

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES WITHIN CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN HISTORY

With an Appendage-Exhortation for Further Research

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Congregational Christian Roots

Congregationalism was the established religious tradition of New England with historic roots in English Puritanism and religious separatism. The Christians came from an independent movement on the American scene which rejected all party labels and developed simple church structures especially suitable to American frontier life. In the 1930's the Congregationalists and the Christians joined together to establish the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches, thereby preserving important Puritan and separatist legacies in one denomination. These Congregational Christians had a strong history of women's ministries.

When the Congregationalists came to the American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they came as families. Unlike the Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese who sent the men to "bring" New World treasures back to Europe, the early American colonies were populated by men, women and children. Grounded in the Protestant Reformation, Congregational women were expected to be persons of faith -- diligent in the care of their own souls, and careful cultivators of authentic household religiosity. Although female piety may not

have been very visible, it was a cornerstone of family religious life and the foundation of all ministry (male and female) in colonial America.¹

Women quietly nurtured a significant private ministry during the colonial period. Because women necessarily confronted the specter of death with every pregnancy, women were regularly challenged to think through questions of grace and salvation. Some clergy encouraged women to hold "private meetings" for "prayer and mutual confession of spiritual needs and feelings." Literacy for women was promoted to enable Bible reading and spiritual growth. The imagery and principles of a hierarchical, affectionate marriage maintained social stability and actually increased gender equality.²

The story of Anne Hutchinson in the Massachusetts Bay Colony is a case in point. Her religious concerns were never questioned. Her leadership became a problem, however, when she became too public in her quest for religious meaning, and especially when her popularity began to challenge male authority.³ So too, women who were accused of witchcraft in the early colonies highlight the fact that early Congregationalism sometimes had difficulty honoring the spiritual gifts of women.⁴ Throughout the early colonial period Congregational women accepted reformed understandings of salvation which both blamed and honored women.

1. Laura Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) and Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth Century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

2. Amanda Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980) and by the same author, "Women's Attraction to Puritanism," *Church History*, vol. 60 (June 1991), 196-209.

3. Selmar R. Williams, *Divine Rebel: The Life of Anna Marbury Hutchinson* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981).

4. The classic work about this phenomenon is Marion L. Starkey, *The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern*

Eventually the popular theological assumptions about the connection between human sin and women began to soften. By 1725, the famous Congregational pastor, Cotton Mather, called women "People who make no Noise at all in the World: People hardly Known to be in the world;" people who were nevertheless the salvation of the church. He noted that "as there were three Maries to one John standing under the Cross of our dying Lord, so still there are far more godly Women, than there are godly Men ..." ⁵ In time, the Congregationalists, with their establishment mentality, became more appreciative of women's ministries.

It was still the case, however, that for many colonial women the primary way in which a Congregational woman could exercise a more public ministry was by marrying a clergyman. Many did, becoming theologically knowledgeable and working with their husbands in long and productive pastorates. Many Congregational clergy husbands leaned on their wives for intellectual, practical and spiritual support. It is not surprising that Jonathan Edwards, probably the greatest theologian of early Congregationalism, looked to his wife Sarah for more than domestic services. On his deathbed he whispered, "Give my kindest love to my dear wife, and tell her that the uncommon union which has so long subsisted between us has been of such a nature as I trust is spiritual, and therefore will continue." ⁶

Emerging Forms of Independent Ministries for Women

Enquiry into the Salem Witch Trials (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1949).

5. Cotton Mather, *El-Shaddi. A Brief Essay ... Produced by the Death of ... Mrs. Katharine Willard*. (Boston, 1725), 21 quoted in Gerald F. Moran, "The Hidden Ones: Women and Religion in Puritan New England" in Richard L. Greaves, ed., *Triumph over Silence: Women in Protestant History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 127.

6. Elizabeth D. Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The "Uncommon Union" of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 201.

As colonial experience adjusted to the needs of the emerging United States of America, women's faith and contributions to church life became more public. A good example of recognized but unauthorized female ministry is found in the life of Sarah Osborn. From the 1760's until her death in 1796 Sarah led many revivals near her home in Newport, R.I. As a school teacher, mother and religious leader she was highly respected and lauded by the well-known Congregational clergyman, Samuel Hopkins. Although she was never ordained he considered her an exemplary Christian and saw to it that her memoirs were published.⁷

The Christians, like the Baptists and the Quakers, supported more public visibility for women as preachers in their frontier revivals. Women not only provided hospitality and financial support for the fledgling Christian movement, they actually functioned as itinerant evangelists, moving around the countryside "witnessing" and "sharing" their faith. In 1814, a woman named Abigail Roberts was converted by a woman preacher named Nancy Cram. The life and ministry of Nancy Cram remains a mystery, but Abigail Roberts became an important unordained "female laborer" among the Christians, founding many churches until her death in 1841.⁸

Leaders in the "Christian Movement" had little formal education. They were skeptical of book learning and credentials. Yet with great evangelistic zeal, they were very skilled at calling large groups to repentance. They often quoted from the book of Joel where God says "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy." When itinerant

7. [Sarah Osborn], *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, Samuel Hopkins, ed. (Worcester, MA: Leonard Worcester, 1799).

8. Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Abigail Roberts: 'Female Laborer' in Christian Churches, *Historical Intelligencer II* (1982), 3-10.

“Christian” female evangelists (or “laborers” as they called them) “turned sinners toward God” they were affirmed.

“Christian female laborers” took biblical texts very seriously, anguishing over the apostle Paul’s words about “women being silent in the churches,” and not “ruling.” After much prayer and Bible study they developed an interesting argument to justify their ministry. They said that when Paul objected to women “ruling,” he never meant to prohibit women from praying aloud, singing, witnessing, exhorting and preaching *in public*. “As long as women did not try to rob men of their rightful authority in the church, they could help them save souls.”⁹

Furthermore, both male and female “Christians” were generally skeptical about “ordination” and wary of all “settled pastors” (male or female). They agreed that inside the church, women needed to keep silent to allow men to carry out their governance roles. In the world, however, they argued that both women and men were called to preach. Ordination was irrelevant. As far as they were concerned, time was running out and calling people to Christ was primary.¹⁰

Unfortunately, after several decades as the “Christian Movement” became more concerned about building stable congregations than saving souls, its apocalyptic thinking faded and the legitimacy of female laborers was questioned. “Christian Movement” female laborers defended their right to preach on the grounds that they were “Joel’s prophetic daughters,

9. Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1998), 217-19.

10. Ibid., 136.

harbingers of the apocalypse,” but by the 1830s, “stripped of its transcendent meaning, female preaching was no longer a miraculous sign of God’s grace, but a sin against nature.”¹¹

By the early nineteenth century there was a "feminization" of Congregationalism, if not all of American Protestantism. Women became more visible and active in church and society -- functioning in the church, and for the culture, as guardians of morality. Whereas in the colonial period definitions of domesticity and the private world of women were self-contained, as Congregationalism moved West, the social significance of household, family and women steadily increased. Ideals of female piety in Congregationalism shifted from cultivating individual charity and devotion, to active engagement through voluntary female organizations.¹²

Ironically, as Congregational women became more involved in church and society, clergy also expanded their understandings of "ministry." Pastorates became shorter and more "church work" was done by laity, especially women. Seminaries were founded to provide "graduate professional" education for male pastors. All clergy developed more mobile careers and identified themselves with emerging denominational structures.

These developments affected women in two ways: First, there was more specialized work for women to do in local congregations and in wider mission -- in Christian education, music, medicine, social outreach and evangelism. These were not ordained ministries, but by the twentieth century Congregationalists had developed special "tracks" to educate, credential and support women in various forms of specialized ministries. Second, the creation of national and

11. Ibid., 291.

12. Richard D. Shiels, "The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981), 46-62 and Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

regional denominational structures within Congregationalism and among the various Christian groups led to greater awareness of the need to regularize authorization for ministry. Although Congregationalism was at the center of early New England history, Congregationalists did not actually organize themselves as a national denomination until after the great Yankee migrations west and the trauma of the Civil War (250 years later). Prior to that time, regional structures and national organizations for abolition, mission, education, peace and temperance enabled cooperation among Congregationalists without any national denominational bureaucracy.¹³

Principles of local congregational autonomy, religious liberty and an educated clergy had long informed Congregational and Christian practice regarding ordination. Even with the pressures for more centralized denominational life, Congregationalists remained true to these principles, becoming the first major ecclesiastical community to ordain a woman in 1853.¹⁴ During the same period the Christians enjoyed the evangelical gifts of women as itinerant preachers, formally ordaining a woman in 1867.¹⁵

There might be a contradiction between the image of woman as delicate, retiring and gentle, and her increasingly important role in church and society, but this contradiction actually aided a process by which the churches came to sanction new forms of public behavior for women -- new ministries.¹⁶

13. John von Rohr, *The Shaping of American Congregationalism: 1620-1957* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993), 275-78.

14. Antoinette Brown was ordained in South Butler, NY on September 15, 1853.

15. Melissa Timmons (later Terrill) was ordained at the Ebenezer Church in Clark County, Ohio on March 7, 1867.

16. Page Putnam Miller, *A Claim to New Roles*, ATLA Series No. 2 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985, 203-211.

Specialized Ministries in Mission, Medicine, Education and Social Service

Early in the nineteenth century, Congregationalists (along with many other American Protestants) felt a strong call to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to other parts of the world. Beginning with the so-called "Haystack meeting" in 1810, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) mobilized thousands of mainstream of American protestants to support mission work in Asia and Africa. Women organized into auxiliary "ladies associations" to raise money for this worthy effort. But women also felt the call to serve as missionaries themselves.¹⁷

Initially, the male dominated mission boards argued that single women should not be sent out as missionaries. It was too dangerous and it was not "seemly" for a Christian woman to be unaccompanied. Not to be stopped, many committed women found husbands with shared enthusiasm for the mission field and enjoyed years of service in foreign mission settings.

Some mission work, however, was very difficult for married women, who were limited by their obligations to their own families. Gradually, with the encouragement of missionary wives, public opinion shifted and single women were invited to consider mission appointments. Furthermore, recognizing that single women needed extra support, women throughout the Congregational churches organized independent women's boards of missions -- establishing four separate "Woman's Boards" to support the ministries of single women missionaries in their work with women and children.¹⁸

17. R. Pierce Beaver, *American Protestant Women in World Mission: A History of the First Feminist Movement in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968).

18. Barbara Brown Zikmund and Sally A. Dries, "Women's Work and Woman's Boards," in Barbara

Another development that supported women's ministries was the "deaconess movement." Deaconesses were quite common among German immigrants and among Methodists. However, some Congregationalists in Illinois organized the American Congregational Deaconess Association in 1901. For various reasons, however, this form of ministry for women did not attract many Congregational women.¹⁹

Congregational women developed other modes of ministry in the nineteenth century. With and without formal relationships to churches many Congregational women organized maternal societies to help mothers with infant care, moral reform societies to rescue young girls from prostitution, Sunday schools to educate unchurched urban children, abolition societies to support the underground railroad and work for the end of slavery, and temperance unions to protect homes and families from the destructive consequences of alcoholism. The involvement of Congregational women in these benevolent volunteer societies was phenomenal.²⁰

By the end of the nineteenth century the foreign mission movement was at its peak and more than half of all American protestant missionaries overseas were women. To prepare women for these ministries and other forms of service, many denominations saw the rising need to organize schools and colleges for women.²¹ In 1889 the trustees of Hartford Theological

Brown Zikmund, ed. *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, vol. I (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1984), 140-153.

19. For information about the deaconess movement in Congregationalism see Dorothy C. Bass, "The Congregational Training School for Women," in Barbara Brown Zikmund, ed. *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ*, vol. II (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1987), 151-153.

20. See Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

21. Elizabeth Alden Green, *Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke: Opening the Gates* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1979).

Seminary (Hartford, Connecticut), a seminary for Congregational pastors (men), became the first seminary to vote to admit women to all courses of study. Initially there were not many women students, but those who came were expected to prepare for "religious work other than the pastorate." In 1902 the nearby Springfield, Massachusetts Bible Normal School (formerly the School for Christian Workers), worked out a cooperative arrangement with Hartford Theological Seminary and moved to Hartford. After it changed its name to the Hartford School for Religious Pedagogy, and still later when it was known as the Hartford School for Religious Education, it became a center for preparing Congregational women to serve in emerging professional roles as Directors of Christian Education (DCE) or Directors of Religious Education (DRE).²²

One of the most interesting chapters in the education of women for ministries in Congregationalism is the story of the Congregational Training School for Women, established in Chicago in 1909. In 1900 Florence Amanda Fensham, a missionary on furlough from her mission school in Turkey, challenged The Chicago Theological Seminary to admit her to the regular seminary program leading to the Bachelor of Divinity degree (even though she had no desire to be ordained). Fensham was awarded the degree in 1902 and returned to the mission field. A few years later she came back to Chicago. When a special undergraduate program (the Christian Institute) closed in 1909, Florence Fensham took the lead in establishing a new institution dedicated to graduate theological education for women.

The Congregational Training School for Women was incorporated as a separate institution in close relationship to The Chicago Theological Seminary. Twenty young women

22. Elwood Street, "A Living Vision: A Brief Story of The Hartford Seminary Foundation," *The Bulletin of the Hartford Seminary Foundation* 25 (October 1958), 1-61.

lived together, did "practical work" in the city, and took courses from their own instructors, as well as faculty at CTS. After graduation they worked in urban social work, became foreign missionaries, and most frequently became "church" or "pastor's" assistants in local congregations. In 1910 Fensham founded the Congregational Woman's League of Church Assistants to promote the "interests of the Congregational churches, especially in matters relating to the service rendered by salaried women workers." By 1915 there were 125 such workers and in 1919 the number had risen to 300.

Local churches, however, did not treat these women well. Many times laity considered a church assistant to be little more than the "church secretary" or "office girl." Male ministers could be supportive, but often they were very threatened by a competent woman. There was little opportunity for promotion and advancement.

By 1922, a growing concern for professional standards in religious education led the Chicago Training School for Women to develop a Bachelor of Religious Education degree. (This was a masters level program -- in the 1960's the graduate level B.D. degree became the M.Div. degree, and the B.R.E. became the M.R.E). In the 1920's many seminaries, stimulated by the pioneering educational work of John Dewey and George A. Coe, instituted graduate programs in Religious Education. Within a few years (1926) agreements were made with The Chicago Theological Seminary to absorb the religious education program. The Congregational Training School for Women went out of existence. Yet, "Christian education" had become a primary channel for women's ministries in Congregationalism. Seminaries enrolled more and more women in special master's programs and larger churches looked for these professionally trained

women to run their educational programs.²³

Lay Women's Organizations

Women who did not prepare for special ministries of mission, social service or education found ongoing support for their ministries in local congregational women's organizations.²⁴

Following the Civil War Congregational women established four independent Congregational women's mission boards (based in Boston, Chicago, California and the Hawaiian islands).

Women in the Christian denomination were slower, organizing their national Woman's Board for Home Missions in 1890.²⁵

By the 1920's, after women had won the right to vote, some people began to doubt the legitimacy of separate women's organizations in the churches. Congregational leaders argued that the Woman's Boards should end their separate existence and create a more efficient denominational bureaucracy by merging into the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Eventually, in 1927, three of the women's boards did join the ABCFM. (only the women in the Hawaiian Islands kept their independence.) Although the women lost control of their money and their direct connection to many women missionaries, they were guaranteed one third of the votes on the governing board of the ABCFM. At a time when women had minimal

23. Op. cit. Bass, "The Congregational Training School for Women."

24. Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Women's Organizations: Centers of Denominational Loyalty and Expressions of Christian Unity," in Jackson Carroll and Wade Clark Roof, eds. *Beyond Establishment: Protestant Identity in a Post-Protestant Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 116-138.

25. Zikmund and Dries, 143-151.

representation on national structures in any major Protestant denomination this was a major breakthrough.²⁶

Local and regional women's organizations of various types, however, continued to flourish at the local and regional levels in Congregational and Christian churches. By the 1940s many women were part of a national Women's Fellowship of the Congregational Christian Churches.

Ordained Ministry

The first woman formally ordained to the Christian ministry in a major denomination in America was Antoinette L. Brown. Raised in upstate New York, a hotbed of antislavery and women's rights thinking, "Nettie" Brown, as she was called, went to Oberlin College in the 1840's. Founded by Congregationalists, it was the only college in the country where women could enroll in the same collegiate courses with men (co-education). Brown became fast friends with Lucy Stone, a feminist radical. She also became convinced that she was called to "preach the Gospel." She graduated from the collegiate program and persuaded the Oberlin faculty to admit her to all of the advanced theological courses. In the end, the faculty refused to award her a theological degree and insisted that a male student read her final essay at graduation.

26. Priscilla Stuckey-Kauffman, "Women's Mission Structures and the American Board," in Barbara Brown Zikmund, *Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ* vol. II (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1987), 80-100.

Antoinette L. Brown was ready. Without a great deal of fanfare, in 1853 she received a call serve as pastor of a small Congregational Church in South Butler, New York. Following the practice of Congregationalism the churches in the area gathered for her ordination service on September 15th. Luther Lee, a fiery Wesleyan Methodist preacher, preached the sermon, insisting that the Holy Spirit had called Antoinette to her ministry. He reasoned, "We are not here to make a minister. It is not to confer on this our sister, a right to preach the gospel. If she has not that right already, we have no power to communicate it to her." He simply acknowledged that God had called her and that the churches rightly gathered to celebrate that fact. She was 28 years old and she had already made a reputation for herself as a lecturer on temperance, slavery and literary topics.²⁷

Brown's ordination took place without a lot of controversy, because of the free-church polity which allows individual congregations to ordain their own pastors. Her ministry in South Butler was short, however, and after a few years she resigned due to ill health and doctrinal doubts. In 1856 she married Samuel C. Blackwell, brother of Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell, early women physicians. Much later, after her children were grown, she authored numerous books on philosophy and science, supported the suffrage campaign and returned to active ministry within the Unitarian fellowship.²⁸

As the role of women became more public, Congregational and Christian leaders affirmed the "ordination of women," but considered the few ordained women they ordained, as exceptions

27. An excerpt from the sermon is reprinted in Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Struggle for the Right to Preach," in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds. *Women and Religion in America: Volume One, The Nineteenth Century* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 214-217.

28. Elizabeth Cadzen, *Antoinette Brown Blackwell: A Biography* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press,

to the rule. For example, Christian "female laborer" Melissa Timmons (later Terrill) was ordained at the Ebenezer [Christian] Church in Clark County, Ohio on March 7, 1867. In September of that same year the local Deer Creek [Christian] Conference met and resolved, "while we do not approve of the ordination of women to the Eldership of the church, as a general rule, yet as Sister Melissa Timmons has been set forward to that position at the request of the church of which she is now a member," ... "we send her credential letters of an ordained minister of good standing in this Conference."²⁹

Although today Antoinette Brown [Blackwell] is remembered when historians outline the history of ordained women in the United States, Brown's ordination was not a portent of things to come. In 1889, over 35 years later, there were only four ordained Congregational women ministers listed in the national Congregational yearbook. By 1899 the number had risen to 49, with 89 in 1910, and 109 in 1920.³⁰

In the 1920's the National Council of Congregational Churches appointed a commission to investigate the number, standing and need for women ministers in Congregational churches. This commission reported that in 1919 there were 67 women ministers among the 5,695 clergy in the denomination. Eighteen women were pastors of "very small" churches, 14 were co-pastors with their husbands, 14 were religious educators or church assistants, and 21 were employed outside the churches. The commission reported that the women presented no serious problem to

1983).

29. John Franklin Burnett, Early Women of the Christian Church: Heroines All, Booklet Six (Dayton, OH: Christian Publishing Association, n.d.), 26.

30. I am indebted to Marilyn Hedges-Hiller for much of the statistical information which follows. It is taken from an unpublished paper she did as a student in the UCC History and Polity class at Pacific School of Religion. "A Trickle of Ordained Women," November 1992.

the denomination -- "being too few in number and too modest or at least inconspicuous in their form of service." Women could serve successfully in small churches, but the commission suggested that women would be of greater use in the field of Religious education or as church assistants.³¹

In 1930 there were 131 ordained clergywomen out of 5,609 Congregational ministers, or 2.2%. As the Congregationalists approached their 1931 merger with the Christians, the 1930 yearbook also reported that there were 45 women among the 917 Christian clergy -- fewer in number but a better percentage. In 1940, the number of Congregational Christian clergywomen increased to 184, or 3.1% of clergy in the new denomination -- these numbers might have been higher but some of the clergy and churches did not join the merged denomination. World War II provided more opportunities for women, yet the 1950 statistics show only a modest increase in clergywomen to a little under 207 out of close to 6,000 clergy.

The Congregationalists and the Christians were pioneers in their support of women's ministries. Yet for one hundred years ordained clergywomen exercised only a very small percentage of the ministries carried out by women in these denominations. Furthermore, women were never more than about 3% of Congregational Christian clergy. Women continued to respond to their call to ministry by marrying a pastor or a missionary, training and going out on the mission field themselves, or serving in special ministries of education and social service.

31. National Council of the Congregational Churches of the United States, Minutes of the Nineteenth Regular Meeting (New York: Office of the National Council, 1921), 39-41.

Concern for clergywomen within the Congregational Christian churches in the early 1950's focused upon the individual ministries of particular women and the general need for more clergy in the churches. Articles reported that women ministers were keeping little churches from dying out, uniting small congregations and serving on tiny salaries. Few people objected to women serving as clergy in Congregational Christian churches, but it was assumed that their numbers would remain small.³²

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Continuing the Story of the Woman's Movement and Women's Ministries
among Congregational Christians

The modern feminist movement gained momentum in the early 1970's. Things began to change. . . . however, there has not been any serious research done on these developments from a Congregational Christian perspective. The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches' Center for Congregational Leadership, in Olivet, Michigan, is expectantly waiting for a student of the Congregational Foundation for Theological Studies (CFTS) to take up this mantle of research and finish the story. A quick review of the 2010 year book of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches reveals that females make up approximately 17% of the clergy listed under "Ministers of the NA." Likewise, a decade into the 21st century, the majority of current CFTS students are female; many leadership roles of the NA, from moderator to division chairs, staff positions including the Dean for CFTS, are filled by the capable women ministers who have responded to God's call on their lives.

32. Margaret M. Morton, "The New Vocation for Women," Advance 147, no. 16 (September 7, 1955), 12.

Fertile ground for original research lies fallow in journals, yearbooks, and statistics just waiting to be sown and harvested. Women no longer simply “quietly nurture private ministry” as they did during the colonial period. While many women certainly continue work in the areas of “Christian education, music, medicine, social outreach and evangelism,” they are no longer (completely) bound by such “traditional roles” of women. By the grace of God, further softening of the patriarchal-pastoral domination can, and will, be accomplished. 157 years have passed since the first ordination of a woman. Significant developments have transpired in the last third of these years—developments that wait to be uncovered and thrust into the limelight—developments telling a story that must be told for the sake of Congregationalism; for its growth and its evolution.