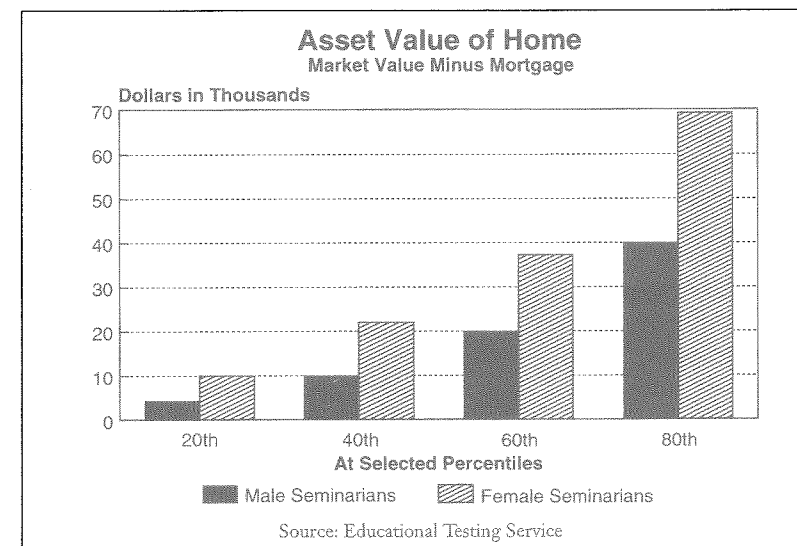


Fig. 3

CHANGE IN AGE PROFILE: THE SECOND CAREER CANDIDATE

Since the founding of Andover Seminary in 1807, future clergy have usually followed the traditional path of entering seminary within a year or two after graduating from college. The exceptions to this pattern occurred at those times when the nation was at war. Soldiers back from World War II raised both seminary enrollments and average age. A survey conducted in 1946-47 by the Selective Service System showed that in the Episcopal Church, for example, more than 60 percent of the 501 full-time divinity students en-

rolled at the eleven Episcopal seminaries that year were veterans of World War II (Selective Service System, 1950). During the Vietnam War, however, the average age of entering seminarians fell between 1968 and 1972, probably reflecting the effect of the draft laws enacted during that period.

Using 1962 as a base year, data from the Theological School Inventory files show entering seminarians with a mean age of 25.4 years (Larsen, 1989). For the years 1975-1989, we have compiled an

⁵The Theological Schools Inventory database was prepared by Richard Hunt of Fuller Theological Seminary.

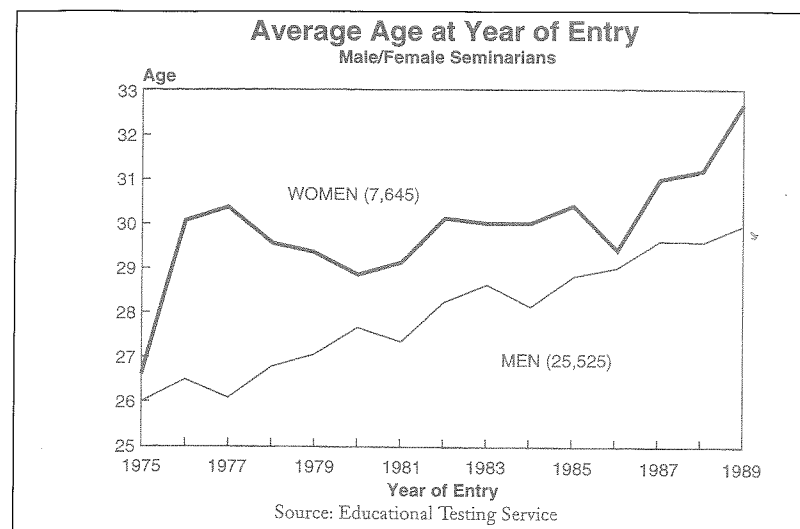


Fig. 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF SECOND CAREER CANDIDATES

The men and women who enter seminary after age 30 have ordinarily had extensive experience in a prior career or occupation. The percentage of those in the TSI population who had spent ten or more years in a previous occupation rose from 17 percent in 1975 to 39 percent in 1989. Almost 40 percent had been engaged in two or more types of work before they entered seminary.

It is not surprising that the women and men who enter seminary after age 30 are customarily called "second career" candidates no matter what their occupational background. (Interestingly enough, the candidates themselves often consider this designation an inappropriate one. To them, ministry is their real calling). The over-30 group are not just older but quite different in their personal history from those who enter directly from college.

According to data from the GRE and TSI:

- Men over 30 were more likely than their younger counterparts to have majored in business, the sciences, or education; men under 30 were more likely to have majored in religion, the humanities, or psychology.
- Women, in general, were less likely than men to major in religion. Women over 30 were more likely to have majored in biology, health sciences, or education than their younger female counterparts.
- In 1975 only one entering seminarian

age profile of 25,525 men and 7,635 women seminarians (Figure 4) from four of our retrospective databases.

During the entire period, the average age of entering women seminarians was consistently higher than that of the men. Even so, the age profile of male seminarians changed considerably as well. The percentage of men under age 30 in the Profiles of Ministry population dropped from 86 percent in 1977 to 63 percent in 1987. In some denominations the age shift is even more pronounced. In the Episcopal Church, for example, among those women and men currently enrolled in seminary, only one in five is under age 30.⁶

in four had children; by 1989 more than half had children when they entered.

- Fewer students report that they themselves are in excellent physical health. The self-rating of "excellent" dropped from 64 percent in 1975 to 51 percent in 1989. There was little or no change, however, in the self-reports on emotional adjustment.

There is also some reason to believe that today's seminarians may not have had the same opportunity to exercise their leadership skills in college as seminarians in the past. The percentage of those reporting in the TSI that they had never been elected to leadership positions in student government, extracurricular activities, or clubs rose from 21 percent in 1975 to 30 percent in 1989. This may be due to a change in the type of undergraduate institution they attended. As a rule of thumb, the larger the college, the more competition for leadership positions. Whatever the reason, any erosion in the leadership skills of entering seminarians would be a cause for concern.

At a time when the college graduation rate was rising for Americans in general, TSI seminarians had fewer years of formal education in 1989 than they did in 1975. The percentage of those who had not graduated from college rose from 5 percent in 1975 to 10 percent in 1989, and the percentage who had no college at all rose from 1 to 4 percent over that same period of time.

CHANGES IN FAMILY SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

What kinds of families do seminarians come from? Are they broadly representative of American society as a whole, or are they concentrated in one socioeconomic stratum? The Profiles of Ministry background questionnaire asks students to estimate the socioeconomic status of their parents during the students' youth. Though such estimates often do not have high objective reliability, they do reveal the student's perception of his or her family background.

The chart that follows (Figure 5) summarizes POM responses from 1977 to 1988. In general, women seminarians report that they come from families that were somewhat better off financially than those of their male counterparts.

Neither the GRE background questionnaire nor the Theological School Inventory asks about parents' economic status. We do, however, have a reasonable surrogate for such status in the educational level of the seminarian's father. As a rule of

thumb, the more years of formal education a person has completed, the higher the level of income. Three of our databases contain information about parents' education. From them the following patterns have emerged:

- The fathers of women seminarians have, on average, completed more years of education than have the fathers of male seminarians. According to our GRE data, 24 percent of the women "prospective" Master of Divinity candidates, but only 17 percent of the men, had fathers with a graduate or professional degree. In the GRE population as a whole, 26 percent of the males and 24 percent of the females reported having fathers with a graduate or professional degree (Grandy, 1990).
- In the TSI database, 15 percent of seminarians' fathers are college graduates, almost exactly the same as the national average for white males age 55 to 64 (Bureau of the Census, 1990). The fathers of the TSI seminarians are twice as likely than other men their age to have had some college.

To what extent these TSI findings are representative of seminarians in general is somewhat problematic. There are very few Roman Catholic seminarians in the database and seminaries outside the southeast are less well represented than in other databases we have drawn upon. In the sections that follow we will look at campus-based studies whose student profiles may vary significantly from the POM, TSI or GRE populations. No one template will fit such a varied group of students, and the research projects on individual campuses give witness to some of that variety.

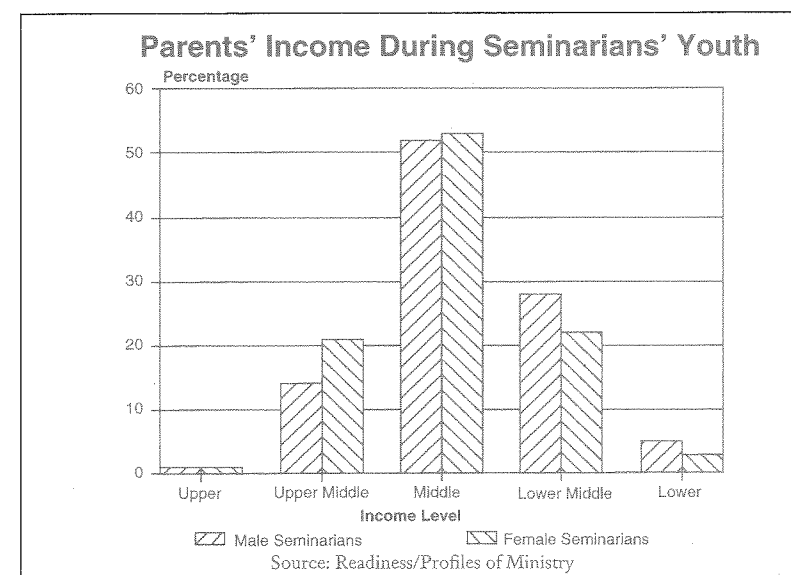


Fig. 5

AGE AND GENDER PROFILES IN CAMPUS-BASED STUDIES

As useful as broad-based statistical surveys are, they often do not capture the rich and informative detail found in more fine-grained studies. In turning to the findings of a few of the 70 institutionally-based projects funded under the Lilly Endowment's "Quality in Ministry" program, we find a wealth of detail that complements our retrospective data.⁷

⁷The information in this section is drawn from project reports to the Lilly Endowment.

⁶From a survey conducted in 1989 by the Alban Institute for the Episcopal Board of Theological Education.

they had finally found their niche. They experienced high levels of personal self-fulfillment after they began theological studies. In contrast, those under 30 often exhibited a greater degree of tentativeness about their call to ministry. Many entered seminary to look for the truth rather than to prepare for a profession.

To examine these differences in more detail, the Endowment funded a set of projects that examined the biographies of those who began their seminary years some 10 years after graduating from college. One of the more intriguing reports came from Union Theological Seminary in New York. The dean wrote:

"At Union we are regularly seeing within our student body, a particular group of ministerial candidates of high quality who have an especially high potential for effectively representing a theological perspective to the world. These students come to us, almost by chance, from a still-underdeveloped pool of possible applicants; that is, we have not reached them through our customary recruiting methods."

A similar phenomenon was reported by Colgate Rochester Divinity School. They, too, were receiving applications from high caliber students with whom they had no previous contact. Where were these outstanding candidates coming from? Were there more like them whom the seminaries might be able to contact?

In looking at their records from 1976 to 1988, Union identified 170 former students who entered seminary at least ten years after graduating from college. Of these they were able to find current addresses for 107, two-thirds of them women, one-third men. The staff report from Union described them as "wanderers", people who had not, with a few notable exceptions, been very successful — at least in the way the world measures success.

We were much more impressed with their backgrounds, especially their education, than the staff had been. These were not typical college graduates. There are some 2,500 institutions of higher education in the United States. And these 107 people came from the very best of them. A quarter had graduated from the following institutions:

Smith	4
Wellesley	3
Cornell	3
Harvard	2
Barnard	2
Columbia	2
Stanford	1
Duke	1
MIT	1
Radcliffe	1
Vassar	1
University of Pennsylvania	1

Most of the others graduated from highly regarded state universities or liberal arts colleges. Forty-eight out of the 107 had postgraduate degrees. Six were attorneys; four held doctorates; and two had MBA's. Their degrees were from Harvard, Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Columbia, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the University of Virginia, and New York University.

But how had they arrived at Union? Why did they choose the ministry? The findings surprised us, although in hindsight, it is not clear why they should have. Practically every one of these exceptional students (83%) was rooted in a local congregation and was active in its leadership. And those students who were not rooted in a local church, as the Colgate Rochester report pointed out, tended not to stay the course. It should have been obvious to us from the beginning. A major source of the Church's ordained leadership will be found in the ranks of those already exercising lay leadership.

In contrast to the "wanderers" at Union and Colgate Rochester, Vanderbilt Divinity School looked into the biographies of younger students whom it called "searchers". By definition, searchers were bright, enjoyed the study of theology, did well in parish internships, but "evidenced uncertainty in the admission application essay about parish ministry as a vocational goal. . . ."

To determine the characteristics of searchers, Vanderbilt reviewed the files of 395 Master of Divinity graduates from 1977-1987. Of that number, 113 fit the profile of a searcher. Most were under 30 years of age, and all 113 subjects had written

into their admissions essay a negative critique of American society and prevailing social norms. After graduation most of the searchers had not pursued the "ecclesiastical fast track," as measured by movement to larger churches or senior pastorates. Even a dozen years after leaving divinity school, they were still searchers, tentative about their calling and still likely to question social norms and their denomination's polity.

We are inclined to believe that Vanderbilt's "searchers" have a different personal profile from that of Union's "wanderers". Union's second-career students had finally found their niche. Their wanderings were over. Vanderbilt's searchers were searching still. Wanderers, it seems, are not older searchers; nor searchers younger wanderers.

The interaction of wanderers and searchers in a seminary student body may not always be a happy one. In a study of some 340 first-year Protestant seminarians — one-third female, two-thirds male — Howard Stone found that older males may find themselves "the odd man out". Men over 30 are more likely to see the seminary as a hurdle to be jumped before getting on with the real work of their lives. Older men are significantly more conservative than younger men and women. But not so expected is that they are more conservative than older women as well. Stone notes that, in counseling sessions, male second-career candidates often voice the feeling that they are "out of sync" with the rest of their colleagues. And says Stone, "In fact, they are" (Stone, 1990).

Older women students may face a different problem. In Stone's data they appear clearly more interested in theology as a

discipline, more flexible in their social attitudes, more open and probing about beliefs and ideas than their older male counterparts. But paradoxically, enough, Stone points out, the very qualities that make them eager students of theology may, according to TSI scale scores, be an index of a dimming interest in parish ministry.

Vanderbilt findings about "searchers" led us to take a more detailed look at the GRE data we had been compiling. Among the prospective Master of Divinity candidates who took the GRE in 1988, about 20 percent had majored in religion as undergraduates. Among the Vanderbilt searchers 36 percent had majored in religion. Do these two sets of people share common characteristics beyond majoring in religion? Is it possible that the GRE religion majors exhibit the same tentativeness about ministry and negative critique of American society that we saw in the Vanderbilt searchers?

If academic achievement is any criterion, the two populations may not coincide. Vanderbilt's searchers were described as high achievers. The GRE test takers who majored in religion, on the other hand, have lower verbal scores than those majoring in most other disciplines. The chart below is the 1988 verbal score data for 1,070 prospective Master of Divinity candidates ranked by undergraduate major.

If we sort the scores of religion majors, we find that males had a mean GRE verbal score of 465 and females 497. The male scores are almost a full standard deviation below those of students majoring in the natural sciences. If seminary recruiting efforts are focused on undergraduate departments of religion, one wonders whether the intellectual quality of seminary students is likely to improve.

GRE Verbal Scores — 1988
1,070 Master of Divinity "Prospectives"

Major	GRE Verbal Scores	
	Mean	Number
Natural Sciences	544	135
Humanities/Arts	528	282
Social Sciences	515	149
Education	504	80
Other	500	110
Business	474	89
RELIGION/THEOLOGY	471	225

Source: Educational Testing Service

CLERGY SURPLUS AND DEFICIT

One of the more paradoxical findings of the "Quality in Ministry" studies is that as the mainline Protestant denominations lose membership, the number of those presenting themselves for ordination continues to grow. In the newly merged Presbyterian Church (USA), for example, the two merger partners have seen their membership drop from more than 4 million to less than 3 million in approximately one generation. Despite this decline in membership and the aging of the Presbyterian population, the number of non-retired clergy rose from 12,285 in 1976 to

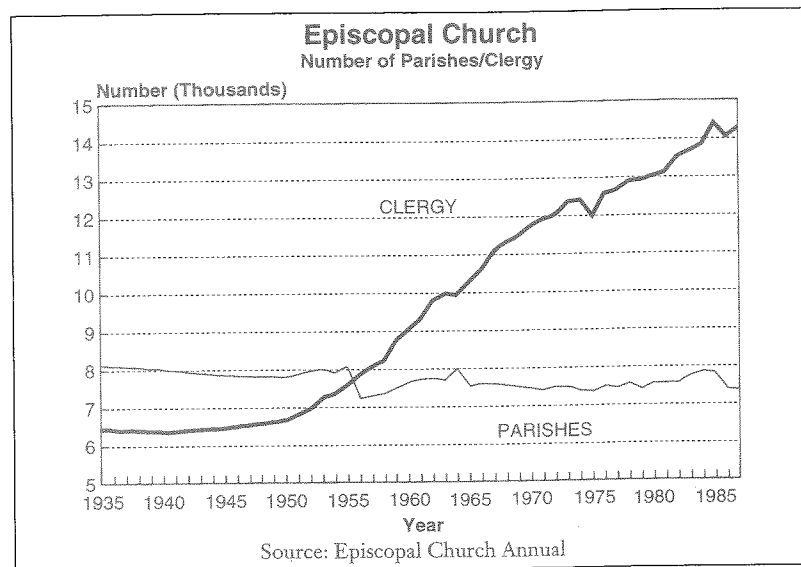


Fig. 6

CONCLUSIONS: EFFECTS ON POLICY DUE TO CHANGES IN AGE AND GENDER

If demography is destiny, both Church and Synagogue in North America are destined to change as an increasing number of older seminarians and, especially, women clergy bring their talents to the work and worship of local congregations. The presence of women in the ranks of the clergy is not likely to be a "bulge" phenomenon, that is, a one-time surge due to the lifting of earlier barriers to ordination.

The college-graduate pool from which candidates for ordination are drawn will continue, for the foreseeable future, to be heavily weighted in favor of women. In 1989-90 some 6.2 million men and 7.2 million women were enrolled in college. These numbers suggest that if congregations are open to women clergy, the proportion of

15,726 in 1988, an increase of 28 percent. Only a small proportion of this increased number of clergy (about 4 percent) are serving in local congregations (Research Division, 1989).

In the Episcopal Church, as seen in figure 6, the number of parishes has remained stable at between 7,000 to 8,000 since the 1950's, but the number of clergy (active and retired) rose from 7,500 in 1955 to 14,300 today.

The only major denomination that has an acute shortage of clergy is the Roman Catholic Church. The number of those preparing for the priesthood at the high school, college, and theological school level dropped from 42,900 in 1966 to 8,394 in 1989-90; the number enrolled in Master of Divinity programs fell to 3,698, a modern low (Fuerst, 1990)⁸. Today there is approximately one Roman Catholic priest—active and retired—for every 1000 American Catholics. (This compares to one Episcopal priest—active and retired—for every 150 Episcopalians and one Presbyterian minister—active and retired—for every 190 Presbyterians). Richard Schoenherr, a demographer at the University of Wisconsin, has projected that by the year 2,000 there will be one priest for every 4,000 Catholics (Hemrick, 1985). The Roman Catholic dilemma will be the subject of a later occasional paper.

women entering seminary classes will continue to increase.

Seminary staff and denominational officials should be aware, however, that in certain areas women candidates for ministry show higher levels of stress than male candidates do.

- Women seminarians, on average, come from more affluent families, and have higher current income and greater assets than their male counterparts. Yet women are much more likely than men to say that they will not be able to continue their seminary education without financial aid. Women candidates also indicate that outside work is less of a possibility than it is for male candidates.

- Women seminarians are much more likely than men to be divorced and, whether married or divorced, to have primary responsibility for the care of children.
- Women candidates who have not had careers outside the home are reported to have a significantly higher rate of adjustment problems than candidates, male or female, with prior career experience.

We strongly suspect that the conditions mentioned above are closely related to each other. They suggest that financial aid, child care, and counseling that is sensitive to the needs of women seminarians should be of special concern to policy makers both at the seminary and denominational levels.

Policy concerns related to the increased age of seminarians are less likely to center on personal issues and focus instead on institutional debates about the effect of older candidates on the stability of pension funds or the economics of subsidizing a seminary education for students who, because of their age, will serve the Church for a relatively short period of time.

Policy makers in some denominations have already placed unofficial caps on the age of candidates admitted to Master of Divinity programs. Even if they had not, the number of older candidates is likely to fall off. The impact of the "baby boomers"—those born between 1946-1957—is beginning to diminish, and the effects of the "baby bust"—the sharp decline in births between 1967-1976—are yet to be felt. But it would not be unduly rash to suggest that the average age of seminarians has peaked. Not only demography but new denominational policies and the logic of the life cycle itself are likely to hold the average age under 35. Several denominations have already begun focusing their recruitment efforts at high school and college-age students.

The demographic changes of the past two decades have had a significant impact on religious bodies in North America. For the most part, the changes have been seen as beneficial. We hope that the baseline of data we have established will assist others in measuring future changes in the biography, education and social background of the North American clergy.

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⁸ Soon to be published data by Father Fuerst for 1990-91 shows a further drop to 3,609 Roman Catholic candidates for the priesthood enrolled in Master of Divinity programs.

APPENDIX Description Of The Retrospective Databases

Morrison, S.E. (1935). *The founding of Harvard College*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

National Center for Education Statistics (1989). *Digest of Education Statistics, 1989*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics (1990). *Targeted forecast: Higher education enrollment, Fall 1988 to Fall 1994*. (NCES 90-689). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Research Division (1990). *The Presbyterian placement system: A summary research report*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (USA).

Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Service (GAPSFAS).

GAPSFAS is a centralized financial need analysis service administered by Educational Testing Service. The 1988-89 GAPSFAS data consists of 118,497 individual files. That year 5,708 individuals identified themselves as Master of Divinity students from 156 institutions. Of these 3,518 were men (69%) and 1,577 were women (31%).

Graduate Record Examinations (GRE).

The GRE is a set of standardized tests, administered by Educational Testing Service and used for admission to graduate and professional schools. Of the approximately 1.5 million test-takers between 1981-89, some 12,000 individuals were identified as "prospective" Master of Divinity candidates.

Readiness/Profiles of Ministry (POM).

The POM was designed by the Association of Theological Schools to assess a seminarian's readiness for ordained ministry.

The POM dataset contains 18,510 individual files from 115 seminaries during the period 1977-89. Of the 17,674 persons who indicated their gender, 14,002 were men (79.2%), and 3,672 were women (20.8%).

Selective Service System. (1950). *Theological school enrollments 1937-1947, 1947-1950: A survey study of the effects of the war and of the exemption of theological students from the selective draft on enrollment in certain theological and divinity schools*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense.

Stone, H. (1990). Changing patterns of people entering ministry. *Clergy assessment and career development*. R. Hunt, J. Hinkle, Jr., and H. Malony (eds.). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Winer, M. (1990). Are all rabbis equal? *Reform Judaism*.

The following are those denominations with 400 or more files:

American Baptist	515
Anglican/Episcopal	714/302
Christian Church	490
Evangelicals	1,409
Lutheran	1,628
Presbyterian/Reform	1,409
Roman Catholic	3,063
Southern Baptist	5,247
United Church of Christ	519
United Methodist	1,620

The Theological School Inventory (TSI).

The TSI is used to assist seminarians in values clarification. The TSI dataset covers the period 1975-89 and describes 26,151 individuals. The 1975-81 data is in an aggregated form that does not allow gender comparisons. The 1982-89 data lists student's gender and seminary attended but not denominational affiliation.

Seminaries and Career Counseling Centers (SCCC).

A description of the standardized instruments in these datasets and the biographical information that accompany them are displayed in the charts that follow.

Biographical Data

	Seminaries	ETS Databases GRE GAPSFAS	Career Development Centers	National Databases TSI POM
Total Number of Seminarians	9,980	27,000	5,477	41,893
Range of Years	1944-1989	1981-1989	1964-1988	1967-1989
DEMOGRAPHIC/PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS				
Date of birth	X	X	X	X
Age on entering seminary	X		X	X
Gender/sex	X	X	X	X
Marital status	X	X	X	X
Ethnicity	X		X	X
Country of birth	X	X		X
Religious affiliation/denomination	X		X	X
Previous denomination	X		X	X
Colleges attended	X	X	X	
Academic degrees received	X	X	X	X
Major field of study	X	X	X	
Minor field of study		X		
Subjects liked most	X		X	X
Subjects liked least	X		X	X
Full/part time employment	X	X	X	X
Career/Occupation before seminary	X		X	X
Level of activity in local congregation	X		X	X
Ordination status	X		X	X
Definiteness of "Call"	X		X	X
Perceived status of physical health	X		X	X
Perceived status of emotional health	X		X	X
Perceived liberal/conservative status	X		X	X
FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS				
Mother/Father living	X		X	X
Parents divorced	X		X	X
Mother/Father educational levels	X		X	X
Mother/Father occupations	X		X	X
Mother/Father denominations/affiliations	X		X	X
Mother/Father away from home	X		X	X
Mother/Father active in local congregation	X		X	X
Number/Gender of siblings	X		X	X
First born/birth order	X		X	X
Relatives in Ministry/Rabbinate	X		X	X
Spouse a Minister/Rabbi	X		X	X
Number/Gender/Ages of children	X	X	X	X
Influence of Mother/Father on "Call"	X		X	X

**Examinations
and
Standardized
Instruments**

	Seminaries	Career Development Centers
Total Number of Seminararians Range of Years	9,980 1944-1989	5,477 1964-1989
GRADUATE RECORD EXAMINATIONS	YES	NO
(1) Aptitude Tests		
Verbal	X	
Quantitative	X	
Analytical	X	
(2) Subject Area Tests		
Social Science	X	
Humanities	X	
Natural Science	X	
(3) Advanced Tests		
Philosophy/Religion/Hebrew	X	
INTELLIGENCE/ACHIEVEMENT TESTS	YES	YES
Critical Thinking Test		X
IQ Test	X	
Miller Analogies Test	X	
SRA Reading Test	X	
Terman Concept Mastery Test	X	X
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Test	X	
SELF REPORT PERSONALITY INVENTORIES	YES	YES
California Psychological Inventory		X
Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory	X	X
Myers-Briggs Type Indicator	X	X
Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire		X
TESTS OF INTERESTS/ATTITUDES/VALUES	YES	YES
Kuder Occupational Interest Survey	X	
Minnesota Importance Questionnaire		X
Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory	X	X
Strong Vocational Interest Blank	X	X
Theological School Inventory	X	X



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