"A Little Labour of Love": The Extraordinary Career of Dorothy Ripley, Female Evangelist in Early America

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“A LITTLE LABOUR OF LOVE”: THE EXTRAORDINARY CAREER OF DOROTHY RIPLEY, FEMALE EVANGELIST IN EARLY AMERICA

by

ELISA ANN EVERSON

Under the Direction of Reiner Smolinski

ABSTRACT

In the past two decades or so, feminist historians have sifted through the copious illustrations of the turbulent, emotion-ridden years of early nineteenth-century American revivalism to devote considerable attention to the rise of female evangelism. Despite the notable upsurge, scholars generally remain untutored about the plethora of powerful female preachers who devoted their lives to advancing the kingdom of God. This dissertation seeks to resurrect the voice of one such woman: Dorothy Ripley (1767-1831), an evangelist from Whitby, England, whose personal and evangelical awakening rivaled the revolutionary power of the revivalism sweeping the new Republic. Citing her direct mandate from God to preach, Dorothy grasped religion and reshaped it into a spiritually, culturally, and politically altering device. She became the first woman to preach before the U.S. Congress, composed five literary volumes (most of which she published herself and in multiple editions), crossed the Atlantic as many as nineteen times, and traveled up and down the Eastern Seaboard to preach among the different levels of society in a variety of settings. As an unlicensed, unsanctioned preacher, Dorothy defied powerful social and religious conventions by her solitary travel, scriptural
exegesis, public performances, and presumption of the patriarchally assigned and
protected role of preacher. She strove to proclaim the gospel even at the expense of
reputation, family ties, home and hearth, marriage and motherhood, and personal
security. Her rebelliousness allowed her to rise above the backstage role commonly
assigned to, and accepted by, women of the early Republic. Her works serve as cultural
artifacts by providing eyewitness accounts spotlighting the problems inherent in the
formative years of a Republic reeling with the headiness of self-rule: the tension between
Protestantism and American capitalism, the conflict between an emerging elite and the
increasingly dissatisfied lower class, the misogyny of the cult of domesticity and separate
spheres, the embryonic stages of widespread social reform, and the virulent
ethnocentrism of the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny. Through an examination of her
spiritual autobiographies, this dissertation seeks to enrich scholarly understanding of
women’s influence in the evolution of evangelization, abolitionism, women’s rights, and
social service.

INDEX WORDS: Early nineteenth-century America, Conversion experience, Female
evangelism, Social reform, Slavery, Native Americans, Prisons,
Missionary, Trans-Atlantic travel, Dorothy Ripley
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by

ELISA ANN EVERSON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Sciences
Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family . . .

to Mom and Dad, for instilling in me a value for the hard work and perseverance necessary for doctoral study

to my sister and brother and their families and to Aunt Chot, for their smiling tolerance as I droned on about research and manuscripts and writing and other academic stuff

to my children, Annie and Hank, for their love and patience while Mommy worked—may you also be motivated and encouraged to reach your dreams

to my husband, for ten years of uncomplaining witness to the many ups, downs, and challenges of my graduate work and dissertation process—sorry, love, that it took me so long

and

in memory

of

Dorothy Ripley
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This dissertation would not have been possible without the emotional support of my friends and family. Love and a special thank you go to my mom and dad, Kathy and Larry Turner, who stood by me during the frustrations, tensions, successes, and rewards of graduate work. To my husband, Randy Everson, I would like to express an abiding devotion and appreciation. Without his patient and loving support throughout the years of my doctoral study, this dissertation could not have been possible. No one could ask for a better friend in life than he has been to me.
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Introduction

The above excerpt from the Holy Bible could open any number of conversion narratives, spiritual autobiographies, and ecclesiastical works published in early nineteenth-century America. A spirit of revivalism and spiritual enthusiasm swept the land in great gusts, carrying the generally pragmatic in a whirlwind of emotionalism and rousing expression that alarmed conservative clerics holding sway in the established churches and august civic leaders forging a new political structure in the post-revolutionary era. The cleared fields in the countryside rang with religious fervency as camp-meeting followers quaked, fainted, and screamed in joy as the Holy Spirit permeated their souls. As one young convert put it, “The congregation was melted into tears; I could compare it to nothing but a storm of wind . . . the congregation nearly all rose from their seats, and began to fall upon the floor like trees thrown down by a whirlwind . . . my tears flowed freely, my knees became feeble, and I trembled like Belshazzar; my strength failed and I fell upon the floor.” The evangelists, derisively called “ranters,” attracted followers in droves, some traveling great distances, and wielded enormous power in their ability to knead the emotions of huge crowds, whipping them into frenzies of worship—all at the behest of God.

Literary historians examining early nineteenth-century revivalism have ample examples at their fingertips to attest to such a scene. After all, early nineteenth-century Americans were ordinary men and women who had recently established a country where, in the words of Benjamin Franklin, “a general happy mediocrity prevails,” and who

“Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.”
inhabited a world which generally assumed the reality of divine existence as the Protestant reformers defined it. These ordinary men and women believed the Bible not only provided authoritative teaching for all but also accepted as truth the proposition that it deserved a prominent place in the evolving culture of the century. As Perry Miller and numerous other historians have noted, the nineteenth century reigned as the age of evangelical religion, and its agent, revivalism, may well have been “the defining factor” of post-revolutionary American life. Miller writes, “We can hardly understand Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, unless we comprehend that for them this was the one clearly given truth of their society . . . . For the mass of the American democracy, the decades after 1800 were a continuing, even though intermittent, revival.” Indeed, the revivals amongst the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and a host of other sects and denominations in the decades immediately following the American Revolution “represented a fundamental restructuring of American religion around the principles of freedom and competition.”

In the past twenty years or so, historians have sifted through the copious illustrations of those turbulent, emotion-ridden years of revivalism to devote considerable attention to the rise of female evangelism as a contender for the driving force behind Miller’s “defining factor.” Major feminist-historical studies have recently dedicated their energies to examining how women of varying social, racial, and geographical distinctions grasped religion and often reshaped it into a spiritually, culturally, and politically altering device. Thanks to the intensive analyses of historians like Catherine A. Brekus, Christine L. Krueger, and Christine Heyrman, among others, the crucial role played by women preachers in the mass evangelizations that swept the country has begun to reap
deserved attention. These studies afford greater insight into the female evangelists who, frequently citing their direct mandate from God, girded themselves with divine endorsement and took to the streets, fields, schools, church halls, and any other locale which accommodated the increasingly large crowds they attracted. Just as women represented a clear numerical majority in the evangelical movement of the post-Revolution, so too do female evangelists represent the heart of revivalism. Because of its voluntary and popular nature, revivalism primarily reflected the hopes, fears and aspirations of its constituency, most of whom were women, spurring one historian to christen the nineteenth-century revivals as a “woman’s awakening.”

Female exhorters offered these women the plain, forceful, assertive preaching favored by women searching for not only spiritual nourishment but relief from the endless demands of mending, cleaning, cooking, and child care—facets of the “mediocrity” that Franklin so keenly observed.

Despite the rigorous feminist studies testifying to women’s empowerment in the American evangelistic tradition, women remain few in number and the literary-historical world remains woefully uninformed about the mass of individual female evangelists of the early republican era. As Linda Kerber commented, “The great set-pieces of the history of religion in the early republic . . . have yet to be explored fully for what they can tell us of the involvement of women, the impact on women, and the renegotiation of relations between the sexes in various religious contexts.”

Truth to tell, the overwhelming majority of female evangelists exist as virtual unknowns in the history of the Christian tradition. According to Brekus, more than one hundred preached between 1740 and 1845, the era encompassing the two periods known as the First and Second
Great Awakenings, and Louis Billington more boldly estimated that between 1790 and 1840, probably hundreds of women preached, even if only in a local church, revival, or the parlors of their homes. However, the fact remains that few of the names of these female evangelists are known, even to the scholars of the period. Unless we investigate closely, we cannot hear the muted voices of the female evangelists who played such a prominent role in the Great Awakenings; this issue in itself is an historical point of great importance because it testifies by its eloquent silence to the crucial need for scholarship on these women.

This dissertation serves as an attempt to retrieve the voice of one of those women in the early nineteenth-century reviver tradition, a woman whose conviction burned brightly with religious fervor during the new republic’s religious awakening, but whose voice teeters on extinction among today’s readers. Largely lost to the ages, Dorothy Ripley, the independent evangelist from Whitby, England, who forsook all to spend the last half of her life in religious dedication to the masses in the former colonies, deserves reinstatement to the literary forefront. Although her published works or religious endeavors earn her an occasional line or the rare short paragraph in literary studies, her contribution to America’s political, social, and literary history remains largely unexplored, eliciting little critical interest in its own right, but more in context of female evangelism and early American women’s writing or, more remotely, patriarchally centered nineteenth-century studies of Protestantism. She offers today’s readers an eyewitness account of the advancement of female evangelism in nineteenth-century America, of the formative years of a republic reeling with the headiness of self-rule, and of the embryonic stage of widespread social reform. As the first woman to preach before
the U.S. Congress, the publisher of six literary volumes in multiple editions, and the independent preacher who crisscrossed the Eastern Seaboard and traversed the Atlantic an estimated nineteen times, Dorothy Ripley—who takes the chapter’s opening epigraph as her own to launch her conversion narrative—draws her accounts of wonders, portents, marvels and miracles from her own conversion and evangelical experience in an effort to mute the detractor, sway the questioning, energize the complacent, and edify the believer. More pragmatically, she refuses to shy away from recording examples, often quite graphic, of the complex issues plaguing nineteenth-century American society: the relationship between Protestantism and American capitalism, the conflict between an emerging elite and the increasingly dissatisfied lower class, the misogyny of the cult of domesticity and separate spheres, and the virulent ethnocentrism of the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny. A more thorough analysis of her life and works can only serve to enrich our understanding of women’s influence on the development of evangelism, women’s rights, and social service in the United States.

In order to understand Dorothy’s contribution to female evangelism in the Second Great Awakening, one must first question the lack of a broader context in which to place her. Dr. Samuel Johnson, the famous compiler of The Dictionary of the English Language, once allegedly satirized the female preacher thusly: “Sir, a woman’s preaching is like a dog’s walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.”\textsuperscript{16} The dismaying fact is that, as Christine L. Krueger pointed out, “had it not been for Dr. Johnson’s contemptuous remark, women preachers might hold no place whatever in literary history.”\textsuperscript{17} Despite women’s deep embroilment with the evangelical movement of the period, their role has been unambiguously relegated to that of a
domesticated moral guardian. Certainly their distinction as extemporaneous speakers with public power and creators of literary discourse with remarkable scriptural authority rarely wrinkles the fabric of history. In short, these women suffer re-marginalization and require an historical “awakening” of their own.

As Brekus observed, the women evangelists of the early nationalist period struggled “to create an enduring tradition of female evangelism.” Why then has the tradition, or at least record of their ideas, not been sufficiently preserved? Why have these women, the frontrunners of the masses of women mobilizing the revivalism of early nineteenth century, been eclipsed from historical, literary, and religious studies?

One reason for this can be attributed to the lack of extant texts by women. With the waning of the sweeping revivalism of the Second Great Awakening, a time when conservatism took hold of the established churches, shutting down the emotional onslaught of the camp meetings and outdoor revivals, and with the fresh emphasis on industrialization in an infant republic, came the declining interest in the religious texts that too closely resembled that of the old order, texts which the increasingly sophisticated Americans seemed generally eager to relegate to the past. As Mark Noll put it, the world which assumed that “sophisticated intellectual labors were compatible with piety” weakened in its suppositions as the nineteenth century matured, and intellectual and rationalist circles at the end of the century completely discarded the notion. The message of the evangelists was “no longer those of America’s dominant intellectuals.”

Interestingly, some female evangelists operated with a subtext to their missions, which some historians cite as a primary motivator for their lapse from literary history. Whether consciously or without forethought, these women made use of the inner reality
of their religious experiences to make an emphatic statement about the larger political
struggles of post-revolutionary America. While the Revolution freed the country of
British domination and afforded Americans the opportunity to forge a new nation of their
own making, the war did little toward truly liberating anyone but the white, middle-
class/merchantile male. Numerous studies have illustrated how women, slaves, and
Native Americans found themselves forgotten in the equation of democracy. Women,
though they played a formidable role in the war, found themselves confined culturally,
socially and spatially by the rhetoric of separate spheres and the cult of domesticity. These inherent, codified gender differences enabled males to channel their energies into
politics and the marketplace even while it relegated a female to a realm of domesticity
that charged her as the guardian of piety, purity, and godly endeavors as it concerned her
family. Simply put, women of the nineteenth century enjoyed little outlet for public
expression.

Whether with intent or by default, female evangelists found a means of
circumventing these socially accepted norms. By virtue of a divine call, they wrested
control in the creation of their own spiritual self, one which not only challenged a
theological edict of their subordination but also challenged this social construct of a
separate sphere for women. Armed with their divine calls to preach, female evangelists
demanded liberty to follow the impulse of the spirit, including public prayer, praise, or
exhortation at venues near and far. Thus, they secured for themselves greater freedom
outside the home and a measure of free will from social dictates in general, constructing a
self outside that which was socially constructed. As Nancy Cott commented,
Protestantism, through its medium of revivalism, enabled women “to rely on an authority
beyond the world of men and provided a crucial support to those who stepped beyond accepted bounds.”

Some historians view this subtext as a potentially explosive element not only in the culture of a distinctly patriarchal world, but also the literary one. Early nineteenth-century America witnessed the busy transformation of an oral culture to a print one, yet here too was an arena “dominated by men and ideologically defined by masculine attributes,” a world which excluded the bulk of American women, as female literacy lagged considerably behind that of the male. According to Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, although the literary marketplace invited women, it issued its invitations only when their texts had been excised of any discourse resembling an ambush of male authority: “Publishers were unwilling to support literary endeavors that would re-create and fix in print a woman’s ‘original violations’ of man’s spatial and social turf.” In response, when the moment made it possible, women like Dorothy Ripley again flouted conventionality by publishing works at their own expense.

Even then, going public through the print media became a viable option for only a small percentage of female preachers, as most operated on extremely limited budgets and did not possess the means to cross the great divide between oral and print culture. When women did achieve publication, few of their works ever made it into subsequent editions. As many of the female evangelists came from modest, even humble, backgrounds, they possessed little or no education and lacked financial and social connections generally needed for publication. Much of our knowledge of early American female evangelism, then, comes from the published texts of men and established churches, or, in some cases, the belle-lettres of the women themselves. For those exceptional instances in which these
early female evangelists published their own ideas and recorded their own lives, particular diligence must be expended for preservation and examination, since the primacy of their own stories cannot be underestimated in reconstructing female evangelism. Thus, recovery of female evangelists’ voices through publication proves a tricky business.

**Dorothy’s Life**

Devoted to missionary work from an early age, Dorothy Ripley was born April 24, 1767, in Whitby, Yorkshire, a quaint seaside town bordered by the Yorkshire Dales and the North Sea. The second daughter in the large family of William and Dorothy Ripley, her father toiled as a master mason and officiated as the first Methodist preacher in the town. After a divine voice commanded three-year-old Dorothy to cease playing with her toys and pray, she began a lifelong commitment to God and began accompanying her father in ministerial service to his Methodist flock. A study of contradictions, her tumultuous teenage years were mottled by the deaths of several family members—including her beloved father—and periodic suicidal thoughts—including one botched attempt. Juxtaposed against this was the life-changing event which thereafter governed all she did—her rebirth into spiritual faith including her conviction of a “holy calling” to preach the gospel to the heathen (Letters iv).

Following her conversion, Dorothy discovered the “Inner Light” of the Society of Friends, which operated a meetinghouse on the opposite side of town from the Methodist church. Severing her ties with the Methodists and her former lifestyle, Dorothy donned the routine garments of the Quakers and applied for membership to the Society. Leery of
her radicalism, the increasingly exclusionary Quakers denied her entry but failed to deter Dorothy from her determination to proclaim “the joyful tidings of salvation” to “Ethiopia’s children” living under “base tyranny” in the “large cities of America” (iiv). Thereafter, Dorothy emphasized her religious independence, declaring “As I am not a member of any community, no society can answer for my irregular conduct” (Bank iv).

Although the scanty historical records remain unclear about the number of times she crossed the Atlantic, Dorothy herself reveals at least ten crossings throughout her writing and her constituents cite as many as nineteen. Much of her national travel centered around New York and Philadelphia; however, she also carried her message of faith—liberally dosed with abolitionist overtones—to Virginia, Georgia, and South Carolina, including Charleston, the very heart of the slaveholding world. Through her ministry, she issued spiritual advice and emotional comfort to the many needy she sought out, with a burgeoning concern for the sick and dying and for abused and misguided women. Her compassion warred with temper during her encounters with the enslaved Africans and disempowered Native Americans, lending her message of spiritual conversion the added edge of abolitionism and civil rights. In contrast to Puritan/Congregationalist women who most often limited themselves to accounts of their conversions, leaving scriptural interpretation to the clergymen, Dorothy explicated the Scriptures in oral sermons, epistolary communication, and published writings. Her preaching was surprisingly ecumenical, as she brought her message to Methodists, Presbyterians, African-Methodist Episcopalians, Friends, and others. In short, she preached to anyone who offered her a meetinghouse, church, barn, schoolhouse, town hall, or courthouse—public places usually reserved for men.
Unlike most female evangelists of the time,\textsuperscript{25} Dorothy left a generous cluster of written volumes, having composed, edited, and published six literary works—three of which saw second editions. She meticulously kept a journal throughout her lifetime, recording an outsider’s impressions of the new Republic and the people, both welcomed and unwanted, who inhabited it. Throughout her life, she exchanged letters with prominent Quakers, including those from her hometown who had denied her membership, and other itinerant ministers. She died on December 23, 1831, in Mecklenburg, Virginia, at the home of her niece, who had accompanied her on one of her transatlantic crossings and decided to remain and marry in the States. A notice in \textit{The Whitby Repository} in May 1832 reported that Dorothy passed away “in great peace after an illness of five days.”\textsuperscript{26}

Unfortunately, locating Dorothy Ripley in a context of female evangelism poses difficulties, for, despite serving as wholly representative of female evangelism in commitment and calling, she also stands as uniquely different in many regards. She blended effortlessly into a homogenous pool of female preachers who defied societal and theological constraints to publicly broadcast the word of God; yet, she also separated in tangled diversity that sprang from a confliction of loyalties, a formidable intensity in personality that bordered on contentious, and a sense of religious (and as an offshoot, financial) entitlement that both attracted and repelled prospective adherents and political allies. Her speech, otherworldly at times, had an unerring, sober knack for zeroing in on others’ faults, often alienating the very people whose favor she sought to curry. She publicly confronted male clergy, lay brethren, and eldermen whom she found spiritually dull and, in written form, reproached the “professors” of Christian faith whose practice
she felt was inconsistent with their professed principles. Without regard for societal or ecclesiastical position, she publicly chastised those whom she felt sacrificed spiritual integrity for the attainment of worldly goods, power, and influence. Most scandalous of all, she trespassed into male terrain by engaging in public debate over scriptural interpretation. Hints of resentment over Dorothy’s high-handedness emerge in writings of contemporary male clergy and laity, even while approbation over her strength and direct aim at the hypocrisy of men surfaces in writings of male evangelists. Her outspokenness, and oftentimes contentiousness, coupled with her spiritual virtuosity, made her a liability to many men and women alike, leading her contemporaries to write of her in less than complimentary terms.²⁷

Although British-born, she spent approximately half her life tramping throughout the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, and although she essentially immigrated, she never severed residential ties with her homeland. Further, by virtue of her existence as a nomadic preacher without viable means of financial support, she spent her life essentially penniless; nevertheless, she moved liberally in influential circles that included the politically strong such as Dolley Madison²⁸ and Henry Dearborn;²⁹ the economically strong, such as the rich Quakers of Philadelphia, New York, and Rhode Island; and the ecclesiastically strong such as the Methodist bishop Francis Asbury³⁰ and the Quaker minister-missionary David Sands.³¹ Even while maintaining these important contacts, she preferred spending her days with the country’s less-favored groups whom she deemed most needy: the religious- and liberty-starved slave, the pagan and exploited Native American, the crowded and disease-ridden prisoner, and the sick, dying and morally-
bereft poor. In short, she fails to fit neatly into denominational, geographical or socio-economic categories.

**The Dissertation’s Chapters**

Appropriately, the opening chapter of the dissertation pertains to Dorothy’s homogeneity with her fellow sister evangelists. Bound together by a common emphasis on what they believed to be not only a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, but also their divine mandate to publicly proclaim His Word, these evangelizing women publicly charged hearers to confess their sins and believe in Christ’s forgiveness. Often styling themselves as “strangers” or “pilgrims” sojourning “in a strange land,” they became willing wanderers, mouthpieces for God, who unabashedly cajoled, threatened, reasoned and shamed their listeners into conversion. They demonstrated a lack of suitable respect for the Pauline edict to “Let your women keep silence in the church,” and as a result, endured strong familial opposition, clerical scorn, and public ridicule, threats and violence.

With an astonishing disregard for their comfort, and often their own safety, Dorothy and her evangelizing sisters roamed the quaint towns, crowded cities, and small wilderness enclaves, exhorting listeners to embrace pietistic spirituality through the sole medium of religious conversion. Through it all, they alternately experienced approbation and contempt. Sometimes communities welcomed the itinerants and at other times chased them out with violence or threats of imprisonment. History has come dangerously close to forgetting stories of courageous women like Jemima Wilkinson who found her lodgings under attack by a mob armed with bats and rocks in retaliation for her audacity
in preaching in Philadelphia; Zilpha Elaw who preached in front of a group of angry white men “with their hands full of stones”; and Dorothy Ripley who found herself verbally accosted by a drunken white sailor who burst into her services in a Philadelphia black church and, on another occasion, thrown into jail for holding a revival that New York City termed “inciting a riot.”

Even when the threats of bodily injury never reached fruition, the injuries to the women’s reputations did. Many of them suffered belittlement as eccentric or insane, lewd or immoral, ill-mannered or ill-bred, all for daring to be plainspoken, visionary, and occasionally disputatious. They endured very public assaults on their characters and their teachings in the media, fodder for the public’s hunger for entertainment and scandal. Labeled frauds, hermaphrodites and charlatans, these women found their characters annihilated in the scandal sheets of the media. Like Wilkinson, Ann Lee, and the other women preachers who preceded her, Dorothy received her share of public, printed attacks deriding her as shrewd, unscrupulous, and an imposter. Even after her death, Dorothy found little sanctuary from her detractors, as her critics laced her obituary with charges of profiteering from her deluded supporters.

Particularly destructive to a female evangelist’s reputation were charges of lewdness. In the eyes of nineteenth-century patriarchy, any “decent” woman rendered herself a public disgrace when she put herself on display, even in the service of God. Critics disparaged these female evangelists as both “masculine,” because they dared to usurp male authority in clerical and social matters, and as “lewd,” because they enticed male listeners by scandalously allowing the men to view them publicly. Dorothy fell victim to charges of sexual misconduct for her public exhortations, despite donning
Quaker-styled clothing, which in the nineteenth century occasionally insulated a woman from accusations of promiscuity.

Furthermore, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century female evangelists varied widely in their socio-economic status, educational advantages, and racial make-up. Most hailed from modest, even poor, homes and so boasted little or no education and resources such as the former slave Sojourner Truth.\textsuperscript{35} Still a few others, such as Elizabeth Fry and Harriet Livermore, enjoyed a birthright of comfortable living and advanced learning. Others married into financial security, including Clarissa Danforth and Ann Rexford.\textsuperscript{36} Dorothy, the inheritor of a noteworthy education as the daughter of a lay minister and member of a well-respected and highly visible, albeit impoverished, family, frequently read both the Bible and non-fiction works and liberally indulged in biblical exegesis. Conversely, her education instigated mistrust from those she sought to convert, rendering her educational advantages not so advantageous after all. Still other women managed to achieve a measure of escape from the stigma of color or ethnicity through their evangelism, even while others did not. For Dorothy, a British accent became a troublesome liability, often inspiring incertitude or inflaming suspicion among the recently liberated Americans who still treated most things English as cause for wariness. Profitably, Dorothy’s Tory roots soon give way to more republican leanings, garnering greater favor with her adherents. Complicating the whole was Dorothy’s penchant for traveling alone, unlike most female evangelists of the era. Her solitary travel, resulting from a desire to retain sovereignty and a necessity brought about by finances and lack of denominational endorsement, left her vulnerable to the licentious attentions of immoral men, two of whom propositioned her immediately after her arrival in America.
The second chapter examines Dorothy’s own conversion and her call to the ministry, succeeded by analysis of her complicated relationship with several religious sects. This chapter places her in a theological and denominational context and illustrates how such disaffiliation proved a hindrance to her presence in literary and religious history. While most evangelists moved within the constraints of an established religious order, Dorothy Ripley proudly proclaimed no ecclesiastical orientation, which afforded greater freedom from denominational dictates but conversely limited evangelical activities because of scarcity of funding and communal support.

Most significantly, Dorothy aligned herself with the Society of Friends, a group which could neither fully embrace nor completely reject her. Although the Friends denied membership to Dorothy on three separate occasions, Dorothy nevertheless profited from the Society of Friends’ far-reaching associations. Because she donned the clothes of a Quaker and generally adhered to Quaker doctrine, she reaped the benefits of the widespread respect that the sect earned by the early nineteenth century through its industriousness, honesty, and clean living. Lodgings within Quaker homes and endorsement through personal references ensured Dorothy’s successful travel during her first journey to America. At the same time, she crossed verbal swords privately and publicly with Quakers, including a newspaper announcement paid for by members heralding Dorothy’s non-affiliation.

Conversely, the Methodists found much to celebrate in Dorothy, though she readily estranged herself from a childhood legacy of Methodist itinerancy. Reared in the Methodist tradition as a daughter of one of John Wesley’s itinerants, Dorothy found approbation among both the major denomination and its offshoot, Primitive Methodism.
Although she primarily traveled alone, her evangelical missions included travels with Methodist-revival heavyweights such as Hugh Bourne\textsuperscript{37} and Lorenzo Dow.\textsuperscript{38} She also traveled with non-denominational evangelicals such as the radical Johny Edwards.\textsuperscript{39}

The lack of official membership in any denomination occasions an obvious loss, for scholarship often ignores that outside the mainstream. Both the Quakers and the Methodists occasionally offer scanty reference to Dorothy as an adherent, but her peripheral orbiting of the major denominations relegates her to the realm of radical, complicating the already pressing situation caused by the general eclipse of female preachers from nineteenth-century church histories—“a silence that has been perpetuated ever since.”\textsuperscript{40}

This chapter also analyzes Dorothy’s foray into written exhortation. As mentioned earlier, some female evangelists expanded their mission into the realm of writing and publishing, another means of creative expression of their faith. While public exhortations comprised the larger part of their evangelistic mission, publication created a greater pool of prospective converts, magnified validation of the authenticity of their divine call, and presented further opportunity to amplify their autonomy not only beyond the home but also beyond the community, region, and even country. By writing their own stories, these women entered yet another arena traditionally recognized as a male domain and commandeered yet another opportunity to defy the separate-sphere ideology and break away from the cult of domesticity. By writing and publishing their own conversion accounts, life stories, and sermons, female evangelists merely seized another form of pulpit, usurping again the male clerics and male church leaders who denounced them for their presumptiveness. Dorothy’s writing owes a debt to the plethora of Quaker
conversion narratives which provide a writing model on which she built. While
Methodist undertones, compliments of her Methodist upbringing, echo through her
works, Dorothy nevertheless made liberal use of traditional Quaker narrative structure,
voice, and emphasis. Moreover, her works benefited from epistolary endorsement. In the
first three of her works, she relied substantially on the credibility lent by personal
 correspondence with leading Quaker missionaries, most notably the celebrated ministers
David Sands and Priscilla Hannah Gurney.41

In her works, Dorothy wields her writing to achieve what Elizabeth Elkin
Grammer calls “textual revenge.”42 Just as the written word can function as a thank-you
to those assisting the evangelist in her mission, so too can the writer use it to achieve
reprisal against her critics who thwart her objective. Dorothy Ripley, for instance,
commented expansively on those who attempted to impede her mission, especially the
Society of Friends, which repeatedly denied her a coveted certificate sanctioning
missionary travel, as well as individual Quakers who frustrated her daily activities
through perpetuation of gossip and denial of lodgings and financial backing.

A prolific writer as well as an extemporaneous speaker, Dorothy spoke with
authority in biblical commentary and typology, a practice generally reserved for male
clergy. In the Quaker style, she never resorted to notes in her preaching, nor did she
record her sermons in any fashion, preferring divine inspiration to deliver her message.
Hence, little remains of Dorothy’s sermons, excepting the occasional reference in her
treatises and letters. However, in those, she liberally engaged in scriptural exegesis and
quoted frequently from the Bible. She also included poetical utterances in her writings,
yet another expression of religious inspiration. She included several poems in her prose,
including an extended biographical offering at the beginning of *The Bank of Faith and Works United* (1819); excerpts from this poem open each of the dissertation’s main chapters. In addition, imitating the Quaker style, she maintained a lifelong journal to note providential occurrences, always with an eye toward publication, and these manifested into spiritual guidance for others.

The following two chapters scrutinize how Dorothy’s disaffiliation with any religious denomination or sect—although the source of roadblocks in many ways—also broadened her missionary work among disenfranchised populations. Because she considered herself answerable only to her God, Dorothy obtained a greater expanse of freedom than female evangelists who felt compelled, because of familial or institutional ties, to maintain a standard of decorum dictated by society. Many women shied away from participation in evangelism, for they worried about becoming estranged from spouses who might resent their wives’ embrace of religious views at variance with their own or enjoying greater public distinction. With no husband, no church, and no denomination, Dorothy operated as an evangelistic independent, which left her free to tout ethics over dogma, to consort, in very Christlike fashion with populations that no “decent” white woman would publicly acknowledge: the sexually promiscuous, the diseased and insane, the criminally degenerate, and the racially “inferior.”

Shocked by the prodigious fortunes acquired by Southern aristocrats through slave labor, Dorothy spent much of her latter years among the enslaved and free blacks. Although Dorothy primarily focused on the conversion of the spiritually lost or misguided, she also perceived the negative effects of slavery on both white and black Americans. The uneasiness she displayed in her conversion narrative blossomed into
frank opposition by her second published work, and her altered attitude viewed wealth and slave-holding as corrosive to spiritual values. Always a champion of abused women, Dorothy grew increasingly troubled by the impact of slavery on women and children, perceiving the sexual control white men had over their black female slaves—an offshoot of slavery which most of the new republic, especially white women, refused to even acknowledge, much less publicly denounce.

Equally troubled by the country’s attainment of land power through the dispossession and exploitation of an indigenous people, Dorothy spent nearly two months preaching to the Oneida Indians, defying convention and personal safety by freely moving amongst them, often without escort. She censured proprietors and white citizens alike for their collusion in defrauding the Indians, particularly denouncing the practice of supplying alcohol as a means of disarming natives during trade. Her increased awareness of the mistreatment of Indians spurred her to spread a spiritual message liberally laced with tolerance, fairness, and justice to her white listeners. To the Oneidas, she focused her efforts on the women and older chieftains, dismayed by her perception of degeneracy among the male Indians, primarily as a result of alcohol consumption.

Lastly, Dorothy made numerous visits to prisons, almshouses, and workhouses in New York and Boston, bringing a message of salvation to the incarcerated souls living in a range of conditions, from clean and tidy to filthy and squalid. As she did with the Oneidas earlier, she delivered a message of comfort and spiritual awakening to the inmates, while chastising readers about moral reform. Sensitive to the prevailing sexual injustice, Dorothy denounced the practice of boarding children, often undernourished and poorly dressed, with their incarcerated mothers. The New York prisons often housed
women and men together, rendering some women defenseless against sexual assaults and exposing children to pervasive immorality. Possibly as a result of her youthful witness of a mob’s tarring and feathering of a girl in England, Dorothy gives special attention to prostitutes, emphasizing reform and kindling self-respect through the medium of evangelism.

**Dorothy’s Published Works**

Throughout this dissertation, I offer a literary assessment of Dorothy’s works as well as historical analysis. Each of her published texts resonates with the conviction of salvation through God and her role as God’s agent. Although interspersed with historical and political implications that inform our own society and with which we still struggle today, unquestionably, the core of each work concerns her own continued dedication through faith and works to ensure her entitlement of holy deliverance and the redemption of the spiritually lost.

Her narrative, *The Extraordinary Conversion and Religious Experience of Dorothy Ripley* (1810, 1817), provides a provocative, emancipatory chronicle of the evolution of an unconventional woman into an independent minister of God, motivated solely by the prophetic impulse. The half-orphaned daughter of one of John Wesley’s itinerants, Dorothy left the poverty she knew in Whitby, England, to answer a divine call to minister to the enslaved populations of the newly formed United States. Her text testifies to the grueling life of an itinerant evangelist, in her descriptions of multiple transatlantic voyages and navigations through the terrain of the East Coast, which retained wilderness properties even twenty years after the Revolution. Aside from
typography, missionaries also struggled with the practicalities of mission work. Even while Dorothy consciously centered herself in a spiritual text, circumstances forced her to address the mundane tasks of securing accommodations, food rations, and alternative modes of travel. For independent missionaries such as Dorothy, complications arose as a result of their lack of association with any church faction. Because membership in an organized, widely ranging religious community such as the Moravians and the Society of Friends ensured immediate acceptance and access to lodgings, supplies, and a ready source of financial support, those itinerants traveling without benefit of denominational affiliation did so at considerable risk. Their lot was a lonely one. While traversing unfamiliar territory, Dorothy found herself vulnerable to the uncertain whims of her adherents, most especially the Society of Friends, with whom she most closely aligned herself. Dorothy’s reliance on the financial goodwill of others lent benefactors a false perception of evangelical jurisdiction. When Dorothy challenged Friends’ belief in their right to question her activities, the result was a clash in methods if not ideals, fueling both sides’ increasing resentment. Her unwillingness to relinquish her hard-won autonomy often engendered a backlash of harsh criticism and public denouncement from both the ecclesiastical and secular worlds. The text, then, gives insight into the missionary’s challenge to reconcile denominational affiliation with evangelical autonomy.

Her follow-up work, *The Bank of Faith and Works United* (1819, 1822), treats Dorothy’s second journey and reveals a mature evangelist refining a ministry on predominantly familiar territory. Denied entry yet again into the Society of Friends, she embraced interdenominational fellowship and expanded her ministry outside the realm of the rising white, educated middle class to incorporate an ever-widening range of
spiritually lost and morally misguided. While maintaining her original focus of ministry to slaves, she funneled her evangelistic energies into converting other disenfranchised masses of the new republic---those enslaved in a multitude of ways in a land that espoused freedom. Much of her second missionary journey targeted the Native American tribe, the Oneidas. One of the first white women to minister to the Oneidas, Dorothy eschewed accepted practice and moved independently among the natives, sometimes accompanied by a guide, sometimes alone; sometimes with a translator, sometimes relying on the transcendental tongue of spirituality. In her narrative, she chronicled Indian custom, successes, grievances, and downfalls, offering an unspoiled glimpse into the altered life of a conquered people.

Similarly, she focused her spiritual energies on another forgotten segment of the existing society, the imprisoned, sick and diseased. Her text spotlights the crowded conditions of filthy communal cells that housed both the healthy and the diseased, the pickpocket and the psychopath, the sojourner and the lifetime resident. Her text juxtaposes the state prison of Massachusetts, with its neat and orderly cells and moderately nourished residents, with the gaols of New York that oftentimes failed to segregate in concession to gender, age or criminal intent. Her evangelistic liberality extends to the almshouses and workhouses, which ranged just as widely in quality of upkeep as did the prisons. Accounts of her evangelistic forays into the dark underworld of the docks, the seedy playhouses, and the wretched prostitution dens serve as early examples of social awareness in the new republic.

By the end of the narrative, her high-powered lens of social perception turns its focus to the slave-holding South, where she traveled unaccompanied except for her
inflammatory message of abolitionism being a necessary component of Christianity. She carried this message to the very heart of Dixie itself, Charleston, South Carolina, where she proposed a school for girls styled as a half-way house. Thus, the overall text brings the historical moment into greater focus, revealing the seeds of social consciousness which gradually germinated into nationwide social reform by the end of the century.

Her third work, An Account of Rose Butler (1819), continues the social theme by addressing the issue of capital punishment, a national pastime that Dorothy considered counter to the very heart of Christianity. The text opens with the execution story of an indentured servant guilty of setting fire to her mistress’s house. Aside from the morbidity of the execution itself, the gloomy theme encompasses published epistles of the unconstitutionality and immorality of capital punishment. Written under the pseudonym of Benevolus, the outraged statements itemize contemporary objections to the practice, echoing modern-day divisions over the legal right to take a life. Further, the story offers an historical view to the beginnings of class division in the United States. Rose Butler’s account reveals the indignities and deprivations inherent in the state of enforced servitude. While the early nineteenth century saw the rise of the middle class, it also witnessed the flood of the indentured, immigrant, and poverty-stricken among the lower class and a burgeoning antagonism toward those more fortunate. The account of Rose Butler gives silent testimony to the cry of frustration heard from the poor of the early nineteenth-century cities which gradually increased in volume to the roar of rage from contemporary urban ghettos. The poor, indentured arsonist of the nineteenth-century presages America’s present-day issues of poverty and crime.
Dorothy also lent amplification to voices of other revolutionaries of varying magnitude which the historical moment otherwise would have muted, including her publication of written works by the indigenous, the enslaved, the imprisoned, and the dead. In 1807, she edited and published *Letters Addressed to Dorothy Ripley*, a collection of epistolary communications “on subjects of Christian experience” (ii). Among the letters are correspondence from such diverse writers as black ministers, proto-feminist Indians, and convicted felons. Under their accounts of spiritual experience lies a subtext of cultural, political and legal struggles, lending contemporary historians multi-faceted, eyewitness accounts of nineteenth-century issues. Like her major works, this too enjoyed a second edition.

Included in the slim volume *Letters*, Dorothy added *An Address to All in Difficulties*, in which she combined jaunty verse and prose as yet another creative articulation of her faith. In imitation of the Biblical psalmists, she composed “A Hymn From My Nativity,” which recounted God’s call early in her life, the evangelistic foundation of her father’s itinerancy upon which she built her own missionary work, and the barriers she overcame as an errant minister of God. While the book addresses the “professed Christians” and diverse classes to whom she ministered during her missionary journeys, it also functions as a “how-to” manual for prospective evangelists, an audience heretofore untargeted by Dorothy (*Address* 4).

Finally, late in her life, she published the rediscovered memoirs of her Methodist itinerant father, William Ripley, which recount his early life, his ministry under Wesley’s tutelage, and snippets from the Ripley home. The memoirs, for which she penned a preface, present an interesting counterpoint to her own accounts of traveling ministry and
demonstrate that even while itinerants’ differing experiences directly related to gender and geography, they also evolved as part of the greater common phenomenon of all traveling ministers, irrespective of denomination.

**The Dissertation’s Purpose**

Each of Dorothy’s works reveals facets of its creator, an evolving evangelist with divine appointment, as well as offering greater insight into the female evangelism movement of post-revolutionary America. Her texts illuminate the daily experiences common to female evangelists, as well as spotlight those specific to the radicals who orbited a radical movement which challenged the Puritan model of female submission to male authority, both secularly and theologically. In addition to a religious perspective, Dorothy’s texts provide a compelling and compassionate secular view. They furnish a firsthand glimpse into the social and political upheaval experienced by the new Americans as they sought to form a nation, and in particular, highlight the hardships of the country’s disenfranchised populations and their responses to those challenges. Thus, through restoration of her voice to historical study, we gain deeper intellectual penetration of the religious and social complexity of post-revolutionary America and the evangelism that became a means of rejecting the dominant culture’s plan of subordination. Dorothy Ripley wrested a measure of autonomy from the secular world, seizing an allegiance beyond the home and using both the press and the pulpit to spread her message of conversion. She explored a new field to become an active, assertive, and relatively free agent of God—a member of a group of evangelizing women who felt “responsible for nothing short of the redemption of the world.”
Like a complex puzzle in which valuable pieces have become lost or misplaced, our collective historical view has a distorted pattern and order. Major “pieces” of this puzzle—those representing women and their roles, significance, and contributions in literary, religious, and social history—have been discarded, rejected, or mislaid by those constructing this elaborate puzzle: the patriarchy. This circumscribed view has rendered later scholars woefully ignorant or dismissive of women in early American discourse, and the literary canon’s reductionist tendencies reflect this. The purpose of this dissertation is to address the need for enlightenment by adding a valuable puzzle piece about one particular woman, one representative of the hundreds of preaching women who remain silent and forgotten in our religious past. By examining Dorothy’s contested role in evangelism, her problematic participation in authoritative, exegetical expression, and her reformative impulses, I seek to fill a blank space in that incomplete puzzle. The resurrection and restoration of Dorothy’s voice will be one more move to rectifying the exclusion, marginalization, and misapprehension of women from a lost past and to fostering their move to an appropriately significant and visible place in literary, historical, and religious study. Combined with other pieces, this small fragment of the greater puzzle may one day lead to a panoramic view of the contribution and importance of women to our collective past.
He gave me my text, and bid me then preach,
Tho’ satan hath vex’d, my soul it doth reach,
   The crown of salvation, I offer to all.
On every plantation, for sinners I call.

I arose with new strength, the message to tell,
   That Jesus at length, had save me from hell;
Fourteen years now over, the Lord made me fit,
   To stop sin’s disorder, men going to the pit.

Let no man henceforth, take from thee thy crown,
   But think of the worth, and heavenly, boon,
To aid in His vineyard, seek souls for thy God,
   For millions and trillions, are bought by His blood.

My name was cast out, as filth of the place,
   And follow’d about, unworthy of grace;
But some doth believe me, a Christian indeed,
   And others relieve me, from hearts that doth bleed.

They see I am right, to preach Christ the Lord,
Yet have not the sight, of Him, their Great God;
   So I do them gather, as sheafs for my love,
That they may call Father, and be as His dove.

— “A Hymn from My Nativity” (Address 12-15)

Chapter 1

Dorothy & Female Evangelism

“I have consulted dozens of histories . . . without finding more than one or two scanty references to women preachers. I have wondered whether some of the authors—all of them men—may have felt that a woman preacher was a monstrosity best forgotten. It is improbable that any large number, or perhaps any outstanding ones, would have been ignored.” In the mid-twentieth century, Elizabeth Anthony Dexter sought to compile a
history of women preachers in American history. As the frustration in the above statement reveals, she discovered little information about the female evangelists who both practiced as God’s servants in their collection of scattered farms or crisscrossed the countryside as unlicensed, unsanctioned preachers for the little outposts called towns. Until the last thirty years or so, women have been all but absent from histories of religion.48

The women preachers of the early nineteenth century frequently defied powerful social and religious conventions. They strove to proclaim the gospel even at the expense of reputation, family ties, home and hearth, and marriage and motherhood. They rose above the backstage role commonly assigned to, and accepted by, women of the early Republic.

In an interesting twist, institutionalized religion assisted them in their goals. By the nineteenth century, loosely regulated evangelism had become commonplace, as religion joined the ranks of other areas where the populace discarded ineffective ideas and establishments in favor of more popular policies and practices. Religious sects such as the American Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians, were surprisingly decentralized systems. Despite generally well-defined central hierarchies, these sects relied more on volunteers such as lay and itinerant preachers than on established clergy. Because of this basis of a voluntary system, local congregations shouldered much of the responsibilities of church services, church polity, and the day-to-day affairs of the church. Thus, a wide variety of lay leadership positions opened up to ordinary people, even to women and African-Americans. Unprecedented numbers took advantage of such opportunities, responding to the call of the Holy Spirit. This became especially visible among the
Methodists. “The movement had a place for just about everyone who could adhere to its broadly evangelical doctrines and discipline, or at least aspired to.”

Before the Revolutionary War, such activity among religious groups would have been unheard of throughout America, and in some cases, vehemently opposed. As John Wigger noted of the Methodists, “the democratic and leveling impulses of the age” opened new avenues for fervent lay men and women in a bevy of semi-official positions. Within a generation after the end of the war, these new roles evolved into an accepted part of the religious and cultural landscape, helping to redefine the role and position of evangelicals and missionaries.

Women particularly thrived under the fresh religious ideology that found favor in the New Republic. They thrived as exhorters, church leaders, prayer group leaders, church stewards, and revival organizers. Theirs became a new religious world to be explored—except in the world of preaching. Both American religious and secular culture generally frowned upon a woman’s stepping forward as a preacher. Although the lines sometimes became blurred between preaching and exhorting, women preachers found themselves facing great dissent at their presumption. Religion had, for the most part, severed the lines that corralled women into subordinate groups, but the one arena that remained prohibited to them was that of preaching.

Practically speaking, only a technical distinction existed between exhorting and preaching. In theory, exhorting simply meant the public testimony of one’s conversion or life experiences that led to faith, the goal being to bring the unconverted into the fold or to bolster the faith of other believers. Preaching, by contrast, meant the “taking,” or reading, of a scriptural text. When a preacher took a text, he or she interpreted and
explained the context and meaning of the passage. Strictly speaking, only licensed preachers could exercise the privilege of “taking a text.” By the turn of the century, the Methodists and Baptists recanted earlier promises, judging it unscriptural for a woman to preach. As Baptists moved from ad hoc groups responding to church issues on a case-by-case basis to standing committees, women became systematically excluded. The Wesleyan Methodists took a more institutional approach, prohibiting women’s preaching as part of their bylaws in 1803. Moreover, when women did speak they were silenced or labeled “disorderly.”

In terms of religious rights, this last element of sectarian involvement constituted the crux of the tensions between female evangelists and the male clerical establishment. While the term “feminism” may be a twentieth-century invention, women practiced its principles and stratagems long before the suffragettes wrestled for the vote for women. Long before Mary Daly, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Phyllis Tribble, Naomi Goldenberg, or Rosemary Radford Ruether, women preachers penned their scathing critiques of the religious literatures and power structures of society. Women such as Dorothy Ripley burst onto the scene, challenging the religious patriarchal prerogatives and paterfamilias. Other nineteenth-century female exhorters such as Jarena Lee explicitly claimed the right to preach. The call to evangelize became the impetus for nineteenth-century women preachers, and they felt empowered to challenge the male monopoly on moral and religious power. As Lee wrote in her autobiography, “As unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible with God. And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach? seeing the Saviour died for the woman as
well as the man.”

Predating Jarena Lee, who followed in Dorothy’s footsteps in Richard Allen’s African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church, Dorothy challenged the male prerogative to preach in order to secure such for herself. Although she couched her challenge in milder language than that of Lee, she repeatedly asserted that both sexes, male and female, must work in tandem for the salvation of the world. Dorothy insisted that “professing Christians . . . need to be excited to holiness, both by example and precept, from male and female” (EC 128). Dorothy stated that God “can effect wonderful works of purity in every age of the world, to testify the power of the Highest, using either male or female for his own glory” (24). After all, God “shew[s] forth his love to the children of men without partiality” (iv). Further, she challenged male interpretation of the Bible, especially male appropriation of certain portions of it, rendering the Holy Scriptures a resource for sexism. To Dorothy’s way of thinking, males seemed far too eager to reserve preaching for men only, regulating women to exhorting, which by definition proscribed direct interaction with the Bible. Dorothy had learned through personal and religious experience that women were best religiously served by women—including preaching. Her words were echoed by Lee in 1836 who declared, “If the man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one?”

Dorothy’s agitation for the female right to preach advanced in stride with her ministry, and keeping pace was the stridency in her tone. For example, by the final pages of her Bank of Faith and Works United, which recounted her second missionary
expedition completed in 1805, detractors had forfeited her general goodwill and earned her growing enmity. They reaped the blame for many of the hardships visited on her, for their fabrications and innuendoes had hindered and frustrated her ministry. For example, when describing a meeting held for the non-denominational populace along Sansom Street in Philadelphia, Dorothy characterized the congregants as “a set of wild asses” (Bank 2nd ed. 217). The overcrowded mass squeezing into the courthouse that November evening of 1805 consisted primarily of curiosity seekers, nosy meddlers, and snooping objectors to a female preacher. Because so many came in response to the infamous notoriety of a female preacher and with the expressed purpose of gawking at her, they hampered attendance by legitimate penitents desiring true edification about God. Realizing the impious motivations of her audience, Dorothy indicted the “curious hearers” as scoffers who merely sought

an occasion against me, to furnish themselves with arguments, and to block up my path, being agents of sin, and servants of satan, who are always employed to overturn the saint’s faith, were it possible; but the Lord, the Mighty God, baffles the attempts of the cunning adversary; although he appears at seasons just to gain the conquest over them. (217)

The Episcopalians were less likely to raise the bar on hurdles for female preacher. The Episcopal church in Annapolis, Maryland, opened its doors to her when the Methodist meetinghouse proved insufficient to hold the throng which turned out to hear her. Yet, once there, “whispering and smiling [greeted me] when I went in,” and Dorothy marveled at “how thoughtless many were” (235). Despite the “charming musical notes of
men . . . singing either a psalm or an hymn,” the obvious amusement of the congregants at the sight of a female preacher dispelled the spirituality of the moment.

Even among the Quakers, long known for their favorable view of women preachers, some objected to the sight of a woman taking center-stage and preaching to male and female congregants. In Long Island, New York, in 1805, when the Holy Spirit moved her to speak before the congregated worshippers, she stood, only to be chastised by one of the ministers at the front of the meeting hall. Although Dorothy heard the man’s admonition, she ignored the earthly command in favor of the spiritual one. “One in the gallery requested me not to disturb the meeting; I heard, but regarded not man, until the Lord bid me sit down, that He might open the passage to every poor wrestling Jacob, and prevailing Israel there” (EC 40).

Like the Methodist women preachers before her, who refused to confine themselves to addressing only women and children, Dorothy sought to evangelize the patriarchy itself. Great crowds of men and women swarmed to hear her preach, and she facilitated the conversion of many of them. For example, in New York in the autumn of 1805, an estimated eighteen hundred people turned out to hear Dorothy’s gospel address, and this followed a harsh summer of blistering heat which had taken its toll on the physical and spiritual fortitude of would-be converts. Worse, yellow fever had swept through New York, carrying more than 50,000 inhabitants to their deaths. Even after Dorothy’s two-hour delivery, many in the crowd trailed her to her lodgings “and would not go home, begging for another meeting the same evening, which they waited two hours for, standing all around the windows, and doors” (Bank 181). As Krueger points out, “direct results were crucial to women preachers,” and the numbers thronging to
hear Dorothy preach lent the most persuasive confirmation of her calling. With such approbation of her spiritual appointment, Dorothy could not deny them an encore performance and delivered yet another message to the spiritually hungry swarm.

Unfortunately, much of the arguments limiting women’s liturgical and leadership roles in the church and community stem from that much misunderstood first-century Christian leader, the Apostle Paul. As the undisputed author of seven letters of the New Testament, Paul historically has occupied an honored place as the authoritative voice on matters of Christian doctrine and practice. Questions of sexuality and gender are often referred to him, with those opposed to women’s public involvement in liturgical matters citing Paul’s resistance to the religious leadership of women prophets in first-century Corinth. Similarly, feminist biblical criticism has long been plagued by the androcentric language of 1 Timothy and its famous proscription of women:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.68

Oppositional male leadership in the church appropriated Paul’s situational advice, fueling their arguments for limiting women’s claim to religious experience and church leadership. “His letters are occasional pieces, situational, and partial. They do not present a coherent, systematic explication of [Paul’s] theological project. Rather, they are letters written to address particular circumstances and local conditions. As such, their later use
by Christian communities as systematic and normative texts strains against the texts’ own contingent histories."

Indeed, one willing to comb the material remnants of early Christian texts can find evidence of women’s participation in the establishment of the Christian church. While reports of women’s participation dot scripture in sporadic and sketchy detail, the references give credence to the claim that women played active and public roles in first-century Christianity. For example, the greetings which appear at the end of various Pauline letters specifically referred to numerous women active in the founding churches scattered throughout the Roman Empire. In Romans 16 alone, Paul commended Priscilla for her hard work and effort with her husband Aquilla; Mary, who “has worked hard among you”; Tryphaena and Tryphosa “those workers in the Lord”; the “beloved” Persis; and Julia and Nereus’ sister. Feminist biblical scholars argue that these women had vital roles in missionary work. Still, Romans 16’s most fruitful reference to the significant and sustained presence of women in the ranks of the early church was made in regard to Phoebe. The chapter commenced as a letter of recommendation for Phoebe, a “minister” or “deaconness.” Such an elevated title for a woman rendered her a prominent, and unquestionably powerful, voice in the fledgling Christian church.

However, by the commencement of the nineteenth century the winds of change had gained speed, progressively sweeping away the consequence of women in liturgical matters. The Methodists had judged women excluded from the right to preach except in extreme cases of an “extraordinary call.” In Alexandria, Virginia, the Methodists forbade Dorothy to conduct meetings in their church “lest I should open a door for the women of their society” (Bank 247). Likewise, many Baptists denounced women who trespassed on
the male prerogative to preach. Presbyterian James Carnahan of upstate New York denounced Martha Howell as an itinerant preacher. He also indicted the Baptist church at large, charging, “They suffer that woman Jezebel which called herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce the servants of the Lord.” With equal heat, the Baptists countered with the claim that Howell only witnessed to her own experiences and faith and that she stopped short of preaching and teaching. As observed by Susan Juster, by the end of the eighteenth century, most Baptist men declared that women had no authority to preach, teach or pray aloud—an “unlimited” prohibition. As one man anonymously, and comprehensively, concluded in a published account:

I conceive it to be unscriptural for them to speak in the church at all, not only by teaching, or by prayer, leading the devotions of the church, but by professing their repentance toward God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, or their future contrition and confidence; by imparting necessary information on any matter; in giving testimony to confirm any fact; in asking or answering any question; or by verbally assenting to or dissenting from, any proposition there . . . .

The furor caused by a contemporary of Dorothy at the 1811 session of the Western Association held in Pennsylvania demonstrated this injurious transformation. An avuncular clergyman attending the session described the raised hackles of the venerable male leadership and the resultant clamor when preacher Maria Cook presented herself to organizers with the intent of delivering a sermon. The men’s first resource for opposition was Apostle Paul.
Some of our brethren and friends were a little fastidious about allowing a woman to preach, supposing St. Paul forbade it, where he says, he suffered not a woman to teach, or to usurp authority, &c, while others thought differently, believing he would not have applauded the labors of so many female helpers in the Lord, if he did not, under suitable circumstances, approve of their public ministration. But the phenomenon of a female preacher appearing among us was so extraordinary, and curiosity was on tiptoe among the mass of the congregation, to hear a woman preach, our opposing brethren finally withdrew their objections, and she very cheerfully obliged us with a discourse.74

Maria must have felt a suffusion of validation, for her sermon was “more listened to [and] with more devout attention” than any at the Conference, earning her thundering applause from the previously recalcitrant crowd. To the clergyman’s delighted surprise, Cook’s delivery was marked “with more eloquence, with more correctness of diction, or pathos” than any other address of the Conference. Following that sermon, Cook’s were the most numerously attended of any preacher of any denomination who had traveled through that portion of Pennsylvania. The cleric credited her meetings as “quite advantageous to the cause of truth,” for they enticed many to the services—even if the impetus was, simply as the novel opportunity to stare openly at a woman. Further, the largesse of her listeners surpassed that of any preacher in the Conference.

In spite of her auspicious beginnings, Maria soon fell victim to the machinations of her critics. Before long, they had inculcated a general feeling of disfavor with the female preacher, irrespective of the doctrine she advocated. The rumblings of discontent
swelled until Maria felt the harsh bite of her critics’ very public imputations. Disturbingly, in Cook’s case, the dissension initiated from members of her own gender, who thought it highly improper, and even indecent, for a woman to preach. Hypersensitive to the uncharitable remarks of her censurers, she became considerably discomposed, and a defensive tone eventually crept into her public discourses. Soon she lapsed into lengthy harangues in vindication of her right to preach, further alienating the biased horde.75

However, Baptists initially did not seem comprehensively to denounce women preachers, for Dorothy received nothing less than the full support of Baptist minister Henry Holcombe upon her arrival in Savannah. The preacher not only supplied room, board and chaise for Dorothy, but also labeled her “sister.” To his wife, he introduced Dorothy as “a minister, such as helped Paul in the Gospel” (Bank 286). Unused to such wholesale acceptance from a male minister, Dorothy proclaimed him “free from those prejudices that prevail over many against women officiating in the Gospel with them” (287). Emboldened by the minister’s ready acceptance, she suggested they share sermonic duties, he officiating over the morning services, and she the evening. Without hesitation, Holcombe announced to his congregation, “A sister like Phoebe who helped Paul will preach here at evening” (287). Such unrestrained respect and deference, similar to that accorded a fellow male minister, prompted Dorothy to exclaim, “... I seemed at a loss to know whether to call him father, or brother, believing Him able to feed both the lambs and the sheep, in the Lord’s pasture on Savannah’s barren soil ...” (287). Likewise, Dorothy wrote accolades for minister Joseph “Judge” Clay, who teamed up with Holcombe to protect Dorothy when the sheriff threatened arrest. Initially, both
ministers staunchly shielded Dorothy and provided for her as they would have done any male itinerant preacher.

Unfortunately, Holcombe and Clay’s backing proved short-lived, for their show of support to a female itinerant did not extend to a female abolitionist. In a bid to halt further broadcast of Dorothy’s abolitionist message, they penned false letters of introduction for Dorothy to carry to Beaufort, South Carolina. In the sealed letters, the men warned fellow Southern ministers of Dorothy’s objectionable abolitionist sympathies and her unbridled tongue. Without their letters of support, Dorothy’s evangelistic trailblazing through South Carolina would have been impeded, if not thwarted. Perhaps the Georgian ministers feared for the well-being of those who would house Dorothy, for Holcomb and Clay both became political, social, and legal targets for their public defense of the woman preacher-cum-abolitionist. Their support had waned only after Dorothy’s message veered to abolitionism and trod a fine line between lawful and illegal.76

In New Stockbridge, New York, her missionary work among the natives drew additional fire from the ordained ministry. The Presbyterian clergyman who served a white flock nearby but occasionally spoke before the Oneidas objected not only to her evangelism among the natives, but also contested the right of a woman to preach. Incensed at her presumption upon male territory, the minister took liberties to lambast her in front of Samuel Kirkland, the long-standing, revered minister to Skanando, chief and king to the Oneida nation.77 His objections splintered down to gendered condescension, belittling Dorothy with the paltry opportunities culturally accorded to women:
When I got there, the Presbyterian minister came, who said, “She had better teach them to knit and sew, as preach to them,” enquiring what apology he should make to them for my preaching, as they did not teach the Indians, that women had any right to preach? I told him candidly, to save himself the trouble; for no one had any business to interfere respecting this, since I was accountable to no one but God, who had brought me hither, neither was any answerable for what I did. (Bank 94)

Perhaps riled by the audacious and unapologetic stance of the female upstart, the Presbyterian minister persisted in his harangue, resuming again once ensconced behind the pulpit. Further, he fortified his position by bringing in reinforcements: other male missionaries accompanied him to the pulpit, bolstering their claim not only numerically but by virtue of the power inherent in the pulpit. Their antics had successfully usurped Dorothy at a meeting arranged solely for her services. At this point, Dorothy’s possible responses eroded to two equally repellent options: she could permit the minister and his minions to persist in their tirade and usurpation of her as assigned preacher, or she could contest their attitude and actions in the sacred vicinity of the pulpit and in full view of the religiously impressionable natives. Swallowing her antagonism, Dorothy assumed a mantle of meekness, surely a tricky task for such a fiery sort as Dorothy whose fire was prompted not only by her divine call but also her ego:

I was sitting in silence a little, with a large collection of Indians, when this missionary walked in with a pompous air into the pulpit, unlike an humble preacher of the Righteousness of our Meek and Lowly Jesus: however, I thought it best to set him an example of love, so permitted him to partake
of the opportunity, which had been mercifully prepared for me, by the Providential mercy of God.

With surely an undisguised rancor in her voice, she acquiesced to a subordinate role, limiting her sermon to the women alone. Such an arrangement would have been approved by the male missionaries, as a female exhorter traditionally confined her address to the women, allowing the males congregants to be favored with the scriptural exegesis of the male minister. The same arrangement would have been anathema to all that Dorothy inculcated. Whether by advance design or by enforced circumstance, Dorothy chose a sermon text headlining a prominent female of the Bible: Mary of Magdala. Significantly, Mary was the first to proclaim the resurrection, the male disciples having fled before the crucifixion into the safety of hiding. Mary’s role as the first apostle—male or female—has been a bone of contention among disputers and proponents of female preaching for centuries. The biting irony and evocative aptness of Dorothy’s chosen text was momentous, reflecting her burgeoning militant stance in defense of a woman’s right to preach:

“Woman why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? was my text, therefore I confined myself to my Indian sisters; and told the men, as there were two preachers there, I left them to the instruction of those missionaries; testifying, boldly, that if the disciples had watched with the same assiduousness as Mary did at the Sepulcher, they would have had the joyful tiding to preach, “That Jesus Christ the Lord was Risen from the Dead” (Bank 94).
Dorothy’s text implicitly asserted the female’s solitary right to preach, as a woman served as the first evangelist to proclaim the Good News of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene has been called the “Apostle to the Apostles,” as she became the first to tell anyone—including ten of the eleven remaining disciples, who huddled in safety, physically disconnected from the tomb—of the risen Lord. Importantly, she served as the prototype for later female evangelists like Dorothy, in that she acted on a divine command from the recently risen Jesus to “go to My brethren and say to them” that He was preparing for ascent into Heaven. \(^80\) Significantly, the second appearance of Jesus after the resurrection was to other women as they returned to the tomb, on Resurrection Day. \(^81\)

Dorothy’s stance was, of course, doubly ironic since Native American women were in much the same unequal political position. Thus, she found that her female audience was highly receptive to her egalitarian ideals. \(^82\)

Clearly, Dorothy scored a direct hit with her choice of subject, for her account rings with righteous satisfaction as she reported, “This chagrined the missionaries so much, who opposed me among the Indians, that I believe the next woman the Lord sendeth, he will not dare to insult” (94). Dorothy accomplished a personal victory for herself as well as paved the evangelical way for other female missionaries who followed in her footsteps.

Another minister, chagrined by his earlier censure, not only recanted but publicly denounced his previous rejection and admonished his congregation to do likewise. In Albany in 1805, a Methodist minister took the pulpit to tearfully counsel congregants to “treasure up what they had heard” from Dorothy, “for in Jesus Christ, male and female were one” (105). He further encouraged the congregants not to share in his
presumptuousness: “When you go home don’t you say as I said last week, ‘It is only a woman.’ ‘My brethren and sisters, I went to hear this woman in a barn, and the Word reached me powerfully, and followed me home, and has brought me miles to-day, to testify this among you; for before this I did not think a woman ought to preach; but now I am convinced God has sent her to preach Jesus Christ’s Gospel’” (105-06).

Despite such validation, the overwhelming number of skirmishes Dorothy fought in defense of her right to preach commenced at heated challenges by male clergy. More than half a dozen bitter and public conflicts with indignant clergymen resulted in Dorothy’s increasing militant attitude toward those who opposed woman’s equal birthright to preach. Of the most acrimonious of these battles was with her vociferous detractor, the Methodist itinerant and later bishop, John Early. He became known for his fervor and eloquence and especially for his success in revival exercises. His interest in revivalism most likely prompted him to attend the revival in his home state of Virginia where he met—and instantly locked horns—with the female preacher Dorothy Ripley.

Early had been an itinerant for five years when he encountered Dorothy in 1812, at the five-day gathering for open-air preaching, singing and praying. More than one hundred converts, white and black, traveled great distances to hear the various preachers overseeing the revival. While most of the ministers presiding over the revival favored Dorothy with their esteem, Early crossed verbal swords with Dorothy on more than one occasion during those five days. Although Dorothy left no record of their encounters, John Early detailed the frays in his diary.

Early’s journal described the camp meeting, held in the fields of a farmer identified only as “Taylor.” The revival opened at 11 a.m. on a Tuesday and “continued
day and night until Saturday morning following.” Early preached four times that first
day, quickly establishing himself as a prominent voice at the revival.

Tellingly, Early recorded a previous encounter that helps shed light on his
personality, and in turn focuses the crux of his problem with Dorothy. On the Wednesday
following his early morning service, Early verbally sparred with an unnamed man who
complained about pejorative comments made during the minister’s sermon. The
disgruntled man objected on behalf of his distraught wife, who took umbrage at Early’s
lack of sensitivity to her husband’s profession, that of a Negro Speculator. Slave
speculators (or slavers) legally purchased the rights to runaways, captured them, and then
resold them at a profit. Slave speculators earned a fearsome reputation, for their legal
captives oftentimes ended up in the Deep South, the area traditionally known as the most
punishing to slaves because of intensive field labor, high mortality rates, and excessive
cruelty. Neither did speculators confine their efforts to legitimate runaways but often
seized blacks at random, relying on their inability to prove their status to the satisfaction
of a magistrate.

Speculators occupied a unique position in slaveholding society. In pro-slavery
propaganda, the high social status of traders was deliberately concealed, to further the
view of slavery as a benign and paternalistic institution. “The truth about ‘Negro
speculation’ would have made it impossible to defend the ‘morality’ of slavery.” As
James Stirling, a Scottish visitor, declared in the 1850s: “The slave traffic was a sore
subject with the defenders of slavery . . . They fain would load all the iniquities of the
system on the trader’s unlucky back.” Thus, pro-slavery novels and polemics invariably
portrayed the speculator as an outcast and a scoundrel, a pronounced contrast to the
image advanced by white slaveholders of the righteous, humanitarian plantation owner who only sold slaves as a last resort to clear his debts. Long after slavery ended, conservative white Southerners still maintained the image of the slaver as social outcast, whose business had been of minimal importance to Southern life. In his 1904 history of the slavery trade, the Southern historian Winfield H. Collins wrote that speculators “were accounted the abhorrence of everyone . . . . Their descendants, when known, had a blot upon them and the property acquired in the traffic as well.”

In reality, however, historians have discovered that traders very often moved in prominent circles as respected leaders of their communities. Slave trading was not a profession readily assumed by a poor man. For example, a “coffle” of forty slaves might cost the trader more than $30,000 in cash. An exorbitant amount in the nineteenth century, the sum equates to about $600,000 today. The main artery for supplying major traders was wealthy planter families, the traffic in human beings successfully padding the family coffers.

Thus, Early’s disingenuousness in his disdain of the negro trader remains to conjecture. As a born and raised Virginia boy, he certainly would have been nursed on the cultural milk of white superiority. His scorn could merely serve as a ruse not unlike that used by other white Southerners to disguise the welcomed usefulness of the negro speculator to the institution of slavery.

However, Early’s contempt for the negro speculator rings true, as evidenced by his disquiet at being alone with the man. Clearly, Early considered him unsavory and insolent—if not for his professional leanings, then certainly for his questioning of Early’s
spiritual authority. The minister consented to a private audience with the man, but only if another, esteemed white person accompanied them.

A strange young man came to me and said he wished to speak with me in private. I told him I should not go in private with him but if he would let Col. G. who was near us go I would go in private, to which he agreed. After going a short space he said I had injured the feelings of his wife by saying a negro speculator was among the blackest characters and he was a speculator himself. I told him I was sorry I had injured his wife and further (I was sorry) she had a negro speculator for her husband. He said he would not have minded what I said but I looked at him and winked while preaching on the subject. I told him I did not known [sic] him but that would not have affected my discourse if I had. He said he would say no more about it now. I told him to say all he intended for it would not do for him or (any) negro trader to interrupt me much, and left him.90

Early’s ready dismissal of the man’s objection left the latter with no options or satisfaction. The white minister exacerbated the discord by veiled threats of reprisal should the man infringe on what he obviously considered his religious and hierarchal right. Adding injury to insult, Early complained of the man to the magistrate, prompting the latter to give “him a close lecture on the subject and many of the wicked were much displeased at his conduct.”91 Thus, not only did the hapless negro speculator incite the vocal displeasure of the religious and legal prefects, but he also earned the enmity of his fellow “wicked” congregants. Early made no further mention of the man in his journal,
but one can only presume the pestiferous trader left the revival with all due haste—most likely with a nasty residual taste of reverse prejudice in his mouth.

Hence, Early’s aversion to the negro speculator seems genuine. If so, then the Methodist minister did not lack for a measure of empathy toward enslaved blacks and, presumably, other minority groups. Therefore, his disparagement of Dorothy likely stemmed less from a misogynistic impulse than from a hearty disapproval of a female’s presumption of scriptural authority and public preaching. Perhaps, too, he disliked the hard edge of Dorothy’s steamroller tactics. Her methods may have proved eerily similar to his own.

The two wars of words between the opposing preachers initiated soon after Early’s tussle with the negro speculator. As he had done with the trader earlier, the Methodist itinerant quickly judged the female evangelist to be inconsequential and feckless. His soured disposition primed for conflict, Early suffered no qualms about tackling Dorothy, whom he dismissively referred to as “an English woman who passed for a preacher.”

Evidently, Early’s tale commenced after hostilities already had been declared, so the tinder that touched off the verbal fireworks remains to speculation. However, Early’s initial line of the tale implied that Dorothy had been apprised of less than complimentary comments made about her by the male minister. Miffed at Early’s misplaced superiority, she immediately confronted him with her suspicions:

I went into the tent where she was and she asked me if I had not evil in my heart against her. I told her no, but I disliked her conduct very much, and after a little conversation, which I saw displeased her, she asked me to...
pray. I refused but when the proprietor of the tent asked me a second time
I prayed and she (D.R.) began as soon as I was done so I left the tent. 93

Displeased but denied her nemesis’s company, Dorothy had no choice but to
shelve her argument. The next day, however, she entered the skirmish in full
ecclesiastical armor. Interestingly, Early once more initiated the contact, seeking Dorothy
out as they each concluded their own sermons. This time, while the tone remained the
same, the source of the tension became more apparent, as Early enunciated his hostility:

After preaching myself I went into a tent where she was and she began to
inquire of me if I did not have evil in my heart against her. I told her I did
not believe it was practicable for a woman to preach the Gospel and, if it
was, she had acted rudely in several instances prior to and at that meeting.

She said I lacked love and was not as the rest of the preachers for some
had bid her Godspeed. 94

Clearly, Early held to the belief that only male clergy could claim scriptural interpretive
authority, despite the fact that he himself, while licensed, was not an ordained minister.

His strike having narrowed to a comprehensive opposition to a woman’s preaching, Early
further incited Dorothy’s indignation with his rejection of her personally:

I told her she lacked several qualifications to prepare for preaching and
that she should behave herself better than she had done while on the
grounds. She got agitated and left that part of the tent I was in and would
talk with me no more. Soon afterwards she fixed up pack and package and
. . . started for Norfolk . . . . She told the people in Norfolk that Early was
the adversary of God and man and full of all mischief. 95
Perhaps Dorothy felt free to malign Early to the residents of Norfolk. Certainly, a woman preacher would have invited great resentment at such public rancor directed at a man of God. However, Dorothy had made her mark in Norfolk six years earlier, during her second missionary journey. Then, Dorothy had made great inroads into the Norfolk upper-echelon, for its constituents proved remarkably generous as she prepared for her first mission to the South. Without the intricate network of supporters already in place, Dorothy may have stirred up the proverbial hornet’s nest in Norfolk. By labeling Early “the adversary of God,” she effectively branded him evil, for any foe of God could only be one in league with the devil. On the other hand, had Dorothy been taken seriously by the denizens of Norfolk, Early could not have risen to the exalted Methodist position of bishop.

Although lacking the causticness of the Early encounter, another confrontation occurred when Dorothy commenced her second missionary journey. She became embroiled in an ecumenical tussle between the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists, when vicious rumors followed her into the church sanctuary. A Presbyterian minister had granted Dorothy the right to appropriate temporarily his congregation for her meeting to be held on Sunday with the Methodists. However, Dorothy’s way was barred when a Baptist minister “had given charge to his people not to come and hear me” because of Dorothy’s purported desertion of her family in England (Bank 41-42). The rumors trailed Dorothy to the crowded meeting hall, where irate congregants, appalled at the idea of a woman deserting her family, waited, primed to evict her. An honest, simple-hearted Christian took pity on her, enquiring forthrightly whether “I had left a husband there, or not, with children” (Bank 41). Thankful for the direct approach, Dorothy emphatically
stated that she “never had any husband but Jesus Christ, and no children except spiritual
ones, which I have a goodly number of in Heaven” (41). Fortunately, the kind-hearted
gentleman believed Dorothy and took her under his financial wing, declaring, “My house,
heart, and purse then, is at your service” (41). He further calmed the religious waters
when he stood before the amassed crowd and testified that Dorothy had assured him the
rumor was baseless:

“I am happy to inform the present congregation, who are prejudiced, that
this is not the person Mr. ---- had warned them against,” which prepared
me to sow seed in faith, and the people to hear, who had come there to
look on an infamous character, as they thought: for they were determined
to see who I was; and multitudes stood without, who could not get into the
Baptist’s place of worship, which the minister could not hinder me of,
neither his hearers, whom the Lord had disposed to “Come and see.” (41-
42)

Despite—or perhaps in consequence of—the infamy attached to her name by the
Baptists, Dorothy trod an easy evangelistic path to churches in neighboring towns.
Among the Methodists in Elizabethtown she held “precious meetings” with those
gathered, their “minds sweetly prepared for the streams which flow from God . . . .” (42).
More, she did so with the full approbation of the presiding elder there. Fortuitously, even
the Baptists eventually relaxed their prohibitions enough to invite Dorothy into their
hallowed halls, as was the case in Philadelphia in November 1805. “My day I have closed
profitably in a new House for worship, belonging to the Baptists,” wrote Dorothy.
Interestingly, she couched her judgments of the congregants in a dramatic, bestial
metaphor: “[There] were collected above a thousand Fowls of the air, birds of prey, young lions, and old fierce ones, not a few: yet a goodly number, whom I believe are not only plunged in water, but I trust baptized with the “Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Bank 210). Whether the Baptists were indeed baptized with water and holy fire that day, Dorothy stamped her day’s work with a disclaimer of any responsibility for apostasy or backsliding: “Whether I pleased the ear or not, I am sure that the blood of any will not rest on my head: therefore, I feel clear of all this day, and can lay down in peace, expecting the blessing of my Heavenly Father upon my labour of Love . . . (210).

Not surprisingly, one place where the show of resistance to female evangelism found even greater purchase was in the hardened patriarchal caste system of the American South. In the early nineteenth century, the South desperately wanted for educated preachers. Crude road systems contributed to the dearth of itinerants, especially women, since they rarely had access to their own transportation nor could they readily manipulate a horse and carriage across pockmarked trails through the countryside. Hence, female preachers proved an oddity in the South, for while white male itinerants such as the Methodist Lorenzo Dow braved the elements to follow a circuit, few women ventured into the South with their message of salvation.

According to Christine Leigh Heyrman, in her comprehensive religious history of the southern states, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, evangelicalism did not surge uninhibitedly into the religious vacuum created by the American Revolution. Southern whites were still rankled by early evangelical teaching and practice, particularly opposition to slavery, class privilege, and generational hierarchy. Of particular effrontery was the evangelicals’ tendency to dismiss masculine and racial prerogatives, encourage
women’s public involvement in church affairs, and insist on spiritual intimacy with blacks.

Indeed, in a letter to her parents from her new Southern home in Clifton Grove, North Carolina, Sara Hicks Williams of New Hartford, New York, bemoaned the lack of educated leaders in religious affairs: “As for religious privileges, they [slaves on the family plantation] enjoy all that their masters do. I should say more, for all the preaching I have heard has been more suited to the illiterate than to the educated.” In another letter to her parents, she described her first experience in a Southern church and exhibited shock at the crudity of the locale and services:

We went six miles to church, as they have preaching at Snow Hill only every one or two Sabbaths. On arriving I found a rough framed building in the midst of woods, with a large congregation, consisting of about equal numbers of white and black. These meetings are held about one a month and then addressed by two or three exhorters, who are uneducated, and each speaks long enough for any common sermon. The singing is horrible. Prize your religious privileges. They are great and you would realize it by attending Church here once. I shall miss these much.

Despite the obvious dearth of religious leadership in the post-revolutionary South, women failed to step into the void. Although upstate New York’s early Baptists included a few female itinerants in its ranks and the southern Quakers allowed women to preach, “there is no evidence that southern women, Methodist or Baptist, preached in their own neighborhoods or abroad.” In fact, early Southern evangelical churches strictly limited women’s participation in the matters of church governance. Lay Methodists, male or
female, had no input into either the appointment of ministers or the admission and
discipline of church members.\textsuperscript{101} By contrast, laymen among the early Baptists of the
South played pivotal roles in church governance and even allowed a limited involvement
in deliberations by white female and black members. However, as Heyrman notes, by
1800, nearly all the Southern churches had barred both white females and African-
Americans from voting in church matters. Such power became “the exclusive and
jealously guarded right of the white brethren.”\textsuperscript{102} Also by the last decade, white male
church members had steadily and decisively curtailed almost all women’s participation in
governance because “like underage sons and African Americans, [white women] lacked
the independence to reach impartial judgments.”\textsuperscript{103} Thus, white brethren were vested with
the sole authoritative voice in church matters.

If women suffered such exclusionism in governing powers, much more so was
their dismissal by white brethren as acceptable spiritual guides and evangelists. Southern
women had not benefited from a cultural tradition of according women any kind of
spiritual authority.\textsuperscript{104} A culture long steeped in misogyny, the South traditionally denied
its female constituents’ possession of powerful qualities such as acumen and discernment,
stamina and influence. Hence, Southerners typically proved poorly receptive to the few
female preachers who ventured into the Deep South, and Dorothy’s taking up the cross in
these regressive venues resulted in a rough reception. At best, the greeting was
lukewarm; at worse, a more sinister atmosphere reigned, the hackles of slaveholders
raised at the dangerous combination of female evangelicalism and abolitionism, such as
that touted by Dorothy Ripley. Once, Southerners pushed her to the point of fleeing for
her life under the cover of midnight’s darkness.\textsuperscript{105} In the South, Dorothy spent most of
her time proselytizing among the small planters, tenant farmers and settlers of the region, as well as among women and slaves. Hers was an emotional religion, centered on repentance and rebirth, with Satan playing a prominent, real part, and fiery damnation awaiting the lot of nonbelievers. Deliverance came at the direction of a forgiving God, not Southern white overlords. Thus, her combination of emotionalism and message of divine liberation aroused suspicion, resentment, and on at least two occasions, intentions of violence.

Similarly, bigotry combined with racism to team up in vocal opposition to Dorothy’s preaching among the Oneida tribe in New York. Her first salutation from the white residents there was “Many are determined to hinder you of preaching,” (Bank 86). Others declared, “‘A woman has no right to preach!’” (86). The Presbyterian minister there shooed Dorothy away from preaching to the men, commanding her to limit her services to the women. The minister went so far as to eject the women from the worship services, forcing Dorothy to reconvene the women at an alternate venue. Seething, Dorothy nevertheless preached to the women only, for she “was determined that there should be none present, who wanted the true mark of Christ’s Disciples” (95). Collecting the female Oneidas around her like a mother hen with her chicks, Dorothy squawked loudly when “the uncivil minister” later tried to invade their territory, mistakenly thinking to condescend to preach a belated message to the women. “[I] therefore told him to ‘Go away, and attend to his own preaching elsewhere,’ which he did, when he found I was resolute and saw the displeasure which he had raised in the breasts of the women universally” (95). Opposition spewed even from the visiting male missionaries working among the Oneidas, men supposedly chosen for their broad-minded tolerance. They
advised her to exercise talents best served in the traditional area of “women’s work.”

Dorothy concluded, “I verily believe by their proceedings, it was their opinion that a woman ought not to preach; for one of them said afterwards, had I come to teach them to knit and sew, it would be very well” (92).

**Secular Conflict**

Not only did opposition come from clergy but also from civic male leadership. Dorothy engaged in a battle of wills with the captain of the ship *Triton* which carried her to her initial mission in the U.S. Although the ship officially docked in New York, it stopped for a brief respite in Rhode Island. There, Dorothy was permitted to go ashore for a short spell, but a command from the ship’s captain had the crew scurrying to reboard. Dorothy, in direct defiance of the order, refused to budge, insisting on attending worship services that day, perhaps in an initial bout to establish the all-important contacts of an itinerant. The pilot dismissed Dorothy’s wishes and needs out of hand because of her gender:

> . . . I requested the pilot to take me on shore, but he refused, saying, “If I were a man, he might have business; what can a woman have to do?” I again said, “Pilot, take me on shore.” He then replied, “There is not a woman in the island that dare to go for the waves.” I answered, “I am not afraid of being wet, therefore, pilot, take me ashore for I must and will go.” (EC 57)

When the pilot saw her determination, he conveyed her to shore, “and I rode on the waves as safely as possible, it being to obey God” (57).
In Albany, New York, bigotry again joined forces with racism to make trouble for the female evangelist. A Methodist goods trader to the Indians named J. Taylor provided lodgings for Dorothy, but he made no secret of his prejudicial opposition to Dorothy’s preaching to whites:

He told me scornfully, I might do to instruct the Indians, or Blacks; but said, “As for White people they have good preachers, and enough of preaching from them.” My answer was, “I had rather teach the Indians and Africans, than White people; for their souls are more precious to me, having suffered much for them.” He then told me thus, “You are on the Pinnacle, and as for your talents they are very small, though you think much of yourself.” (Bank 108)

Part of the objections levied against Dorothy’s preaching certainly must have stemmed from the cultural conviction that obligations to family and kin must take precedence in a woman’s life. Duty to God gained primacy only in the life of a man, for a woman could claim no higher calling than wifehood and motherhood. Thus, those people steeped in such cultural convictions were unsettled by the sharp divergence of female preachers from conventional feminine roles. They could little comprehend the motivations behind a woman whose life choices reflected those traditionally reserved for men. Theirs was a generally conflicted view of female preachers’ willingness to sacrifice family stability or to shun the blessing of offspring in return for a life of constant geographic movement, economic insecurity, and personal upheaval. According to Catherine Brekus,
During the tumultuous years of the early nineteenth century, when definitions of “masculinity” and “femininity” were being reshaped by religious, political, and economic change, female preachers epitomized the confusion over the proper boundaries of women’s sphere. Because of their public visibility, they became the screen on which people projected their anxieties about the meaning of womanhood.106

The collective opinion remained that women who chose the ministry over marriage and motherhood had clearly abdicated from their true feminine calling.107

For those itinerants outside the comforting and supporting embrasure of a denomination, the stakes were even higher, their lives fraught with perpetual theological and doctrinal anxieties. As Wigger elucidated, “The question was not whether or not God could speak through women; he surely could. The question was whether or not it was right for more than a few women to forsake the calling of wife and mother to spend their lives in a masculine pursuit.”108 In the years subsequent to the Revolution, Methodists, for example, progressively resolved that it was not.109

However, for Dorothy, the very opposite could only be true. She harbored no such deep-seated cultural disquiet, for her evangelical conviction was such that no greater claim than duty to God could be made, for man or woman. Many times throughout her works, she proclaimed her willing subjection to her life calling as a minister of God. Hers was an unassailable confidence in her spirituality, despite the opposition meted out by scornful men and women alike. She felt duty-bound to warn others of the wrath to come and to help usher believers into their full inheritance. To collapse under cultural pressures and family attachments was tantamount to inviting divine disaster. Refusal to heed a holy
call by placing others’—indeed, her own—needs before God’s would surely serve as a lightning rod for the strike of divine correction. Secure in her virtuosity, she found fulfillment in personal and spiritual experience rather than cultural or clerical approval.

On the other hand, hers was not a life completely free from the emotional turmoil of familial accountability. Despite her self-acknowledgement of the wisdom to recognize where her ultimate loyalties must lie, Dorothy remained burdened by the earthly hardships attending her heavenly commitments. Her description of the tearful departure from her widowed mother at the commencement of her first journey to America in 1801 is acutely poignant. In the predawn hours on the day of her daughter’s departure, her mother rose to perform a last loving ritual for her child. Copious tears attested to the mother’s wrenching pain as she tenderly washed and dried her daughter’s face before assisting her with her dress. Taking her child into her arms one final time, she “kissed me with tears, saluting me with her voice thus: ‘I can trust thee the world over, for I know thou wilt be preserved, but I shall never see thee again’” (EC 36). Dorothy’s rejoinder seemed almost jocular in response, her assurance that “we shall live together for ever” ringing almost playful. However, as Dorothy insisted earlier, her decision to become a missionary “was not an hasty one, for it had been contemplated by me from a child,” and it had taken twelve years of soul-searching and fortitude-building to “give up myself” (41). For only with such inner scrutiny could she be confident “that my peace might be secured” (41). Still, for one who consistently proved herself keenly discernible regarding people’s emotional and spiritual needs during her repeated missionary journeys, Dorothy appeared singularly uncomprehending of her mother’s sorrow and devoid of compassion for the elderly woman.
Surpassing the poignancy of her leave-taking was the anguish and despair exhibited by Dorothy at her notification of her mother’s death. In this account, she displayed the compassion missing from her leave-taking described earlier. Alone, in a foreign land, she learned of her mother’s death, a short four months following her departure.

Should I never meet my beloved mother again in time, the remembrance of having yielded her up, for the sake of her God and mine, will soften my sorrows, and assuage my grief on her account; but ah me! How could I bear to hear the tidings of her death in a strange land, where I cannot take one glance of her lovely frame, before it is silently entombed to become a feast for worms? (EC 61)

Certainly, Dorothy must have suffered great angst, realizing that, had she delayed her leave-taking until Spring instead of setting off in the heart of winter, she could have been at her mother’s side when she died. Dorothy devoted nearly eight pages of her first published work to mourn her mother’s death. At no other point in all her works did Dorothy devote so much valuable print space to personal information disconnected from her vocation. Because she published at her own expense, every page became a financial liability. Hence, to dedicate approximately five percent of the overall text to her mother’s death signified a strong emotional need to come to terms with her mother’s death—and to assuage her own guilt at what could be viewed as abandonment of her mother.

Throughout the whole of the eight pages, Dorothy took great pains to assure her readership of her unassailable conviction that her holy calling took precedence over familial obligations. Yet, in the repeated assertions of such, Dorothy revealed her own
anxieties—even shame—at her readiness to abscond from familial duty and willingness
to forsake her mother and two younger siblings. When she returned to her English home
at the conclusion of her first missionary journey, she retired, alone, to her mother’s
bedroom to come to peaceable terms with her desertion of the elderly woman:

Entering into my honoured mother’s chamber, which she had left desolate,
I sat down in the chair which my eyes have often seen her occupy,
sometimes weeping over us, her earthly treasure, and at other seasons
searching the scriptures, that she might learn thereby to find eternal life.
During the time which I sat in my beloved mother’s seat, I considered
thus: What joy would it afford her were she here to embrace me, whose
breasts nourished me with milk in my infant days, when helpless in her
parental arms? (EC 159)

Nearly suffocating under the pain of her abandonment, loss, and heartache,
Dorothy wrapped herself in the intangible cloak of faith, reiterating in writing the belief
that her evangelistic mission reigned superior to any familial attachments or obligations.

Well, I do not mourn that I left her. No, I cannot; for it was the voice of
my Jesus that allured me, by saying, ‘He that loveth father or mother more
than me, is not worthy of me.’ Nothing would have forced me from my
aged parent, unless my duty to my Maker, who has required this at my
hands to prove my faith, to try my patience, and to make me perfect in the
love of God.” (159-60)
Following immediately on the heels of her justification of abandoning her mother and sisters was the challenge to her readers, defensively demanding who would have done anything less?

I ask any individual, in case it had been required of them to occupy a talent of light in a different part of God’s vineyard, would ye not have disobeyed him, if you had not been subject to his time, as well as the place he had qualified you for, by purifying baptisms, such as he thought requisite?—Surely, as the angels move subserviently, so we, as reasonable creatures, or adopted heirs, should, with subordination, obey our Maker in all his requirings; if it be even at the peril of our lives. (EC 160)

Such marked effort at justification and challenge can certainly be interpreted as a defensive mechanism, for any doubts or reservations whatsoever would have named her negligent in her responsibilities as a daughter. She summed up her monologue with the reiteration that she was not “able to bring a charge against myself . . . of leaving an indulgent parent” because

I tell you, in the name of my God, and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that I rejoice greatly in yielding myself a servant to obey him for ever. Yea, I glory in laying aside every idol for his sake, not excepting even my mother! my beloved mother! whom I shall soon meet again in the regions of unutterable pleasure, where we shall recount the mercies of our God, and shall see that it was his providential love which separated us for a short season. (EC 160)
Hence, even while Dorothy’s evangelical commitment went far deeper than any misgivings about how sharply she diverged from traditional gender roles, she also embodied the reality of how wrenching such life choices were.

**Female Opposition**

Surprisingly, many women proved resistant to female evangelists. Sensitive to issues of hearth and home, early nineteenth-century women seemed innately distrustful of any woman who would forsake maternal and familial joy. Not only did they exhibit more mistrust, but they also were often astonishingly likeminded to the men in their rejection of women’s scriptural authority. In an interesting paradigm, some women openly repudiated female preachers, even to the point of more being more vicious in their public verbal attacks against their sisters of God. In fact, women sometimes made more worthy adversaries than their male counterparts. Women could be more manipulative, insinuating and even downright belligerent toward women than men. More, they generally had a broader network for perpetuating vicious rumors, for the women wielded strong communal influence in the early Republic.

Perhaps the concept of women as the weaker sex kept some ladies’ belligerence under control, but other women felt no such constraints. One such woman was the Quaker, Unice Painter of Stafford, Virginia, who opened her home, if not her heart, to Dorothy in Sept. 1802. Evidently, Unice doubted Dorothy’s virtue after another Quaker repeated “a strange account” circulating about Dorothy. The Painters were members of the Stafford community of the Society of Friends. When Dorothy appeared on their doorstep requesting hostelling for the night, Unice responded with great surprise and
disdain. Unice’s husband, identified only as “R. Painter,” must have been demonstrated more compassion toward Dorothy, for she described him as “an innocent man (if I am not mistaken) who wishes to be ready for the Master’s call when he shall pronounce, ‘Behold the Bridegroom cometh’” (108). When Dorothy declared “it was false what [the malicious young Quaker man] had related, by way of degrading me in their eyes,” possibly it was Mr. Painter’s influence which finally convinced his wife to extend hospitality to a laborer in God’s harvest. Dorothy viewed the incident as the attempted “revenge of Satan, who was enraged with me because of the precious time I had with the sick young woman at the tavern, where I advised the dear company of young Baptists to ‘fear the Lord’” (106). Perhaps Unice’s haughtiness stemmed from an unhealthy marriage of denominational and virtuous superiority.

Another wolf adorned in the sheep’s clothing of her flock was Phoebe Pemberton, an on-again, off-again friend of Dorothy who caused as much angst as solace. Wife to the Quaker minister James Pemberton, Phoebe wielded great influence as a prominent member of the religious and civic communities. Her capricious support caused Dorothy angst more than once. In a letter to her steadfast friend Abigail Eames, Dorothy bewailed Phoebe’s inconstancy, particularly recriminating Phoebe for her failure to defend Dorothy against false accusations. Her detractors had charged Dorothy with delusion and insanity, yet Phoebe’s support failed to extend beyond the provision of a room for her friend.

After a day and night in emotional turmoil over the rampant rumors questioning her sanity, Dorothy confronted her friend:
I informed P.P. of my distressed condition, and that it would be her wisdom, to try to heal my wounded heart; for some tell her I am deluded; others say to her “Is she not insane?” while the third class of professors give credit to all manner of evil, said of me falsely, for Jesus Christ’s sake; and I must not only take patiently, but joyfully, the spoiling of my spiritual riches; which may the Lord incline thee to pray for divine help to enable me to do, as well as to “Rejoice evermore.” (Bank 187)

Evidently, Phoebe never recanted her doubt of Dorothy, for she worked in league with Thomas Scattergood¹¹⁰ to force Dorothy’s hand to join the Quakers in membership. According to Dorothy, Phoebe plotted with the minister to compel the evangelist to “quietly sit down in silence among them, to receive membership, that I might move with regularity, and not in the degrading line that is my lot mostly” (189). Ironically, had Phoebe issued such an invitation three years earlier, Dorothy might well have jumped at the chance. However, as it was issued in 1805 on the heels of two successful missionary treks, Dorothy interpreted the gesture as yet another move to block her evangelism.

Despite her rancor at Phoebe’s defection, Dorothy remained at Phoebe’s bedside for eight days following a virulent sickness that confined the older woman to bed rest. In an obvious indulgence of a writer’s retaliation, Dorothy penned the judgment that the sickness was providentially inspired, the “afflictions . . . coming on her from the Father’s correcting Hand” (189).
Women Ogled by the Crowds

In her journals, Dorothy often expressed astonishment at the numbers who came together to hear her, and, though she sometimes might have overestimated, the fact that crowds thronged to hear her preaching was incontestable. Curiosity, the longing to escape from the dull sense of uneventful lives, and the anticipation of a lurid exposé largely explain those crowds. The very fact that a woman willingly paraded herself before a racially and sexually mixed crowd served to motivate the less penitent and ruffians to turn out in droves. Stunned at the idea that a woman would exhibit herself before men, people’s curiosity was piqued, and as soon as the word went round that the radical female missionary had come, men and women alike convened on village-greens and in marketplaces.

As a rule they were not hostile crowds, though they did often ridicule and mock her, alternately deriding her as both lewd and masculinized. On one hand, their critics belittled them as “masculine” women devoid of any feminine or attractive qualities appreciable to a male. On the other, they indicted them for inflaming male lust. Brekus notes that, “because ‘respectable’ women did not put themselves on stage in the early nineteenth century, female preachers were often compared to actresses or prostitutes.”

Certainly, this attitude has biblical precedence. The Bible, written in androcentric language, has its origins in the patriarchal cultures of antiquity, and throughout its history has inculcated androcentric and patriarchal values. According to feminist biblical scholar E. Moltmann-Wendel, “A long accepted view of the Bible, which is mostly hostile to women, has given form to a history of the tradition which has made a deep mark on human consciousness.” This tradition classified women into three categories: sexuality
and sin (Mary Magdalene), cooking and housekeeping (Martha of Bethany), and motherhood (Mary, the mother of Jesus). Women in the Bible, according to Moltmann-Wendel, were stripped of any beauty, autonomy, or inventiveness of their own, and “are made to fulfill the function of providing whatever image of womanhood Christianity may desire.”

Moltmann-Wendel quotes the refrain, “Martha and Mary in one life. Make up the perfect vicar’s wife.”

Thus, the views of women by Christian men of the early nineteenth century stemmed from layers-old and centuries-old paternalistic interpretation and ritualistic categorization. The tradition of Christian teachings proved a formidable force in the domestication of women, perpetuating the myth of ideal womanhood and ensuring the silence of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries except for discourse which fell in line with patriarchal aims. Therefore, to males (and to most females) of the era, women performed clear, necessary functions in a Christian home, giving life to the “women’s sphere” ideology dominating the post-revolutionary period. “Women were also citizens, desirous of contributing to America’s welfare. The idea of their voting, fighting, or governing was seen as either laughable or outrageous, but they could contribute indirectly,” asserts Susan Hill Lindley. To the early nineteenth century, a woman’s most valuable contribution to society was in her private efforts in her home, as a wife and mother. As one minister thundered from the pulpit after Dorothy’s arrival in 1802, “How should it enflame the desire of the mothers and daughters of our land to be the occasion of so much good to themselves and others! You will easily see that here is laid the basis of public virtue; of union, peace and happiness in society . . . . Mothers do,
in a sense, hold the reins of government and sway the ensigns of national prosperity and
glory.”

As a result, when men of Dorothy’s age encountered female evangelists who had
forsaken home, family and love to follow a calling, they knew not what to make of them.
The women’s ready dismissal of the primary, accepted roles of womanhood roused equal
shares of scorn, pity, acceptance, lust, amusement, and confusion from the men who
viewed their efforts as a rejection of their femininity. The men’s reactions to the women
as evangelists generated the same jumbled profusion of emotions, ranging from awed
faith, weird fascination, and territorial ambition.

Consequently, historical religious labeling helps explain the reaction of men such
as the Congregationalist minister Parsons Cooke, who angrily denounced female
evangelists as little better than “shameless” actresses who had invited men to lust after
their bodies in public. To Parsons, and many other male detractors, these evangelizing
women had failed to fool anyone with their pretenses of piety and had shown their true
natures with the wanton abandonment of their “feminine delicacy,” “trampling under foot
the commands of God, and the decencies of [their] sex.”

With their groaning and
crying out during the sermons before male spectators, the women revealed themselves as
Jezebels leading men into sexual temptation, rather than Mothers in Israel.

And Cooke may have had some basis for his overblown rhetoric. Many
nineteenth-century men seemed to have been attracted to the opportunity to stare at
women in a public setting.

Brekus notes that, even though nineteenth-century men
rarely accorded space in their memoirs to the physical attributes of male ministers, they
emphasized women’s physical attractiveness. For example, contemporaries described
Dorothy’s one-time traveling companion Ann Rexford as “young” and “rather beautiful to look upon,” and Nancy Cram as “rather handsome.” John Greenleaf Whittier, the famous Quaker poet, remembered Harriet Livermore as both “beautiful” and “graceful”: she was a “brilliant darkeyed woman” with a “Spanish looking face.” Dorothy traveled in the guise of a Quaker, complete with unadorned gown, bonnet and apron. While that image does not seem particularly “masculine,” the austerity of her style was magnified by her rejection of the curled hair, flounces, and jewelry that nineteenth-century fashion favored. To her critics, she would not have seemed particularly “feminine” either. Hence, simply by speaking in public, Dorothy and other female evangelists like her seemed to have unwittingly encouraged men to fantasize about them. Ironically, when Dorothy donned the clothes of a Quaker, she deflected some of the charges of licentiousness levied by the general populace; yet even then she attracted criticism from Quakers, who wounded her with accusations of being “cunning” and a “hunter” and walking “in a serpent’s path” (EC 59). To the Quakers, who had rejected Dorothy’s repeated bids for membership, her choice of garb smacked of deception.

Disturbed by the sight of young, attractive women behaving like men, many critics spread rumors that female preachers were guilty of sexual promiscuity or even prostitution. And, at least in one instance, the rumors were not entirely unfounded. In her lengthy study of early female preachers, Brekus found that one African Methodist woman, Julia Pell, had once been so destitute that “she had sold herself on the street.” However, Brekus unearthed no evidence to suggest that any other female preacher resorted to prostitution for support. This led Brekus to conclude that the pervasive images of the “wantonness” of the evangelists revealed “less about the realities of their lives than
about their critics’ overheated imaginations.” Such was the occasion in Alexandria, Virginia, in June 1802. After leaving New York to minister in the South, Dorothy found that the unfounded rumors of her licentious behavior had preceded her journey. A young Quaker man, believing her to welcome his attentions because of his misconception about her solitary travel and calling, presumed to proposition her:

. . . A grievous affliction followed me from the conduct of a vile young man, who professed membership with that society [the Friends], whom I met with betwixt Washington city and Alexandria, as he was on his way to Richmond in Virginia. This young man being disposed to take undue liberties to me, was sharply reproved by my conduct, which he hated me for excessively, and could think of no other remedy to prevent him being exposed, except making me appear in the sight of others what he was in the sight of God, and in my eyes, a vile person. (EC 71)

In several instances, Dorothy’s critics accused her of being too bold, too outspoken, too unfeminine. To them, her ardency marked her as “an enthusiast, a deceiver, or even insane” (Bank 116). She knew full-well the indictments levied against her: “Perhaps none have been more fearful of deception than I have in my spiritual warfare, although some bring a charge against me, saying, ‘I am too zealous, and run too fast.’ Alas! For me, I am always behind-hand with my work, having a desire, if possible, to please both God and man” (EC 76). Perhaps her detractors had a legitimate claim, for even the Quakers—long known for their sponsorship of female missionaries—shied away from her forceful approach. “I have been led a long round, against the minds of many well-disposed Quakers, who fear the truth will suffer on account of my singularity . . .”
Well aware of her critics’ finger-pointing, Dorothy often responded with complete dismissal of their concerns, citing her allegiance to God and His directives as to her conduct: “Some, whose souls are neither hot nor cold, will say I am extravagant in my assertions; but that will not injure my reputation, since the reproach of Jesus Christ is my greatest riches” (Bank 202). To the Quakers and their fears that her intensity might prove daunting to would-be converts, she responded, “. . . they do not consider disobedience, or willful neglect [of her divine calling] will do more harm” than a more vigorous approach (EC 76).

To combat cultural opposition, female preachers may have dressed especially modestly, making them appear more demure and docile, qualities esteemed by the prevailing society. Further, modest dress helped deflect accusations of lewdness levied because female preachers scandalously allowed men to stare at them in public. The cultural approbation of modest dress was born from the biblical injunction against flamboyant garb, sure signs of pride and vanity. Saint Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.”

In some instances, the demure clothing of the Quakers that Dorothy voluntarily donned successfully stymied vicious rumors and cooled male interest. Except for the objection raised by Quakers, as described earlier, Dorothy’s garb drew general approval from the common people she encountered—at least when she didn’t position herself in front of the crowds. Unfortunately, even the modesty of her garments failed to quash the entirety of the gossip and innuendo following a female preacher. In one of her low
moments aboard the ship Mary bound for Charleston, South Carolina, in February 1806, Dorothy defended her dismissal of fashion and consequence, reiterating the biblical accusation that such trivial concerns constituted vanity,

> which will destroy millions in my day, who are wasting their golden hours, in foolish fashions and the mockery of the righteous who they account mad, because they cannot engage with the trifes of the moment; and I am not surprised that many will presume to suppose it is thus with me, as I neither dare, nor will, follow the foolish maxims established by the enemies of our Lord Jesus, who taught self-denial both by His example and holy precepts; which I greatly desire to imitate, and long for all my friends also to follow His Rule above every other in time . . . . (Bank 271)

Dorothy indicted the instigators and perpetuators of rumors as glory-seekers who built their social standings on the crushed reputation of others. The rumors were “made by mortals who vie with each other, to see which can bear down and become the strongest, or wisest; yea, the richest, or gayest, and the greatest of this world” (271). In a deft move to deflect criticism of her mode of dress, she redirected attention to her own aims to “vie in a very different manner, setting the Lamb slain before me, who is the Object of the saint’s Faith, and the Only One whom we all ought to measure our thoughts, words, and actions by . . .” (271).

To mainstream Americans, the idea of a woman displaying herself—in what they could only interpret as a wanton fashion—before a mixed crowd had long been anathema to their Puritan background. Under a general ban of silence in the churches from the time when Anne Hutchinson aroused the ire of the men of Puritan Boston until late in the
nineteenth century, women nevertheless played a noble part in the maintenance of religion in America. Using the means accorded them by a hierarchal and patriarchal society, they advanced the kingdom of God both openly and clandestinely. They were the mothers who taught the children the rudiments of religion in the home and sent them to Sunday school, taught them in the classrooms, and sent them out into the world shielded by their prayers. They served their church and community as wives of ministers who sustained the men’s courage, censored their sermons, aided in pastoral service, and maintained the house on a pecuniary allowance that was often pitiable small. Women frequently functioned as the mainstay of the small parishes by raising money for church purposes through personal sacrifice and uncomplaining service. Almost single-handedly, they conducted the social life of the church. They constituted the largest part of church membership and comprised the most regular attendants at the appointed church meetings. They organized in mission circles for encouragement, support, and monetary contribution to foreign missions. They served as the burden bearers of religion.

What they couldn’t do was preach.

At least, within the majority of the mainstay sects sprouting up in post-revolutionary America, women encountered varying degrees of opposition, outrage, and even violence for their daring to slice for themselves a piece of the ecclesiastical pie. For women outside denominational or communal membership, the hardships increased. These women struggled to reconcile two sets of ideas which coexisted in tension: equality of all persons before God, and the post-revolutionary ideology of “woman's sphere.” As persons of faith, their response to God’s commands could be on the same footing as a man’s, eclipsing any theological challenge because equality of all persons
before God was a long-standing thread in the fabric of their Christian tradition. As
nineteenth-century women, however, they were expected to submit to lowered status and
protective restrictions, strands of the fabric of woman’s sphere ideology that were as
equally strong as those of the religious tradition. These women chose to become
missionaries, compromising on second-class status and protective restrictions. “In their
view, the missionary vocation was worth the cost of compromise.” However, when
they chose the solitary existence of missionary work, their critics belittled them with
accusations of lewdness and aggressive masculinity.

Self-Doubt & Stage Fright

With such foul rumors contaminating their missions, it was little wonder that
female evangelists faced corrosive moments of great doubt and depression. On the whole,
women of the early Republic had little experience speaking in front of crowds, and
female evangelists often recorded in their memoirs the stage fright they felt stepping
before crowds early in their careers. One occasion of note occurred near Brotherton, New
York. Such a vast crowd turned out to see Dorothy so that the congregants could not all
squeeze into the schoolhouse, the appointed meeting place. Rather than turn away so
many who had traveled so far to hear her, she opted to deliver her message in a nearby
field, in her first-ever open-air service. The summer heat posed as her enemy that day as
she traded the pulpit for a horse’s cart. Her elevated position from the cart permitted her
to view the large throng as well as promoted her audibility. Dorothy felt the humbleness
of the venue did little to dampen the spirituality of the moment: “I was much favored
with the Presence of God; for this opportunity required great fortitude, as I never was
before called to stand out in the air, exposed to the burning sun, though I screened myself as well as I could” (Bank 90). Her new venue accorded the hundreds of whites and Native Americans, men and women, to scrutinize her under the harsh sunlight, devoid of the solemnity, transcendency, and inviability of the pulpit and altar. She recalled the great anxiety that accompanied the moment:

There is great courage also necessary for such a calling as this, which females are not in general possessed of; because a false delicacy prevails over the mind that is termed refinement, which shudders at the very idea of standing a gazing stock to men of the basest passions; unless they have been betrayed, and desire to insnare their fellow-mortals which is now become so common, that a prudent woman must be very guarded to shun the censure of the vulgar, if she wish [sic] to maintain her character, as a virtuous woman, among mankind. (90)

It is difficult to judge how many people genuinely respected female preachers, but their popularity, according to Brekus’ in-depth study, seemed to have been based on more than the novelty of seeing women in the pulpit. To be sure, their meetings were often crowded with curious bystanders, but because they tended to return to the same towns again and again, the power of their message soon eclipsed any significance attached to gender.

Even so, with their limited experience and vocal detractors, female evangelists found it difficult early in their careers to take a prominent stance before crowds so obviously gathered for worshipful—and non-worshipful—reasons. In their memoirs, many women preachers recorded moments of stage fright. Upon her inaugural arrival in
the former colonies, Dorothy, too, felt stage fright get a stranglehold on her. While attending a Quaker’s meeting, Dorothy was led to the minister’s gallery. Whether the ceremonious ushering of the neophyte into the prominent seats reserved for preachers unnerved her, or whether the sudden pressure inherent in an extemporaneous speech discomposed her, Dorothy felt the immensity of the moment weighing down her confidence. She nearly succumbed to the temptation to flee: “The weight of the ministry, I felt now so great, that I verily thought I should die . . . . Another awful judgment was brought before me to try my faith, and prove to myself whether I was sent there by the Lord, or had ventured thus far presumptuously by my own cunning or art of Satan. I was like one dumb . . . .” \(\text{(EC 58)}\). Unable to compose herself enough to speak and her “spirit being exhausted with this severe travail, I entreated the Lord to excuse me rising till afternoon, to declare his goodness . . . .” \(\text{(58)}\). Believing God had granted her a reprieve, she adjourned the meeting without speaking at all. Although not uncommon among the Quakers, the “silent meeting” testified to Dorothy’s attack of nerves, for many had congregated that morning for the specific purpose of hearing the missionary so recently arrived from England. That afternoon, the group reconvened, and Dorothy “still felt great fear, and holy dread come upon me” \(\text{(58)}\). Despite the coldness of the day, “the trembling of my body, with the agony of my soul, made me sweat exceedingly,” and she again toyed with the idea of absconding from her divinely appointed duty \(\text{(58)}\):

However, I could not excuse myself from this solemn work, neither by fear nor trembling, for I was commanded at once, in the name of the Lord, to arise and declare to the people, that the Lord had brought me forth in
obedience to him, and influenced me by his Spirit to lay aside my own interest, to put forth an effort to instruct Ethiopia’s children . . . (58)

Having braved the gathered Quakers, Dorothy felt the burden of her first address slip from her shoulders, and she “appeared as happy as I could be, knowing my duty was fulfilled to God and myself, who had been thus critically placed among strangers to answer divine appointment” (59).

**Female Support System**

Especially important in the face of such dissent was the support system offered to the female preachers by their fellow sisters. Brekus asserts that nineteenth-century women may have been “particularly attracted to female preachers because they lacked satisfying relationships with their male pastors” (229). Even while women made up the numerical majority, their needs were often neglected or ignored by their male clergy. According to historian Karin Gedge, male ministers never had the benefit of instruction on how to “minister” to their female parishioners, leading them to avoid intimate, face-to-face encounters. Perhaps they dreaded discovering any inadequacy in tackling female issues; perhaps they feared the taint of scandal at intimate association with individual women. Whatever their motivation, they drove women to seek religious direction from female relatives, friends, and even pious memoirs. With the newfound connection to female preachers, these neglected women had finally discovered a ready resource for the crucial spiritual guidance they needed.

In turn, the female preachers unearthed a vital psychological support system in their women followers. Often beleaguered with families, children, and home
commitments, these supportive women still made time to resuscitate the flagging fortitude of their female preachers. Dorothy’s dearest American friend, Abigail Eames, often appears in the former’s missionary accounts. She looms large as a woman whom Dorothy praised as one who “alleviated my drooping powers . . . by her attention to me, while bearing the Burthen of the Lord my God” (Bank 181). In 1806, Dorothy felt the Holy Spirit guide her to another female supporter, Rosanna Cox, to arrange a preaching appointment at the Mammoth Church in Norfolk, the largest church Dorothy had ever seen. With her influential connections, Rosanna secured the appointment for Dorothy to speak there that very day—which proved fortuitous for Dorothy, as she had already announced to a crowd of three thousand followers earlier that she would hold evening services at Mammoth (257). Several days later, when weakness resulting from the arduous trip to the South from New York threatened cancellation of her planned services at the hospital in Norfolk, Dorothy again turned to Rosanna Cox who provided the necessary transport for the three-mile distance. The chaise ride not only prevented Dorothy’s disappointing the debilitated sailors who awaited her “offer of salvation,” but it also allowed her to “retain my strength for the exercise of prayer” (265).

When in the wilds of western New York in 1805, Dorothy spoke to a huge crowd alongside two other preachers—both women. Dorothy’s initial wonder at the all-female ministerial crew—a pleased disbelief shared by her fellow evangelizing sisters—gave way to the thrill of the singular experience:

When I had opened the passage, and stood a considerable time I gave over, and was succeeded by one of my sisters, who appeared astonished at me, and longed for a vacant moment to testify that, “The spirit of
prophecy was not to continue always within the narrow limits of our brotherhood, as male and female, are one in our Lord Jesus, when they become members of One Mystical Body, even the Spiritual Body, or Bride of Christ, whom he will remain Head of, or Bridegroom to, for ever, by lawful inheritance,” having “Swallowed up death, in victory.” As soon as she had finished, I made way for another, by sanctioning what was already advanced; and then, the third time, I resumed my office, almost like a mother in Israel, although but a babe, comparatively speaking. It was a time which will be remembered, I verily believe, because no other person spoke, or prayed, but us three women, who never had seen each other’s face before. (Bank 91)

By the end of the meeting, Dorothy realized the full import of the moment. She viewed it as an avowal from three women that they not only believed but also put into practice the holy premise that female evangelists possessed equality with their male counterparts in the eyes of God. More, because of equal standing as His disciples, the women shared an identical inheritance to His glorious kingdom:

We witnessed according to this declaration, “Where the Spirit is, there is Liberty,” and I am of opinion, if we never see one another again in the flesh, we shall be admitted into that Mansion, where there is joy and peace, and everlasting pleasure, to reward every soul, who have denied themselves of all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and taken up the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. (91)
Women also supported the female preachers in more concrete ways, such as offering their homes for meetings, arranging preaching appointments, and deflecting the barbs of their disparagers. For example, when a group of “brethren” attempted to foil Salome Lincoln’s scheduled preaching appointment at a local schoolhouse by locking the doors against her, two “ladies” indignantly demanded the key. Less obtrusively, women lent support to their fellow sisters by quietly standing or sitting behind them as they delivered their sermons. At a camp meeting in Waynesburg, Ohio, escorting female preacher Ellen Stewart into the pulpit were her husband and “two or three other females.” More than once, Abigail Eames moved at Dorothy’s side, despite the odds stacked against them. She plodded alongside Dorothy through the mud and muck of New York streets to minister to the wicked. She braved the danger-ridden and disease-infested prisons with Dorothy to minister to the criminals and insane incarcerated there. She accompanied Dorothy on late-night treks and pre-dawn jaunts to interact with the seedier side of New York’s city life in hopes of redeeming ungodly souls.

In the Old Testament, women stayed securely tucked in the background, primarily exercising influence as the archetypal mother and wife. The graces and virtues of wives and mothers were often extolled and on a few occasions recorded for history, but they were always seen in relationship to husband and sons. As in Dorothy’s age, the women of the Old Testament met with approval for their strength yet submissiveness, their resourcefulness yet their dependence on men. Within the home, women commanded an honored place, yet only under the auspices of a male. Women of the Old Testament clearly remained under the domain of the husband, a man’s possession in the eyes of the law and cultural dictates. In fact, Hebrew offers no actual word for “wife,” the literal
translation meaning “the woman of” or “the woman belonging to.” Before marriage, she offered her family a valued opportunity to establish a desired political or social link and upon marriage, retained that value as a companion, foundation of a stable home, and with God’s blessing, the vessel through which the familial line continued. Therefore, she maintained certain rights, including the right to be protected from unjustified divorce, and being bought or sold. Despite this maternal value, the whole process of child-bearing and the female cycle were treated with shame and degradation throughout the Old Testament. After delivering a child, the mother was forbidden to touch anything holy for a month if she delivered a boy and two months if she bore a girl.\textsuperscript{132} Only shame and censure awaited the barren woman.

Thus, the curse of Eve reflected the overall experience of a Hebrew woman. For all the honor accorded her as wife and mother, as a woman, the Hebrew woman found little societal value in comparison to men. Her physical nature remained somehow sullied and shameful.

Alternatively, the Old Testament offered women like Dorothy validation, for the Holy Scriptures offered them brief insights into the powerful possibilities of women. Strong women such as Miriam and Deborah—women reflective of Dorothy Ripley—played vital roles in securing not only national stability but also religious constancy. Like Dorothy, the women of Hebrew history exerted a subversive influence as well as a public presence. Despite being undervalued in legal and cultural worth, the power of women found magnification in a religious sense. The Old Testament abounds with stories of women who in the private domain exerted a dangerous influence over the men for which they cared. In the home, the women are in possession of the men’s territory, making them
vulnerable to their wiles and winsome beauty. Society generally regards the names of Jezebel, Delilah, and Jael as synonymous with danger, ruthlessness and deviousness. These women violate societal and cultural codes by betraying their husbands and communities, siding with their foreign families. By contrast, the stories of Ruth, Esther and Bathsheba show women who sacrificed much of their cultural heritage and personal safety in exchange for the love of their husbands. Ruth and Esther became the center of the books of the Bible, and Bathsheba established David’s royal line with Solomon.

Significantly, women of the Old Testament played numerous secret roles in the establishment of both the Hebrew and Christian religions. For example, women played pivotal roles in the epic of the Hebrew liberation from Egyptian domination in the stories of the mother who hid her baby in the rushes, the daughter of the Pharaoh who defied her father to keep a foundling, and the sister who played a trick to establish the baby’s natural mother as wet-nurse. These women, agents of God acting secretly and in some cases deceptively, paved the way for the emergence of Moses, the political and religious hero. Israel’s liberation lay indirectly in the hands of subversive women who refused to be confined by the laws of men, dictating limitations to what their hearts demanded.

Thus, Dorothy built on a firm foundation of female religious empowerment. Women like Dorothy Ripley shared in the impassioned, unswerving faith of the Old Testament frontrunners. They were unafraid to challenge the religious and cultural backlash of the post-revolutionary period because they had God on their side. Obstacles to their missions simply would not be tolerated, for anything less than utter commitment to their divine calling meant their eternal doom. Since Dorothy harbored no doubts about
the holy nature of her mission, she functioned relatively devoid of misgivings and regrets about her chosen path.

**Mothers in Israel & Sisters in Christ**

Equally convinced of this legacy, female admirers of their sister evangelists prompted frequent and venerable usage of the moniker “Mother in Israel” (or “Sister in Christ”). The title, representative of a spiritual faction rather than an earthly one, linked the domestic and holy aspects of a woman to form a powerful metaphor of feminine authority. The term proclaimed their spiritual might while at the same time celebrated their higher earthly calling as nurturers, protectors and guides. Every woman who lived a virtuous life and promoted righteousness in her family and in the Church was entitled to the designation. These women inherited the promises given to Sarah and other biblical mothers. The title implied intelligent and faithful support of Christianity, and implied more than earthly significance. As Brekus observed, “Drawing on both biblical imagery and the language of republican motherhood, they rooted women’s religious authority in their traditional domestic roles as mothers and sisters.”

The nineteenth-century “women’s sphere” ideology prized women like Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose response to the angel's announcement that she would be with child epitomized religious female submission: “I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said.” To the dominant religious culture of Dorothy’s era, Mary modeled for Christian women a most important aspect of woman in worship and ministry: women served God through a submissive and supportive role to the man. And it was the man who advanced the kingdom of God.
Consequently, some question the legitimacy of the term “Mother in Israel” as one of religious power. Krueger, for example, points out the inherent marginalization—at least as conceived by women virtually enslaved in a nineteenth-century marriage—in the first word, Mother. Rather than identifying women as a group inclusive in the religious community—in this case, patriarchally dominated Israel—women earned validation only as Mothers in the group.

. . . The term “Mothers in Israel” when applied to women in the public sphere, or more precisely a patriarchal “Israel” as opposed to a community of women, suggests the way in which their authority might be circumscribed. Rather than identifying women as a group with the Israelites seeking liberation from political oppression, Mothers of Israel might find themselves preaching on behalf of the patriarchy, at least insofar as they acknowledged the extraordinary nature of their activities and thereby reaffirmed women’s subservience to male authority. Likewise, Phyllis Mack suggested that however much they may stretch the bounds of female behavior, “Mothers in Israel” remained circumscribed within the patriarchal model of familial relationships. Motherhood, while a powerful role, indicates a woman answerable to a higher, earthly figure as well as a divine one. Further, the similarity between the activities of an early nineteenth-century “Mother” of Israel and the duties of patriarchally defined motherhood seemed to reinforce cultural limitations. Mothers of Israel most often served as class members, class leaders and exhorters—but not as preachers. Despite their strong presence as women who nurtured the community of believers and missioned to the non-believers much as a mother does to her own child, the
term implied conspiratorial acceptance of the pervasive “woman’s sphere” ideology. In this way, it gained widespread social acceptance. Thus, in their move from mothers in the house to Mothers in Israel, women failed to overtly challenge the societal limitations that inhibited their natural growth in evangelism, bleeding all power and authority from the term.

In her case, Dorothy liberally applied the title to her ardent friend and supporter, Abigail Eames, whom she called “the only companion of all my joys and sorrows” (Bank 1st ed. 66). Abigail served “in sympathy [as] a help-meet of a truth, breathing forth in silence, ardent supplication that I might have the assistance of my God, adequate to the painful task at hand” (Bank 1st ed. 66). Although she supported Dorothy emotionally and financially for years, Abigail never herself sought to override the limitations inherent in the term, as defined by Krueger. Abigail accompanied Dorothy on her missionary and evangelical efforts to prisoners, prostitutes, the acting community, sailors and other groups considered unsavory by nineteenth-century society. However, never in Dorothy’s records did she indicate that Abigail’s role evolved into anything other than a supportive one. Dorothy assumed the male, dominant role; Abigail, the passive, submissive one.

Yet, Abigail provided the necessary bolstering that enabled Dorothy to continue her ministry, especially when Dorothy’s emotional and physical well-being flagged. Abigail accorded the earthly comfort that Dorothy had willingly forfeited when initiating her mission. Several times throughout Dorothy’s life, Abigail rescued Dorothy from a lonely condition, providing her with lodging, sustenance, and money when the younger woman found herself on the streets.
Just as importantly, Abigail supplied the much needed encouragement and comfort that the harassed Dorothy so desperately craved in the face of unified dissent. Bouts of depression and loneliness attend any such solitary existence, and with admirable frequency, Abigail bolstered the other woman’s confidence, scooping up her drooping spirits, dusting them off, reenergizing them and, then, sending Dorothy on her evangelical way again. Therefore, when Dorothy conferred on the older woman the title of “Mother in Israel,” she did so in the sense of a nurturer, for she supplied the orphaned Dorothy with the sustaining milk of companionship, fortitude, and approval.

However, despite its implication of marginalization, the term suggests a subversive power, as well. For example, Krueger puts a new spin on the appellation in The Reader’s Repentance by emphasizing the fact that women preachers not only understood the intrinsic deceptiveness of the term, but they also used it to their advantage. Women preachers invoked the gender-specific title when referring to each other’s astonishing evangelical power, and in turn, it provided the women with a constructive image to facilitate their access to public ministry. These Mothers in Israel “tended to be older women who had been long and faithful pillars of the church.”

These experienced, knowledgeable, tried-and-tested women preachers were Mothers who nurtured the neophytes who followed in their footsteps. In their application of “Mother in Israel” to the icons of feminine authority, younger women preachers celebrated Mothers of the family of God. Theirs were hands that not only rocked the proverbial cradle but also ruled over a small following in a religious world.

So, when Dorothy applied the designation to Priscilla H. Gurney, a Quaker minister from England, she witnessed in the woman a messenger “sent as by God to yield
comfort to my soul” (EC 38). As “an highly favoured minister” among the Quakers, Priscilla provided Dorothy with a role model who likewise had “forsak[en] all to become a true disciple” (38). Thus, she served as a worthy prototype “to confirm my faith in the first setting out of a pilgrimage” (38).

Likewise, another Quaker minister functioned as a Mother to Dorothy, providing the much needed reassurance when the latter was a frightened ministerial novice. The woman preacher, identified only as Eliz. H, spoke on the holy assurance that, like the Israelites who crossed the Red Sea, those who fought against all odds for the Lord would find their needs fulfilled. The sermon so closely addressed Dorothy’s circumstance that she was immediately and unassailably convinced this Mother in Israel presented evidence in human form that her own mission was a righteous one: “I was assured by the Holy Ghost that this was given forth to encourage me not to faint by the way” (36). Dorothy “took [the assurance] as from the mouth of God, and treasured it up in my heart against the day of affliction” (36).

Further, because women preachers rarely overtly contested patriarchal authority within the denominational organization, they gained power as members within the religious community even while establishing the term as a base to create a subversive discourse in which they sought feminist aims as well. “Slowly, a dual discourse would emerge from these strategies,” Krueger argues, “one, a jeremiad calling the patriarchy to repentance, the other a dialogue among women in an atmosphere of linguistic separatism.”138 Importantly, the term gained power from its limitation. As historian Pamela Walker put it, “The absence of a masculine equivalent emphasizes that this was a role only women could fill.”139
Hence, Dorothy found a “Mother in Israel” in Mary Mifflin, a fellow woman preacher and abolitionist. A Quaker, Mary proved her mothering spirit to Dorothy several times throughout the latter’s ministry. In a decided show of support, Mary unhesitatingly informed Dorothy of salacious rumors circulating about her ineffectiveness as a preacher because she not only claimed to be free from sin, but also preached from carefully prepared notes. Once her friend and role model brought the nature of the gossip to Dorothy’s attention, Dorothy wasted no time in dispelling the rumors, sure that the insidiousness of the rumor mill would tarnish her evangelist reputation beyond repair:

I have been unjustly censured in this quarter of the world for preaching the gospel of our lord Jesus Christ for hire. I deny the charge; having never suffered a public collection to be made in any religious meeting I have held in England. Trusting to the rich beneficence of my inward Teacher, his everlasting love hath not left me once destitute of silver, while I have traveled thirty thousand miles, and thus afforded me an opportunity to comfort the prisoners, instruct the poor in their solitary life, and lead the sick to the Physician of souls, whose healing power I have seen extended to several, who are now adoring the richness of his merit in the kingdom of glory. (Letters v-vi)

Also among the Society of Friends, Dorothy witnessed Mothers in Israel “taking a text,” by interpreting and explaining specific pieces of scripture. In Baltimore at the 1802 Quaker’s Yearly Meeting, a vanguard of twenty female ministers absorbed Dorothy into their midst, and their solidarity as a confederation echoed in Dorothy’s confirming words of sisterhood:
Mary Mifflin invited me to dine with a goodly company of women Friends, who were ministers. I think there were twenty of us, if I recollect aright, and some were nigh four-score years old; a beautiful sight, such as I had not before seen. May God preserve them all, and deliver them from the fear of man, that they may, according to their dignified station, honour the Lord, and minister from his ability to the different people whom they are appointed over, as the watch women of the most high God. (EC 114-15)

Likewise, the Quaker international evangelist, Martha Routh, earned the moniker “Mother in Israel” from Dorothy (Bank 132).140 When she attended the Quaker monthly meeting of the Southern District in Philadelphia in 1803, she felt “favored” to hear the “powerful testimony” of Martha. The elder woman’s words concerning the worldwide church touched a responsive chord in Dorothy, not just because both women hailed from England, but also because Martha promoted an inclusive doctrine encompassing all people of every gender, race, and locale. To Dorothy’s lesser-experienced eye, Martha represented the power, influence and respect due a woman preacher. Dorothy marveled at the stark evidence of a woman preacher’s equality to her male counterparts in scriptural exegetical dexterity. Further, Martha’s command of metaphorical language awed her fellow female evangelist: “The great simplicity, and copious language, that adorned these parabolical sentences, truly animated my drooping powers” (133).

Ironically, Martha’s nature metaphor paralleled the fertility of woman, lending further evidence of a woman preacher’s perpetual awareness of woman’s difference, her uniqueness, among God’s creatures. On that April morning, Martha likened Quakers of
different meetings, in different towns to the berries clinging to the tops of boughs. Those who walked in the narrow righteous path of the Lord and “who refuse[d] to be led and guided by” any but Him ripened as the berries on the vine. True believers continued to flourish after the harvesting of falsely professing Christians. True believers would then fertilize the ground for future generations. As Dorothy exclaimed in obvious awe, “Each individual who could read their experience in figurative language, might go home satisfied, and rejoice in the God of their salvation” (133). Martha’s powerful rhetoric presented a linguistic and spiritual blueprint for the younger evangelist.

Perhaps Dorothy’s exuberance for Martha’s sermon could be explained by the latter’s implied approbation of Dorothy’s preaching. Martha’s insistence that only those following the directives of the Lord would ripen from seedling grapes to the choicest fruit on the vine echoed precisely what Dorothy had been repeating to her detractors. Dorothy’s evangelical aims sprouted as a direct response to a holy call. So, more than likely, Martha’s sermon trumpeted a clear message to Dorothy—and perhaps other women preachers who justified their ministries by citing complete submission to the Lord’s decree. Contrary to what so many male preachers had been hammering home to Dorothy, this woman preacher—this Mother in Israel—had patently indicated that Dorothy’s preaching had been divinely ordained.

Similarly, the designation “Sisters in Christ” played an important role in the lives of female evangelists. Sisters in Christ were young or middle-aged women who had “helped to foster the faith of new believers.”¹⁴¹ They helped spread the Christian faith through their nurture of the members of the family of God. Dorothy frequently described these women, like their Mother counterpart, as part of her “family,” a dedicated
community of believers with the common aim of advancing the kingdom of God. Although not related by blood, these sisters supported each other in times of need, providing morale boosting as well as more tangible elements of aid. Just as was the case with motherhood, the basis of sisterhood was “spiritual rather than biological.”¹⁴² The sisters in Christ provided service as vital to the women preachers as that of the Mothers. They comprised important elements in the worldwide family of God. Indeed, Dorothy embraced all true Christians—God’s “adopted sons and daughters everywhere”—as “my brethren and sisters” (EC 164). The only standard for admission into the family was “doing [God’s] will and mourn[ing] on account of the iniquity of the world” (164).

Therefore, Rebekah Brooks of Savannah assumed the role of a “Sister in Christ,” helping initiate Dorothy into the close-knit Georgia community. Despite her upbringing and practice as a Baptist—versus Dorothy’s as a Methodist and later a Quaker—Rebekah did not hesitate to invite a large group of “her choice friends” to meet Dorothy (Bank 290). As a sister, she provided a ready audience for Dorothy’s exhortations of salvation. Further, Rebekah turned the moniker around and applied it to Dorothy, comparing her to “an Elect lady of old,” for the woman preacher’s “conversion was uncommon” (290). The time spent with the “Sisters of Christ” in Savannah was a rare time of connection for the typically loner Dorothy: “I verily thought myself happy among my Baptist sisters, and as much united to them, as ever I was to any . . .” (290). Dorothy cited her fervent belief that her soul would “see all my dear friends meet together above, where all will be harmony and joy!” (290).

Quaker abolitionist, Ann Mifflin, became another “sympathizing sister” for her support in providing lodging and valuable contacts. Ann had long been involved in
abolitionism and corresponded extensively with British abolitionists. Her extensive communication network with Friends at home and abroad helped usher Dorothy into the world of organized abolitionism.

So, the Oneida women proved themselves “sisters” to the female evangelist on several occasions. When they congregated to hear Dorothy preach, they vocally exhibited their deep offense at the patent dismissal of a woman preacher by the regular male itinerant and missionaries assigned to the encampment. As Dorothy observed, the “Indian women [had] proved me their sympathizing sister, who felt for their bodies and souls, and desired no reward, further than their present peace” (94-95).

**The Life of the Itinerant**

In the New Testament, evangelists earn special commendation because of the trials and temptations they must overcome. Perseverance became the hallmark of any itinerant evangelist because of the great obstacles to be overcome in the spread of the word of God. As James, Jesus’ brother and a leader in the Jerusalem church, proclaimed, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”143

The Apostle James did not say *if* trouble came the way of the true believer, but *whenever* it came. James assumed the believer would have troubles and these difficulties would be opportunities for learning.

However, more than evangelist *brothers* suffered the trials of itinerancy. In some situations, evangelist *sisters* endured more than their fair share of harrowing travel,
wretched weather, squalid housing, deteriorating health, and the harmful, and even depraved, mind of society. In some cases, their pockets remained consistently empty of money, letters of recommendation, and supplies. In the nineteenth century, the peripatetic life offered few comforts for a woman.

So, what motivated women such as Dorothy Ripley and other wandering female evangelists such as her occasional companions Nancy Towle, Ann Rexford, Ruth Watkins, and Ann Mifflin? When faced with overwhelming possibilities of calamity, what spurred women to relinquish family and friends, children and marriage, homes and livelihoods? As Dorothy testified several times throughout her works, nothing less than a supernatural impulse impelled and supported her during the oppressive burdens on the body and mind that she so frequently bore for the advancement of the kingdom of God. And perhaps as a result of these women’s shared adversity—as well as their similar religious conversions and experiences—they not surprisingly developed close personal ties with one another. Cut adrift from family and community, these female evangelists often traveled together, preached together, defended their rights as evangelists together, and shared communications and friendships that spanned their lifetimes.

In an era when most Americans lived on scattered farms or in small and often remote villages, itinerancy travel took a hefty toll. In 1795, about 95 percent of Americans lived in places with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants. By the time of Dorothy’s death, that proportion still hovered at 91 percent. Thus, roving evangelism proved exhausting, time-consuming and expensive.

Because of the scarcity and expense of public transportation, travel by foot or horseback necessarily reigned as the dominant choice for evangelists. Perambulation not only ate up one’s time rather than the miles, but it also left one vulnerable to the elements. This became especially true if the destination could not be reached by nightfall. Menacing creatures—both human and non-human—roamed the forests, and a woman in solitary travel might find herself at their mercy. Southerly travel complicated an already
importunate situation, as the heat and humidity teamed up to assault weaker constitutions. For Dorothy, the relentless southern sun and humidity proved nearly overwhelming on more than one occasion. Tired and hot, Dorothy struggled against the nearly debilitating heat, unaccustomed to the soaring summer temperatures of the southern states. In June 1802, in her first sweep through Virginia, Dorothy felt herself nearly overcome by the oppressive high temperatures. “The 28th [of June] I set off on foot, alone, to Goose Creek monthly meeting, which was eight miles distance, and which oppressed me exceedingly, the sun being vehement, and my body being debilitated through the suffering of my mind” (EC 73). A woman traveling alone by societal standards ranked as a scandalous practice, but a woman traveling alone in the sweltering summer heat constituted as an extremely dangerous practice. With no one around to revive her had she collapsed from heat or sun stroke, dehydration, or hyperthermia, Dorothy could have found herself in dire straits indeed. That day fortune smiled on her, for not only did she make it to locale of the Quaker service but a compassionate family also invited her home to dine, tendering a bed for her to rest until the meal was served. The kind Quakers, and later their parents, cared for her as she suffered from heat and exhaustion.

I thought I met with a mother in Israel in M.H. and ever shall keep in remembrance her great respect and tenderness to me, with the attention of S.S. her daughter,¹⁴⁵ who has nursed me; for the powerful beams of the sun almost killed me when shining in its full strength on my head, which brought to my remembrance the wretched situation of poor Jonah, when he “fainted,” and wished in himself to die, and said, “It is better for me to
die than live.” Such a prayer was in my heart, when overwhelmed with grief, not knowing the way, or any creature there when I came thither. (73)

Yet the redemptive power of prayer, a steadfast faith, and a hardened independence bolstered Dorothy, so that by the end of the week, she resumed her travel. Undoubtedly she underestimated her stamina and ability to spring back after such a bout with the heat, for she again staggered under the oppressive southern sun as she traveled to another village twenty-six miles from her previous abode. Her newfound friends allowed her departure with great fear, not knowing what would become of me [for] I cannot walk, and the weather is so excessively hot, that I can scarcely bear the fatigue of riding. My constitution is at present very bad, although it has been very strong, but from a child, afflictions have been my portion, therefore I am worn out, and I do not desire to live my time over again . . . .” (75)

Having been riding and walking almost non-stop since her arrival in America four months earlier, the new evangelist from England most certainly suffered from sore muscles and a pervasive fatigue. Throughout her first missionary journey, Dorothy traveled extensively by horse, which took a hefty toll on Dorothy’s health, unused as she was to such an activity. Her days generally consisted of an early departure, a long ride, a late arrival, a religious meeting (overwhelmingly Quaker), and then a quick meal and bed. She usually repeated the routine between one-to-three days later. By September 1802, after a full summer traversing the demanding Virginia terrain, this schedule had become habitual, even if her reaction to the heat had not. “I arose at four and set off for
Fredericksburg before sun-rise, on horseback, which is a long ride for one unaccustomed to it, in the burning sun thus exposed” (106).

An uncertain horsewoman, Dorothy found travel by horse a formidable undertaking, threatening her safety on several occasions. While negotiating the woods on her way to an appointment with the Oneidas, for example, the horse pulling Dorothy’s chaise stopped suddenly, nearly throwing its human cargo from the precipice where they precariously perched: “I expected we both should be thrown out, (as we were on the midst of a hill, which scared my dear companion so much that) I was obliged to force her to jump out of the chaise, to prevent her fainting away, which she did, as she reached her father’s residence, running thither for some one to make the horse move” (Bank 74).

Later, an Oneida woman loaned Dorothy the use of her horse, to facilitate the evangelist’s movement from hut to hut. In this way, Dorothy could better reach recalcitrant natives diffident about heeding the proclamations of a white missionary woman. Unaccustomed to riding bareback without saddle or pillion, the undertaking led to yet another near-death experience for the missionary. “The horse was going to throw me off, which perceiving, I took the advantage of the creature, and jumped several yards, and it was out of sight before I recovered from the surprise and stun that I received by falling heavy on the ground after I alighted . . .” (76).

**The Life of the Itinerant—Disease**

Similarly, with each journey, the itinerant faced his or her own mortality from disease and illness. If the disease failed to ravage the body, it certainly devastated the spirit. Itinerant Thomas Olivers captured the precariousness of life in his description of a
smallpox outbreak along his circuit. After Olivers traveled as a local preacher near Bradford for about twelve months, the small-pox lay waste to the city. His great exposure to the disease—for the dead and the grieving families required the last rites of a minister of God—wracked his soul.

So universal was the infection, that in all that populous town, and the neighbouring villages, scarce a single person escaped, who had not had it before. It was also so mortal, that six or seven were buried in a night, in Bradford only. As I had never had it, it was often suggested to me, to leave those parts: but I thought, I am in the hands of a wise and gracious God; and also, in the place where his Providence has fixed me; and therefore, whether I live or die, I will continue where I am, and commit myself to his wise disposal. 146

Dorothy, too, battled against the threat of disease, most notably yellow fever. Also called black vomit or sometimes The American Plague, yellow fever is an acute viral disease. Today, it remains an important cause of hemorrhagic illness in several African and South American countries despite existence of an effective vaccine. In the past, it launched several devastating epidemics, particularly in America. Yellow fever infested large cities such as Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Wilmington, and Norfolk, ravaging one of the cities every year between 1793 and 1805. The disease brought fear, death and devastation. In 1793, five thousand Philadelphians died from complications of the disease. The repeated ravages of yellow fever roused among the seventy thousand citizens of Philadelphia a high regard for sanitary precautions and cleanliness.
Likewise, the disease assaulted New York with devastating harshness. When Dorothy sojourned there in 1804, New York flourished as a prosperous little city of about seventy thousand people. It extended two miles north from the Battery to Houston Street. Greenwich was then a village to which, in the following year, most of New York's population fled to escape a yellow fever epidemic. As many as fifty thousand people fled the city. The City created the Board of Health, which used its powers to evacuate residents from all streets near the East River, where the epidemic hit the hardest. This measure successfully warded off the disease for another fourteen years.\textsuperscript{147}

To understand the fear which gripped the cities attention must be given to the misery endured by a sufferer of yellow fever. An Englishman who journeyed to America in the last decade of the eighteenth century for investment purposes contracted the disease when it swept through Norfolk. He described the baleful influence of the horrible affliction:

\begin{quote}
The symptoms by which I was attacked, were sudden. I had supped with an appetite, slept as well as the heat would permit, and was rising at my usual time in the morning, when I felt a most singular sensation, accompanied by a chill. I lay down again, and soon felt a nausea at my stomach, which produced vomiting of bile, in color and quantity which astonished me. This relieved me so much, that I ascribed the cause of my sickness to a foul stomach, and had dressed myself before I perceived new symptoms. A lassitude hung about me, and was accompanied with a depression of my faculties, an acute pain at the back of the head, and an aching through my limbs. Medical assistance was now procured, but on
the third day I felt so weary that I could not remain a minute in the same
posture; a sensation not to be described—worse to be endured than acute
pain, and more irksome than the smart of a festering wound. During this
time the fever had made great progress, and the thirst it occasioned could
not be appeased, though I drank large quantities of the juice of limes, with
water, which was permitted by my physician. My stomach, however, soon
refused the grateful beverage; the vomiting continued often so long, and
with such violence, that I was exhausted, and found a temporary relief in
the deprivation of my mental faculties. In this state I suffered several days,
the greatest part of which I was insensible of my situation, and the
intervals of reason were horrible. My bones felt as if they were disjointed;
a burning pain was seated in the spine, while the throbbing and tormenting
sensation in my head drove me again into a state of delirium. The
treatment of my physician was judicious; by his aid, and that of a good
constitution, I struggled through the dreadful disorder. I was copiously
bled in the first instance, and blisters were applied to my legs, my feet, and
the back of my neck. This regimen, with the good effect produced by
strong doses of calomel, and afterwards of bark, effected my cure. During
this severe trial, in my intervals of reason I readily complied with the
prescriptions of my doctor, and the directions of my black nurse: but was
informed, that in my delirium I was most refractory, and evinced great
bodily strength in attempting to escape from the chamber—a common
symptom in the yellow fever.¹⁴⁸
This disease began its ravaging attack on New York City in August 1805, sweeping Dorothy up in the fear of the moment. She earlier had fled from the threat of the fever while traveling through Baltimore in September 1802. Three years later, after commencement of her second missionary journey, the disease again confronted Dorothy.

After branching off to Albany for a short evangelical trip, Dorothy returned to New York City aboard the sloop *William*. Only two days following her disembarkment from the ship, a divine warning cautioned her to flee the city for the fever was imminent. Her response was immediate. Unquestioningly, Dorothy booked passage aboard the *Victory*, bound for Boston. Since her life had been dedicated long ago to God, her earthly sojourn could not be hers to direct.

. . . I owe my life unto God, who wisely apprised me of the danger which I was in, coming from the fresh air, and fatigued almost to death, into the very entrance of the sepulchral scene of wo! [*sic*] here shall it stand recorded to the Honour of my Gracious Father, who has fixed me most wisely to recover my strength, and health, having no certain place of abode, or country residence to fly unto, like many of your citizens, who shelter themselves, and leave the poor to perish among the arrows of death, which will find them, and me, at last: for none can escape the grave, unless the coming of our Lord shall change them who are alive . . . . (Bank 147)

Dorothy knew full well the horror she left behind by obeying the holy command for flight. As she wrote to her friend Abigail Eames, “Consider how many have been cut down by the dreadful pestilence! . . . Death has been all around, sweeping away high and
low; and the doleful sound of the heavy load of corpses thou hast heard many times, at midnight, when passing thy door, in the solemnity of thy soul, to the Potter’s field!” (146). She fretted for her friend who already sported the “wan cheek and pale lips” of the afflicted, although she “has hitherto escaped the scourge” (146).

The speed of her departure came at great expense and the comfort of a close friend. Equally daunting, the haste deprived her of letters of recommendation and directions to acquaintances who might provide shelter. After eleven days, the Victory arrived in Boston, but officers there ordered the ship either to return to New York or seek a pass from hospital officials. The yellow fever had broken out in New York immediately on the heels of the Victory’s exodus, and Boston officials assigned the ship to quarantine off the coast of Rainsford’s Island, four miles from the mainland. A hospital doctor on the island informed them of their detainment of twenty-five days, time enough for manifestations of the disease to appear. Fortunately for the bored and provisionally unprepared passengers, those aboard the Victory remained confined on ship for only twelve days. Nine other vessels bobbed in quarantine alongside them at Rainsford’s Island. Cold, boisterous winds buffeted the island, and rough seas rocked the ships sequestered in the harbor.

Dorothy spent the majority of her time reading the Bible, journaling, and writing letters. In addition to lengthy epistles warning the unconverted and backsliders of impending holy doom, Dorothy composed six protracted letters during her confinement. With a tone of shame born of necessity, Dorothy excused her hasty departure to her great friend and supporter Abigail Eames, citing her unfinished ministry and poor health as the impetuses behind her actions: “Let the Mercy of our God to us, soften our hearts, and
humble our minds, while His Judgments still threaten New York, which I have left with
dread awe, lest my weak fabric should fall down before it was fully prepared to sow in
corruption; it being the Temple of the Holy Ghost, that the Spirit in me might minister to
the prisoners, and poor, where the Lord does cast my lot” (146). Anything less than
Dorothy’s submission to the divine directive to quit the city meant doom. “Had the Spirit
been rejected, when I was warned to leave the city, I might now have fallen with the rest,
who are dying daily, and fled from by their dearest friends, as loathsome creatures, whom
God has marked with his heavy Scourge, fearing His Hand will follow them!” (146-47).

Following nearly ten weeks of silence since her departure from her motherland,
Dorothy wrote to friends and family in Old England, including her good friend Jane
Sanders of Whitby and beloved sisters Sarah and Catharine Ripley. These two letters
serve as fine testimony to the trying life of a female missionary of the early nineteenth
century. In the letters, Dorothy revealed much of herself, including her penchant for holy
visions, her mandatory obedience to God’s holy command to evangelize, her missions
among the seedy populace of America’s cities, and the physical and mental debilities
resultant from a life of itinerancy.

The Life of the Itinerant—Lodgings & Food

Part of itinerants’ legitimate worry regarding disease and illness certainly
stemmed from the uncertainty of their lodgings as they traveled the length and breath
of the new nation. Although Dorothy occasionally stayed at inns, she most often lodged
with sympathetic families who offered their hospitality following one of her sermons. In
most of her notes, she recorded a pleasant stay, with comfortable lodgings and a gracious
host or hostess. At times, however, she stayed in more humble accommodations such as those extended to her by a white woman in Oneida County, New York, in August 1805. Dorothy had traveled five miles from the Oneida tribal grounds to conduct services among some white constituents. Too far from the comfortable housing provided to her by Calvin and Eve Young, white sympathizers of the Oneidas, Dorothy accepted an offer of lodgings from a white woman in the congregation. Identified only by the name of Webster, the woman lived in humble surroundings indeed, the house being a small log one with only two cavities made in the walls for the provision of light. No glass filled the window holes, allowing the night air to rush throughout the poorly insulated home. While Dorothy possessed a vibrant spirit, the bodily vessel which housed it proved ill-equipped to endure such meager protection. “And it being a damp night, the cold seized me, and my body was brought into affliction, which made me groan under the weight of a corruptible house, that I shall be as glad to part with as the log one” (81).

On other, albeit rare, occasions, Dorothy’s sole means of lodging was the great outdoors. The wilderness posed a frightening venue for a lone itinerant, especially in the darkened hours. On a solitary ride of twelve isolated miles through the forests surrounding Vernon, New York, Dorothy “heard a terrible howling” within the woods. As she was armed with nothing more than her religious convictions, her physical vulnerability was absolute. In somewhat deceptively mild language, she described the hair-raising experience as “throw[ing] a damp on my spirit” (77). Perhaps the occasion was of more frightening import than she alluded to, for when a drunken Indian of the Oneida Pagan Party jumped out at her, she “cr[ied] out like one almost scared to death” (77). Whether her fear was born of her lonely trek through the forest or a white woman’s
fear at the unexpected encounter with an Indian, Dorothy was scared witless. When she gathered her senses, she stopped the chaise to speak to the Indian, “stung with remorse and the rebuke of the Spirit” at her telling fear (77). During her stays with the Oneidas, her humble abodes included a stay in a lodge that sported little or no roof. Despite a grueling, eight-mile ride from Brotherton, the exhausted Dorothy found that sleep eluded her because of the squalidness of the accommodations, the revealed night sky, and the shared room full of nocturnal companions:

[I] slept very little in the night, by reason of poor accommodations, for we all lodged in one room, where I could see the firmament from a breach which had been made by fire. The sky attracted my notice, and prevented my sleeping, as I had not before met with such poor lodgings, yet I had the best this miserable log house afforded, being welcome there” (90).

During a stopover in Newbury, England, on her initial mission, Dorothy felt compelled to minister to an unconverted flock, and this provided the means to refuse the generosity of a poor Christian. She accepted the kindly offer of a respite and refreshment from a kindly tinner who lived in one of the almshouses. He “freely gave me such as his habitation afforded, with a smile,” Dorothy remembered. However, she refused his offer of a bed, preferring to sleep in the wagon rather than at the man’s home. “[The tinner] would have given me a night’s lodging, if I had not been able to proceed all night in the wagon, which I preferred before any bed offered” (EC 39). Her preference of the wagon bed over “any bed offered” seemed to indicate less her fastidiousness than her eagerness to proceed with haste on her journey, which was years in the making. Dorothy’s actions the following morning bolster this theory, as she rose early to walk and mission to the
“dear young women” who traveled with her. She “advised [them] to serve their Maker with their blooming days” (39); they listened with attention to my counsel and would gladly have followed me henceforward, but I recommended them to come and follow my master, Jesus, who was seeking after their precious souls” (39). Dorothy continued her efforts to convert the women until they reached the destination of Bath, where the women parted company. Another reason might have been that Dorothy felt guilty of depriving the poor man of his bed since—like the widow with the two mites—he was willing to give everything he had.149

Equally taxing on her fortitude, Dorothy often had to partake of food so polar to her upbringing that she failed in her instinctive urge to accept such graciousness. Once, when the Oneida women offered victuals to Dorothy, she could not make herself accept the generosity. “The women brought me some Indian corn bread, with large beans stuck all over it, which I thought were raisins: but, found my mistake as soon as I took one: and it being very sad, and boiled, I chose to fast all day till night, rather than eat it” (Bank 77). To her shame, Dorothy learned that her willing sacrifice of the food “suited one of my poor sisters very well: for, observing my uncommon delicacy, she looked at me, and made me understand that she was hungry, and could eat it fast enough; so I gave it her, and she wrapped it up as the richest dainty with thankfulness, which was a lesson I mean ever to remember, while I sojourn below” (77).

On another occasion, a lack of funds rather than fussiness drove Dorothy to hunger. After a 110-mile trek from Petersburg, Virginia, to Portsmouth, Dorothy was forced to sleep in “a very damp bed” where she “caught cold: so that mortality seemed to me, like oppressive chains put about my soul, which fettered me to the dust, and
prevented the sweet union betwixt my God, and His groaning worm” (251). That night, she “retir[ed] without supper, as the traveling expenses came so high, and no one was led into sympathy with me, to ask if I wanted a supply of money” (251). Weary from her travels, uncomfortable with soggy bedding, and hungry from two days without food, the despondent Dorothy sought solace in the only comfort remaining to her—she communed with God in prayer: “Surely the Lord will raise me up friends: for I never experienced the want of His divine Help more” (251).

The Life of the Itinerant—Uprootedness

Another characteristic of the life of the early nineteenth-century itinerant was a pervasive sense of uprootedness. In her sacrifice of home and family, Dorothy shared with her evangelistic kin the “stranger” mentality. According to John Bryant, in his Melville and Repose, two types of religious cosmopolitans emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century: the benevolent nonsectarian and the evangelical millennialist; the two shared little characteristically. “The benevolists were simply devout humanists, more at home with secular cosmopolitans than with their evangelical kinsmen, whose sense of a prophetic ‘other world’ actually promoted an inverted consciousness.”

In direct opposition to the cosmopolitan myth of worldly brotherhood, millennial cosmopolites characterized themselves as homeless and estranged. “Instead of being ‘nowhere a stranger,’ they insisted that like Christ they were strangers in every place.” These millennial cosmopolites believed denominations to be “illusory factions beclouding the path to one true, all-embracing belief.” Thus, Dorothy proclaimed herself a “citizen of this world, but going above to the NEW JERUSALEM.” She was a “stranger in a
strange land” who was “separated by the wide ocean” of earthly existence from her spiritual reward.

This stranger mentality permeates Dorothy’s works. She frequently referred to herself as a “poor pilgrim” (EC 127) who commenced a “lonesome pilgrimage” (81, 25) to labor in the harvest of the Lord. Her lot in life consisted of “going from city to city, from one nation to another” (22). At the outset of her conversion narrative she exclaimed, “Ah! The solitary path that I took! Who but a God of everlasting strength could have brought me safe through?” (21). The “hard and rugged paths of the just” were softened only by the knowledge of the “triumphant joys of heaven, which await every faithful pilgrim” (25).

Her sense of being a stranger stemmed from a psychological separation as much as a geographical one. Even when she returned to her homeland of England following her first missionary journey and stayed in her sister’s home, Dorothy acutely felt her alienated state: “I consider myself a stranger at my sister’s house” (EC 161). And she was. Recently orphaned and lately estranged from her homeland, Dorothy could name no space her own. She could claim no husband or children, no belongings or material possession as her own, excepting the few articles of serviceable, unadorned clothing she owned. Her two remaining sisters, though beloved, had made families and homes which no longer included Dorothy in their nucleus. Her journeys across the Atlantic robbed her of deep and lasting involvement with family and motherland. Considering herself “appointed by God,” she acted under a holy directive “not to entangle my mind” with an earthly lover or worldly goods (161). To be a woman of God, she had to reject “the Mammon of unrighteousness in any respect” (161).
She alluded to affliction similar to the holy prophets of the Old Testament, equating her nomadic and despised state with theirs. To the itinerant Dorothy, their situations paralleled “because they were burthen bearers for the Lord, testifying against sin, and the unrighteousness of their princes!” (116). Like these prophets of old, Dorothy felt the sting of being a social outcast:

[They were] considered as the refuse of mankind, not fit to dwell in the world! I might bring the sufferings of the righteous down to the present day; having witnessed many doors shut against me; many hearts incensed with rage, because they cannot compel me to stay in my own nation, or banish me from one city to another, before the Lord’s time; so that it appears, at seasons, as if I could not get one foot of land to set my feet on.

(117)

While her account bordered on the melodramatic, certainly Dorothy suffered legitimate pangs of guilt because of the discord she sowed between her supporters and detractors, oftentimes members of the same family. “Husbands will turn against their wives if they shelter me; and wives will think hard of their husbands; parents will prevent their children; and children will oppose their parents in entertaining me; and frequently I am hurried from house to house with the spirit of opposition, till I am almost wearied to death . . .” (117). At other times, the supporters and detractors faced off in the churches. In 1806, the Methodist circuit preacher John Potts denied his meeting house to Dorothy, which set him in opposition with John Cox, the Methodist preacher in Petersburg. At Potts’ obstinacy, Cox organized a separate venue for Dorothy, “leaving John Potts and a few hearers, who were bigoted like himself, to feel the mortification which pride and
envy always feel, when they desire to prevent God sending by whom He pleases, or work as He sees meet, among the children of this World” (250).

**The Life of the Itinerant—Reception**

Not only was Dorothy a “stranger,” but also her missionary journeys appeared “strange,” especially to Americans generally unused to seeing a female preacher. Dorothy’s receptions in diverse locales defy characterization; the dynamics rarely fit into neat categories. Large cities such as Newport, Rhode Island, provided fertile ground for backbiting, rancor and even maliciousness. By contrast, other cities such as Washington, D.C., and Boston welcomed her with open arms. Interestingly, one cannot solely lay the blame for a negative rejection at the feet of the city’s predominant denomination. For example, even though Quakers represented the largest denomination in Newport—and may account for her cool reception in that locale—they also made up the majority in the traditional stronghold of Providence, Rhode Island, and in that city, Dorothy recorded overwhelming support and approbation. Likewise, the Quakers in the thriving city of Baltimore proved loyal while the Baptists of Newark, New Jersey, the Episcopalians in Annapolis, Maryland, and the non-denominational throngs in Philadelphia made Dorothy burn with religious fire because of their flagrant scoffing, gossipmongering, and inciting mistrust among would-be converts.

Similarly, small-town receptions resist characterization. The cool response in Fauquier Courthouse, Virginia, evolved into a wholesale rejection of Dorothy, forcing her self-removal from the rural town. The Quakers there made her mission so difficult Dorothy elected to search out more fertile pastures for her message. On the other hand,
Quakers in the small community of Goose Creek, Virginia, embraced Dorothy’s arrival, the kindly members supplying her with room, board and funding.

Thus, the variances of Dorothy’s reception offer evidence to the theory that rejection or acceptance of evangelists relied on gender as much as denominationalism, population size, economics, or demographics.

However, Dorothy considered such sacrifice as inherent in the life of the itinerant preacher—particularly a female one. As she wrote to her friends, the Amorys of Boston, aboard the ship *Eliza* in 1805, “I had rather (as an individual), bear the frowns of the despising age, and long fatigues appointed for the trial of my faith; then [sic] live at ease, reclining my head upon the silken lap of fortune's smile, where threatening dangers lurk unseen, and so surprise the heedless sinners in a moment, when they think themselves the most secure” (Bank 175).

Despite Dorothy’s self-characterization as “stranger,” small towns generally appreciated her arrival. In the early Republic, nomadic preachers or itinerants served a number of roles to communities who might not have seen a holy servant of God for weeks or even months. These itinerants often served not only evangelized but also baptized, buried, married and consoled. They maintained death vigils, prayed over the sick, counseled couples, and served in the kitchens, homes and farms where they lodged.

For instance, in September of 1802, the testy Quaker hostess where Dorothy lodged called on Dorothy to assist at her impending death. Interestingly, the request was not for Dorothy’s gift of preaching but rather her skill with a needle. Although Dorothy reluctantly acquiesced to the woman’s demands, she resented being put to work as a seamstress.
[She] requested me to make [the Quaker woman] a short gown and muslin skirt, for a shroud, as a preparation for her approaching dissolution, being aged. It was a solemn time with me all the day while occupied with my needle feeling this friend to be unchanged, or unadorned with the meek and lowly mind of Jesus Christ, which occasioned me to endure great travail of spirit, and perhaps it was for this purpose that she was suffered to make this request; for I have enough to do in spirit, without making garments for the dead. (EC 107)

Dorothy insinuated that the woman considered her a burden and a liability. Not only did the family have to feed and shelter the uninvited female missionary, but some members also doubted the legitimacy of her call. Certainly, Dorothy’s high praise of her host did not extend to her hostess.154

Dorothy often served as the only spiritual guidance to populations that society deemed beyond redemption. In 1819, Dorothy officiated at the graveside of a hanged prisoner when no other minister stepped forward. She also performed the deathbed absolution of an alcoholic woman whose life had been so dissolute that no clergy could be found to ease her fears of the spiritual unknown.

**The Life of the Itinerant—Travel on Land**

For the majority of nineteenth-century female preachers, the life of an itinerant evangelist was one of hardship and want, deprivation and poverty, emotional fortitude and physical stamina. Not the least of their hardships was the land itself. Traveling in the early nineteenth century was an arduous, laborious and even risky business. Even after
nearly two centuries of struggle against nature, civilization had failed to tame the terrain by Dorothy’s arrival in 1802. Forest abounded, except for the rare strip here and there of cultivated soil. More than two-thirds of the people clung to the seaboard within fifty miles of tidewater, for only there could the enjoyments of cultured life be obtained.\textsuperscript{155} The center of population rested within eighteen miles of Baltimore, north and east of Washington. Except in political arrangement, the interior was little more civilized than in 1750, and was not much easier to penetrate than it had been more than a century before.

A great exception broke this rule, and it became one that Dorothy found advantageous and frequently availed herself. Two wagon-roads provided the means—if not the comfort—for stagecoach, carriage and horseback travel. Both roads crossed the Alleghany Mountains in Pennsylvania—one leading from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh and another from the Potomac to the Monongahela.\textsuperscript{156} By these roads and by trails less passable from North and South Carolina or by waterways from the lakes, Dorothy traversed the land between the Southern states and New England. For her frequent trips between Boston and New York, Dorothy traveled along a tolerable, yet time-consuming highway. When money and luck were in suitable supply, she could take a stagecoach for the three-day trek. Three times a week, light stagecoaches carried passengers and the mail. From New York a stagecoach started every weekday for Philadelphia, consuming the greater part of two days in the journey. However, the newspapers in 1802 declared the road stretching between the new Jersey City and Hackensack to be as poor as any other part of the route between Maine and Georgia. South of Philadelphia the road proved bearable as far as Baltimore, which probably accounted for Dorothy’s recurrent trips along the latter.
However, between Baltimore and the new city of Washington the road meandered through forests, and Dorothy’s frequent trips through that portion of the Eastern Seaboard drained the travel-weary Dorothy on more than one occasion. As she observed in December 1805, “Having rode forty miles in the rain among an ungodly company in the stage, I arrived with joy in Washington City” (Bank 232). Even when the stage driver exhibited the good sense to opt for the track which seemed least dangerous, Dorothy rejoiced if in wet seasons she reached Washington without the wagon miring in mud, breaking an axle along the pockmarked road, or overturning at the risk of life and limb.

Most of Dorothy’s travel weariness manifested as a result of the long delays in reaching her destinations. In the Northern States, the coach between Bangor and Baltimore averaged a speed of four miles an hour. Beyond the Potomac the roads progressively worsened, until south of Petersburg even the mails were carried on horseback. Except for a stagecoach which plied between Charleston and Savannah, no public conveyance offered travel in the three southernmost States. Timing presented additional problems, for Dorothy disliked traveling on Sunday, and if she waited until after delivering a sermon or visiting the spiritually or physically needy, no public transportation could be had until days or even a week later. When Dorothy fled Savannah in the dead of night, she did so along the stygian, perpetually precarious river, a hazardous enterprise for sure, but the only one available to the horseless, carriageless evangelist except her own two feet. And walking posed its own dangers. For a woman in the cumbersome skirts of the era and in the sweltering Southern heat, troubles ranging from a fall resulting in broken limbs to sun stroke ending in illness or death presented a constant threat.
A crude conveyance, the stagecoach held twelve people, if all crowded into the single wagon. The misfortunate travelers jolted over rough roads, their bags and parcels thrust inside, cramping their legs. Passengers’ sole means of protection from the heat and dust of mid-summer and the intense cold and driving snow of winter came from leather flaps buttoned to the roof and sides. Used to the heavy vehicles of Europe and the harsh English turnpikes, Dorothy occasionally found pleasure in stagecoach travel in America if the weather proved fine and dry. Conversely, when spring rains drew frost from the ground, the roads turned nearly impassable. In winter, the frozen rivers added a serious peril, especially along rivers such as the North River which Dorothy frequently traveled, for it had to be traversed in an open boat—an affair of hours at best, sometimes leading to fatal accidents. Traveling in the stage from Baltimore to Philadelphia in April 1803, Dorothy suffered through a severe snowstorm that raged across the land, bringing “extremely cold” winds which magnified the hazard of land travel because of visibility problems, snow drifts and wind speed that assaulted any exposed flesh such as the eyes. Early departure times in the pre-dawn hours exacerbated the blustery, frigid conditions (EC 127).

Danger could be found inside the stagecoach as well. The seediness, menace or treacherousness of diverse travelers—coupled with the long hours forced to endure each other’s company—made for awkward, vexatious, or even perilous moments for Dorothy. Shortly after her arrival, she suffered the enforced, overnight presence of two lecherous men in the stage. In April 1802, she rode from “Rhoway, New York,” to Philadelphia. With her traveled two well-dressed charlatans, one from Boston and the other from Philadelphia. Both men were married yet obviously eager to seize on the opportunity to
proposition a lone female commuter—especially one literally “trapped” in the overnight stage with them. In turns aghast, enraged, and forgiving, Dorothy described the men as “the most abandoned I ever met with; for the one was rapacious as a lion, and the other subtle like a serpent, bent upon my destruction, if possible, before day approached” (64). By the time the stage arrived at seven in the morning, the men had clearly failed to solicit her feminine favors and gave up their skirt-chasing to pursue whatever had originally occasioned their travel to Philadelphia. In this circumstance, Dorothy escaped unscathed except for an offended sensibility.

Four years later, she recorded another harrowing stage ride from Charleston, South Carolina, in which she traveled ninety-seven miles “with a set of vile men, which bowed down my spirit exceedingly through their profaneness, despising God, and taking His name in their unhallowed lips in vain. When she chastised the driver for his blasphemy and vulgarity, he cynically rejoined, “I would not give up swearing for one hundred dollars a day” (Bank 283). The driver’s sarcasm so animated the drunken passengers of the stage ride that they too commenced an inebriated tirade, swearing “as rapidly as” the driver himself (283). Dorothy lamented having to endure the “insults by the white men rejoicing that they had filled my heart with sorrow, while their oaths were like as many arrows, or flaming darts shoot[ing] into my soul, to prevent me doing the Lord’s work, and testify[ing] against sinners of every description” (284). However, their paltry insults paled in injuriousness compared to their plot to inebriate the black man assigned as their driver the following day: “I heard the white men say through the thin sealing [sic], “We shall have to-morrow a black man to drive us, and he will be afraid of her, and will not swear, unless we give him something to drink,” which each agreed to,
that they might torment me the second day, as they had this” (284). Despite the obvious
danger to everyone traveling aboard the stage, the men succeeded in their plan. The
inebriated driver cursed everything, including the hapless horses drawing the stage.
Conversely, their plan to frighten Dorothy backfired, and her prayers for deliverance
imbued her with strength born of self-righteousness. She fired a challenge to her
tormentors:

[I was] surrounded as with devils, in the shape of men, who gloried in
their shame, because I was cast down with the bitter imprecations of the
cursed among us. My tongue was loosened, and my heart filled with zeal
for the Lord God of Hosts, and I addressed the swearers, and those who
rejoiced over me, who were scorners . . . . Sware [sic] as much as you
choose to-day; for it will not hurt me; neither will I sorrow for it, if you
sware for your own pleasure, it will be upon your own heads; and when
you make such an agreement again, mind that there is a thicker partition,
and that no one hear you: for I heard all you said.” (284)

In a surprising show of embarrassed chagrin, the men retreated from her heated rebuke
and fell silent. Satisfied that the men “appeared plunged in a moment into that pit which
they were digging for an harmless woman,” Dorothy leaned back into the stage’s backrest
to enjoy the remainder of the trip, “freed . . . from the malignance of those tongues that
are poisonous as vipers” (285).

Of such magnitude were the difficulties and perils of travel in the Southern States
that they formed an intangible barrier nearly as insurmountable as the geological one.
Even Virginia, through which Dorothy frequently traveled, proved no exception to the
rule. At each interval of a few miles, a horse rider was stopped by a river, liable to sudden freshets, and rarely bridged. According to Adams, Thomas Jefferson in his frequent journeys between Monticello and Washington felt lucky to reach the end of the hundred miles without some vexatious delay. “Of eight rivers between here and Washington,” Jefferson wrote to his Attorney-General in 1801, “five have neither bridges nor boats.”

Despite the struggles and impediments of overland travel between the Southern states, Dorothy took time to enjoy the bounty that surrounded her. In July 1802, as she traveled as a guest of a young man driving his wagon through the fields surrounding Fredericksburg, Virginia, Dorothy sat in awe as they rode by 432 acres of standing corn, “just in flower, which was beautiful to the eye” (79). Perhaps her awe at such bounty as she crisscrossed the wilderneses and cultivated fields of the new Republic gave rise to the nature metaphor she conjured the following summer, when she contemplated the conclusion of her mission and her return to England:

I have experienced (while in bonds) a fruitful field to become a barren wilderness, and remain often in this situation. Perhaps, in mercy, the Lord will instantaneously turn the same again into a fruitful plain, that shall bud and blossom as the rose. In these dry seasons, where there are no productions, I labour to live by faith, but find it hard work to the mind that has been accustomed to gather large grapes from its own vine planted in its own vineyard. A hope doth arise in me this moment, that faith which has been in daily exercise shall be lost in sight, when a full reliance is obtained on him who saith, “I am the bread of life.” (131)
Again, Dorothy found pleasure in the bucolic countryside when on horseback from Occoquan Mills, Virginia, to Richmond. She found herself delighting in the “very fine day” (71). The fruit trees along the highway being laden with cherries, Dorothy and her companion ate “freely . . . from the boughs that hung over our heads, so that I forgot the toil of the day, although we rode forty miles” (72).

On the other hand, the stifling heat of the Southern states curbed true, serene enjoyment of the pastoral beauty. Once, on her way to Fredericksburg, Virginia, she nearly swooned while on horseback, “a long ride for one unaccustomed to it, in the burning sun thus exposed” (106). On another occasion, after riding nearly nonstop since her landing in America four months earlier, Dorothy was halted in her footsteps by sheer fatigue. Desperate, she called aloud on “His holy name” to “convey me from one place to another; for I cannot walk, and the weather is so excessively hot, that I can scarcely bear the fatigue of riding” (75). The rain earlier in the day, mixed with the unending heat, made a cocktail of thick, nearly insufferable humidity for Dorothy. Traveling alone along the wilderness path of South Fork, Virginia, twenty-six miles short of her destination of Rector Town, Dorothy rejoiced when a kindly passerby conducted her the remainder of her way in his conveyance.

When she journeyed through New York—where she centered much of her missionary work—she faced less dangerous, though still challenging terrain. Upon her first arrival in 1802, the wilderness still covered most of New York and tested the fortitude of the newly transplanted woman from the tamed countryside of Yorkshire, England. For example, two years before her arrival, Utica contained only fifty houses, mostly small and temporary. Even in the predominantly Dutch Albany, the nucleus for
much of Dorothy’s New England travels, only five thousand inhabitants lived. The steadily increasing wave of immigration swelled through Albany to trickle into the valley of the Mohawk. Another tide of immigrants flowed from Pennsylvania, following the Susquehanna, and spread toward the Genesee country. Both slow, but steady streams of immigrants provided new listeners for Dorothy’s high-octane revivalism. As Dorothy wrote to her Quaker friend Mary Pancoast in Philadelphia, “When I had got about twenty miles [from Philadelphia], it appeared impossible for me to proceed; but I thought I must continue my journey, let the consequence be ever so trying, and at length I reached this city [New York], worn out with the roughness of the roads, and the shaking of the stage, while riding one hundred miles” (Bank 222).

When she branched outward from New York in mid-1802, Dorothy encountered the same inferior roads and perilous rivers, connecting the same small towns, and extending into the same dense forests as when the revolutionaries first took up arms against their dictators more than twenty years previous. “Nature was man’s master rather than his servant,” observed Henry Adams, and the five million Americans “struggling with the untamed continent seemed hardly more competent to their task than the beavers and buffalo which had for countless generations made bridges and roads of their own.”

Even by water, along the seaboard, communication moved nearly as slowly and irregularly as it had in colonial times. For instance, a letter informing Dorothy of her mother’s death trailed her during her missionary travels from outpost to isolated outpost through Virginia in April 1802. By the time the message caught up with Dorothy, it had passed through the possession of many of the congregants and supporters to whom Dorothy had already preached. Her mother had long been deceased and buried by the
time Dorothy learned of her mother’s demise. The delay imposed by international mail constituted only part of the problem. While Dorothy’s spontaneous, uncharted movement hindered delivery of the letter, blame could also be placed on the inadequacy of the general mail route. By the time Dorothy first stepped onto American soil, one general mail-route extended from Portland, Ma, to Louisville, Georgia, and took twenty days to navigate. Between Portsmouth, NH, and Petersburg, Virginia, a daily service provided mail, except Sundays; yet, between Petersburg and Augusta, Georgia, the mail came only three times a week. Branching from the main line at New York, mail traveled to Philadelphia in ten days, explaining why patrons came to Dorothy’s aid with hand-delivery. Because more than twenty thousand miles of post-road, with nine hundred post-offices, barely provided for the vast country, Americans resorted to an acquaintance-based system for expedited delivery.\textsuperscript{161}

Complicating the delayed postal service, the wars in Europe caused a sudden and great increase in American shipping employed in foreign commerce. Although this failed to lead to general improvement in navigation, it opened new opportunities for penniless evangelists such as Dorothy to pursue international missions. In fact, a Quaker merchant ship conducted her from England on her first missionary journey, and the ship \textit{Young Factor} carried her back home in July 1803. On the return journey, Dorothy’s ship accomplished only two-thirds of its voyage before war broke out between France and England, adding unease about warring militaries to the already perilous expedition. News came sporadically via other ocean-going vessels, which was the case upon Dorothy’s return in 1803. By mid-July, the war between the European powerhouses had been ongoing for more than a month, but the \textit{Young Factor} crew and passengers remained
oblivious to it until an English cutter from Dover pulled alongside for a chat. “This cutter was in company with a fleet bound for Newfoundland and which had taken a French West Indiamen of five hundred tons, laden with coffee and sugar” (EC 151). Any valuables or people on board made ships targets for unscrupulous privateers; in the case of war, anything was game.

**The Life of the Itinerant—Travel by Water**

Seafaring remained a perilous and arduous undertaking in the early nineteenth century. The ordinary seagoing vessel carried a freight of about two hundred and fifty tons. Elaborately rigged as ships or brigs, the small merchant craft necessitated large crews but only plodded slowly through the waters. The vagaries of ocean weather occasioned great fluctuations in passengers’ enjoyment of the trip. In one moment, Dorothy wrote of “head winds and a calm, which made the sea as smooth as a pond of fresh water. Looking at the mighty ocean, it was delightful to behold all around” (151). Her next sentence, however, dispelled the mildness of the description, for she exclaimed, “the calm was suddenly succeeded by a strong wind, which occasioned us to have our dead lights in two nights and one day, the sea being very boisterous” (151). Despite the uncertainty of their safety and comfort, Dorothy exhibited unabashed pleasure in the erratic changes. “I admired the sudden transition, which displayed the inimitable power of Jehovah, as well as caused us to run nigh three hundred miles in two days” (151).

Rivaling the elements in deadliness, disease ran rampant through oceangoing ships, plaguing passengers and crew alike. The long Atlantic voyage lasted from six weeks to six months, many immigrants killed or left in such a weakened or dying
condition that their arrival on the New World’s city docks constituted their doom.\textsuperscript{162} Afflictions such as dysentery, typhus, typhoid fever, smallpox, and yellow fever thrived in the wretched conditions of the ship’s hull. Unsanitary conditions and overcrowding in the already small vessels teamed up with disease to result in disaster for both passengers and crew.\textsuperscript{163}

In his voyage from Europe to Pennsylvania, immigrant Gottlieb Mittelberger recorded the horrific experiences endured by transatlantic travelers. “During the Journey,” Mittelberger wrote,
\begin{quote}
. . . there is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of sea-sickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably. Add to this want of provisions, hunger, thirst, frost, heat, dampness, anxiety, want, afflictions and lamentations, together with other trouble, as \textit{c. v.} the lice abound so frightfully, especially on sick people, that they can be scraped off the body. The misery reaches the climax when a gale rages for 2 or 3 nights and days, so that every one believes that the ship will go to the bottom with all human beings on board. In such a visitation the people cry and pray most piteously . . . \textsuperscript{164}
\end{quote}

Mittelberger traveled to Pennsylvania from Germany in 1750 on a ship primarily filled with poorer immigrants destined to become indentured servants upon arriving in Philadelphia. Mittelberger was lucky enough to escape servitude, for he worked as a
school master and organist for three years, giving him the means to pay for his passage, before returning to Germany in 1754. Consequently, if paying passengers withstood such problems, conditions for poorer migrants in steerage berths frequently must have been terrifyingly worse. In light of such life-threatening circumstances, Dorothy’s voluntary and repeated voyages across the Atlantic (as many as nineteen times) seem baffling.

Unfortunately, accurate records offering a definitive number for Dorothy’s crossings remain unavailable. Historical accounts differ widely in their estimations. The Lynchburg Virginian quoted the same number in Dorothy’s obituary: “She crossed the Atlantic Ocean 19 times and traveled probably 100,000 miles.” The Virginia Herald, in its obituary on Dorothy, stated that Dorothy crossed the Atlantic Ocean “many times, eleven trips since 1825.” Some of those who knew her best and studied her life remained inconsistent in their descriptions of her international travels. For instance, the Primitive Methodist George Herod, who both heard her preach and provided transportation for her between revival bouts, stated in his church history that Dorothy had “cross[ed] the Atlantic more than a dozen times to preach to the Americans, especially to the Indians.” The ardent supporter of female evangelism Zechariah Taft claimed, “She has crossed the Atlantic Ocean ten times.” The Whitby historian E.W. Dickinson wrote that she traversed the Atlantic nine times. And Dorothy’s one-time companion and ardent supporter Lorenzo Dow claimed she “crossed the ocean nineteen times on religious visits.”

Whatever the number of transatlantic crossings, however, more than likely Dorothy’s voyages from Europe presented only slightly less comfort and dependable service than her routine, 150-mile sea jaunt from New York to Albany. Because no
regular packet plied between the two cities, passengers had to bide their time until a sloop advertised its intent to sail. As Dorothy lamented in her narratives, passengers provided their own bedding, food, and supplies. They had to stockpile enough stores to survive the anticipated week it took to traverse the North River, for any number of calamities or natural disasters could prevent a timely arrival. For example, Dorothy once found herself quarantined off the coast of Maryland for nearly two weeks due to an outbreak of yellow fever at her departure port. Her supplies minimal, she (and other passengers) had to go ashore to replenish their rations. Her benefactors cut off from her, Dorothy had to stretch an already meager horde of funds. For a destitute woman who had given up all material possessions to advance the kingdom of God, nearly two weeks’ worth of provisions constituted a tall financial order, indeed.

Besides delays, river travel made an unsure and perilous enterprise. Hazards and impassability in the form of drought, flooding, and heavy rain- or snowfall exacerbated an already arduous trip. Yet such as they were, the streams crisscrossing the land made the main paths of traffic. Despite the dangers, the bubbling water that whisked through the country’s interior made the best highways for commerce and passenger travel. “The Americans of 1800 were prepared to risk life and property on any streamlet that fell foaming down either flank of the Alleghanies.” In June 1802, Dorothy took a “packet” from New York City to Alexandria, Virginia, the passage taking eight days to complete. In the last fifteen hours, the captain steamed ahead an incredible distance of 150 miles (EC 70-71). The aid of turbulent waters greatly accelerated their pace.

Despite the aid of a direct ocean highway, bringing New England nearer to Virginia and Georgia had not advanced since colonial times. “In becoming politically
independent of England, the old thirteen provinces developed little more commercial intercourse with each other in proportion to their wealth and population than they had maintained in colonial days. The material ties that united them grew in strength no more rapidly than the ties which bound them to Europe. Each group of States lived a life apart from its neighbors. Thus, even the lightly equipped traveler found a short jaunt no easy endeavor. When Dorothy traveled aboard the Mary for the 450 sea miles from Norfolk, Virginia, to Charleston, South Carolina, she suffered sea sickness of a magnitude surpassing that of her initial ocean voyage. She remained confined to her bed, for any exertion sent her rushing to the railings or the chamber pot. Dorothy felt “like one in prison,” so sick she could not even “sit up to occupy my pen” to maintain her detailed missionary journal (Bank 274). Worse, the sickness prevented her from ministering to the other passengers, and “no time seems vacant for religious worship, which adds to the affliction of my mind” (274). On the occasion of such torment, Dorothy determined that the rough weather testified to her recent defiance of God. Despite the holy dictate to journey to the southern states by land, Dorothy had elected for sea travel, hoping to conserve finances:

It was for want of confidence in my God, that I am exposed to the boisterous waves, and contrary winds, which seem to fight against me, obeying their Lord more than I have; for I was commanded to go by land, yet I have conferred with flesh and blood, which are now punished with justice, a reward suitable to my crime of unbelief, fearing my expenses would be too great for Him to discharge; because He hath not given me a supply to answer every purpose for many days, lest I am full, and forget
my daily dependance [sic] is on the Universal Giver of all good things.

(274)

Ironically, a ship need not have been seafaring to have posed danger to its passengers, as Dorothy discovered during her confinement on Rainsford’s Island. Responding to an invitation to disembark and spend the day on shore, Dorothy nearly forfeited her life as she lost her balance in descent along the side of the ship. The men assisting passengers from the ship’s side to the small rowboat bobbing below were intoxicated, magnifying the danger of an already risky endeavor. The drunken men, “went off from the sloop, supposing I was with them, while I hung suspended by a boy’s arm, knee deep in the water, astonished at myself, betwixt life and death” (132). Horrified realization of her jeopardy crystallized into true fear as she “whirled round and round, with my whole weight on a rope, which the boy gave me, and as a stone in the air, hanging by the Power of Jehovah, who strengthened me to preserve my life at this critical juncture” (133). Dorothy dangled between heaven and earth “until they looked behind them, and returned to relieve me out of my misery and great surprise, that they had brought me into by their folly” (132-33). Unable to speak as the men assisted her into the boat, she bounded to the side and huddled there silently until the small boat reached shore. Once there, she beat a hasty retreat to her assigned lodgings where she “stripped off all my wet clothes, and went to bed, having such a violent pain in my left side, that I was apprehensive of an inflammation, from the consequence of the great exertion I made to keep myself as high out of the water as I could” (133). Undaunted for long, however, Dorothy girded herself with faith in the Lord’s deliverance and answered a summons to minister to a dying, alcoholic woman.
While nineteenth-century female evangelists never “challenged the basic inequality between the sexes by fighting for women’s full legal, political or economic equality to men,” these stalwart women frequently disputed powerful social and religious conventions. \(^{173}\) Even at the expense of their reputations, safety, homeland and future dreams of home, marriage and motherhood, they grappled for a separate religious identity as chosen spokespersons of God. They rose above the limitations of the “women’s sphere” ideology to capitalize on a contested birthright of spiritual inheritance. They fought religious dissension in the form of irate male clerics, incensed at the idea of “disorderly” women wrinkling the religious, patriarchal fabric that the andocentric language of the Bible wove so tightly. They struggled against societal calumny which objected on the grounds of their radicalism, troubling perhaps because it was viewed as a sign of men’s declining authority in the world and family. They struggled against natural obstacles such as the sea, land and disease.

By rights, they should have secured for themselves a wedge of religious history as deeply entrenched as male preachers of their era. It is acutely ironic—indeed, tragic—that these evangelizing women were effectively written out of denominational histories during the late 1830s and ‘40s. As Brekus observed, “Few evangelicals wanted to preserve the memory of the female visionaries who had once made the campgrounds ring with the sound of their impassioned hallelujahs.”\(^{174}\)

Two centuries later, their voices are finally being heard.
I cried then aloud, God’s mercy to find,
With tears I was bow’d, that Jesus would bind
Old satan, the dragon, and cast him straight out;
My mission to Pagan, was thus brought about.

I wrestled all night, like Jacob of old,
My spirit in fight, is always made bold;
Then learnt Abba, Father, my Lord, and my God;
Who sent forth the Saviour, to heal with His Blood.

Astonish’d, I gaz’d, on the high Mount of God,
When I also rais’d, and kissed the rod;
His blood then was streaming, to my naked eye,
Which oft had been teeming for sinners that die.

With joy I cried out, “My Lord, and my god, ’
My pulse beat about, and breathed at His Word;
His arms stood wide open, for sinners like me,
This word I heard spoken, “Christ died for thee!”

Forsaking my all, I traverse abroad,
Poor heathens to call, and walk the straight road;
That pilgrims may see me, as I do pass by,
And mourners behold Thee, my God, reigning high.

— “A Hymn from My Nativity” (Address 14-15)

Chapter 2

Dorothy & A Legacy of Evangelism

Beginning in her thirtieth year, Dorothy took a drastic step, one with life-altering ramifications and which would both fulfill and nearly deplete her spiritual stores: she waded into the non-denominational waters of independent evangelism. Her liberation
from any one religious tradition came as a result of her spiritual conversion and its profound effect on her personality, ideology, and life course. Decidedly a spinster, with no home or livelihood of her own, and clearly dissatisfied with the ritualism of her childhood religion, Dorothy experienced late in adulthood a spiritual revolution that irrevocably revised her life. In that year, she left Methodism and aspired to Quakerism. The objective of membership in the Society of Friends would become a fruitless, yet lifelong goal for Dorothy. Throughout her evangelical career, Dorothy felt torn between Methodism and Quakerism, and this ambivalence and resultant tension gave rise to her struggles among both sects and would at once complicate and enhance her preaching.

Yet, even while official membership in the Society of Friends proved an insurmountable hurdle for Dorothy, the Quakers supplied her with a valuable tool: a writing model which would furnish the literary framework for her many publications and would afford Dorothy a new mechanism for reaching an untapped constituency. Within the spiritual and literary structure provided by the Friends, Dorothy would explore her spirituality and evangelism in ways she had never before experienced.

An examination of Dorothy’s use of the Quaker writing model will accomplish a dual purpose. Not only will it demonstrate the vast literary heritage that Dorothy built upon, but it will also illuminate the core of Dorothy’s unending effort to align herself with the Society of Friends. Her works echo the spiritual and reformist development that characterized the writings of earlier, female Quaker preachers. The strong thematic connection between her works and the narratives of female Friends who traveled as ministers attests to the extent that Dorothy absorbed Quaker ideology into her life. This can be especially detected in her first publication, The Extraordinary Conversion and
Religious Experience of Dorothy Ripley (1810, 1817) Like other female “Publishers of Truth,” Dorothy experienced an inward impulse that both initiated her ministry and resulted in a work which detailed what Dorothy herself described as “this holy calling” (Letters iiiv). Further, such an assessment will expose to the reader how deeply Quaker tenets saturated her life. Rooted in the love, goodness, and power of God, Dorothy’s belief evolved into a total, almost childlike, reliance on and submission to His will. Through vicarious participation in her spiritual maturation, the reader can determine how Dorothy increasingly reflected the Quaker belief in divine providence, the inner life of the spirit, visionary revelation, and a profound sense of security in God’s love and provision.

First, as with most Quaker female preachers, Dorothy felt the need to publish an autobiographical account of her spiritual development, evangelical efforts, and humanitarian missions. Interestingly, for Dorothy, none of those endeavors took precedence over the others, as she illustrated in the titling of her first publication. On the title page, Dorothy named her work The Extraordinary Conversion and Religious Experience of Dorothy Ripley; but on the interior, first page of the body, the emphasis is reversed, reading The Religious Experience and Conversion of Dorothy Ripley [italics are mine]. For Dorothy the evangelist, spiritualist, and philanthropist, these two elements of a godly person were intimately and irrevocably entwined.

Still, Dorothy allowed little ambiguity. In the opening lines of Extraordinary Conversion, Dorothy frankly stated her purpose: “I have believed it to be my duty for some time to testify to the world what God hath done for my soul” with the intention “to glorify my heavenly Father and excite mankind to seek after a Free and Full Salvation”
To that end, she adopted the Quaker tradition of maintaining a journal, to which she added intermittently for more than twenty years and which comprised the bulk of her spiritual autobiographies.

With equal frankness, Dorothy early on announced her inability to capture in words what she felt in her soul. Writing became a challenge that she feared as much as she cherished: “How then shall I begin to rehearse his goodness with my pen, that others may obey the Light, and not hesitate respecting the difficulties in the way . . .” (21). In her preface, Dorothy exercised the apologia that historian Sharon M. Harris noted distinguished so many writings of early American women. Dorothy characteristically expressed her contriteness “for the hubris of writing and publishing” even while she defended and justified her actions:

I have been dubious respecting publishing any thing while I was young, lest I should advance any false ideas to mankind that might tend to embarrass, instead of exalting Jesus, the Redeemer of the world. But as I am weaned from all visible objects, and fixed to worship the Lord my God in spirit and in truth, I hope the Holy Ghost will direct my pen by its wisdom, so that good may be done thereby, to honour the King of Kings.

Dorothy’s efforts fall in line with Harris’ estimation that women writers used the preface to “locate themselves in relation to their literary endeavors and assert their right to a public presence.” Hers was a need to break the silence, the manifestation of which became a transforming force in her life.
Dorothy’s *Extraordinary Conversion* sold in 1810 for one dollar per copy. The “profits after expences of printing etc. are discharged,” she later announced in *The New York Commercial Advertiser*, “will be applied to charitable uses which will afford an opportunity to the humane and benevolent not only to furnish themselves with a pious and valuable work but also of alleviating in some measure the distresses of the poor and indigent.”\textsuperscript{177} A later, equally important work, *The Bank of Faith and Works United*, sold for six dollars and proceeds funded an evangelical mission to the Southern states.\textsuperscript{178} Well into the mode of publication, Dorothy published in 1807 a collection of letters from the various populations she had encountered throughout her early ministry. The proceeds financed a third missionary journey to the United States:

> If my health permit, I purpose to return again, and hope to see a further proof of David’s prophetic declaration, respecting Ethiopia’s children, which induces me at this time to bring forward the Testimonials I now present to the impartial readers, who may be disposed to purchase this small work, which I commit to their hands, just as I received it, unadorned with the artifice of what is called eloquence; admiring the simplicity of nature. The profits which may accrue from this publication, are their due: and I hope to deal them out, as a just steward, to the hungry and thirsty souls who are longing to be brought to the knowledge of the unchangeable Truth, which is declared by the Apostle Paul, “God has concluded all in unbelief, that he might have mercy on all. (Letters iv-v)

Secondly, whether a “birthright” Quaker or a convert to the faith, most of the female Friends who preached and published had been religiously oriented as children.
Early Quaker women such as Catharine Payton, Barbara Bevan, and Elizabeth Ashbridge wrote about their early interaction with God and religious teachings. Likewise, Dorothy began her conversion narrative by cataloguing her own strong religious foundation. She “was born of religious parents” and from the age of three “was convinced of sin” (EC 1). One morning, playing on the floor of her parents’ home and with her toys scattered around her, three-year-old Dorothy heard a voice from heaven instructing her that “it is a sin to play” (1). Heeding the voice, she fell on her “infant knees” and begged the Lord to teach her to pray (1). Dorothy wrote of the immediacy of the enlightenment: “[My] spiritual eyes were opened, and my heart melted, and tears flowed from my eyes copiously for my lost condition” (1).

Raised on high-octane Methodism, Dorothy learned of the power of God at an early age. The Ripley household rang with song and, at least three times a day, the whole family and the household servants sank to their knees in prayer. While still in the womb, Dorothy was offered to God “to be a preacher of righteousness,” and her parents “trained me up in the fear of the Lord for his kingdom” (8). She watched her father’s virtuous example that “was the most like Jesus Christ’s that ever I saw” and early on declared her desire to follow in his itinerant preacher footsteps (8).

However, a common pattern in female Quaker writings is the interference and destructive nature of secular pleasures followed by a dissatisfaction with their childhood religion. According to Quaker historian Rebecca Larson, “in adolescence, the world’s vanities and amusements obscured earlier spiritual inclination.” Usually, a crisis precipitated a more enduring spiritual commitment. Nourished by a hearty diet of familial love, Dorothy grew to maturity with an enthusiastic respect for the spiritual. This,
Dorothy related, established her as a prime target for the devil’s machinations. As Dorothy described it, “From this period my warfare commenced” (1). In her descriptions of inward struggle, desiring to imitate her father’s strict religious rites and yet craving to lead the carefree life of a small child, Dorothy revealed the confusion of a youngster laboring with adult questions concerning good versus evil and one’s place in the world. Not surprisingly, Dorothy experienced dreadful apprehensions and fears that she would “trifle away” childhood and thus sacrifice eternal life with God. She depicted a girl dangerously attracted to the very things which repelled her, mystifying her so much that by the time she reaches the age of twelve she sank into severe depression. Dorothy described bouts of sickness and listlessness, including a four-month-long confinement in which she refused conversation, physical interaction, and all but the smallest amounts of food and drink (3). By age 15, her spells of melancholy escalated to the point that she considered suicide by throwing herself from the seaside cliff. “Yea, I believe that every baptism which a child could endure, fell to my lot,” Dorothy later summarized (3). Complicating this inner turmoil was discontent with the Methodism that figured so prominently in her young life. Dorothy later confessed how she had longed for a religious alternative to meet her spiritual needs:

When I was a child, I often marked how little progress was made in the truth by professing Christians, and concluded the greatest part of them were living under the law; and not under grace, although they professed to believe in our Lord Jesus, the Redeemer of the world. Such a religion would not satisfy my mind, expanded with the enlightened beams of
divine glory; no, my soul was ever desiring to be further instructed by the
Author of eternal life . . . . (EC 22)

Typically in Quaker writings, the dread of future divine reprimand, the fear of
post-death experience, and the desire to secure salvation served as catalysts for women’s
energized spiritual exploration. Likewise, Dorothy fretted that she “was as one accursed,
who believed not in God at all; or else that he had made me a vessel of dishonour, to
endure his wrath for ever” (3). Escapism took shape in the innocent wish to become one
of God’s lesser creatures, a bird or beast, “thinking the feathered creation, or dumb
animals, were well off, having no soul or eternal substance in them, neither being capable
of grieving their Maker” (3). Like the misdirected seed in Jesus’ parable, Dorothy’s faith
perished because of its rootlessness.181 Choked by the cares of the world, Dorothy’s
fledgling spiritual belief underwent many fits and starts.

Finally, a forewarning of spiritual crisis came late one night in 1797. A
supernatural command instructed her to “Arise and preach salvation unto fallen man
beyond the seas, where poor Ethiopia’s chains of darkness shall fall off, and Jacob’s
scattered seed shall again be gathered” (16).182 Terrified, “in midnight’s awful silence, I
then with ghastly awe trembled with fear” and remained huddled under the bedcovers
until the morning light, thankful to have survived the nightmarish scene (16). With the
emotionally stabilizing light of the dawn, Dorothy could rationalize away the fear of the
previous night, ignore His commands, maintain her unproductive lifestyle, and “dare not
to utter the secrets of Jehovah” (17). Her experience paralleling that of the biblical Jonah
before he decided to escape by way of Joppa and Tarshish, Dorothy hid from her Lord,
preserving her “silence profound” for seven years and grappling between the desires of both the body and soul, uncertain which would win the battle royal (16-17).183

Later, Dorothy characterized the troubles that marked her young adult life as divine punishments for her obstinacy in clinging to a sinful life rather than submitting to God’s will. Much like the Puritan Anne Bradstreet did two hundred years before her, Dorothy attached supernatural significance to every element of her life. As Adrienne Rich noted about Bradstreet, “. . . No event [was] so trivial that it could not speak a divine message, no disappointment so heavy that it could not serve as a ‘correction,’ a disguised blessing.”184 So too did Dorothy correlate the hardships of her life to divine chastisements. During the seven years before Dorothy came to terms with her divinely inspired mission, she withstood numerous sufferings which she understood to be trials to break her stubborn will. She depicted herself as a heart in rebellion.

Foremost among these sufferings was the frequent visitation of death to the Ripley home. Dorothy lost her sister Mary to consumption and another sister Ann to “boreas,”185 their passing bringing the family death toll to five. These latest deaths renewed the pain Dorothy bore at the loss of her father and two brothers, and she agonized at the demise of two young, lovely women, one engaged to be married. As her family slowly dwindled, Dorothy suffered recurrent nightmares that she, too, would be “snatched away from earth, leaving my work undone” (16). At night, she trembled with fear and shame, bargaining with God for fifteen more years of life, long enough to summon sufficient courage to go to America and minister to “poor Ethiopia” (16-17).

In addition to these tests of mortality, Dorothy perceived God’s correction in the destruction of the family home. A massive landslide robbed the remaining Ripleys of
their sanctuary and all their belongings, casting them on the charitable mercies of their neighbors. The Ripley house stood on Henrietta Street which, despite being “far fuller of holes than at Creation,” was considered a desirable residential area. About one hundred and thirty houses dotted the lane.

![Image of Henrietta Street](image)

**Figure 2.1 “Henrietta Street.”** The remaining segment of the narrow Henrietta Street leads into downtown Whitby while on the hillside directly above stands Whitby Abbey.

Edging the east cliff, the street perilously clung to a promontory susceptible to suddenly breaking off and sliding into the ocean. Beginning in 1785, several falls of overhanging cliff along Henrietta Street had given warning of the thoroughfare’s dangerous condition, portions of the cliff collapsing into the sea. At around midnight on
Christmas Eve, 1787, twenty-one-year-old Dorothy, her widowed mother, and her younger sisters fell victim to such a catastrophic landslide. In her journal, Dorothy recalled that horrific moment “when a shock in the ground . . . rent the foundation of the houses where we lived” (15). The straith had given way, and with a tremendous crash, masses of earth from the hill above overwhelmed part of Henrietta Street. Great masses of stones from the ill-fated homes along the thoroughfare joined in a severe landslide as it all slid into the sea. One hundred ninety-five families lost all the property they owned. Neighbors took in the homeless, including the remaining Ripleys.

Figure 2.2 “A View of Henrietta Street.” This view of Henrietta Street from the shoreline reveals the jagged remains of the cliff, illustrating the catastrophic damage caused 220 years ago. Metal wiring now crisscrosses the cliffside to inhibit rockslides.
Compounding the heartache of Dorothy and the Ripley women was the destruction of the Methodist memorial built by the Ripley patriarch before his death. William Ripley had faithfully and laboriously sponsored the building of the octagonal-shaped Wesleyan Chapel, a seven-story structure aptly nicknamed “Ebenezer” (meaning, stone of help). Although the chapel itself did not collapse, it was rendered utterly unsafe for further use. The might of the elements had smashed the manmade structures with laughable ease.

Figure 2.3 “Dead End.” This view of Henrietta Street shows the abrupt end of the lane. The cobblestone street had continued another 200 yards or so before it was washed into the sea. Today, posted signs caution visitors of the possibility of falling rocks.
Although devastated at the family’s misfortune, Dorothy relied on the same faith that buoyed her following the deaths of her family members: “[The landslide] blasted all my hopes on earth, so that I had the enjoyment of God to comfort me, which, if I had not sought for in early life, I should have been miserably poor” (15). Dorothy took solace in the proverbial stance of Job that what the Lord gave, the Lord could take away. She “encouraged herself” with “an eternal foundation, which would bear the shock of nature,

Figure 2.4 “The North Sea.” This view of the North Sea would have been visible from Wesley Chapel. The rooftops in the foreground are those which still line Henrietta Street. Whitby harbor is today protected by entrance piers. The arms of the piers (the left side pictured here) extend toward the sea in a northerly direction. Although the entrance remains exposed to strong winds from the northwest and the north-to-northeast, the retaining walls shelter the beach from winds and swells from other directions.
when the mountains shall melt as wax before the fire, and all earthly things shall pass away” (15).

Dorothy also suffered chronic sickness, physical debilitations, and low energy levels which she attributed to her disobedience to God’s will. Shortly after the landslide, Dorothy “was seized with a consumption, and brought night to the point of death by too great fatigue, having sat up with my dear sister Mary every other night, for some weeks previous to her departure” (15-16). In her sister, Dorothy saw a worthy model, for she interpreted the young woman’s death as her capitulation to God’s design: “Her resignation to the divine will, was a bright example to me during her tedious affliction: for she submitted cheerfully to be cut down with the scythe of death; knowing her spirit would bloom perpetually with God, in a quiet habitation, where no disease shall ever enter” (16). The admiration she expressed for her sister, however, failed to manifest a like willingness in her, for her “disobedience” continued and “enfeebled nature was loath to leave the comforts she possessed and resisted the sacred influences of the Holy Ghost” (18). The result was a case of lockjaw, and Dorothy felt that God’s patience was running out. Dorothy’s narrative skirts the brutal effects of having one’s jaw locked: the food deprivation that necessarily comes with the inability to open one’s mouth, the loss of speech, the possibility of death. Instead, Dorothy emphasized that the disease was divinely inspired, the effects supernatural. The disease struck her specifically in order to make her “a fool in the eyes of all the world, that she might make me wise to win souls” (18).

Like so many of the Quaker women recording their spiritual evolution, Dorothy endured a near-death experience that ushered in a desire for a more secure, enduring
spirituality. Her recovery from lockjaw came only at the relinquishment of her former ways, and she described her recovery in new, mystic terms:

When tired nature, weary of resisting, saw herself thus conquered by sovereign power, she fell a victim to the sword of the spirit, and was slain, and all her borrowed jewels, and gems of highest value, perished with her in the field of battle. Happy for those who understand this mystery; yet happier far are they who willingly resign, and let the great master-builder lay the foundation of a new heaven and a new earth in them. I endured the day of the Lord, which burned as an oven, and the fire consumed the dross, the stubble, and the whole of the former heaven and earth. Then a glorious circle of pure light stood before me, and a voice commanded me to fall in adoration before it, testifying it was the “Eternal Spirit, which should lead and guide me into all truth.”195 No more was I to pray for the spirit on my bended knees, those long hours; but turn my eyes within, and worship in the temple of my soul the Living God, who should dwell in it for ever [sic]. Astonished at this new salvation, I knew not what to think! I durst not mention to any mortal the wonderful condescension of my God! who deigned to instruct me by his marvellous power, how to worship him aright. In silence, now I saw a Jehovah by his Spirit, lay a new foundation of righteousness, and joy, and peace, which was my new heaven, where the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, were to dwell in perfect unison for ever (18).

Dorothy’s shift in narrative perspective in the above passage exposes a revealing self-perception and a literary technique that, in connection with the dramatically exciting
narrative, makes the tale of her conversion easily accessible to the reader. In a linguistic fragmentation of the self, Dorothy used the morphemes “she” and “I” as mighty warriors in an epic battle for supremacy of the soul. The “she” functioned as a roughly etched enemy, the component of herself that cherished the “jewels” and “gems” of the secular world; the protagonist “I” of her tale, the new spiritual self, could survive only with the complete eradication of the adversarial third-person. With divine aid, the “I” emerged heroically triumphant, felling the antagonist with the sword of enduring, unshakable faith. Like the mythological Phoenix, her reimaged soul arose from the ashes and destruction of a fiery conflagration of spiritual turmoil. Hers was a freshly forged, devout identity, one with a full consciousness of its divinely inspired mission in life: to evangelize.

More significantly, Dorothy’s spiritual rebirth echoes the secret to salvation revealed in the Gospel story of Jesus and Nicodemus. A “learned and intelligent believer,” Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling Jewish council, and a highly respected, influential, and wealthy member of the Jewish community. “A learned and intelligent believer,” Nicodemus was nevertheless “timid and not easily initiated into the mysteries of the new faith.” When Nicodemus sought out Jesus under cover of night, Christ enlightened him about the path to salvation:

Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be
surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”197

Jesus emphasized the inadequacy of mere intellectual belief and proclaimed that only a spiritual regeneration, or being “born again,” could mean salvation. The re-birth was not outward but inward, not of the body but of the soul. Jesus used the illustration of the wind to demonstrate that, just as no one knew the point of origin or destination of the wind and yet all who came under its influence felt its effects, so too was the Holy Spirit felt by the spiritually reborn. Similarly, Dorothy made use of metaphor to convey to her readers her own spiritual “rebirth” and its effects on her life, and she even used the phrase “born again” at the conclusion of her Extraordinary Conversion: “And am I born again to behold the glory of the Father dwelling in Jesus Christ his beloved Son?—Yea, verily . . .” (168).

Additionally, Dorothy’s self-objectification not only defined her conflicted and then reborn spiritual energy, but also presented the awakening in a way more accessible to her readers. Imaging her interior revolution in an epic battle between the divided parts of herself would have resonated to Dorothy’s readership, many of whom would well remember the battle days in the War of Independence. Thus, in a visible and corporeal sense she represented the invisibility and elusiveness of spirituality. She lent sight and sound to the indistinct uncertainties, religious doubts, and sectarian eccentricity which instigated such consciousness and, in her symbolic reterritorialization, the falling away of all those spiritual fears. She better illustrated to her unconverted readership her own change of attitude from apathy to acceptance, from disbelief to faith, from self-
antagonism to enthusiastic purpose, while at the same time offering them a pattern that they could utilize to envision their own spiritual rebirth.

In this account of regeneration, Dorothy made use of the final stage of the conversion experience common to Quaker writings. She entered into a newfound, enduring covenant with God: “... The Spirit assured me I should dwell for ever in bliss unutterable ... which filled me with rapturous joy, and surprising awe, so that I was lost in wonder, love and praise” (19). During the following sixteen months, Dorothy began preparations for a new spiritual quest. Assiduously studying the Gospels and Barclay’s Apology, Dorothy equipped herself for a relinquishment of her childhood creed and the full embrace of a fresh religious tradition. As Dorothy later recorded, “... He declared that my former heaven and earth must pass away, and all things then be made anew; that is, my past religious experience must be set aside ...” (17).

Thus, a new Quaker convert was born.

**Dorothy & The Quakers**

While the Society of Friends became an insurmountable hurdle in many respects, the Friends also fortified the penniless novice minister, shaping Dorothy into a religious force with far-reaching service. Quaker benevolence, funding, and friendship enabled Dorothy to evolve into what she truly sought to be: a holy woman of God.

The manifestation of Dorothy’s spiritual conversion could be seen in her adoption of Quaker doctrine. Drawn to the divine directive to “turn my eyes within and worship in the temple of my soul,” Dorothy cast off the externally focused dogma of Methodism in exchange for inward-born inspiration of Quakerism (18). Theologically, Quakers of
eighteenth-century England subscribed to the principle of the “Inner Light,” which maintained that one must wait in quietness for communion with God; hence, Quakers valued the purity of silence over what historian Catherine A. Brekus described as the “carnality” of speaking. Meetings were based on silent worship, versus the scripted sermons of mainstream religions of the day, for it was “only in moments of silence that God’s still, small voice could be heard within.” Although verbal religious communication remained important to early Quakers, it had to be initiated by the Holy Spirit, a result of direct, divine-to-human intercourse. Historian Rufus M. Jones characterized this silent worship as a brand of Quietism, “an intense and glowing faith in the direct invasion of God into the sphere of human personality.” As Quaker Quietism gained momentum, meetings converted to extended periods of silence, vocal contribution evolving into human intrusion into the movement of the Holy Spirit. Some early travelers to America recorded sitting through numerous, consecutive meetings with complete absence of verbal communication. “Hence all Quakers, whether male or female, hesitated to speak during meetings unless they were certain they genuinely had been called,” stated historian Richard Bauman, “and even then, they sometimes broke silence with only a few sentences or a single word.”

Like many other non-Quaker converts, a dramatic change in appearance, behavior, and attitude followed Dorothy’s conversion experience. Dorothy began to dress plainly in the style of the Quakers, eliminating any adornments, jewelry, or frills from her garb. Previous to her spiritual transformation, Dorothy would have donned the typical conservative, yet colorful clothing of the female working class in Yorkshire in the late eighteenth century. While younger women in 1800 strove to attain the slim-line look with
a higher classical waist, the working woman’s costume consisted of a more practice combination of a cap or kerchief topped by a round felt hat, an apron, oversleeves and petticoats, a bed-gown jacket in bright colors, skirt, and brown stockings. Worn by all country women, the apron typically was dyed to shades and patterns particular to an area: while Yorkshire aprons were either white or dark blue, Lancashire sported checked and Wales blue. By contrast, the Quakers emphasized simplicity and propriety in their choice of style, fabric, and color. For the Quakers, group loyalty had led to a demand for uniformity, and, although there seemed to be no standardized garment in the sense of a religious habit, Quaker dress did, indeed, become something of a uniform. The Quakers adhered to a general style of attire that emphasized minimalism. The outer Quaker dress, then, served as a sign of her inward spiritual revolution.

In addition to the distinctive Quaker bonnet, Dorothy adopted the plain language of the Friends, including use of the characteristic “thee and thou” instead of “you” and the application of numbers in lieu of days of the week and calendar months. She spent full days reading Barclay’s Apology. She believed it her “duty to choose to live upon bread and water” only (20). She exorcised all joviality from her life, having been “gay before, profuse in compliments” (20). Dorothy evidently held fast to the belief that a somber appearance indicated piety.

More than just a modification in habit, dress, and personality, Dorothy fostered a comprehensive makeover that altered her perception of familial and social constructs and responsibilities. Like the fictional “Christian” in John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress, Dorothy’s newfound faith required her to turn her back on her community, relatives, and former belief system. This faith, and its concomitant evangelical mission, were radically
individual and would remain so throughout her life. She shrugged off familial accountability and shunned intimate, emotional connections that would in any way qualify her responsibility for her own soul or for exerting her greatest efforts at saving the souls of the spiritually lost. For Bunyan’s Christian, the spiritual journey began with his running away from the most immediate human contacts:

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now he had not run far from his own door when his wife and children, perceiving it, began to cry after him to return; but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life! life! eternal life! So he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain.210

Similarly, in her newly awakened faith and duty, Dorothy believed she must shut out the distractions of the world, in the form of her loved ones. She ended “a long acquaintance with a valuable young man in Portsmouth” and “free[d] my affections from him, which was hard for us both to pass through; but the Lord would not accept of a divided heart from me, therefore I freely parted with an object which was worthy of my highest esteem next to God” (38). The residents of Whitby who had known Dorothy and her family for thirty years could only view Dorothy’s abrupt change in lifestyle as drastic, perhaps even corrosive to her emotional well-being. For Dorothy, the active carrying out of her faith depended upon excising any but spiritual responsibilities; anything less could prove dangerous to her mission. If the price, then, of turning her back on her neighbors was that they ridiculed the newly born pilgrim, then that was the price she was prepared to pay.

And the cost became dear, indeed. Inevitably, her dramatic transformation gave rise to “many evil reports . . . basely spread abroad concerning me” (20). She dismissed
the gossip as an inescapable consequence of “a character so singular as mine has been from a child” (20). Those who “despise the sacred scriptures must perforce treat with contempt the redemption of man” (20).

Unfortunately, the Quakers reacted just as poorly to her physical transformation as did the Whitby community. After assuming the outer Quaker dress, Dorothy “sat down among the friends,” but she confessed in her spiritual autobiography that the Quakers “knew not what to think of me; for there were none in that part who had received the Lord Jesus Christ after this manner” (20). Her characteristic zeal bordered on radicalism, and in hindsight, Dorothy realized that she “made too mean appearance for them” (20).

Understandably, the Quakers must have harbored suspicion about the conversion of the daughter of Whitby’s first Methodist minister and a close friend of John Wesley. The name Ripley meant Methodism in the seaside town of Whitby; her father’s fiery, well-structured sermons and Sunday services were anathema to the individualistic connection to the Spirit that Quakers touted in their meetings. For a Methodist daughter to enter their midst, proclaiming her Quaker conversion to all via her altered dress, speech, and mannerisms must have been suspect. After all, the Ripleys were well-known for their religious fervor\textsuperscript{211} and, some could claim, flamboyance. When, for example, William Ripley laid the head-stone for the first large Methodist meetinghouse in Whitby, he brought “forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings; crying, grace, grace unto it” (9). In addition to his Sunday sermons from the Whitby pulpit and his Methodist circuit preaching, the Ripley patriarch led his wife, children, servants, and guests in ritualistic reading of the Bible: “I never remember one day in my life in which my Father omitted calling his children and servants together to worship in Spirit the Creator of the
Universe, if at home. Morning, noon, and evening, were set times for our devotion...”

(9) Wesley himself had called the Ripley patriarch a “burning and shining light.”

Public demonstrations of religious vehemence such as Dorothy displayed ran
counter to eighteenth-century Quakerism, which emphasized that no theologically trained
priest or outward rite was necessary to establish a spiritual union between the soul and
God. Instead, the inner consciousness from which Quakers gleaned understanding,
guidance, and divine truth precluded such open exhibition of conviction.

Despite Friends’ misgivings, Dorothy devotedly attended Quaker meetings in
Whitby for two years, never missing a service and willingly sacrificing elements of her
previous life. She bemoaned only her lack of foresight in not joining the Society years
before: “Had I been obedient to the Spirit’s command, I should have sat down with this
people in my twenty-second year; but alas! The weakness of the flesh refused to carry the
cross” (20). This, she later mused, was the source of her troubles, causing the “Lord [to]
strip me according to his own will and pleasure” (20).

After this two-year stint, Dorothy submitted her first bid for membership to the
Society. “Thinking it not proper,” however, the local membership rejected her request
(21). Rather than being daunted, Dorothy renewed her efforts, dedicating two additional
years to perfect attendance at meetings before resubmitting her petition (20).

The minutes from the various Pickering monthly meetings, housed at the
University of Hull’s Yorkshire Quaker Heritage Project archives, shed greater light on
Dorothy’s application to the Society. The preparative meeting in Whitby was the first to
hear Dorothy’s appeals for membership. From the preparative meeting, the request
advanced up the hierarchal ladder to the monthly meeting at Pickering. Dorothy’s name
first appears in the minutes of the men’s Pickering Monthly Meeting, dated July 1799. Because a male had to speak to the committee on Dorothy’s behalf, close friend and prominent minister George Sanders brought her bid before the Quaker men gathered together that night; a single statement noted Dorothy’s endeavor: “George Sanders reports that Dorothy Ripley requests to be admitted a member of our Religious Society.” Such a simple notation, however, cannot reveal the effort put forward to garner support for Dorothy’s application. Various minutes showed that Sanders lobbied extensively on Dorothy’s behalf, as did his wife Jane, Mary Linskill, and other powerful, staunch supporters. As was usual in a case of conversion to Quakerism, the men’s group appointed a committee to visit Dorothy to determine her suitability for joining the Quakers. Included as the representative from Whitby was Dorothy’s good friend Jane Sanders. Yet, Dorothy’s name did not reappear in meeting minutes for any Quaker group until the eleventh month of that same year. This time, the Pickering Women’s Monthly Meeting recorded Dorothy’s progress: “One of the fds [friends] appointed reports a visit has been paid to Dorothy Ripley wch [which] was to a good degree of satisfaction [sic] her case to remain solidly under the care of Frds [Friends].” A similar report appeared about four months later, yet the issue seemed to have quietly slid into oblivion, as no further action or discussion was recorded.

In other words, the verdict was no.

With no forthcoming offer of membership, the bewildered Dorothy required an explanation. Seemingly at a loss for a reason, the members simply responded, “We cannot tell” (21). Another attempt upon her return to England in 1804 would lead to the same disappointing results. As Suzanne Keen noted, “Quakers’ eschewing of sacraments
(including baptism), their silent worship, and their extremely close-knit, well-to-do communities made conversion to membership in the Society of Friends as unusual as it was difficult to achieve."

Quaker historians indicate a possible motivation for the Society’s refusal. Just as she freely cited in her narrative the aspiration to minister to “poor Ethiopia’s children,” most likely she made little secret of it in her hometown, among friends and family. Such an obvious agenda may have led some Quakers to doubt Dorothy’s sincerity in converting to their faith. As one historian observed, “Friends distrusted her motive and her prudence,” and they may have “become aware of her proposed travels and that she would expect a certificate if a member.”

A “certificate” conferred upon an individual full ministerial rights in the eyes of the Society. In the eighteenth-century, Quakers conveyed special recognition to a male or female Friend who possessed a “gift” in the ministry. This exceptional minister was one called by the Holy Spirit to be a mouthpiece to convey His divine messages. Since frequent preaching by one individual was not permitted without formal recognition by the Society, ministers had to obtain in written form an official sanction granted by the minister’s monthly meeting. Had she attained a certificate, she would have been assured of comprehensive ministerial rights within the confines specified in the written document. More importantly, the certificate would have heralded to all Quakers the authenticity and indisputability of Dorothy’s ministry.

In addition, travel across the Atlantic, while common among the Quakers since the 1600s, remained a major undertaking at the turn of the nineteenth century. Aware of the hardships and financial burdens associated with transatlantic travel, the Quaker
meetings often took years to bestow approval for ministerial travel. According to Larson, the process of gaining approval for religious travel resembled the process of gaining recognition as a minister. The applicant for travel initiated a “concern” before the monthly meeting. The concern’s effect on the fellowship of Friends became the litmus test for its legitimacy. The meeting reviewed the minister’s “conversation” (his demeanor and manner), the settlement of familial and business affairs, and the reaction by the Quaker community to the minister’s testimony. After due consideration, the meeting either advised a waiting period to determine if the “exercise” increased, disapproved of it, or issued a certificate of unity with the “concern.” When approval was granted, the minister could travel accordance with the certificate.

Clearly, for Dorothy’s purposes, the practical elements of Quakerism enhanced its spiritual fundamentals. In the closing years of the eighteenth century, Quakerism became more outward looking in scope, with an amplified sense of social concern and evangelism. Perhaps these later Quaker objectives spurred Dorothy’s attraction to the sect in her thirtieth year. Her heavenly call to preach to the enslaved in America could have been best addressed by the three-pronged promise of the Quakers: recognition of the woman’s right to preach, escalation in evangelical ministry, and intensification in philanthropic activity. While Dorothy’s writings show a deep, abiding sense of allegiance to Quaker precepts, she also must have been attracted to the Quakers’ sense of mission.

Ironically, one historian detected in the Friends’ rejection of Dorothy a general dismissal of this very aspect. Instead of rebuffing Dorothy individually, the Friends instead vetoed her humanitarian aims, which they interpreted as beyond the scope of Friends’ responsibility. That, coupled with her eccentric, otherworldly language, sealed
her doom: “Reading between the lines of her self-written narrative, we can realise something of the hesitation Friends had to admit her into membership. The nature of her ‘concern’—her ‘travail in spirit for the African race and mourning for the recovery of the Jews and the restoration of the ten tribes who were led away captives of Shalmaneser, King of Assyria,’ would not appeal to Friends generally—friends living at a period prior to that when world needs began to make an appeal.”

Others put it in simpler terms; in her obituary published in The Lynchburg Virginian, the writer remarked, “A Methodist for some time, she later tried to join the Society of Friends but failed because she travelled too much.”

Certainly a certificate to identify her as a “Public Friend” would have opened doors that remained firmly shut against Dorothy. Because the travel certificate officially documented Friends’ conviction in the legitimacy of a “concern,” it situated itinerant ministers to receive immediate acquaintance and aid from the Friends of any region. By necessity, the Quakers depended upon the certificates to establish the traveling minister’s veracity, and without it, the would-be preacher came under suspicion: “A certificate of the meeting’s unity with the religious journey protected Quakers from having their hospitality imposed upon by vagabonds and swindlers, and preserved the Society’s reputation as well.” Without a certificate to entitle her to Quaker hospitality, companionship, and funding, Dorothy had to depend on assistance sporadically rendered from benevolent Friends unmindful of her lack of credentials or sponsorship.

Records show that Dorothy once again attempted admission into the Society late in 1803 following her return from her first missionary journey. By the turn of the new year, the case was still “continued” in the monthly meeting at Pickering. Toward the
end of February, Dorothy’s friend George Sanders along with Whitby stalwarts David Priestman and Joseph Priestman were appointed to accompany “some women Fds. [friends] from their meeting to pay a visit to Dorothy Ripley and report.”226 While the minutes reflect that this requisite visit ended “to some satisfaction,” the Friends ultimately decided to again reject her appeal for membership.227 Ironically, it was at Whitby—where her membership odyssey first began—that the Friends decided her case. The minutes reveal an unemotional, final denial:

Acct [Account] is given that a visit has been paid to Dorothy Ripley agreeable to appointment which was to some satisfaction. —it is now agreed that her case for the present [be] refus’d [refused] —George Sanders and David Priestman are appointed to inform her thereof—.228

Dorothy internalized this third rejection to a greater depth than the original. She wrote, “I verily believed none of the committee had a view of my tried situation” (Bank 8). Magnifying her dejection was a tantalizing inducement from the visiting committee of Friends: “[They] signified [that] if I would centre down to the Light, which might prove death to all performances, I then should experience unity with them” (8). In other words, membership was contingent on her agreement to halt all public testimony and to focus instead on an individualistic spiritual communion. Dorothy’s acceptance could only come at the expense of her ministry: cessation of preaching and suspension of all missionary travel. What the ultimatum did accomplish was to reinforce Dorothy’s conviction that her call to ministry was divinely inspired rather than the mere promptings of a misguided zeal: “But those were to prove [to] me, and in the Master’s Hand, instruments of
refinement: therefore, am I made subject to His divine pleasure” (8). For Dorothy, her evangelizing mission was one of destiny: “Wo! be to me if I preach not the gospel” (86).

Her earlier bewilderment of the Friends’ rebuff giving way to comprehension, Dorothy accepted with grudging insight this concluding refusal, realizing the Whitby meeting was “anxious for me to remain quiet, till such times as they think it convenient to receive me into membership” (19). She girded herself for additional “persecutions” from the Friends during her second journey, recognizing that “the hearts of Friends will not receive me, because I do not move in a regular line, according to their excellent discipline” (20).

The first of these unkindesses came from an unlikely quarter: a father-figure to Dorothy. On board the ship Victory after her second departure from England, Dorothy wrote to her valued friend Jane Sanders. The letter contained Dorothy’s reaction to the contents of another letter, one written by Sanders’ father-in-law, Jonathan Sanders of Whitby, an honored member of the Whitby Friends’ meeting and a man to whom Dorothy had looked to as a surrogate father after her own father’s death when she was nineteen. In an abrupt turnabout, the Sanders patriarch accused Dorothy of being “carried away with vain imaginations, in [her] present undertaking” (155). His disdain for Dorothy’s ministerial call reflected the general attitude of Friends unconvinced of a legitimate call. At this further evidence of Friends’ rejection, Dorothy grew despondent, writing to her friend Jane that “an agony of spirit seized me, and I thought, that I must certainly sink away in death, because a precious friend, whom I highly esteemed had treated me thus” (155). Perhaps her despair stemmed from this definitive evidence that Whitby Friends’ had permanently rejected her, officially declaring her ministry
unauthentic. Particularly marking the denunciation was the defection of Jonathan Sanders who had, seven years previous upon her first application to the Whitby meeting, convinced her of her acceptance:

Had he wrote me his mind, it would have evidenced that regard for me [that] he professed seven years ago, when he told me in Mary Linskill’s [house] that “I was in a situation of being received, and that Friends erred in withholding membership from me at that period and likewise said, I would be a “Cunning hunter, and have to walk in a serpentine path, and God would prepare my way before me.” I know he was right in this, therefore must be wrong now: because, at that time, this present business, I am now engaged in was my weighty distress, which Friends thought (according to their judgment) deprived me of my senses, and therefore refused me on the account. Justice to my own character, I value not, but Truth, who has led me forth, shall be vindicated with my dying breath. (155)

Instead of attracting the Whitby Friends with her first successful missionary trip, the 1801 trip to America had pushed her farther from approval. Dorothy’s fiery response indicates a subtle shift in outlook: no longer did she seek to join the Society of Friends but rather she desired members’ esteem regarding her ministry. To invalidate her ministry was to nullify the past five years of her life and all she had sacrificed in order to take up her cross.

Thus began an unending ambivalency in her relations with the Quaker community that proved both a blessing and a hardship for Dorothy. Her works include an equal share
of cordial assistance, love, and fellowship from gracious Quakers and of distrust, accusation, and outright hostility from harsh dissenters. Even in her own hometown, Quakers remained of two minds about Dorothy. Many of the Friends there accorded her a measure of acceptance if not outright membership. While the official declaration denied Dorothy membership, she continued to move in Quaker circles, maintained a Quaker persona, and associated with Quaker ideals in the public mind. Although Jonathan Sanders of Whitby had his qualms, George and Jane Sanders continued by her side as warm friends and correspondents throughout her life. Mary Linskill, a widow whom the prominent minister David Sands called “a true mother in Israel,”231 lent valuable support to Dorothy both before and after her first sojourn in the States. By contrast, other Friends described her in less-than-glowing terms:

D.R. was a singular mixture of pride and humility, of self-denial and self-assertion. She puts up with any discomfort, but complains if a perfect stranger, on whom she intrudes, does not give her a royal reception. The late Mr. J. Buchanan tells how she constantly invited herself out to tea on Sundays to a farmhouse in the neighbourhood. At first, pleased to see her, they treated her in the most hospitable Yorkshire fashion. She approved, and came regularly. The farmer and his wife at length decided to treat her as one of the family, but she was disappointed and did not fail to show it. The farmer reminded her that she had the same as they did. ‘Oh, but,’ said she, ‘it may be my Heavenly Father desires to feed me with the finest of the wheat.’ ‘Whether that be so or no,’ the farmer said, ‘this I know very well, that if your Heavenly Father
desires to feed you upon the finest of the wheat, He never means to do it at my expense.”

Perhaps the Friends cannot be faulted for their wariness of this new-born convert, whose flamboyance so differed from their usual modesty. Certainly, non-Quakers experienced the same equivocacy toward Dorothy, not only during her own age, but also after her death as her legacy lived on. For example, even the kind-hearted, staunch supporter of female evangelism Rev. Zechariah Taft hesitated to attempt a comprehensive characterization and endorsement of Dorothy. In his biographical history of holy women, Taft equivocated in his description, and prefaced his approval with a disclaimer:

Her manner of procedure is very singular, and if we admit that she is doing what the Lord requires at her hands, she must have received an extraordinary call from God. On this subject there will be a diversity of opinions. The author is inclined to believe that she is eminently pious and devoted to God; as her labours have been abundantly owned with His blessing.

This ambivalence toward Dorothy and the ambiguity regarding her status as a Quaker amplified upon her initial arrival in the new Republic. When the ship Triton docked briefly in Rhode Island due to inclement weather, the ship’s first mate offered to take Dorothy to a Friend’s home to await the cessation of the storm. He told the Friends “there was a woman on board, and he supposed that she was a public friend,” and the Friends immediately issued an invitation to Dorothy to dine and worship with them (EC 55). Donning her Quaker bonnet, Dorothy set off for the home of Thomas Robinson, an unfamiliar Quaker who nevertheless issued the most gracious welcome
she encountered in the United States. Robinson bid her to “think thyself at home in this strange land, for we are all of one family” (56). Weary from transatlantic travel, Dorothy gratefully accepted his offer, feeling an instant kinship with him: “The simplicity of his dress and the friendly salutation from his honest heart, united my spirit to his instantly, for I felt that he was a servant of the living God, therefore [sic] I esteemed him as a brother in the Lord Jesus” (56). However, even a sympathetic, kindred spirit evidently recognized the need for discretion because Robinson cautioned her before she had a chance to step onshore: “Should any ask if thou art a member of the Quakers’ society, answer, no; but thou must not say it of thy own accord here” (56). Diplomacy was essential, apparently, for any unsanctioned traveler among the Quakers since the first call of duty was to sit in an honored spot in the gallery among the ministers as a sign to all that the Lord had anointed her and her mission. To Dorothy’s relief, no one openly questioned her legitimacy to sit among the Quakers or their ministers. However, a “good old father of Israel” innocently inquired of her, “Hast thou brought thy certificate on shore?” (56). Hedging, Dorothy replied in the negative, not daring to elaborate further. Although she waited with bated breath for recriminations, none materialized, and she later ashamedly observed, “neither did any make the smallest inquiry whether I had one [certificate] or not, which was of the Lord, who withheld them, to answer his own purpose” (56). Feeling a bit of a fraud, Dorothy resigned herself to confess the following morning. After a verbal tussle with Captain Howland who had determined to set off for New York with the dawn, Dorothy finally secured the mate’s assistance to return to the Robinson home. Feeling wretched about her earlier omission and its implication of deception, she was convinced that the moment was a trial “brought before me to try my
faith, and prove to myself whether I was sent there by the Lord, or had ventured thus far
presumptuously by my own cunning or art of Satan” (57). Later, she recalled, “I verily
thought I should die” for the “weight of the ministry I felt now [was] so great” (58).
Trembling, she gave her testimony before the amassed congregation, confessing that
while her purpose was true, her methods were unsanctioned:

I was commanded at once, in the name of the Lord, to arise and declare to
the people, that the Lord had brought me forth in obedience to him, and
influenced me by his Spirit to lay aside my own interest, to put forth an
effort to instruct Ethiopia’s children, if possible, and therefore it would be
pleasant to me if they would aid with their sympathy, and ardent solicitude
for my preservation; also exciting them to diligence to follow on to know
the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, that they, with me,
might be found acceptable at the last. (58)

After she finished, she felt a “great burthen” drop from her shoulders, gratified that the
tender Quakers accepted her humility if not her unauthorized mission (55). She later left
Rhode Island with her confidence and credibility intact.

Dorothy’s failure to obtain official endorsement of her ministry left her vulnerable
to distrust, preventing many from lending her aid. Other Friends responded to her
unsanctioned travel more acerbically, viewing it as outright trickery. One public Friend
accused her of being “a cunning hunter” who “walked in a serpent’s path” (59). Still
another, witnessing the uncommon sight of a woman wielding a pen, charged her with
forgery: “Thou dost appear to write tolerably well, and could write a letter to deceive
[with a forged certificate], if thou hadst a mind” (80). With ease, Dorothy acknowledged
her ability to deceive him “if I had been so disposed” (80-81). Her casual acknowledgement of her writing ability and dismissal of his accusations spurred her accuser on to harsher invectives, but Dorothy refused to dignify his words, even declining to record them in her journal: “Much more he said of an insulting nature, which I throw into oblivion” (81). Ironically, Larson has noted that the Quaker ministerial role drew many female converts with well-developed reading and writing skills. Because all Quaker ministers were expected to be able to read the Bible, the importance of reading figures prominently in Quaker women’s spiritual autobiographies. Obviously, while some Friends valued literacy in all their ministers, the intellectual leanings of females proved a source of consternation for others.

Therefore, at Friends’ meetings, she rarely knew beforehand whether she would be graciously welcomed as an adherent of the Society of Friends or ostracized as an impostor. Once, at Fauquir Courthouse in Virginia, “a place where Friends are entertained in the best manner, free of expence [sic], if they are moving from a religious concern,” she enjoyed a courteous reception and was even invited to meeting (76-77). Once there, however, she appeared a curiosity to the worshipping Quakers who “were looking at me most of the time, instead of worshipping God with their spirits” (78). Although she frantically searched her mind for some biblical passage with which to earn their approbation, she heard the voice of Christ signify “that I had work enough at present . . . [and] therefore I kept my place, and sat still, enjoying peace of mind from obedience to my Master, who teaches me by his Spirit when to speak, and when to remain silent” Evidently, her silence merited credit, for a Quaker woman befriended her after the meeting and invited the curiosity home for lunch (78).
Similarly, she experienced angst when presenting herself at Friends’ homes requesting shelter. Arriving once in Baltimore at sunset, following a day of hard riding, she had no lodgings for the night. With nowhere else to turn, she “went with a trembling heart” to Friend James Carey’s home,\textsuperscript{240} “lest the door should be shut against me” (121). Delightfully surprised at his cordial greeting, Dorothy thankfully accepted his hospitality. Dorothy’s fear had stemmed from the circulating reports of her services among the Methodists in her first foray into the pulpit proper. Earlier that week, a large crowd had traveled from Washington city, the countryside, and as far as Georgetown to hear the woman preacher. The multitude had loved her, and she taught three times from the Methodist pulpit before moving on to Baltimore and the Carey home. While she thrilled at the opportunity to spread her message to such a large group, she cringed at the expected fallout, fearing the Quakers’ displeasure at her association with the Methodists.\textsuperscript{241}

And her fears were justified. By the end of the eighteenth century, Quaker “discipline” became much stricter. According to Quaker historian David M. Murray-Rust, the practice of “disownment” was applied both before and after formal membership was established by Yearly Meeting in 1737.\textsuperscript{242} Friends could be disowned for a variety of offenses against the accepted code, including trivial breaches of the dress code, marriage outside the Society of Friends, and indulgence in musical activity. For an adherent on the fringes of the Society, fraternizing with Methodists would have been cause for great concern and even ostracism.

While the Careys welcomed her into their home and invited her to meeting with them, other Friends lacked such tolerance, excluding her at meeting to such a degree that
her host felt compelled to apologize on their behalf, confirming that their “minds were prejudiced from the report of my attending the Methodists’ meeting” (122). Rumors circulated that Dorothy “had left the Quakers” and, in an unusually ironical response, she ruminated, “and some were kind enough to send so far as England, to different cities, which I am greatly obliged to them for . . .” (122). And the gossip did, indeed, precede Dorothy’s 1803 return to England, for when she passed through York on her way to Whitby, a Quaker acquaintance greeted her with a querulous growl: “Where hast thou come from? We thought we had got fairly shut of thee when thou wast gone to America, and would have no more trouble with thee” (156). Still another Quaker, a widow whom Dorothy had considered “a valuable woman,” proved even more vocally prejudicial against the unsanctioned and traitorous Dorothy: “. . . Her door was shut against me so far, that she testified vehemently if I staid in her house she would leave it” (87). Dorothy, “feeling how her spirit was embittered against me,” proved very willing to depart, “shaking the dust off my feet as a testimony against such as were the cause thereof” (87). And another “was so bold as to whisper to me thus, ‘If thou art a Quaker, I am not’” (Bank 222).

Since her tentative entry into ecumenical worship had opened the floodgates to widespread Quaker criticism, Dorothy fully embraced a non-denominational evangelism, addressing any who would “receive [my words] in the spirit of love and simplicity” in which they were delivered (EC vii). Immediately after attending the Methodist service, Dorothy also joined devotions at the Dutch chapel and the African church. More flagrantly, she attended the Methodists’ Conference held in Baltimore the next day. With supreme indifference, she worshipped at all the meetings and even dined with leading
Methodist bishops Francis Asbury and Richard Whatcoat and Methodist preachers Samuel Coates and Henry Foxall at the Coates home (118-23).

In the face of such blatant disregard of Quaker comportment by someone readily identified with the Quakers, the Friends found it prudent to publish a disclaimer regarding Dorothy’s lack of membership and ministerial sanction. In The Bank of Faith and Works United in a section dated New York, 6th mo. 1805, Dorothy included the proviso, adding a preface of her own:

The following communication was put into the paper as a reward for my assiduousness, by some who thought I should dishonor the respectable body of Quakers:

“Communication.—The Editor of the ‘Commercial Advertiser’ is requested to insert the following statement in his paper and in order to prevent the public from being mistaken, or mislead, other Printers will be doing justice to the Society of People called Quakers, by an insertion of the paragraph in their papers:

‘Dorothy Ripley, a female lately from Great Britain, under the appearance and character of a Quaker, having had frequent meetings in different parts of the City, and parts adjacent, and officiated as a preacher therein; therefore these are to inform, though with no wish to injure her service or hurt her reputation, that she is not a member of the Society of People called Quakers, although generally reputed as such.”’ (45-46)

Undoubtedly, the announcement was the same as that noted by eighteenth-century Quaker minister Rebecca Jones. In her journal, under the date of 6 mo. 27, 1805, Jones
observed: “Saw a paragraph taken from a York paper certifying that Dorothy Ripley is not a member of the Society of Friends.” On the 23rd, Jones wrote from Philadelphia to Ann Alexander of New York, exclaiming: “Where is D. Ripley? And what does she mean to do in America?”\(^{247}\) The disclaimer seemed necessary as many mistook Dorothy for a Friend, an understandable mistake since the evangelist maintained the appearance, plain language, expressions, and tenets of a Quaker. In fact, Friend Mary Pancoast of Philadelphia, upon admiring Dorothy’s Quaker-styled bonnet, requested the pattern. Even today, literary historians mistakenly refer to Dorothy as “Quakeress” and “Quaker missionary.”\(^{248}\) Dorothy herself wrote, “Could I, consistent with my duty to God, put off the appearance of a Quaker, I would do it, and not reproach you as a people: but the language, dress, and principles I adopted for conscience sake, and for conscience sake I must continue them” (222) Dorothy was regarded both as a Quaker (by outsiders) and an outsider (by the Quakers).

While her Quaker associations caused her periods of embarrassment and discomfiture, Dorothy never entirely abandoned the Society, as the Friends had made such a profound religious impression on her from her twenties. She often reflected on her spiritual connection to Quakers: “. . . How can I think of being separated from this people, whom I have given up every thing to go amongst?” (20). She distanced herself, certainly, by correcting those who erroneously labeled her “Quaker” within her hearing, yet she rarely proclaimed her non-association publicly. In her *Extraordinary Conversion*, for example, she included a letter written by “an African, resident in Philadelphia” in which the writer gratefully acknowledged his opportunity to write to “one amongst the people called Quakers” (146). In a footnote, Dorothy enlightened the reader: “He
expected I was a member of that society, which I never yet have been” (146). However, in two letters preceding, written respectively by the Revs. Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, she allowed their salutations of “Dear Friend” and “Friend Ripley” to stand on their own (143-47). While the salutations almost certainly referred to her association with the Society of Friends, Dorothy decided to permit readers to draw their own conclusions.

Still, she attempted to forewarn readers of the prickly relationship she shared with the Quakers. In her preface to Extraordinary Conversion, while on board the ship Herald in 1809, just before publication of the narrative’s first edition in New York, she not only distanced herself from denominational affiliation but also limited herself to membership in God’s cosmic family:

Should any make the enquiry, of what persuasion I am? they will find that I believe in Jesus Christ the true God; for he declares himself to be the “Resurrection and life of men,” and saith, “I am the Bread of life.” And I know him by experience to be my Lawgiver, priest, and King; therefore I am united to his Fold, and he is my Shepherd. But I am a member with no professing people, neither are any answerable for my conduct, should I differ in sentiment from others. Why I am not joined to any sect is, because the Lord hath led me forth by his Spirit, to subject my will, and to answer his own purpose by me, that he may be glorified by a worm, for he has a right to do with me as it seemeth best, having yielded myself up to serve him in time and in eternity. (EC iv)

Again, in another preface added for the second edition in 1817, Dorothy alluded to the discord, stressing that her faith and mission transcended the struggles of
denominational affiliation: “Were it possible to please all, it would be desirable; but since there are two opposites in the world, it cannot be” (vii). In such situations, Dorothy declared, the only recourse was to follow her own “liberal sentiments” and “conscience,” for “I cannot limit Jehovah” (viii).

One kindly Quaker summed up Dorothy’s precarious association with the Quakers by comparing her favorably to the Society’s founder George Fox. Depressed at initiating a second missionary journey without official sanction, Dorothy accepted a carriage ride from the aged Richard Hotham, who offered his consolation in one simple statement: “I believe thou has as great a right to travel without a certificate, as ever George Fox had when he went forth” (Bank 27). Gratefully, Dorothy acknowledged this as a divinely inspired truth, believing the Lord specifically had sent Hotham with both the transportation and the celestial message of approbation: “I shall ever remember this friend, for the Lord made him sensible that He had sent me forth . . .” (27).

Dorothy’s writing reveals a woman whose drooping spirits found frequent buoyancy from recollections of warmth and acceptance from isolated Friends. These recollections effectively offset the aloofness or even enmity she occasionally encountered from less compassionate Quakers. Certainly, without Quaker assistance, Dorothy’s ministry would have been stymied before even leaving England, not only in emotional support but financial as well. It was a Friend who gave her the twelve guineas required for her passage aboard the Triton (EC 43-44). The captain of that same ship, Friend Gilbert Howland, required his men to maintain a respectful air around Dorothy at all times, sheltering her from the vulgarity and crudities she would encounter on her return trip to England in 1802 with a non-Christian commander. Countless Quakers sheltered
Dorothy during her forays up and down the Eastern Seaboard, never expecting remuneration. Throughout Dorothy’s journals, Dorothy related the many occasions when Friends assisted her with food, shelter, clothing, finances, emotional support, and spiritual nourishment.\textsuperscript{250} When Dorothy’s mother died, the Friends forwarded a letter through their geographical ranks until it finally caught up with her. Sarah Matthews, a fellow female minister, consoled the desolate, orphaned Dorothy, extending to her a measure of parental comfort that would henceforth be absent from her life: “. . . She knew well how to lead me to acquiesce in every painful dispensation which he sees meet to prove and try his children by” (111). Her dearest, most steadfast friends numbered themselves among the Quakers. One such companion was Mary Robinson Morton, daughter of Thomas and Sarah Robinson who first befriended Dorothy upon her arrival in Rhode Island early in 1801. The two cemented their relationship in Philadelphia, and Dorothy wrote that “this dear woman hath always been disposed to treat me with tenderness, according to the disposition she possesses, which was grateful to an oppressed mind . . .” (135).

Likewise, Dorothy rejoiced in the friendship she shared with two imminent Quaker ministers and longtime correspondents, David Sands\textsuperscript{251} and Priscilla Hannah Gurney.\textsuperscript{252} An American Friend who ministered to the spiritually needy in England, David Sands was the first Quaker minister Dorothy heard. Sands so impressed Dorothy that he served as the instrument by which “the Lord was pleased to convince me that I must be a Quaker” (40). When Sands learned that Dorothy’s second membership bid had been rejected, he contemplated interceding, but his position as an American-born Quaker convert prompted his hesitation: “I should have wrote to a Friend on the subject,” admitted Sands in his correspondence to Dorothy from Leeds in August 1804, “but
knowing that I am a Stranger, and have no right to interfere in the business of Meetings, farther than I can help, I thought it best to leave it to them, to do as the way might be opened” (Bank 9). Still, he declared to Dorothy his “hope [that] thy patience will not fail; nor thy mind sink under discouragement, should Friends not see their way clear to receive thee soon; as it may be wisely ordered for thy future good” (9).

Similarly, Priscilla Gurney proved a lifelong friend and strong supporter, and Dorothy pronounced “feeling united to her by the bond of love, ever since I heard her in London” (EC 40-41). Gurney, “an highly favoured minister,” spoke at a meeting in Houndsditch during Dorothy’s initial overland journey in England (38). Inviting the younger woman home for tea, Gurney initiated Dorothy’s first social contact with prominent Quaker ministers, including Sands. To Dorothy, “she seemed sent as by God to yield comfort to my soul, which needed much strength to confirm my faith in the first setting out of a pilgrimage; forsaking all to become a true disciple” (38).

Both Sands and Gurney proved instrumental to Dorothy’s missionary efforts right from their doubtful beginnings, for without their influence, her first trip could very well have ended in London, where the cheapest passage available was an exorbitant and unobtainable, fifty guineas. Disheartened, Dorothy had left London for Bristol, via Bath, searching for a more reasonable fare and waiting expectantly for the Lord to supply her means of transatlantic travel. In Bath, confirmation came that the Lord would indeed provide, for she again encountered Gurney and Sands. Each in his or her own way provided an essential ingredient for Dorothy’s continued mission: Sands as a highly regarded itinerant preacher and Gurney as the model on which Dorothy based her evangelical aspirations.
Sands, a minister who had traveled throughout the new Republic and the British Isles, must have been deeply aware of the hardships and pitfalls of itinerant preaching, magnified for a woman traveling alone. When he again encountered Dorothy and learned of her plans to journey to America without the security of a certificate, he “replied smartly, ‘I would have thee consider well what thou art about, for I have only found one old England’” (EC 41). When Dorothy could not be dissuaded, Sands, with the wisdom born from years walking along his own missionary trail, cleverly couched his protest in an innocuous fable:

He then told me the fable of an eagle, which stuck its talons into a fish which was so heavy, that the eagle could not raise it above, neither disentangle itself again, and so perished in the water. Why he introduced this fable I know not, except that he thought, if great care were not taken on my part, I should sink as the eagle did, by a too ponderous weight which I was desirous to load myself with, and therefore cautioned me against entangling myself to my run, as the poor eagle. I told the company my movement was not an hasty one . . . . So in the morning, I went [to meeting] with a determination to be open to conviction, and to receive their counsel as from God . . . . David Sands enquired what I had concluded on from their advice. I answered, that it appeared still my duty to proceed on my journey to Bristol, in search of a vessel to America; for nothing short of this would suffice, as the Lord required it of me. “Art thou going to seek the Lord in America” said this shrewd man; to whom I
answered, “No, I take him with me in my heart, or I should not expect to find him there when I got thither.” (41)

Finally convinced of her resolve, Sands and Gurney put the full weight of their considerable influence behind Dorothy. Together, they arranged transportation to the seaport of Bristol and an introduction to J.M. Waring, a Quaker merchant who had conducted trade business with seamen for their rich cargoes for more than twenty years. Dorothy spent two weeks in the Quaker-stronghold of Bristol as the guest of John and Margaret Waring. There, she met Captain Howland, who was invited to dine at the Warings’ with the express purpose of meeting Dorothy. Finding Howland amenable to her traveling aboard his brig, the Triton, Dorothy made haste to secure arrangements for passage: a ticket for twelve guineas, not including stores. At Waring’s initiative, the Friends of Bristol collected the funds for Dorothy’s travel. Fully cognizant that Sands’ and Gurney’s invaluable practical aid had enabled her mission’s launch, Dorothy proved suitably appreciative:

. . . I took my leave of them, with a grateful sense of God’s mercy, who touched his servants with pity to alleviate an heart oppressed with woe, feeling the miseries of mankind almost insupportable. The ardent breathings of those true Christians, will tend to preserve my soul from danger, whenever I call to mind their solicitude on my behalf, feeling interested for my eternal welfare, that I might not turn aside either to the right or left, but pursue peace with a steady course, eyeing the providential power at all seasons, when he was pleased to direct my way with his propitious smile of approbation. What those friends have done is from a
sense of duty to their Maker, and I trust he will esteem it as done to
himself, knowing his spiritual appearance as brought forth in me to his
own honor and glory. (42)

After their initial meeting, Sands never again doubted the authenticity of
Dorothy’s missions and fully endorsed her journeys, his only reservation being her
insistence upon solitary travel. In 1804, he once again voiced his approbation of her
evangelism, writing to Dorothy, “Shouldest thou think it right to return to America, I
shall (if living) consider it my duty to do what I can for thee, and hope thou wilt consider
me unshaken in my love and regard for thee” (Bank 8-9). When funding for the second
journey proved unobtainable, Dorothy proposed to sell her trunk of clothes; Sands,
learning of her dire need, tracked her down in the city and vowed to pay her passage from
his own pocket: “If the Friends here do not pay thy passage, I will pay it every guinea
myself: take this money in my hand to pay thy expenses at an inn, where thou canst call
for every thing which thou dost want” (32). His generous gesture became unnecessary,
however, for another Friend, William Sprigg, stepped forward to pay her passage.

Second only in importance to these two Quakers in impact on Dorothy’s ministry
was Deborah Darby. A well-respected and influential Quaker itinerant minister, Darby
not only became a personal friend and correspondent of Dorothy’s but also lent her
ministerial work credibility by inviting the younger woman to preach with her. In August
1804, Dorothy wrote from Liverpool to her old friend Sands of her exhilaration at having
evangelized alongside the prominent Darby: “I stood at the right hand of Deborah Darby,
on the stage, and thought she was no less famous than Deborah of old . . .” (Bank 12).
The seasoned minister, only six years away from her death, so impressed the neophyte
Dorothy that she aspired to emulate the veteran Quaker: “There appeared great disquietude when the people first gathered, but she arose, not waiting for their attention, and immediately a tranquillity seemed to possess numbers, who, I hope, will remember her powerful testimony in behalf of her Lord and master, whose glorious person she exalted” (12).

Perhaps Dorothy could have accomplished considerably more in her charitable and spiritual endeavors had she been successful in fully aligning herself with any one sect. On the other hand, perhaps the very independency forced on her by the Friends’ official rejection eventually strengthened her evangelical resolve and molded her into the passionate and compassionate missionary she became. Maybe the historian E.W. Dickinson was not too far afield when he praised her as a “fearless” and “self-denying lady.” Upon her convincement of the call from God, she finally shrugged off concern for any denominational rules, intending to “follow faithfully those requirings in my heart, which I believed to spring from Truth” (38). And any physical or spiritual trials or sectarian tussles reinforced her belief that she must “go where He shall prepare my way” (39). As Dickinson later extolled, the “diligent pen of this Whitby spinster” revealed much of America’s spiritually and physically enslaved and needy, and “it was high time the world knew of these detestable atrocities.”

**Dorothy & The Methodists**

“Quite fearless and penniless, she accomplished an almost incredible series of Odysseys, every one of which was a crusade to win Christian freedom for all mankind.
Few women have a finer record, but her vision and her faith came to her in the Society at Whitby and in the home of her father, William Ripley.²⁶⁴

Such words of praise for Dorothy Ripley abound in the journals and histories of the early Methodists, for unlike the official voice of the Society of Friends, its Methodist counterpart found much to celebrate in the daughter of one of their lay preachers. Today, mention of Dorothy Ripley, however sketchy, can be found in several Methodist biographical reference works, earning her a nominal share in religious history. She is, for example, one of the few women in Nolan B. Harmon’s *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*. Esteemed Methodist historians such as Paul Chilcote, Leslie Church, and Frank Baker include Dorothy in their principal works, acknowledging that, although she proclaimed herself free from any religious society, her doctrinal beginnings sprouted from Methodism.

And her inclusion is not without just cause, for while she readily estranged herself from Methodism, her works reveal undercurrents of Methodist tradition and Wesleyan teachings such as the basic tenets of free grace, individual responsibility, and the need for conversion and regeneration. Like the movement itself, her journals and homilies disclose a noticeable absence of theological fences to keep anyone out, and her public addresses—with their conspicuous embrace of the masses—fall in line with the Methodist ideal of inclusionism, rather than the exclusionism that brought Quakerism to the brink of ruin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Methodism also furnished Dorothy with the role models from which she fashioned her own evangelistic self. Free from the confines of established religion and the expectations perpetuated by its various parts, Dorothy could set her own standards and
govern her own activities as she saw fit. However unconsciously, she clung to the instructions of her youth, emphasizing the Methodist measures of spiritual virtuosity, including ministry to the sick and unfortunate, prayer, and exhortation. Such missionary work springboarded her into later public appearances in which she spoke with scriptural authority, assuming the distinguishing characteristic of preaching—that of “taking a text.”

The female role models of her childhood clearly played a pivotal part in the formulation of herself as a missionary and spokeswoman of God, and she emulated her childhood’s public and private religious examples as she matured into a stalwart emissary of God. These female models served as the underpinning for her ministerial commitment despite the adversity she encountered. The insight afforded by these female preachers helped her in future dealings with the American Methodists of the early national period and they, in turn, aided her in the form of fellowship, food, and shelter. Methodist support proved invaluable to Dorothy in the form of cash, indispensable contacts, locales for services, and a conduit for accessing untapped audiences.

Finally, by teaming up with Methodists at camp-meeting, she reached even greater masses of people throughout the Southern United States and her native homeland. In the 1818, she established an association with the Primitive-Methodists and returned to England where she helped introduce a form of camp-meeting that had gained such popularity in the United States. In England, she demonstrated her full preaching power at the side of the eminent evangelists who pepper the Methodist history books.
Despite her emotional and doctrinal separation from the religion of her childhood, the Methodists proved as vital as the Quakers to Dorothy’s mission of advancing the kingdom of God.

**An Heir to Methodism**

When the Quakers turned her away, Dorothy felt led by the Holy Spirit to associate with (if not join by membership) other denominations, namely the Methodists. In the new Republic, Dorothy found willing proponents, and she progressively gravitated to them as she matured in her evangelism. As word spread of Dorothy’s “defection” from the Friends to the Methodists, fewer Quaker meetinghouses embraced her, driving her increasingly to seek her audiences from among the Methodists. Further, as Quaker support diminished, the need to see to such practicalities as food and shelter forced Dorothy to look more favorably on the Methodist religion of her youth.

The turning point in Dorothy’s ministry came in April 1803, when the city of Baltimore hosted the national Methodist Conference. Being a sojourner in the city at that time, Dorothy deemed “it my duty to attend all the meetings for worship I could” (EC 122). Dorothy had found sanctuary with her staunch defender, Henry Foxall, and he took the opportunity to introduce her to America’s august Methodist leaders. On an April evening, Foxall ushered Dorothy into a secluded nook where she came face to face with Methodist heavyweights Bishop Francis Asbury and Richard Whatcoat. At the opening of the meeting, she later described, “a solemn awe covered my mind while we remained silent for the space of five minutes” (EC 123). The men must certainly have heard of the English missionary’s efforts among the Friends and the escalating number of
her appearances among the Methodists, which would explain their eagerness to evaluate Dorothy’s religious predilections. In rapid succession, Asbury fired three germane questions: “Were you ever justified?” “Are you justified now? and “Were you ever sanctified?” Whether from justifiable intimidation or studied simplicity, Dorothy confined her answers to an austere “yes,” which seemed to satisfy the venerable leader. Asbury closed the interrogation with the most salient question, “Are you sanctified now?” (123). This last question required from Dorothy a more contemplative answer.

To the Methodists, sanctification (also called holiness or perfection) would have been a necessary characteristic for anyone converted, and especially so for an evangelist who touted a Methodist background and frequented their meetings. Sanctification follows justification (or salvation) as a second experience of grace and empowers the believer to meet the requirements of the new law emphasizing grace rather than works. The belief in holiness stemmed from the teachings of Jesus as outlined in the Gospels, where evidence shows that the early Church believed that an ideal life could be lived in this world (Matthew 5:48; Luke 6:36). The belief implied freedom from “intentional sin,” or a measurable moral cleansing—at least as much as could be achieved in this life. Final perfection, or glorification, came only after death.

The belief in sanctification gained prominence in the nineteenth century, particularly among the Methodists, as part of what John Wesley called “perfect love.” According to Wesley, who promulgated a belief in both an instantaneous experience of grace (such as the sudden Pauline conversion on the road to Damascus) and a growth toward holiness, the sanctified bear the same crosses and grapple with the same
temptations as the rest of humankind; however, their converted souls now seek God's will rather than flee from it.

According to historian Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, the experience of sanctification proved particularly important to early Methodist women, for it offered not only inner peace but also a power of the sort that could lead to the erosion of gender and racial hierarchies: “An experience of perfection was particularly important psychologically and socially for women who might need the self-confidence freedom from sin could bring and who could use the experience to justify an unorthodox life.”

Therefore, the import of Asbury’s last question must have been readily discerned by Dorothy. Certainly, Dorothy would have welcomed an occasion to justify her own unorthodox life, for even while she shunned official approbation following the Quakers’ rejection, she never flouted her singularity as a means of defiance. Rather, she sought understanding, if not permission, for her evangelical individuality. Thus, Dorothy saw fit to expound on her final answer to Asbury that Spring evening of 1803. Undoubtedly, she must have apprehended how future dealings with the American branch of her childhood denomination hinged on the formulation of her answer—and its reception. Framing her response with care, she writes, “Being called upon to make this confession in the presence of God, and in the midst of two good judges of Israel, I said as follows: ‘My body is the temple of the Living God,’ which sufficed the good old veterans, almost worn out in the vineyard of our Lord” (EC 123). The bishops must have approved of her declaration indeed, for they responded with solicitous inquiries about her monetary needs—a sure sign of high regard and sponsorship. They even invited her to share their
dinner, an honor that any evangelist of the day would have interpreted as a sign of her acceptance. She remembered the occasion as follows:

I signified, if it would not be deemed an encroachment upon them, that it would be pleasant to me to be indulged thus far; to which Bishop Whatcoat replied with complaisance, “O no, sister; for we have all things common here!” I was melted with this sentence, and silently whispered in my heart, “Thou art like a shock of corn, ripe for the Lord’s garner. (123)

The three dined in peace at the home of Samuel Coates, “eat[ing] our bread with singleness of heart, giving glory to God” (123). Afterwards, Asbury ceremoniously appointed her to the care of Coates’ wife, “desiring her to take care of me” (123). Thus, the American Methodists staked their claim, immediately adopting a measure of responsibility toward the English missionary by assuming a measure of responsibility for her most important needs: food, shelter, companionship, and money.

Interestingly, the issue of membership did not arise in her dealings with the Methodists. Either their solicitude came with no strings attached or the pressure of membership was so subtle as to be less than noteworthy to Dorothy. Either way, she failed to comment on the subject. Therefore, when they befriended Dorothy that April evening, the Methodist leadership did so as stewards of the kingdom of God rather than as denominational combatants wrestling for numerical superiority.

Such consideration on the heels of Quaker rejection solidified Dorothy’s renewed interest in Methodism. With the same single-mindedness which characterized her earlier magnetism toward Quakerism, she began attending the Conference assiduously. She devoted herself to the Methodists from seven in the morning until eleven in the evening
without being the least wearied, and felt much pleased to see such a number really affected . . .” (EC 124).

The interview had indeed proved auspicious. The mark of approval bestowed by the bishops that evening ensured Dorothy’s entry into most Methodist meetinghouses. Only those Methodist churches under the jurisdiction of the staunchest defenders of the male-dominated pulpit turned her away in future dealings, and even then, other principal Methodists often rushed to fill the void.

For example, in November 1805, Dorothy had an appointment to preach at a Methodist meetinghouse in Philadelphia, the arrangements having been made by Methodist supporters. However, the presiding Elder vetoed his fellow congregants’ preparations because he was unfamiliar with the female preacher they had secured and because the supporters had not obtained his blessing on the meeting. He reversed his original prohibition, however, after acquiescing to attend one of Dorothy’s meetings earlier in this week. There, he found Dorothy with “respectable Quakers” attending, as well as a gathering of “two thousand people crowded one upon another for want of more room” (Bank 197). The respectability of the Quakers and the desirability of such an amassed throng clamoring for holy sustenance gained supremacy over prejudice and territorialism in the mind of the Methodist elder. Well aware of the impetus behind the elder’s change of heart, Dorothy related the incident in a correspondence to her ardent female supporter Abigail Eames. Dorothy’s wearied tone at the continued discrimination against female preachers reverberates in her words; however, she acknowledged the discrimination as part of the burden she shouldered as a called, yet not ordained, minister of God:
How does appearance carry the day among most of men: for I see the world in its proper light; and am exalted, and debased just as God sees meet, to prepare me to minister out of His Ability to His Creatures, which He has compassion for: therefore, all things work together for my good, and qualify me to serve mine enemies, as well as minister to my friends.

(197)

Her tone and her words reiterate her inevitable conclusion that male leaders and clerics remained the enemy of female preachers, even amongst some American Methodists.

In contrast, other Methodist leaders rushed to her support, as in the occasion of her preaching to the Methodists in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. There, the Methodists greeted her with open arms, their minds “sweetly prepared for the streams which flow from God, the Inexhaustible Fountain of all Grace and Glory” (Bank 42). The presiding elder in the Methodist church there turned his meetinghouse over to Dorothy “without any ceremony,” demonstrating explicit faith in her divine calling.

Interestingly, Dorothy maintained an allegiance to the Quaker way despite the organization’s determination to hold her at arms’ length. When she concluded her vignette of the Methodist bishops’ trial of her, she summed up her theological position with a description of her attendance at the Conference. She pointedly described her inward retreat in the midst of the cacophony of Methodist emotionalism, which characterized the meetings:

I was struck with dread awe, and felt of a truth, God was there, and what was the most astonishing, I felt as quiet as possible in the midst of all the noise, so that I worshipped God in the temple with silent adoration,
rejoicing that I could hear the “still small voice of the Lord,” who by the wind of his Spirit had rent the “mountain, and brake in pieces the rock,” and consumed by the fire all the drossy substance of sin, that there might be a place for His spiritual kingdom of grace and glory, where I now worship the King of Kings, seated on his lowly throne of righteousness, and rejoice in the scepter of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom I call my God and my All. (EC 124)

At the core of her hyperbole lurks Dorothy’s continued allegiance to Quakerism and the Quietists precepts so closely aligned with it. Despite her frank and genuine earnestness among the Methodists and the compulsory curtailment of her Quaker fraternization, she markedly informed her readership of her unremitting honor of the Friends’ credo of “a small still voice.” Her writings demarcate the precarious line between the tussling denominations wrangling for her declaration of allegiance. Further, Dorothy could not bite the proverbial hand which fed her, for even while she found camaraderie and occasional financial support amidst the Methodists, she remained heavily dependent on Quaker goodwill for the bulk of her subsistence—and her readership. And, as some Quakers demonstrated to her in the summer of 1805, her penchant for free association with other religious groups left her in constant jeopardy of the Friends’ withdrawn support. “Several Quakers told me, as ‘I was having meetings among other societies, I was to look unto them for help, as they could not supply me now I had left them’” (Bank 53). Once again, Dorothy resorted to the language of her religiously radical roots, replying that “I neither look unto you nor them: for my trust is in the Living God, who has made all hearts, and who can touch any with sympathy towards
me” (53). Her complete submission to divine deliverance underscored each stage of her missionary journey, and while occasionally plagued with very human doubts, she always maintained that full surrender. The success of her missionary life provided its own evidence to the wisdom of that resignation to the will of God.

Still, close inspection of Dorothy’s works tenders evidence of the strengthening of her ties to Methodism. She exercised discursive freedom in her application of Methodist rhetoric. Falling back on her childhood training, she frequently glorified Jesus Christ using the language of her Methodist father. She praised Jesus for “the washing in the layer of regeneration, through the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost” (FC 152). Further, each of her subsequent publications incorporated more detail of her labors among the Methodists, and even other sects and denominations. For example, her first effort, the conversion narrative, recounted her struggles to join the Quakers and how her ministry integrated aspects of Quakerism and Quietism. At the narrative’s conclusion, even while she reiterated her love for the Quakers and their path, it was to the Methodists that she began to gravitate for her evangelistic services and attendees. In the opening volley of her second work, The Bank of Faith and Works United, she informed the reader of the third and final rejection by the Quakers and launched into a description of her second missionary trip, in which she singled out Methodism and non-denominational groups for her primary religious alliance. With the Methodists and unaffiliated crowds, she was assured of general approbation, for she had passed the tests imposed by the former’s leadership, and she accorded greatly desired spiritual succor and guidance to the latter.
These two groups comprised the backbone of her missionary efforts, for other denominations sometimes proved less supportive and often inhibited her exertions among their congregants. Even when she turned to the Presbyterians and Baptists—two groups who battled with the Methodists for appeal to the common people—she found her way barred by prejudice toward women preachers, salacious rumors, and territorial claims.

For example, in Newark, New Jersey, a querulous Presbyterian minister who had preached for more than forty years turned away her entreaties for a service. According to Dorothy, when he realized that her destitute state prevented her patronage for his church, he chased her off, demeaning her female status as being unacceptable to the pulpit. Later, he accused her of attempting to bilk his congregants of money (Bank 38-39). Insulted, yet used to such jealousy from male ministers, she made her way to the town courthouse where she successfully secured her own arrangements for services. Not content with barring her from his own place of worship, he trailed her to the Courthouse, evidently prepared to heckle her from amidst the congregants there. Later, with a great deal of satisfaction, Dorothy recorded the change of heart experienced by the crusty old preacher.

He heard my voice proclaim in the Court-house, against every bold daring sinner, with power and divine authority. The Lord permitted this man to give me a trembling baptism, for to qualify me to testify of God in Jesus Christ. . . . The Presbyterian minister, who was so unkind to me, when he came out of meeting cried, “Let her alone, let her alone:” for I suppose he saw that he was in an error by testifying to my face so boldly, “I had nothing to do.” (39-40)
One can only speculate as to why the cantankerous old minister changed his mind about the young upstart female preacher. Perhaps she earned the elder’s respect with her no-nonsense approach to the services. Typically, her early style of services emphasized the sermon and eliminated the singing and emotionalism that characterized her later outdoor meetings. The solemnity of her service must have appealed to his own austerity and convinced him of his inaccuracy. Or, perhaps he expected Dorothy to dissemble since he suspected her of being a Judas, the disciple who earned history’s enmity for dipping into the disciples’ treasury. But her emphasis on prayer rather than the collection plate must have convinced him of his misjudgment. Alternatively, perhaps he doubted her power of exhortation since she lacked official training and was a woman. However, she relied solely on an extemporaneous sermon, believing in the Quaker tradition of the power of holy inspiration. Her unrehearsed address and the enthusiastic response of the gathered crowd must have convinced him of his error. On the other hand, perhaps he doubted her ability to connect with the crowd, “many deists being present” (39). However, she tackled “every bold daring sinner,” her voice ringing “with power and divine authority” (39). Her boldness earned their respect to the degree that they were uncommonly deferential and solemn to suit the occasion:

A large company collected, who behaved exceeding well, from the prudent conduct of my young friend, who was willing to give out a psalm for me: but, I told him, I did not choose singing at worship, and would esteem it a favour if he would get five or six to keep silence, as I understood the boys were very rude in this place. Never did a meeting
afford me greater comfort; and it was remarked, that never greater order
was seen there. (39-40)

Yet again, perhaps the irritable minister simply respected Dorothy for having
attracted and appealed to a group of deists that he himself had been unable to bring into
the fold. Whatever his motivation, he reversed his original opinion of Dorothy. The
man’s newfound endorsement enabled her to embark on a friendship with his
Presbyterian daughter, a relationship that would withstand the test of time and distance
and prove a balm to Dorothy’s lacerated confidence.

A Methodist Foundation

When one considers Dorothy’s initial defection from her childhood religion,
certainly there is validity to the claim that part of Dorothy’s attraction to Quakerism
could be attributed to the Society’s liberal endorsement of female evangelists. After all,
when Dorothy first received her divine calling, Methodist women had little outlet for
evangelism. Women’s efforts, by denominational decree, were increasingly limited to
supportive roles rather than those involving the pulpit. In common with most
denominations, the status of Methodist women was, until recent times, subordinate to that
of men. From the earliest years, however, Methodist women performed or shared in
important functions relating to worship and other areas of church life. In fact, many
Methodists of the late eighteenth century “saw nothing fundamentally wrong” with a
woman exhorting and leading prayer in a Methodist meeting. Their prerogatives,
however, did not include preaching.
Yet, even as Methodism denied her a ministerial birthright, it furnished her with the necessary foundation for securing her own ministerial path. For example, Dorothy first encountered a tolerance of female preachers as a child at the knee of an equally young Methodist Church. In fact, it was during her childhood years that Dorothy initially encountered the strong leadership of women in the formation of a religious society, and it was in Methodism that she discovered her first role models of female empowerment.

Despite her relinquishment of her Methodist membership, Dorothy’s works cannot help but reflect her childhood religious lessons—including those taught outside the church doors. Being reared in the heart of a Methodist home and community provided Dorothy with the spiritual language, ideals and creed that thread throughout her life and her works.

Some denominational background may help highlight Methodism’s remarkable, lifelong influence on Dorothy’s ministry and missionary efforts. Although early Methodism surely never achieved the liberality of the Society of Friends in regard to female evangelism, Methodist women enjoyed a climate of female influence, earning respect and admiration from Wesley and his followers through their pioneering efforts in the movement’s establishment. From the outset of the movement, in the second quarter of the eighteenth century in England, women proved to be the driving force behind the proliferation of the “cluster groups,” which composed the early sect. Their influential muscle can be discerned in their toils to open their homes for regular worship services, invite and host traveling ministers, found prayer groups, maintain correspondence with Wesley and his ministers, act as liaisons between church leaders and the communities, spearhead the establishment of meetings, and support Wesley and his followers as advisors. The women devoted not only their communal sway to the movement but also
their deep purses. Their finances and resources proved essential to the propagation of the Methodist societies and to the accommodation of new members. Independent women and widows endowed estates, erected chapels, and purchased buildings for conversion to chapels. Not content to lend their clout and money to the cause, they stepped forward to lend their physical protection to the cause as well. Astoundingly, in several cases, they even sheltered male evangelists from angry, armed mobs, placing themselves in the line of fire to protect God’s messengers. In one case, for example, a female protector suffered continuous whippings that afterward led to her death, but she stood guard over the Methodist lay minister until help arrived.272

According to Methodist historian Paul Chilcote, whose seminal work about the evolution of Methodist women preachers sheds new light on the vast, largely unheralded history of female evangelistic labor, women forged for themselves a niche in the Methodist itinerancy through a climate of grassroots efforts. Theirs was the proverbial case of *do first and ask permission later*. As Chilcote notes, “The extent to which women were permitted to assume the initiative in the societies, and to function as pioneers and sustainers of the Methodist cause, often gave them a working equality with their male counterparts. The atmosphere created by their activities and witness became more and more conducive to the expansion of their roles.”273

Unfortunately, the pivotal phrase in Chilcote’s quote is “were permitted.” Once men became aware of the vast sway Methodist women were wielding, the tide turned and male opposition to their influence surfaced, leading them to shut down the female missionary machine. Methodist men successfully crushed their counterparts’ march toward dominance, limiting the women’s ecclesiastical efforts just short of the pulpit
itself. Chilcote’s extensive study of the natural progression of women preachers in the religious revival of the Wesleys cites the lack of evidence pointing to women’s roles as preachers in the early movement. For all that their contribution proved vital to the cause, male leadership barred them from the transcending act of preaching. In fact, Charles Wesley once expressly forbade the “preaching” of a woman in 1743, writing that “one only person I reproved; not suffering her any longer, notwithstanding her great gifts, to speak in the church, or usurp authority over the men.”

His devoted Anglican-priest brother, John, agreed.

Following women’s dynamic participation in the explosion of Methodism, including their forays into exhortation and initial, tentative encroachment on preaching, John Wesley anxiously sought to untangle the movement from angry allegations of female preaching. Wesley fortified his position against women preaching with his public and contentious refutation of Barclay’s doctrine of the ministry under his tenth proposition, which sanctioned female evangelism. Wesley refused to countenance the Quaker notion that “we judge it noways unlawful for a woman to preach in the assemblies of God’s people.” In his repudiation, Wesley buttressed his stance with the Pauline edicts to enforce the silence of women in church.

This, however, was Wesley’s public stance. Despite their initial prohibition, the Wesleys eventually relaxed their objections to women’s preaching, even to the point of John Wesley’s expressed encouragement to women to “employ all your talents to the glory of Him that gave them.” While he stopped just short of publicly condoning female preaching, John Wesley nevertheless proved to be the driving force behind the relaxation of those prohibitions. At the same time, as feminist historian Christine Krueger
points out, Wesley’s letters and journals “make clear that while he would sanction
women’s preaching, every available subterfuge was to be enlisted to disguise that fact
from the less tolerant . . . . He was especially careful to call their preaching anything—
prayer, exhortation, amplification, testimony—but what it was, and counseled them to do
likewise.”

Despite Wesley’s evasiveness on the rights of women to preach, Methodist
women’s unquestionable influence in evangelical and missionary work provided the
training ground for later women preachers such as Dorothy Ripley. As a child, Dorothy
would have seen strong, successful women acting on their religious motivations, most
often in the undisputed, highly visible role of “sick visitor.” This role, seemingly
innocuous enough to prove unthreatening to the male itinerancy, actually gave women an
outlet not only for missionary work but provided the early, private means for evangelism.

In his 1748 letter to the Rev. Vincent Perronet, published as “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” Wesley articulated the role of the office of sick visitor:

It is the business of a Visitor of the sick, to see every sick person within
his district thrice a week. To inquire into the state of their souls, and to
advise them as occasion may require. To inquire into their disorders, and
procure advice for them. To relieve them, if they are in want . . . . Upon
reflection, I saw how exactly, in this also, we had copied after the
primitive Church. What were the ancient Deacons? What was Phebe the
Deaconess, but such a Visitor of the sick?

Hence, the position called for spiritual maturity, breadth of knowledge and depth
of wisdom. The sick visitor, perforce, had to be well-articulated and well versed in
theological and biblical topics. Although she did not preach or teach publicly, the “sick visitor” nevertheless ministered to members’ temporal and spiritual needs. In short, she served as frontrunner to the Methodist female evangelists in the second half of the eighteenth-century in England and the Second Great Awakening in the former colonies. The benevolent activity of the sick visitor provided opportunities for women to enter into exhortations and discussions about life and death, earthly labors and heavenly rewards.

Further, when visitation to the sick membership gradually grew into visitation to the imprisoned and the poor, desperate commoners, the openings for evangelism swelled. Women’s work among the unenlightened and unconverted opened the evangelistic floodgates to public testimony, scriptural readings, and exhortation specifically aimed at conversion. Activities such as these blurred the thin line between the sanctioned roles of praying and exhortation and the proscribed acts of scriptural exposition and preaching. Evangelism, then, became a natural outgrowth of casual conversation among first the laity (testimony) and then the unconverted (exhortation), fostering a general sense of approbation from Wesley and his ordained colleagues.

Thus, women like Grace Murray, a prototype for female leadership, served as class leader, sick visitor, and later a regional regulator for female societies. In effect, she functioned as a “subpastor,” leading Methodists in acts of worship. Female instrumentality, then, became an important factor in the spread of the gospel, and Wesley finally acknowledged, albeit predominantly in a private voice, the significant role women could play as preachers.

As a child and heir to this tradition, Dorothy would have certainly absorbed the vapors of female power emanating from the formation of this religious movement. In
addition to witnessing her father’s mercy to the needy, which she lauds in her eulogy to him in *Extraordinary Conversion*, she witnessed her mother’s weighty and undaunted missionary efforts. As the wife of a Methodist itinerant and stalwart believer who bravely weathered the blows dealt by economic misfortune and the premature deaths of two-thirds of her children, the elder Dorothy Ripley set the standard for compassion and nurturing. Her daughter credited her with instilling in her children an attitude of generosity, self-sacrifice, dedication and fortitude. However, the greatest impression made on the young Dorothy by her mother was the elder woman’s unstinting support and gracious hospitality accorded to traveling Methodist ministers:

> Twenty-four years my mother entertained ministers, and many times have my ears heard her saluted thus, “Sister, I am thankful that I have got home, you will make me a good cup of tea to refresh me, for I have fared very poorly since I left your habitation, and am very weary traveling up and down among the poor country people, who have few things comfortable; and I lay in a damp bed several times since I left home, and have caught cold, that I fear I shall have the ague.” (Bank 305)

Her mother’s example of aid to traveling ministers became the benchmark against which every gesture of aid was measured, and Dorothy comments on the rarity of such generosity and compassion extended to her during her own ministry. She particularly reminisced on her mother’s support of the lay ministry during her own travels in the Deep South where professing Christian women accorded Dorothy the minimum of comfort. Once, a Southern woman extended to Dorothy an equivocal yet unsolicited invitation for lodgings. The woman’s offer of patronage and friendship to Dorothy reeked of insincerity
since she assigned to Dorothy meager accommodations and her signs of friendship proved half-hearted. For example, when deep Southern resentment forced Dorothy to flee the woman’s home in the dead of night, her benefactress left Dorothy to make her own way through the unfamiliar streets to a hidden boat that would carry her to calmer political waters. Dorothy acknowledged that part of her hostess’s stinginess resulted from Dorothy’s abolitionist message and from the succoring family’s fears that their neighbors would rebuff them for harboring a female preacher espousing liberation to the enslaved. Still, the woman’s ambivalence underscored the unstinting generosity of Dorothy’s mother. The incident led Dorothy to compose a written tribute to her mother, a Methodist woman who staunchly supported laborers of the faith, even when they were targets of malevolence and prejudice.

The best bed, and most comfortable room were appropriated for [the traveling ministers’] purpose, and [my mother’s] children taught to wash the saints’ feet by her example of humility, in attention to the Lord’s servants. I have met with very few who excelled my virtuous mother in this respect, and have many times believed the blessing of Heaven has been increased abundantly on my head, for the mercy which my parents shewed to pilgrims who came from different corners of the earth, though they had no great possessions to lay up for their children for old age; because God taught them to deal out bread to the hungry and clothe the naked. (306)

Mimicking her mother and other Methodist women who imparted an early model of mercy, Dorothy began at the tender age of twelve a lifelong concern with missionary
work as a “sick visitor.” Following a vision which left her incapacitated and yearning to work in service to God, she began to call on the sick and dying to “warn [them] of their approaching dissolution” (EC 3). Instead of remaining at home in the safety and comfort of her parents, the impressionable adolescent walked the dark streets of Whitby to spend many nights at the bedside of the sick and dying. Instead of playing a lively, carefree game of chase with friends in the garden, she subjected herself to the sight of mutilated flesh and imbibed the stench of the diseased. Instead of enjoying the deep, restful sleep necessary for the young and growing, she spent many of her nights bathing fevered brows, spoon-feeding the weak, comforting the delirious, consoling the bitter and desolate, and routinely confronting the specter of death. Even while performing the nurturing easements for their physical frailties, the adolescent Dorothy nourished their spiritual deficiencies as well, making her first incursions into evangelism. During the many nights she eschewed sleep in order to bring comfort to the afflicted, she “agoniz[ed] with God on their behalf, that mercy might be experienced by them before they were launched into an awful eternity” (3).

Thus, as a result of her childhood indoctrination of vital outreach and missionary work, Dorothy inaugurated an enduring connection with the misfortunate, the afflicted, the troubled and the needy. Throughout her life, she went out to preach and pray with the poor, desperate, and powerless who orbited society: prisoners in jail, paupers in hovels, the overburdened working-class, the uneducated commoners, the bitter and nearly hopeless underdogs of both British and American society — anyone she deemed perilously close to moral and spiritual collapse. In short, true to her Methodist roots, she reached for the masses.
Similarly, Dorothy’s model for praying in public sprang from her Methodist inheritance. For many of the early Methodist women, public prayer constituted their first ventures into the public arena. While many women prayed freely in the small groups of their families and community, still others ventured forth as active instruments of revival. Isabella Wilson, for example, prayed publicly at a revival in Yorkshire.\textsuperscript{282} Anne Cutler, known more affectionately as “Praying Nanny,” added converts to the Methodist membership with her short, yet intense prayers.\textsuperscript{283} Another, Sarah Crosby, proved highly gifted in the art of prayer, and it served as a stepping stone to her more publicly prominent role of the first Methodist female preacher.\textsuperscript{284}

Once again emulating her Methodist models, Dorothy’s first forays into the public arena came through the medium of prayer. Following the divine command to rise to her three-year-old knees and pray, Dorothy placed great emphasis on the power of prayer. She frequently joined in when her father led prayers among his family, servants, and sick converts. Groomed from the beginning to follow in her father’s footsteps as a leader in the Methodist church, Dorothy made ministerial rounds with her father through the town and surrounding community, addressing the temporal and spiritual needs of the Whitby flock. Later, she prayed on the street corners and in the fields as well as in the chapels and meeting houses. She used open-air praying at camp-meeting revivals to break down segregated religion and bring their recognition of God out of the holy places and into secular, every-day life. In the early decades of 1800, she marched along the streets of New York, praying to and for any who paused even briefly during their dash along the wooden sidewalks of the city.
Throughout her life, Dorothy clearly punctuated moments of depression and fear with prayer, wielding it as an insulator from the earthly challenges of her existence. For example, in 1819, Dorothy suffered the attending horror and pain when she accompanied a condemned woman to the gallows. Convicted of arson in the torching of her mistress’s home, the young black woman was executed in New York, while Dorothy maintained a vigilant presence at her side. When the condemned woman felt the cold specter of death overshadow her, she turned to Dorothy for spiritual comfort. During the hours preceding her execution, Rose Butler confessed to Dorothy her fear of the unknowns of eternity. Dorothy “agreed with her to pray all the last night at home, if she would in prison; and the Lord removed the guilt from her soul during the night season, for she said, ‘I have sat up most of the night, and I felt lighter, and my burthen go off at twelve o’clock’” (Account 3). When the day of the execution dawned, Dorothy spent more than seven hours at the side of Butler, allaying the woman’s fears with three separate prayer sessions. The compassion and pity extended to the prisoner by Dorothy contrasts sharply with the bigoted condemnation of the white, imperious minister assigned to Butler’s execution. A greater contrast can be drawn between the disconsolate, empathetic Dorothy and the howling throng of more than ten thousand who swarmed Potter’s Field, jockeying for position to better assuage their horrified fascination. Dorothy accompanied the prisoner to the execution block, offering solicitous consolation all the while, advising the woman to continue her prayers for mercy until the very end and assuring her of eternal reward. Dorothy viewed the prayers as both a means for mercy and a distraction for the woman as she went through the final motions of the condemned. Dorothy stayed at the foot of the gallows during the execution, shouting promises of God’s mercy and praying
all the while that Rose could hear over the ear-splitting jeering of the crowd. Even when the authorities cut down Rose’s body from the hangman’s noose, Dorothy stayed by the dead woman’s side, accompanying her to the unhallowed ground of Potter’s Field. When no other would pronounce the words of consecration for the deceased, Dorothy stepped forward and performed the final service.285

Deeply depressed by what she considered the institutional murder of Rose Butler, Dorothy spent the following four weeks immersed in private prayer and contemplation, shunning friends and all missionary activities. For Dorothy, the purifying power of prayer eventually alleviated her mind of the horror of the unlawful slaying of Rose Butler and ameliorated her travail over the sanctification of the woman’s soul.

Dorothy also resorted to prayer in her moments of doubt and despair over crises in her own life. When journeying in the South in June 1802, Dorothy found herself nearly overwhelmed by the soaring temperatures and oppressive humidity. Because it was her first foray into the South, Dorothy had not yet made the valuable contacts which would offer relief in the form of a drink of cool well water, nourishing homemade food, and a comfortable, clean bed. Her spirits dreadfully low, she felt the temptation to forsake her divine calling.

I was tempted by Satan to be disobedient to the heavenly call, and cried out aloud for help from God as I was on the road, for I could not see the end it was to answer, except to expose me to difficulties; however, I resolved to perish doing the will of the Lord, and so was brought through surprisingly, and met with dear friends, when all hope was lost. (EC 73)
Again in Virginia, in 1806, Dorothy sought relief in prayer when she butted heads with an acerbic Methodist preacher. Entreated by several Methodists in Petersburg, Virginia, to address the needy multitudes, Dorothy accompanied a prominent Methodist man to the home of John Potts, the circuit preacher who controlled the meetinghouse. With a good deal of rancor, the preacher denied their request to use the meetinghouse to conduct a service on the Sabbath: “I will not give up either of my appointments [for the morning or evening Sabbath services]; neither will I inform the congregation for the evening; but I will not prevent her [Dorothy] coming there in the night, if she will make her own appointment” (Bank 249). Disappointed and disheartened by the rejection, Dorothy meditated and prayed on the subject, her spirit low at such wholesale dismissal by a fellow preacher. She wrote of the long, subsequent night spent in prayers, groans, and tears, not knowing what to do for a Place to convene the people together, and when the morning approached, I had no disposition to arise, therefore, I continued my supplications, and then exercised my faith on the promises of God, and recollected one of the dying testimonies of my pious father, who said unto my mother, and all her children; “God will raise up living stones to help you,” which I prayed might be fulfilled at this juncture; for a witness of my father’s faith, as well as to comfort my drooping soul. (249)

The next day, a third Methodist male preacher joined Dorothy in her prayerful entreaties for a meeting place for the spiritually needy of Petersburg. In the midst of prayer, punctuated with “ardent cries and groans” for God to raise up one of those “living stones . . . to assist me, and to my surprise, while I was in the exercise of prayer and faith,
a message came . . . that a youth, one of his acquaintance, had obtained the Episcopal Church for me, which was much larger than the Meeting [house]; therefore, this was over-ruled for my good” (249). Thus, Dorothy experienced again the power of prayer. It provided refuge from the bias and prideful opposition of her male concomitants. God not only supplied a meeting place but He also delivered one better suited to the vast crowd who flocked to hear Dorothy preach. Further, prayer solved not only the practical aspects but also imparted a valuable lesson to Dorothy. She rediscovered the value of leaving to God’s discernment her needs and concerns, for He provided on a much grander scale that for which Dorothy originally prayed.

Another such incident occurred early in her ministry. In 1802, Dorothy made her way to Washington, where she found herself a communal pariah because of her abolitionist message and her daring suggestion that slaves be taught to read and write. Turned away from the home of her only acquaintances in Washington, she roamed the city’s streets in a fit of distress over her uncertain circumstances, spending hours in prayer for holy guidance.

I walked round the city, weeping and wailing for my wretchedness, not knowing what to do in the present case for help; having little money to begin this arduous work, and not feeling free to open a subscription myself, to have the charge of the money belonging to the public. I therefore besought the Lord to undertake for me, and devise means himself to accomplish that which he required of me in this city, whither he had led me by his Spirit. (EC 116)
When evening approached, Dorothy ceased her wandering to and fro, retiring to the lodgings which she had been asked to vacate. There, to her astonishment, she learned of the inquiries made about her by a sympathizing, would-be patron. When Dorothy went in search of her deliverer, she found herself warmly welcomed and appreciated.

... My heart was moved to gratitude, and with tears I rehearsed many of the wonderful proofs of the love of God to me, since I had yielded myself up to follow the dictates of the Holy Ghost. ... The day passed over with rapidity, and I received a full compensation for the preceding day of lamentation, which I had spent tediously when solitarily walking all round in every direction, as if I would call the bricks and timber of the houses to join my mourning, or the solitary streets, that were planned for passengers to walk in, to answer to the tears I there shed. (116-17)

Human understanding and appreciation of divine wisdom and deliverance becomes a leitmotif throughout Dorothy’s works. Consistently, God provided for Dorothy’s needs—and often at variance to Dorothy’s prayers. In such instances, Dorothy recognized in hindsight her own will at work rather than her subjection to God’s design. She acknowledged the perversity of all such hypocritical practice: the giving of praise to God is an authentic act in its own right. An ulterior motive destroys both. She recognized how the elevation of her will over God’s degraded any service to Him and deteriorated it into an exhibitionist display. In retribution for her unwise emphasis, she castigated herself in writing. Her published self-chastisement served as an awful punishment, for just as Dorothy wielded the pen in punitive measure or gratitude, so too did she employ it for her own mortification. By writing and publishing her disobedience to God’s design—as
defined by praying to God for something specific rather than praying for God’s own will to be done—she immortalized her rebelliousness and insubordination to her creator. For Dorothy—a divinely called instrument of God—only complete and utter subjection to God’s superiority would suffice. Anything less, and she acted of her own accord rather than by divine appointment, an hypocrisy of which her detractors had accused her all along.

For example, in 1802, the Holy Spirit commanded Dorothy to establish a connection with the Methodists—and she nearly missed the call. After she had spent a week in the home of sympathizing Methodists, her hosts beseeched Dorothy to attend services with them at the Methodist meetinghouse. “But an unwillingness in my heart speedily answered, No, I never go there, for if I cannot get to a Quakers’ meeting, I go and worship God alone, in my own room, where I purpose to go now, while you are at the meeting” (EC 117). However, when she retired to her bedroom, she felt holy reproof in her mind.

The voice of the Lord command[ed] me to go with those friends, for it was His pleasure that it should be thus; but I answered again, signifying to Christ, (in my heart,) that if I went to the Methodists’ meeting, the Quakers would have no more to do with me, and then my path would be shut up. The Lord then in mercy shewed me, if the way was closed He would open it at His pleasure, and that no one could prevent it; so from this conclusion, I hastened down in obedience to my God, and simply said, “I think I will go with you.” (117)
And the meeting proved fortuitous, indeed. An aged and revered Methodist minister spoke to his congregation that morning, moving Dorothy to tears. During her moment of anguish, the minister stunned her by requesting her to address the congregation during the evening service. Although initially hesitant and with her “travail of soul increased so much, that I knew not what to do,” she sought divine guidance, “intreat[ing] the Lord to assist me, that I might know and do His will, and not follow my own understanding, which I knew would not glorify Him, unless influenced thereunto through His Holy Spirit” (118). Upon convincrement of God’s will, Dorothy acquiesced, and that evening made her first foray into a pulpit proper, leading a full Methodist service.

Because Dorothy heeded the divine reproach and consented to attend meeting with her Methodist friends, Dorothy established the initial connection to the American Methodist ministry. Large numbers turned out to hear her that night and during subsequent meetings, most of which were attended by other abolitionists who furthered her goal of ministry to American slaves. That night, she also made the acquaintance of stalwart women supporters, one of whom was Margaret Foxall, wife of Henry Foxall, who later introduced her to Asbury and Whatcoat, and paved the way for the pivotal 1803 meeting. Rather than closing Quaker doors, Dorothy’s obeisance to holy directives opened prominent Methodist ones that led to new realms of evangelism.

Perhaps Dorothy’s most revealing illustration of her Methodist bloodlines can be seen in her story of conversion—a mainstay of Methodism ushered in by Wesley and maintained by the various branches of modern-day Methodism. In Dorothy’s childhood years, personal testimonies frequently followed a regular service of preaching,
the idea being that the earlier worship should stimulate an experience that must be shared. John Wesley firmly believed “that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, would enable those who had received salvation to bear witness to the transforming work of Christ in their lives.” Wesley himself records a personal testimony of a female follower during an extended tour of Wales, after an August 13, 1746, service at Llansaintffraid.

[One of the women] could not refrain from declaring before them all what God had done for her soul. And the words which came from the heart went to the heart. I scarce ever heard such a preacher before. All were in tears round about her, high and low; for there was no resisting the Spirit by which she spoke.

Here, not only does the woman “preach”—to use Wesley’s word—but she secured Wesley’s overwhelming approbation as well. Hence, the public testimony that ritualistically rounded out the conversion in essence became women’s first means of preaching.

This air of public testimony of a private conversion permeates Dorothy’s writing, especially her Extraordinary Conversion, in which she records the occasion of her spiritual rebirth. She used her works as a forum for witnessing, not necessarily as a fulfillment of Methodist expectations, but certainly as incentive for her unconverted or backsliding audience. For Dorothy, the Methodist idea of religious self-expression fit in neatly with her divine mandate from God. Dorothy demonstrated the Wesleyan ideal that God, via the Holy Spirit, enabled the recipients of salvation to bear witness to their transforming experience. Dorothy, who wrote of her unwillingness to publish too early
in her life for fear of misleading or misrepresenting herself, came to the conclusion that the writings themselves became the irrefutable evidence of the transforming power of Christ. For her, writing became an inevitability, rather than a possibility.

Emphasizing the divine mandate was the temporal exemplar of her beloved father. A devout follower of Wesley and his precepts, William Ripley minutely recorded his own conversion and the circumstances surrounding his theological shift to Methodism. Just as his daughter would later do, he maintained a detailed diary of the marvels of the Holy Spirit at work in his life. The elder Ripley’s memoirs surely sounded a siren call to his daughter, even before she adopted Quakerism, which encouraged public testimony through publication. Even while published posthumously, the journals of her father clearly reveal intention of publication. He took excessive opportunity for not only recording his ministerial activities but also proselytizing his readership. As her father’s protégé, Dorothy must surely have recognized publication as an appropriate medium for testimony and, in her case, a rare opportunity to exercise her gift and develop her skill in communicating the gospel on an international level.

In addition to testimony, another facet of Methodism reverberating throughout Dorothy’s writing is the emphasis on the revitalizing nature of the “love feast,” a public occasion of Christian fellowship that afforded a less restrictive role for women. A simple, emblematical act of eating and drinking together, the love feast patterned after the agape of the early Church and the contemporary Moravian services.

According to historian Frank Baker, the women of the Bristol Society held the first Methodist love feast on April 15, 1739. A simple ceremony that could involve everyone in the symbolic act of eating and drinking together, the love feast (or common
meal) was a powerful symbol of Christian family life. Although prayer and singing were essential elements of the experience, the traditional focal point of the love feast was testimony, “the spiritual ‘sharing’ to which the taking of food and drink together was the symbolic prelude.” Wesley attested to the importance of such a gathering as an occasion for “the Holy Spirit to equip the faithful as instruments of divine love.” This charismatic principle finds full expression in the well-known Wesley hymn:

Poor idiots He teaches to show forth His praise,
And tell of the riches of Jesus’s grace.
No matter how dull the scholar whom He
Takes into His school, and gives him to see;
A wonderful fashion of teaching He hath,
And wise to salvation he makes us through faith.

More importantly, Wesley attested that this principle applied not only to men, but women as well, as demonstrated in Wesley’s declaration that “the very design of the lovefeast is free and familiar conversation, in which every man, yea, every woman, has liberty to speak what ever may be to the glory of God.” The simplest of testimonies, filled with the Spirit of Christ, becomes a powerful instrument of divine love, to be wielded by any of the congregants.

For women, the crucial value of the love feast “lay in its open fellowship and its Christian expression of freedom and equality.” Thus, women enjoyed a ready audience and a relaxed atmosphere in which to display their talents and expressions of faith. This lack of restrictions, then, translated into amplified religious passions, renewed declarations of dedication, and even conversions. As a result, the love feast transformed
into a popular forum for women’s testimonies. The context afforded them their generally welcomed participation—often in front of large crowds—in testimonials of their personal experiences with God. The love-feast leader typically invited anyone to speak about the goodness bestowed on him or her by God. Many women, rarely afforded such an opportunity, found a ready occasion to expound (sometimes eloquently and exceedingly) on their blessings. To some critics, they became more exhorters than testifiers and “came perilously close to transcending the limits of their sex.”

However, Wesley applauded and encouraged women in exhortation. Although exhorting resembled preaching in many ways, it did not actually proclaim the gospel. Exhorters did not “take a text” as preachers did, but they focused rather on reproving the sinner, encouraging repentance, and inspiring through their own personal testimony. Exhorters sought to invoke a response from those already acquainted with the Good News rather than to introduce it such as preachers would do. Thus, it fell short of actual preaching, which may be why Wesley felt free to encourage women to exhort to their fellow Methodists both privately and publicly. He advised female exhorters to “snatch all the opportunities you can of speaking a word to any of your neighbors” and encouraged women to “exhort the believers to go on to perfection.” Thus, prayer and testimony naturally evolved into exhortation, especially within the context of public prayer meetings. With Wesley’s approbation and a ready context, women such as Cutler (“Praying Nanny”) and Catherine Graves became prolific, successful exhorters. Other female exhorters, like Mary Holder, accompanied their preacher husbands in their itinerancy.
Their example possibly explains Dorothy’s preference for love-feasts during her sojourns in the new United States. Confronted with male aggression toward female evangelism, as noted in the previous chapter, women exhorters like Dorothy discovered a comfort zone in the love-feasts. While Dorothy never shied away from a confrontation over her right or call to preach, she nevertheless would have felt a release from the pressure of conflict through exhortation at a love-feast—at least in the early days of her ministry. Certainly, women of the era generally found it extremely difficult to break through the social barriers and offer Christ to others in this way. Dorothy frequently wrote of the sense of satisfaction accorded to her with each breakthrough, making it all worthwhile.

Further, the love-feasts and shared meals evolved into a valuable resource for Dorothy, allowing her to establish valuable contacts. The ambiance of a social gathering accorded greater opportunity to discuss present and future endeavors. The friends and advocates she garnered at these assemblies must have provided not only the foundations for a lifelong support system but also opened avenues for expanded evangelism.

While some of the men in attendance at love feasts sometimes took umbrage for the witness women bore, such opposition is rarely noted in Dorothy’s texts. Her *Extraordinary Conversion* chronicles her attendance at several love-feasts and shared meals, recording the gathering’s tranquil posture, her pleasure in the festivities, and, most importantly, the general esteem extended to her as an exhorter. Interestingly, with each subsequent work, such occasions for testimony garner less frequent mention, possibly as evidence of her increasing evangelical maturity and confidence. Her works expose an increasingly militant attitude toward women’s right to preach. As Dorothy widened her
evangelical scope, thus creating greater opportunities for public addresses, the permissive nature of the love-feast became superfluous. In short, as her preaching multiplied, intensified, and bore fruit, she outgrew the need for love feasts as a career move.

**Methodist Female Role Models**

Perhaps Dorothy’s willingness to wade into confrontations over her right to preach stemmed from the many Methodist prototypes she encountered as a child. While only speculation, it certainly stands to reason that Dorothy would have had encounters—more likely, frequent reunions—with the Methodist frontrunners of female evangelism by virtue of her father’s position as one of Wesley’s itinerant preachers. The Ripley home served as the point of contact for Methodism in Whitby and the surrounding area (as part of the circuit), and John Wesley himself visited the Ripley home several times. Often accompanying him were the indefatigable women who helped to usher in the age of Methodism. Arthur Mounfield, writing for Wesley’s magazine, labored to collect papers and letters in order “to trace the remarkable career” of Dorothy. While unsuccessful in locating her published texts in the days predating computerized searches, Mounfield gathered first-hand information from her contemporaries. He described Dorothy as “deeply impressed by the teaching of the Methodist preachers” during her early years, and the tone he employed in his article indicated the high esteem in which Methodists generally held her.

As Mounfield noted, “[Dorothy] often met Wesley and his fellow preachers, at her father’s home at Whitby.” Among the Methodist preachers to whom he undoubtedly referred are the female preacher prototypes who first braved Methodist
derision to forge an evangelical path for later women. Understanding their plight may shed greater light on Dorothy’s evolution as a strong female evangel.

As noted earlier, by mid-century, Wesley had begun to relax his initial objections to women’s preaching as the roles of women in the revival expanded. From 1761 to 1770, a small group of women emerged as Methodism’s first female preachers, including the famed Sarah Crosby and Mary Bosanquet.303 Strong in purpose and filled with inner conviction, the women nevertheless experienced occasional moments of doubt, to which Wesley responded with unequivocal encouragement. He assured them that they had “not gone too far” in their exhortations-turned-preaching and bolstered them with his support in their leading meetings through instruction, exhortation, song and prayer.304 Wesley’s public declarations remained less supportive, as his comments at the 1765 Annual Conference in Manchester show, where he asserted that women should speak only as public teachers rather than preachers, in accordance with the Pauline edict cited in 1 Timothy.305 Still, he supported women in far-reaching leadership roles, such as Eliza Bennis, who supervised the activities of her circuit and made unsolicited changes.306 That a female would dare to restructure a solely male domain may have been cause for uproar; however, Wesley applauded her bold efforts. To Peggy Dale, he charged with the decree to “Speak, therefore, as you can; and by-and-by you shall speak as you would. Speak, though, with fear; and in a little time you shall speak without fear.”307 Chilcote noted that Wesley’s implications, “in terms of the principle and practice of preaching . . . would have been obvious to the conscientious women who aspired to fulfill a strong sense of calling.”308
The challenge for the right to preach came in the summer of 1771 when Mary Bosanquet wrote a lengthy letter to Wesley, in the first serious defense of women’s preaching in Methodism. Questioning the limitations of women in the church and addressing the often-used biblical prohibitions to women’s preaching, Bosanquet argued that Scripture reveals God sometimes called women to preach in extraordinary situations. In cogent argumentation, she dissected the Pauline edicts in 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14, which prohibit women from preaching. Her letter initiated the arguments that feminists use in contemporary historicism and criticism today and that generations of women built on as justification for their right to preach. She determined that the prohibitive passages referred to specific situations of meddling women in the Corinth church and as such remained unrelated to women in general. She did not believe it to mean “she shall not entreat sinners to come to Jesus, nor say, Come, and I will tell you what God hath done for my soul.” Neither did she accept the argument that women could speak only under a “peculiar impulse” or “extraordinary” calling. She summed up by writing, “I praise my God, I feel him near, and I prove his faithfulness every day, but I want to live as I do not, and to feel every moment that word, My God and my all.”

By 1771, Wesley approved of the preaching by women who felt an “extraordinary call.” Apparently, Wesley had not anticipated the frequency of these “extraordinary calls” to women, for the number of female preachers quickly multiplied, opening a new era in Methodist itinerancy. The ecclesiastical loophole emboldened women like Anne Gilbert, the first Cornish woman preacher, and Penelope Newman, who, following Wesley’s advice, began to tour the surrounding areas near her hometown, preaching and converting. Bosanquet, preaching in public inns and private homes, converted both the
commoners and the elite. In fashionable Harrogate, she attracted the socially elite of High Harrogate, which greeted her with open arms and entreaties to return.\textsuperscript{312} Sarah Crosby, a major voice in female Methodist preaching, initiated a whirlwind campaign across the Yorkshire moors and dales, including Dorothy’s hometown of Whitby, which lasted twenty years. Her services proved to be in such demand that it began to be commonplace for her to address as many as five meetings in a day and often to crowds numbering as many as five hundred people.\textsuperscript{313}

Without a doubt, by the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Methodist women had transcended the limitations imposed by the Church to make an indelible mark in Methodist itinerancy. Building on this firm foundation and cemented by Wesley’s support, women gained an even firmer footing with successful preaching forays throughout England and Ireland and bringing their legacy with them as they crossed the seas to the former colonies.

Interestingly, as these women crisscrossed the English countryside in the late 1770s, the many reports of their activities in North Yorkshire, especially the Whitby area, hint at the exposure to female evangelism that young Dorothy Ripley may have experienced. Her father’s involvement in lay preaching, coupled with his prominence in the Whitby area as the major Methodist voice, would have ensured his contact with women such as Crosby and Bosanquet, among others. Crosby’s twenty years of vigilant endeavors traversing the Yorkshire moors most assuredly brought her into the Whitby community. In her diary, she recorded her July 1774 travels with Wesley through Robin Hood’s Bay and Scarborough. Every morning during this time, she held meetings in the towns and villages through which they passed.
Just as Dorothy would later do, Crosby often addressed those same crowds again in the afternoon and evenings, perhaps because subsequent meetings produced fewer inquisitive spectators and more earnest followers. Crosby and the Wesleyan entourage completed their 1774 travels at Whitby. Crosby records in her diary, “I had a very good time, and a house full of people. In the evening, I went up to the top of the hill, and was so sensible when praying alone, that I was doing my master’s blessed will, in going among the people that no outward voice could have strengthened the conviction. My spirit rests herein.—In the arms of divine love.”

![Figure 2.5 “City Limits.”](image)

*Figure 2.5 “City Limits.”* This marker heralds the entrance to the town of Whitby, a coastal town on Yorkshire’s east coast. Situated twenty miles north of the major tourist town of Scarborough, Whitby lies close to the scenic North York Moors National Park and the unspoilt fishing villages of Staithes and Robin Hood’s Bay.
Crosby again returned to Whitby the following October, where her whirlwind schedule of meetings never slackened. Such close proximity with prominent female preachers must surely have made an impression on seven-year-old Dorothy. Crosby’s journey with Wesley through Whitby came four years after Dorothy first heard the voice of God address her, commanding her to discard her toys and rise from her infant knees to pray. Her burgeoning interest, coupled with her father’s ministerial prominence, certainly must have brought her into close contact with the women of Wesley’s team.

Figure 2.6 “Whitby Harbor.” In addition to its 80-year history as a whaling port, Whitby includes some famous names in its historical past: the explorer James Cook began his whaling career as an apprentice in Whitby; Bram Stoker wrote portions of his famous Dracula while staying in Whitby in 1890; and Lewis Carroll set some of his poetry in Whitby during his regular visits.
What must the young, impressionable girl have thought of an unquestionably successful female preacher such as Crosby? Would she have envisioned in Crosby a future version of herself, one who moved the emotions of both commoners and elite and who addressed small gatherings and large crowds of five hundred and more? What would Dorothy have made of this powerful female evangelist who, despite widespread prejudice, consistently exercised her exceptional talents to groups of “Quakers, Baptists, church folks, and Methodists” of such magnitude that they “feared the collapse of the meetinghouse galleries.” Indeed, one could speculate that Dorothy saw a blueprint for self-construction as an emissary of God, warning sinners of their dangers and leading believers into the full enjoyment of their Christian privileges. Further, she would have witnessed an ecumenical bend to preaching that embraced all—the devout as well as the uncommitted—who sought her instruction. Like Crosby and her contemporaries, Dorothy addressed any religious group which welcomed her, including Methodists, African-Methodists, Quakers, Baptists, and Presbyterians, as well as the unchurched among the poor, sailors, slaves, prisoners and natives. Perhaps her early witness of interdenominational preaching helped her to finally adopt an ecumenical character of her own after repeated rejections from the Society of Friends.

Additionally, she undoubtedly discovered from these pioneering Methodist women the unconventionality of venue. In the prototypical Crosby, Dorothy would have seen a woman who addressed her listeners in stately chapels and comfortable meeting halls and, when those could not contain the crush of people, the barns and open fields. As church doors in America closed to her in the backlash of male objection to female preaching, and as she attracted an increasingly large crowd of followers, the practice of
open-air preaching became a mainstay in Dorothy’s evangelizing career. With progressing frequency, Dorothy wrote in her two autobiographies of her out-of-doors preaching. Initially stemming from her inability to find suitable meeting places which could accommodate the swelling crowds amassing to hear her, her penchant for the camp-meeting style became ever more prominent, despite the inhospitable circumstances accompanying such venues. The damp and cold she encountered during her year-round outdoor preaching exacerbated the delicacy of her health, but she found great satisfaction in taking her message to the out-of-doors. In the summer, the scorching heat and unrelenting sun of the South greatly challenged her fortitude, but she persevered because of the great conversion rewards she discovered in the most informal of venues. In the winter, the cold rains and snows, followed by the accompanying mud, amplified the fragility of her health. The wet conditions made movement challenging, both in conveyances and on foot, for women in the cumbersome, weighty skirts of the day had to battle against the elements. Dorothy wrote of one such instance:

I must acknowledge that I thought it a great hardship, being obliged to force my way through the mud, after standing till my strength was exhausted, stimulating the people of God to be faithful unto death. The ardency that I felt for the salvation of precious souls, deprives me not only of sleep, but likewise of that rest, which would contribute much to the strengthening of this feeble frame, that is ready to faint under the dreadful pressure of mortality. (Bank 251-52)

Her preference for camp-meeting-style preaching found even greater purchase as she teamed up with American revivalism stalwarts such as Lorenzo Dow, evangelist to
the South, and Johny Edwards, radical minister to New York. Just as importantly, at the side of the Primitive Methodists, she would later help introduce the concept of camp-meeting-style preaching on a grand scale in her mother-country of England. Throughout her career, Dorothy conducted religious services in fields, pastures, private gardens, and town greens, as well as along river banks and the decks of ships. Further, she advanced the kingdom of God in such humble surroundings as barns, schools, public inns, courthouses, and jails as often as she did in expressly-purposed chapels and meetinghouses.

Perhaps Dorothy’s increasing partiality for alfresco preaching and camp-meetings stemmed from what historian Roxanne Mountford argues is the inhospitability of the traditional Protestant church pulpit for female preachers. Because rhetorical spaces such as the pulpit “carry the residue of history within them,” the pulpit stands as an object imbued with “masculine” connotations that pose challenges to women preachers. The pulpit, for example, is a piece of furniture designed to suit male rather than female bodies, especially a male’s generally greater stature. This permitted males greater visibility—and in turn allowed them to be better viewed by the congregation. The furniture could dwarf the slighter bodies of the females. Further, the masculine connotations of the pulpit cast women as misfits, making them uncomfortable, even aggrieved in that sacred place. Thus, Dorothy’s recurring abandonment of the pulpit could have deeper connotations than her adoption of Quaker ritual. Her choice of an alternative venue for delivery of her spiritual message may have been an attempt to carve a rhetorical place of her own, one outside the space and position culturally, traditionally, and ideologically unreceptive to her.
Although Dorothy’s true involvement with early Methodist women must be left to conjecture, one can see a pattern of aims and conduct set into motion by these prototypical women and built upon by later female evangelists such as Dorothy. Indeed, there is every possibility that, by virtue of her father’s position and his friendly terms with Wesley, Dorothy would have come into intimate contact with these women as they traveled the itinerant circuits with Wesley. When Wesley visited her home, his entourage often accompanied him, as both Dorothy and her father note in their individual journals. Thus, in her front-row seat, Dorothy would have witnessed the rise of women preachers as powerful voices in Methodist itinerancy and seen firsthand how they served their Lord through their indefatigable public labors. Perhaps the original impetus for her preaching came from the revivalistic fervor of growing Methodism—with women preachers standing in the vanguard—in Dorothy’s formative years. This seed of female power in servitude to God early implanted in Dorothy later bloomed to full flower during her thirty-year dedication to intercontinental evangelism.

Perhaps another female role model from Dorothy’s childhood, albeit of a vastly different nature, was Mary Stokes Dudley.\textsuperscript{319} A trusted Methodist leader at Bristol and an established itinerant, Stokes became the first of a number of Methodist female preachers to defect to the Society of Friends because of the Society’s avowed egalitarianism. In 1772, Stokes left her position at Bristol to join the Friends in Friars, taking the fire of her Methodist evangelism to the Quakers, to whom she devoted the next fifty years in proselytizing.\textsuperscript{320} A number of Methodist preachers, men and women, magnetically drawn to mysticism and the theological stance of Barclay’s \textit{Apology}, converted to Quakerism and took their evangelizing zeal with them.\textsuperscript{321}
Indeed, the Methodists opened the floodgates of defection in the decade following Wesley’s death with their official crackdown on women’s preaching. Perhaps, Dorothy simply saw the proverbial “writing on the wall,” in regard to Methodism’s intolerance of female preaching, and this occasioned her attempted cross-over to the Quakers, well-known for their tolerance of female evangelism.

Certainly, Methodism traveled a fast track to a moratorium on female preaching in the final decades of the century—the years of Dorothy’s increasing impatience to realize her dream of ministering to “Ethiopia’s children” enslaved in America (EC 3). Over the course of the Methodist movement’s third decade, the future of female preaching looked promising enough; however, despite the past twenty-five years of publicly exercising their gifts in the ministry of preaching, Methodist women preachers found their movements severely curtailed in the absence of their ardent supporter.

Hardening antifeminist sentiment resulted in the Conference of 1803, convened in Manchester, imposing the following restrictive resolution:

We are of the opinion that, in general, they ought not [to preach]. 1. Because a vast majority of our people are opposed to it. 2. Because their preaching does not at all seem necessary, there being a sufficiency of Preachers, whom God has accredited, to supply all the places in our connexion with regular preaching. But if any woman among us think she has an extraordinary call from God to speak in public, (and we are sure it must be an extraordinary call that can authorize it,) we are of opinion she should, in general, address her own sex, and those only. And, upon this
condition alone, should any woman be permitted to preach in any part of our connexion. . . .

For all practical purposes, the women preachers had received official condemnation of Wesleyan Methodist leadership, which now positioned itself to direct the course of the movement over the next half century. The Conference’s edict resulted in intense turmoil within the women themselves. Witness to the death knell to Methodist women’s preaching, Methodist minister and historian Zechariah Taft observed, “many, very many [women] . . . suffered a martyrdom of conflicting passions, arising from a sense of their duty to God on the one hand, and of opposition from men on the other.”

Thwarted in their evangelistic purpose by the new mandates handed down by the Conference and unable to conform to the new standards and expectations of the Methodist institution, some women preachers sought to recover the more flexible, free, and egalitarian ethos which marked earlier days by joining the Society of Friends. Others, such as Elizabeth Hurrell, succumbed to the edict, and relinquished her calling but lived with the sense that she had betrayed her divine mission. A successful preacher sanctioned by Wesley, Hurrell forsook preaching after the Conference’s edict, but as an old woman in her final illness, she wrote, “O that I but had my time to live again, I would not bury my talent as I have done.”

Like the other women preachers escaping to the sanctuary of Quakerism, well-known for its tolerance of female evangelism, Dorothy perhaps realized the waning potential for her ministerial aspirations. Dorothy’s ambition to preach had burned inside her since that terrifying, physically debilitating conversion at age twelve, and as she moved into her thirties and that desire took on the edge of desperation, her witness of the
escalating Methodist crackdown on activities bordering on female preaching must have alarmed her. Unquestionably, one must speculate if Dorothy foresaw the eventual, official termination of such evangelistic potential. Perhaps absconding to the Quakers stemmed as much from her ardent yearning to preach as her conviction of the superiority of the Friends’ tenets.

Fortunately for Dorothy’s ambitions, by the time the Conference had severed any hopes of preaching for a large section of its constituency, she had already embarked on a lifelong ministry in America. Tellingly, she demonstrated how intimately connected she remained with the Methodists through her literary nod to the Methodist Conference’s edict of an “extraordinary call” as the determiner of a woman’s legitimacy to preach.

The Methodist initiative of an extraordinary call must have carried a degree of authoritative weight for Dorothy, for she gave it enough credence to acquiesce to the proposition in her writing. In fact, she not only referred to it within her memoirs, but she alluded to it when titling her first published work.

In order to better understand Dorothy’s strategizing, some detail must be given about Wesley’s definition of extraordinary call. During the 1770s, it must have become increasingly obvious to Wesley that accommodation of a woman preacher had to be made. Historians remain uncertain about when the transformation to acceptance of a woman preacher with an extraordinary call came about, but most agree it came in response to the acclaimed works of Bosanquet and Crosby. In fact, it was to Bosanquet that he coined the term extraordinary call in his response to the epistolary challenge for a woman’s right to preach, as discussed earlier. In her letter, she challenged the male privilege to limit a woman’s addresses to what she called “a peculiar impulse,” for any
timeline must be a man-made construct rather than a divine one. As she argued, while men may limit a woman’s peculiar impulse to two or three times in her life, “perhaps God will say, two or three times in a week, or day—and where shall we find the rule for this?” Bosanquet rejected any link between immodesty and preaching, pointing to the biblical examples of Mary, Deborah and others—all women of purity, humility and godliness who publicly proclaimed God’s message. She asserted that these women acted on extraordinary calls from God, much as she and other women felt, and “woe be to them if they obey it not.”

Significantly, the idea of an “extraordinary” drive must have seeped through denominational borders, for the term crops up in other circumstances regarding a woman’s spiritual calling. For example, the same year that Wesley approved women’s preaching on the basis of an extraordinary call, Samson Occom, the West Indian minister, used the premise to underpin his request of Susanna Wheatley, the white owner of enslaved American poet, Phillis Wheatley. In his letter, dated on March 5, 1771, Occom beseeched the slaveholder to send the poet back to Africa as a lay preacher: “Pray Madam, what harm would it be to send Phillis to her Native Country as a Female Preacher to her kindred, you know Quaker women are alow'd to Preach, and why not others, in an Extraordinary Case.”

Hence, the proliferation of the extraordinary call mentality helps explain Dorothy’s concession to it in her first work. A first-time writer, especially a female evangelist who some readers would consider an interloper on the male domain, would have dedicated at least nominal authorial reflection on the principle. Moreover, the strong Methodist ties maintained through her own itinerancy work and her family’s connections
ensured inclusion of her “call” in her work. The Methodist conception of an *extraordinary call* as a divine marker for a woman’s right to preach would have held great significance for Dorothy. She often preached at Methodist gatherings in New England and, on her returns to Whitby, consorted with the Methodists there. To overlook the notion of an extraordinary call would have been to neglect an opportunity to substantiate her divinely inspired mission, actions and writings—not only amongst her Methodist readership but also among other readers.

Thus, the Conference’s mandate of an *extraordinary call* found purchase in her writings, leading her to title her first work *Extraordinary Conversion*.\(^{329}\) Moreover, she would go to considerable lengths to explain (and often refer back to) her personal, beyond-the-ordinary call. In this way, she strategically preserved approbation among Methodists and sidestepped denominational alienation as a result of a woman’s preaching and publication.

Hence, imbedded in Dorothy’s title of *The Extraordinary Conversion and Religious Experience of Dorothy Ripley* one can see nuances of the Conference’s influence, as well as that of her Methodist upbringing. In titling her first published work *Extraordinary*, Dorothy demonstrated to her Methodist audience that she had indeed received an exceptional, supreme and *extraordinary* call to preach the word of God. As demonstrated earlier, conversion by its very nature included the necessary element of testimony. For Dorothy to have an *extraordinary* conversion then was to have an *extraordinary* call.

Further support for this notion can be found in Dorothy’s preface, in which she cites the “extraordinary power made manifest in [her] childhood” (*EC* iii). Her childhood
conversion imprinted on her mind the duty of a testimonial, and she alluded to this in the very first line of her narrative: “I have believed it to be my duty for some time to testify to the world what God hath done for my soul . . .” (1).

Having established the premise of an extraordinary call, Dorothy moved through the narrative interspersing evidence that the extraordinary call was actually of divine origin, one which she must not fail to heed lest she place her soul in danger. She reiterated her role as a conduit for God’s word, a person who willingly submitted herself to God to “use me as an instrument,” repeatedly emphasizing her passive obedience to God’s will and citing her reliance on His wisdom to guide her way (EC 45). Thus, any Methodist objector to her role as preacher and writer had to fence words with God, for she absolved herself of all active input in her work, declaring that she merely re-acted to God’s will and direction rather than acted on her own motivation.

As further proof of her extraordinary, divine call, she proclaimed that God blesses those whom He calls with the necessary talent to publicize His word. Anyone acting on their own impulse rather than divine impetus would, by default, be unsuccessful in evangelism. She writes, “Thou givest the ability to them whom thou callest to magnify thy name, and sound for thy praise. I give unto thee my heart and hands to direct; that my pen may publish the verity of this declaration, ‘They that seek me early shall find me’” (EC 8). Had God not divinely called her to preach, she would have been powerless not only to sustain a successful ministry, but also to publish such a work. The evidence of her divine call, then, is the text itself.

Just in case she has failed to convince some of her readers as to her extraordinary nature of her call, Dorothy resorted to her standard modus operandi: she went on the
offensive. In a preface added specifically for the second edition, published in 1817 and printed for a British audience, she wrote, “I know that this Work will meet with opposition from the carnal spirit of the worldly wise, who know not any of the Blessed Effects of Faith; because they are contented to be guided by reason . . . as well as despite the productions of Faith, from the consequence of unbelief, that has the ascendancy over their wills or understanding” (EC vii).

Despite the limitations imposed on women by the edict of an extraordinary call, Methodism accorded women great respect in the many supportive roles of evangelism. For Dorothy’s purposes, her Methodist upbringing afforded her a pattern of evangelical development that served her well in the evolution of her own missionary style and practice. While not actually envisioned by John Wesley, the organic developments of evangelicalism in the Methodist tradition nevertheless placed great weapons of persuasion into feminine hands for the establishment of women’s preaching. Methodism encouraged women, by its fundamental tenets, to be preachers. As feminist historian Christine Krueger elucidated, “They had found within Methodism a patriarchal structure that supplied the means by which its own authority could be exploited by the disenfranchised—it offered the silenced a voice.”

Women proved quick to take advantage of that power, albeit not by outright challenging it. Instead, they utilized a subversive means of appropriating the sect’s original objections to Anglicanism to promulgate their own advancement: esoteric methods of exegesis, clerical monopoly on preaching, and limits on the spread of literacy. Following the lead of Wesley, women preachers justified their actions by “claiming they sought to revive the established religion, not rebel against it.”
For example, scripture holds individuals duty bound to follow, interpret, and propagate the word. Accordingly, Methodism promoted scripture as the divinely inspired word of God, not the inert, lifeless discourse which Wesley so objected to in the Anglican Church. A significant religious tradition with deep roots in the early Christian church, testimony had always served a central purpose in that it provided fellowship, mutual accountability, freedom of conscience, and holiness as the ongoing goal of Christian life. While Wesley never made the testimonial of one’s experience a requirement for membership in the Methodist societies (such as the churches with Puritan roots), giving one’s testimony evolved into a distinct characteristic of Methodist gatherings. Reared with the idea that the simplest of testimonies, filled with the Spirit of Christ, could be a powerful instrument of divine love, Dorothy believed that her testimony was of immense value to the nurture of needy souls.

Further, a central theme of the Methodist movement promoted the accessibility of the gospel to all, which in turn promoted personal explication. Throughout her own works, Dorothy emphasized repeatedly that no one was to be denied access to the Holy Scriptures. It was communal property, equally inherited by all children of God. As a result of this tenet of universal accessibility, its devotees—including women—could assume an interpretative role. According to Krueger, the idea of the collective right of usage “effectively promoted private scripture interpretation and application, thus granting to the individual the authority to discern God’s will for herself.” As a child growing up in this tradition, Dorothy benefited from its precept of basic rights to all—male and female—to read the word of God and interpret from them a liberating message.
This perspective reverberates throughout Dorothy’s works, as she exercised her liberty to employ Holy Scripture as examples, description, omens, and prophecy. Even more daringly, Dorothy wielded Holy Scripture in her bid to assure truly repentant sinners of God’s pardon for their sins. When Rose Butler stood on the gallows awaiting execution, Dorothy—envisioning herself as the agent of God—assured the convicted woman that her heartfelt contrition would gain her a measure of heaven. She repeatedly informed her readers that the contrition of Butler was nothing less than genuine and to be rewarded with life eternal. Additionally, she chastised those who would gainsay her authority, invested by the Savior and the Holy Scriptures.

Rose, I believe went from the scaffold to Paradise, a repenting, believing sinner, finding mercy at those hands, that bled for her on Calvary: and who dare to say to Jesus, Jehovah, What dost thou? Or dictate to the Omnipotent Lord God, concerning whom He shall save? Is it not left on Record by the Son of Man, the Son of God? “He that believeth on the Lord Jesus shall be saved: and he that believeth not shall be damned.”

Rose did believe at last that the Lord Jesus, was a Saviour, and a Redeemer . . . . (Account 11)

On the whole, the Methodists that Dorothy encountered in America supported such interpretation and proselytizing by a woman. In Portsmouth, Virginia, in 1806, for example, Dorothy held two consecutive meetings with the Methodists which, despite heavy January rains, prove a “weighty time” of stimulating, evangelistic fervor among two thousand souls. What made this occasion unique was its sponsorship—two Methodist male preachers invited her leadership and made the necessary arrangements for the
meeting (Bank 251-52). Even more surprising, one of the Norfolk Methodist preachers attending the open-air meeting later invited Dorothy to “have his congregation on Sabbath morning,” readily turning over his pulpit to a woman (252).

In addition, Methodism advanced evangelism as a natural outgrowth of conversion. The dialogic structure of conversion—the duty of the convert to respond to the evangelist’s message with a confession—i.e. to listen and then to speak—served as the frontrunner to women’s evangelism. Paul described the process in Romans:

But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. 333

The duty of conversion, then, began with confession but entailed much more. It imposed on the convert a lifelong duty—no matter how subordinate or inarticulate—to proclaim the dramatic and liberating impact of Jesus on their lives. Upon conversion, believers have a new status before God. They benefit from divine favor, enjoy peace, celebrate reconciliation. They take pleasure in a new spirit, exult in their hope and their sufferings, and participate in a new humanity. With such enthusiasm burning in their newly converted souls, the same women previously silenced in ecclesiastical and secular matters could be silenced no longer. Coupled with the new, right relationship with God awarded as a result of conversion, the Pauline injunction to publicly confess became a heady invitation for these women. To them, conversion, with its element of public
confession, became a moment of ecstatic self-revelation, self-justification, and even farther-reaching evangelism. Because conversion implied a new kind of life under a new master—the service to God and His righteousness with its reward of eternal life—the women experienced a separation from their old lives as a slave to sin. Yet, in another sense, they assumed a new role as slave to the male monopoly on religious power. In an ironic turn of events, the very patriarchal religious culture that vetoed their preaching proved powerless to prevent women’s public testimony as part of the theology of salvation.

Further, the immediacy of personal testimony presented women with direct access to a captive audience. Their speech, on the heels of their acceptance of saving grace, accorded the hierarchy less occasion for censorship and afforded women the opening to demonstrate the eloquence and sincerity that obliged religious leadership to acknowledge their spiritual gifts as evangelists. Thus, the progression from conversion to exhortation to preaching proved natural enough. Indeed, as women seized the opportunity for public expression, they appropriated the language of Holy Scripture to invest their own speech with authority. When confronted by their critics, women such as Dorothy who publicly evangelized enlisted the aid of divinely inspired biblical teachings to justify their uncontrollable response to the movement of the Holy Spirit within them. They articulated the scripturally based premise that the converted are no longer orphans for the Father has adopted them. They can no longer be dismissed as prodigals for they have been forgiven. They no longer suffer alienation, for they have come home. As the children of God, they must shoulder the same duty of confession and profession.
Implied in the passages addressing conversion is a change of course or direction, not merely an attitudinal change or altering of one’s opinion. Methodism expounded on this implication, taking the life-redirection element as constitutive. So too, did this hold true for women. Interestingly, in the same letter to the Romans, Paul urges all with charismatic gifts—prophecy, teaching, administration, and benevolence—to use the charismas for the church’s nurture.\(^3\) In the letters to the Romans and Corinthians, Paul instructed the believer to make use of all “spiritual gifts” —gifts of empowerment bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the advancement of God’s kingdom. Further, he emphasized that every believer was graced by some gifts—all of which were bestowed by “the same Spirit.”\(^4\) The Spirit conveyed gifts on whomever it willed: women, slaves, the poor, the uneducated. “The central theme of the Methodist revival—that the simple gospel message was accessible to all who read and heard with an open heart—effectively promoted private scripture interpretation and application, thus granting to the individual the authority to discern God’s will for herself.”\(^5\)

Plus, Paul’s instruction to the individual to publicly confess salvation from Christ serves as a prelude to the command to faithfully serve Him with whatever gifts He bestowed upon the individual. Religious studies tend to divide “spiritual gifts” into three general categories: utterances, practical ministry and wonder-working faith. The gift of utterances includes prophecy and instruction. The gift of practical ministry manifests in caring for the needy: serving, encouraging, performing acts of mercy, and giving aid. The gifts of wonder-working faith include healing and performing miracles. The gift of apostleship, ranked first in 1 Cor. 12: 28, is active in all three ways: in the ministry of the word, in pastoral care, and in the working of miracles.\(^6\)
Like the strong Methodist women of her childhood, Dorothy took the Pauline injunction to heart. Her evangelical and missionary work can be viewed as the embodiment of spiritually bequeathed gifts. The gift of tongues is first and foremost a matter of communication, and each time she proselytized, she utilized her gift of utterances. Each time she addressed a crowd or lone penitent she fulfilled her mission as apostle, and her pastoral work in the prisons and hospitals and the message of hope she freely distributed demonstrated her gift for healing the spirit.

Applying scripture to her own life, Dorothy discovered that submission to God’s will meant breaking ties with temporal authorities. Dorothy emulated the Methodist women of her youth who defended themselves with scriptural appeals when their families chastised them for replacing home duties with church duties such as joining or leading a Methodist class. By appealing to the word of God, she deflected the criticisms and disputes of her detractors. Divine authority imposed spiritual duties on Dorothy, investing her with the authority to converse freely with clergy, laity, and church and civic leaders. When the Quakers cautioned her to wait for official denominational sanction before commencing missionary travel, Dorothy challengingly ignored any authority that posed an obstacle to fulfillment of her divine call. Though the Quakers denigrated her convictions with such language as “imposter” and “fanciful,” Dorothy refused to confine herself to the dictates of temporal authority and escaped to an evangelical life, armed with the confidence that she followed God’s design. Although geographically estranged from her family and suffering the communal ostracism that accompanied a break with the Quakers, she fell back on the orthodox teaching of her childhood. Having discerned a
disjunction between the temporal power that sought to limit her and the divine power that liberated her, Dorothy transcended the social boundaries that defined her.

Finally, while Dorothy adopted the outward accoutrement of Quakerism, the reality of her life reveals her lifelong adherence to Wesley’s directives of personal scripture study, active evangelism, and a doctrine of perfection as the goal of the Christian life, leading to an emphasis on both holy living and social action.

For example, she reiterated throughout her writings the Wesleyan/Arminian concept of free grace:

Yea, every sinner born, might be healed of their malady, if submission in their wills were wrought, through the effects of faith, the gift of God, which is freely given to all who ask the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: for, by grace we are saved through faith, therefore we are all debtors to grace, and all saved through faith, by the obedience of the Son of God, who offered himself up freely for a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of a condemned world. (Bank 52)

Not only did she pronounce repeatedly throughout her works that grace is free and available to any and everyone seeking it, but she also routinely prefaced her words to strangers and would-be converts with reminders of their unclaimed inheritance of salvation. To Dorothy, every “Man is an heir of God, and a joint heir with Jesus Christ for ever . . .” (EC 27).

For example, at the beginning of her conversion narrative, she confirmed God’s willing blindness to human differences. “It is my choice to serve the eternal I AM, because he is infinitely good and gracious, full of wisdom, and full of compassion to all
nations, without respect of persons” (24). Further, she deflected any argument against this premise by contending that one must accept it if one were to believe the biblical dictate that “Jesus Christ tasted death for every man” (24). Dorothy then used herself as the human example of God’s encompassing forgiveness, writing that “surely I must believe this, if I believe he died at all, or died for me the chief of sinners” (24). Summing up her argument, she equated God’s name with love—and not just an all-encompassing, supernatural love which is free to all humankind, but also the more readily understandable parental love common to all humankind. “Did men consider that the very name and nature of God is love! love to all the fallen race, this would prove an incitement to them to return to the great and glorious Parent, who feeds by his bounty, from year to year, millions of all nations, although the greatest part of mankind live as if there were no God observing their ways, neither any hope of immortality in the regions of glory” (24). To Dorothy, people’s willingness to believe in their own doom sealed their ultimate fate.

Her argument serves as a further example of Dorothy’s willingness to tackle the male moratorium on female biblical exegesis. Dorothy readily accepted the concept of free grace as an overriding reason for not limiting her message to female bible study groups, sewing circles, or sick visitations. To confine herself to a small group would be to put human parameters to a divine directive. Taking her message to all people meant a comprehensive missionary effort, one which included the world—and, necessarily, scriptural reading and interpretation as part of the ministerial role. As Krueger elucidated, “When evangelicals attacked these deterrents to scripture reading as obstacles to their Pentecostal mission to save all souls, regardless of sex, class or race, they appeared to be clearing the way for future appropriations of scripture for subversive purposes.” }
Dorothy rarely presented herself as a lobbyist for a special-interest group, advocating and justifying female religious authority, or overtly challenging constituted patriarchal authority. Like the Methodist women of her childhood, she proclaimed a more subversive message than later nineteenth-century radicals. For instance, in reflection upon receiving abroad the news of her mother’s death in England, Dorothy’s lament in *Extraordinary Conversion* not only recalls the *spiritual* language of her childhood, but also its *patriarchal* constituent:

. . . If she had any crimes, her greatest fault was this, loving us too tenderly; and this she suffered for by the stripping power of Jehovah, who unloosed the strings of nature, (that twisted fondly around her loving heart) and so separated her first from her dear sons and beloved husband, and next her blooming daughters, whom she, no doubt, has met again in the kingdom of glory, where each are celebrating the praise of the Lamb of God, who suffered in our stead. (EC 110)

The same Dorothy who flouted convention to forge a path of her direction stressed the importance of her mother’s innately pious, virtuous, and modest character. Obviously deeply influenced by the Methodist vision of a pious woman, she praised her mother for the traditionally maternal characteristics and activities which she herself shunned. Instead of pointing to the dedicated work that the elder Dorothy Ripley certainly must have shown to the church and community in her capacity as wife to the first lay Methodist minister in Whitby, her daughter turned to what she must have believed to be even more important to immortalize in print for later generations:
Never can I be sufficiently thankful for the mercies I have enjoyed since I left an indulgent mother’s house, whom I hope to find numbered among the just, at the right hand of the Father of Spirits. It was God who required me to yield her up for his sake, although I thought I never could part with her in life or death; but, methinks, if she knew the goodness of God, even her God, unto me, she would mingle her tears of joy with mine, her fervent prayers also together, that they might acceptably ascend up to the throne of glory, where the tribute of praise is received from every grateful heart. (60)

To Dorothy, her mother’s character could be summed up with the biblical image of sacrificial, “indulgent” mother.

Or was this case? An interesting hypothesis is that Dorothy merely demonstrated a writer’s technique of knowing one’s audience. Certainly well acquainted with the most likely readers of her works—the same people with whom she had interacted, sheltered, and supped with in her formative years and since initiating her evangelical mission—perhaps Dorothy merely sought to emphasize those characteristics and activities which the overwhelming majority of her generation would have considered estimable. One could speculate that Dorothy simply chose to whitewash the harsh realities of her mother’s life: a woman uprooted from her own native county and family and deposited by her frequently unemployed, idealistic husband into a modest home built on the unstable hillside of a cliff routinely bracketed by heavy winds and responsible for holding the North Sea at bay. After laboring to gift her husband with a houseful of heirs, she was then left for weeks, even months, at a time to care for the children alone while he rode a
horse from evangelical meeting to evangelical meeting behind the venerable John Wesley. As the years advanced and her children prematurely died, she was left widowed, homeless and penniless. In her last year, she watched one of her three remaining children sail away to an unfamiliar land, unknowing if she would ever hold her eldest daughter again. Dorothy’s address to her mother in her conversion narrative revealed a mother’s pain and ambivalence at her daughter’s leave-taking—even when it was at the behest of God: “O my mother! my beloved parent, could I but just step and tell thee the wonderful works of thy God, which I have seen since I bid thee farewell in the Lord, I am certain thou wouldst acquiesce in his calling me away from thee . . .” (60).

Hence, in the elder Dorothy Ripley’s case, rather than empowering and liberating her from traditional gender roles as it did for some female evangelical frontrunners, Methodism merely reinforced the patriarchal tradition. For the mother, her family’s Methodist and the community of Methodists in which she lived restricted her and presented her with far fewer opportunities to extend the limits of her female experience and to make her life exceptional.

In her role of autobiographer, Dorothy may be seen as reinforcing those gender roles, when in reality, her silence on the hardships faced by her mother merely prove a homage. To her mother’s generation—and, indeed, to only slightly lesser extent, to Dorothy’s own—such piety and selflessness proved hallmarks of a woman’s character, especially for the wife of a preacher. Indeed, she must have realized that preachers’ wives were enjoined to be the holiest, most spiritual women in the community in habits, conversation, and overall deportment. While the eighteenth-century marriage was treated cynically by dramatists, drenched in smothering sentimentality by early novelists, and
presented as emotionless transactions by those in the money market, Methodists generally
took a solemn view toward the state. An early London Methodist Conference had
enunciated the requirement that the wives be archetypes of cleanliness and industry: “Let
nothing slatternly be seen about her; no rags; no dirt; no litter. And she should be a
pattern of industry: always at work, either for herself, her husband or the poor.”

An excerpt from a letter by an older Methodist minister more fully revealed the Methodist
position on the suitability of wives—particularly for traveling preachers. Writing from
Grimsby, England, in 1788, William C. Fish advised young minister, Alexander Kilham,
who was then on probation. He drew for the green Kilham an image of the perfect
preacher’s wife—even going so far as to enumerate the necessary qualities so that the
young man could not fail to mistake his meaning:

1. She should be a woman of solid piety; or she will be a burden to her
   husband, and a stumbling block to others.

2. She must be well established in the Methodist Doctrine, and zealous
   for our discipline; else there will be danger of her doing harm among
   the people.

3. She should be a woman of gifts as well as grace, able to preach by the
   fireside and in the class, or by a sick bed, as her husband is in the
   pulpit.

4. She should have a good natural disposition; else should she fall from
   grace, she will be a very devil.
5. She must be of a free open spirit; if not, the people will dislike her, and perhaps her husband too for her sake; yet she must be able to keep a secret, and not show too great freedom with the other sex.

6. She must be of a meek spirit, to bear contradictions, which she must expect to meet with.

7. Of a humble spirit; or she will take too much on herself.

8. Possessed of Christian fortitude; or she will sink under trials.

9. Zealous and active, that she may be useful where she goes.

10. Generous without prodigality.

11. Notable and frugal . . .

Perhaps Dorothy’s perpetuation of the traditional gender descriptors, then, simply proved to be a final loving gesture from a grieving daughter. While Dorothy herself would have only scored about half the points on Fish’s test for a proper Methodist preacher’s wife, she certainly earned high marks when it came to understanding what the Methodists (who composed much of her readership) esteemed in such a person. Dorothy proved herself quick to discern domestic tragedy on a number of occasions throughout her ministry and missionary work, and her intuition for what others would value about the elder Dorothy seems to have been equally perceptive. Thus, Dorothy’s limited summation of her mother’s arduous life was in keeping with traditional Methodist practice: “I dare not doubt of the ability of my heavenly Father, for he has been exceedingly gracious unto [my mother] in all the sorrows and afflictions, which he has purified her with” (EC 60). She immortalized her mother as the quintessential Methodist preacher’s wife.
The Methodist Camp Meeting

With the commencement of her second missionary journey to America in 1803, Dorothy began her evangelical work with the Methodists. The Northeast proved problematic because of the proliferation of Quakers, who oftentimes actively opposed Dorothy’s ministry. As a result, Dorothy ventured farther south, where she encountered the general acceptance of Methodists. Much of her work with the Methodists, then, occurred in the central portion of the Eastern Seaboard, particularly Virginia.

By 1800, Virginia had more Methodists than any other state. Western migration and sectarian splits combined to slow membership growth, but the numbers maintained an upward movement. For example, during the 1840s, Virginia's Methodist membership grew at a faster rate than the state's population—more than three times faster between 1845 and 1859.\(^\text{341}\) The rapid growth of antebellum Baptists and Methodists was rooted in their adaptation to the rural landscape of early America. From fewer than seventy thousand members nationally in 1800, Methodists grew to more than 1.1 million members in 1844.

To account for this astonishing growth, historians have credited the open-air revivals, commonly called “camp-meetings.” According to Beth Barton Schweiger, these meetings “did succeed overwhelmingly as a means of mass persuasion in the young nation’s sparsely settled landscape.”\(^\text{342}\) The camp meeting originated in Kentucky in 1800 during the course of a religious revival and quickly spread across the United States because of its message of inclusionism and free grace.\(^\text{343}\) Immense crowds flocked to hear the celebrated revivalist preachers, toting their families, bedding, provisions and livestock in order to camp on the grounds.\(^\text{344}\) An advertisement of a camp-meeting, taken from a...
newspaper printed, at Trenton, in New Jersey, Sept. 10, 1804, demonstrates the immense popularity of the camp-meetings:

The public is hereby informed, that a Camp-Meeting will be held near Mr. Minard Farley's, in a grove, about a quarter of a mile from New Germantown, in Hunterdon County. To commence on Saturday, the 29th of September, and to continue three days, under the superintendence of the ministers of the Methodist Church.

As camp-meetings are generally attended by several thousands from far and near, and commonly continue day and night, it will be best for those who may come a distance to bring provision for themselves and horses if possible, and to tarry on the ground till the meeting ends.

All friendly ministers and praying people are invited to attend said meeting.

THOMAS WARE,

JOSEPH TOTTEN

Although favored by the Methodists, an amalgamation of preachers directed the festivities, relieving each other in carrying on the services or even preaching simultaneously in different parts of the camp’s grounds. Shouting, shaking, and rolling on the ground often punctuated the emotional upheaval that accompanied "conversion."

Discouraged by conservative ministers because of such extravagances, camp meetings nevertheless flourished throughout the first third of the century but slowly died out by Dorothy’s death in 1832.
Adjourning in the summer season, the camp-meetings attracted surprisingly great numbers of converts—and some neighboring inhabitants who turned out from motives of curiosity. Although Methodist bishops sometimes presided, most camp-meetings consisted of a consortium of lay preachers who conducted services, prayers, and miracles over a fortnight or so, day and night. As demonstrated in the above advertisement, converts sometimes traveled several hundred miles to attend, bringing with them provisions, tents, or blankets. When signs of conversion began to manifest, several preachers crowded around the penitent, exhorting a continuance of the efforts of the Spirit, and displaying, in the most frightful images, the horrors to befall those who did not convert. Signs of regeneration were displayed in the most extravagant symptoms, as one eyewitness testified:

I have seen women jumping, striking, and kicking, like raving maniacs; while the surrounding believers could not keep them in postures of decency. This continues till the convert is entirely exhausted; but they consider the greater the resistance the more the faith; and thus they are admitted in what they term the society. The men under the agony of conversion, find it sufficient to express their contrition by loud groans, with hands clasped and eyes closed.346

For the spiritually hungry masses of the post-Revolutionary and early national periods, Methodism “was pre-eminently a religion of and for the middling and the poor, its Arminian doctrines on grace slicing through the social exclusivity of conventional Episcopalians and orthodox Calvinists. Preachers from humble backgrounds themselves.”
pointed out that in their churches, seats were free and open to all. Here, even journeymen and lowly day laborers could know the Redeemer.”

More importantly for Dorothy, the religious climate of the camp meeting endowed even the most humble convert—the poor, the unlearned, the slave, or the female—with the qualifications to preach the gospel. With the combined influential forces of the turbulent revival meetings, the shortage of ordained ministers, the swelling numbers of female converts, and the life-altering conviction of immediate revelation, they endowed hundreds of women with the authority to pray aloud, testify, exhort, and even preach in public, overturning cultural expectations of female silence. Michael Chevalier, the French visitor who published his *Letters from North America* in 1839, sourly noted the women’s spirited participation at the camp meetings: “Women . . . take a not less active part in them than the most rousing preachers. . . . The camp meeting with the raving Pythonissas have made the fortune of the Methodists, and attracted to this church in America a more numerous body of adherents than is numbered by any of the English sects in Europe.

Into this climate stepped the approbation-starved Dorothy, and with the welcoming arms of the Methodists, she came to know and increasingly incorporate the camp-meeting mode of preaching into her own style of worship. Convinced of her own divine calling yet lacking a suitable venue for illustration of such, she found the Methodist camp meeting fertile ground indeed. With the ready crowds and the general endorsement of Methodism, she flourished and matured into a formidable preacher.

For example, in 1812, Dorothy teamed up with the Methodists in Virginia for a five-day camp meeting in the fields, the preaching, singing and praying continuing day
and night. For the preachers leading the camp meeting, “upon the whole it was a great time,” for they had “no general regulations or orders” to adhere to. Undoubtedly, lack of official church oversight accorded the ministers great liberty at the camp meeting. Forty whites and sixty blacks traveled untold distances to swelter in those Virginia fields to hear the word of God, and scores of them “professed to get religion and many lasting impressions were no doubt made on the minds of many.” While most of the attending preachers “had bid her Godspeed,” Dorothy’s preaching of the Gospel to the Virginian crowd drew fire from some Methodists. Most vociferous among her detractors at the camp meeting was the Methodist itinerant John Early, who dismissed her as “an English woman who passed for a preacher.” When her efforts to reconcile with the prejudicial Early met with unshakable resistance, she quit the camp meeting, returning to Norfolk in the company of her benefactress Mrs. Collins.

However, in 1818, she reaped riper fruit of her Methodist camp-meeting labors when she united with members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church for a revival in Pennsylvania. Although Dorothy left no written account of her own describing the revival, a brief notation by Bishop Daniel Payne, senior bishop of the AME Church, confirmed her presence there. The first itinerant in the service of the Church, Payne sponsored the first camp-meeting of the AME “Connection.” Held in the woods owned by Squire Hibbs, at Ben-Salem, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, the revival began on August 12, 1818, with nine attending ministers. With the exception of Dorothy, all the revival’s leaders were male. Ministering to the flock were Bishop Richard Allen, Jacob Tapsico, James Champion, William Lambert, Rev. John Gloucester (of the Presbyterian Church), Sampson Peters, Edward Jackson, Charles Corr, and Dorothy. As he wrote,
“The Lord was present, and nearly one hundred souls were converted” during the revival in the woodlands in the southern part of the state.\(^{355}\) For Dorothy, the revival proved an historic one, for she not only preached alongside the Connection’s principals, but she also shared the pulpit with Richard Allen, who had earlier rebuffed her request to preach to his hometown congregation of Bethel Church.

Like so many other women preachers, Dorothy gained something of a local-celebrity status as a revivalist.\(^ {356}\) John Melish, the British traveler who visited the United States in 1807-08, described a Methodist meeting held near Augusta, Georgia. His late arrival prevented him from an eyewitness account, but he recounted the rumors widely circulating about one Dorothy Ripley. His account, with its implied criticism of her “art,” captured the derogatory tone of the many who opposed Dorothy’s preaching:

> We were informed that a little before we reached this place, a poor girl was so affected that she fell down in a fit, and that a black female preacher, of the name of Dorothy Ripley, frequently attended, and had the art of playing upon the passions so effectively, that she would sometimes trip a half dozen hearers.\(^ {357}\)

More than likely, Melish’s identification of the female preacher as a black woman was in error. Dorothy would have been in the southern states of the country during the same period Melish referred to, lending credence to the theory that he referred to the English missionary Dorothy Ripley. The fact that Melish expounded on gossip buzzing throughout the camp additionally complicates the veracity of his racial identification of the female minister. His description that the evangelist *tripped* her hearers by *playing*
upon the passions further point to the derision aimed at Dorothy for her evangelistic efforts, even from the secular community.

In the year before her death in 1831, she joined with three famous female preachers to pilot a revival in New York. Although Dorothy left no written account of her own, fellow evangelist Nancy Towle made notation of the female-led revival in her *Vicissitudes*. In a salute to both her feminist and ecumenical leanings, Dorothy shared center-stage with the Christian Connection evangelists Nancy Towle and Ann Rexford, and the Primitive Methodist Ruth Watkins. The revival must have been a momentous occasion indeed, for the ecumenical, all-female quartet relied on their own resources to attract, maintain and convert the crowd there, despite the changing religious and cultural landscape. During the 1830s and 1840s, the same sects which had endorsed female evangelists began to withdraw their support. For example, the Methodists, Freewill Baptists and Christians began to wan in enthusiasm and eventually abandon the women who had been populating their pulpits. Perhaps Dorothy’s reputation provided the firm basis for the success of the revival, for by 1830, she had been preaching in New York for more than thirty years. Her missionary and evangelistic efforts on the wharfs, main thoroughfares, meeting halls and prisons would have earned her an extensive network of people conducive to a successful revival.

Despite such prickly descriptions as that from Melish, and the waning support of denominations which had previously supported female evangelism, Dorothy generally found great success with the revivalistic movement. It proved a mainstay in her evangelistic career for nearly thirty years. It harkened back to the early days of female
Methodist power and provided an alternative venue when chapel doors remained closed against her.

Intriguingly, the camp-meeting provided the impetus for Dorothy’s mid-life return to her mother country, England. And whether she would admit to it or not, it also provided the means for Dorothy to return to England in fine ecclesiastical style.

**The Primitive Methodist Connexion**

On a fair day in 1818, hundreds of people gathered, traveling from diver’s distances in England. As the morning progressed, the broad green lane sheltered by the high, beautiful thorn hedge thronged with people, and the would-be converts jockeyed for position amongst the spreading arms of the huge oaks that punctuated the field. “Such a concourse of people met for divine worship as we had never seen before,” recorded one eyewitness, for it was not only the first camp-meeting ever conducted in England, but it was also the first out-of-door worship that had ever been seen by those gathered. As the eyewitness summed it up: “The great amount of good done that day will much of it remain a secret until the great day reveals it for much of the fruit of its labours was thrown into other religious connexions. I returned home late at night with my company, and we praised God, and talked of the strange things we had heard, seen, and felt.”

Such are the descriptions of the American-style revivals that Dorothy and Lorenzo Dow ushered in to England in 1818. While Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* swept the literary landscape of England that summer, the open-air revivals dominated the theological landscape of the British Midlands. Armed with the knowledge gained from her experiences with open-air preaching in the guise of camp-meeting revivals, Dorothy
returned to her native homeland that year to help bolster the membership numbers of the Primitive Methodists, an offshoot sect of Wesleyan Methodism. While Dorothy left no record of her own describing her travels throughout the mother country, her fellow memoirists and historians have left a scanty trail of information about her movements, giving contemporary scholars clues to her evangelical and missionary activities in the middle years of her life.

The Primitive Methodist Church formed in 1811 by the amalgamation of the Camp-Meeting Methodists with the Clowesites. With lay ministry at its heart, Primitive Methodism was attracting the common man in the smaller villages to its theological bosom much as Wesley had in earlier days. By the time of Dorothy’s involvement with the sect, the society boasted several thousand members, yet the initial surge of membership had flagged and a fresh revival assault was in order. Led by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, the Primitive Methodists’ Great Midlands Revival was ushered in by a great camp-meeting in Nottingham Forest, held on Whit Sunday, 1816. Although led by men, such as ‘Boanerges’ Benton, John Wedgwood, and John Harrison, shouldering her own evangelical burden was the Connexion’s first female traveling preacher, Sarah Kirkland, founder of the society in Derby. In 1817, the revival was mainly in Nottinghamshire, with extensions into Lincolnshire, later turning to Leicestershire, and Loughborough and finally ending in Barlestone. By the following summer, as if to round off the revival and link it with its frontal beginnings, the Connexion sponsored Dow, Bourne and Ripley to repeat the track of the revival, beginning at Leicester and ending at Barlestone.
The Primitive Methodists, commonly known as “ranters,” emphasized the paramount claim of evangelism and the freedom to initiate or vary its methods from the mother church. The open-air preaching espoused by Dorothy and Dow evolved into the most striking and public characteristic of early Primitive Methodism, as well as one of the major sources of conflict with Wesleyanism. While Wesley relied on open-air preaching at the beginning of his ministry, in his later life, Methodism depended far more upon the network of societies and regular preaching houses or cottage meetings.362

Ironically, the new Wesleyan emphasis on preaching houses instead of open-air preaching venues set up an interesting contrast between Dorothy and her father. Wesley’s espousal of open-air preaching in the early years had enabled William Ripley to preach, for it opened up new areas for lay preachers prior to the advent of Methodist meeting houses and chapels. Later, long after the Methodists had abolished female preaching, the Wesleyans’ insistence on preaching houses with an ordained ministry occasioned the Primitive Methodists’ split. This, in turn, enabled his daughter Dorothy to preach, for Primitive Methodism relied on both male and female evangelists.

Further, Dorothy’s temporary sojourn with the Primitive Methodists did not contrast with her self-proclaimed nondenominationalism but rather enhanced it. The ecumenical nature of open-air preaching probably appealed to the individualistic Dorothy, who had long since become used to the practice in America. She had discovered many years earlier that people who refused to cross the threshold of a church or meetinghouse to hear a sermon found it much easier to stand beneath a limitless sky that so clearly encompassed all humanity. An open-air venue welcomed and comforted both the converted and unconverted. Additionally, the revival opened British evangelical doors
that England’s Methodists and Quakers had both firmly closed against her. Primitive Methodism balanced between her foundational religion and the self-styled evangelism to which she had matured.

Perhaps Dorothy elected to team up with Lorenzo Dow for his stint with the Primitive Methodists after having encountered the American preacher several times in camp-meetings in the southern states. Dow’s diaries reveal a loose, yet genuine connection between the two, a mutual respect born of the hardships characteristic of itinerant preaching. He commended her as a woman who “travelled by Faith, through many discouragements and dangers; hence much resolution and perseverance, through much opposition in different parts.”

Alternatively, the motivation for her involvement in the Connexion’s revival may have been the Primitive Methodists’ enlightened view toward female preaching. Two striking features of the Connexion’s evangelization in its earliest period were the extent to which women participated in the work and the ready acceptance of the denomination towards female preaching. Primitive Methodism began with the belief that there was no sex limitation in church work. Hence, not only were females extensively employed as local preachers, as the early plans show, but also as traveling preachers and missionaries. By the time of Dorothy’s death, women constituted a powerful force within the movement. The Connexion’s Minutes of 1832 show that thirteen preachers on the circuits were women, and there may have been years when the number was even larger. Some of these, like Mary Porteous and Elizabeth Smith, as their published memoirs testify, labored as fully and proved as successful as their male counterparts: “Undoubtedly, the
extensive employment of women in evangelistic labour was one of the factors in [the Connexion’s] success as well as one of its most marked features."

Dorothy and Dow’s brand of American revivalism found such favor among the attendees of the Great Midlands Revival that the two missionaries helped to open new chapels along the circuit. Their christenings of the new chapels proved so popular that in one incidence, in Bingham, in Nottinghamshire, the new building was “[in]sufficient to hold half the people assembled” so that by the afternoon Dorothy and Dow “addressed the multitude in the market place.” Just as they had in the new Republic, people in the motherland had traveled from wide distances on that Sunday afternoon in April to hear Dow and Dorothy preach. The two began their open-air service by singing one of the American hymns that so excited the crowds back home, and “hundreds joined in the grand chorus of hallelujah!” Every occasion became an occasion for preaching to the multitudes, and when space became scarce, improvisations were made. On one such occasion, as Dorothy and Dow passed through two small villages—Burton Joyce and Gunthrope—Dow even preached from the top of the carriage, “having the vehicle for his pulpit.”

However, not everything progressed so smoothly. Many residents resented the intrusion of the Primitive Methodists, and the encroachment of the American Dow and female upstart Ripley further inflamed their outrage. The journals of William Clowes, for example, shed light on the violence that the Connexion’s preachers endured. He wrote that in his first forays with the Primitive Methodists he experienced few “apprehensions of being arrested” and, accordingly, nothing of the kind occurred. However, with the furor caused by the arrival of Dorothy and Dow, “thoughts of imprisonment were not so
general as they had been." And Clowes’ fears were realized; he recorded that Dow “was taken to prison; and at the same time, Dorothy Ripley was also committed.”

Dorothy left no record of her imprisonment during the Midlands revival, but by 1818, she was no stranger to the inside of a jail cell. Dow contended that their arrest came as a result of “preaching what they called a strange doctrine.”

Similarly, while preaching during the revival, Clowes suffered an assault by an angry miscreant who “threw a stone which brought blood” to his face, yet he impressed the crowd with “the manner in which [he] bore the insult and prayed for the insulter,” which led to that one’s conversion. The people of Grantham in Lincolnshire pulled the lay preacher John Wedgwood from his makeshift pulpit at the market-cross and tossed him into jail in the summer of 1817. Released on his own bail, he immediately preached and set off for the nearest camp-meeting.

Of greater import was the row between the British and American evangelists upon the arrival of Dow, with Ripley in tow. Immediately upon Dow’s arrival in July 1818, Bourne traveled to meet and greet the American itinerant, but the Primitive Methodist revealed in his journal his displeasure: “Wednesday, 8th: heard [Dow] at five, and was with him a part of the day. Heard him at night at Statham; came then to Warrington; was dissatisfied with him. Thursday, 9th: saw [Dow] again; was dissatisfied with him; but after came to a better understanding with him; came to Stockton-heath. Friday, 10th: came home.” Because of the severe brevity with which Bourne customarily wrote, the reason for his dissatisfaction remains unclear. However, historians attribute the displeasure to Dorothy’s accompanying Dow. As Walford noted,
. . . However consistent it might be with American notions, we are well persuaded, from what we know of Hugh Bourne, and the law prohibiting scandal in the Primitive Methodist Connexion, that nothing upon earth would raise his ire, or excite his disapprobation, sooner than such proceedings; and we do not wonder at it, when we call to mind how his soul had been lacerated by the inconsistency and folly of some of his former friends; and whether he dreaded a similar affliction from his American brother, we know not, but we are glad that these two great men came to a better understanding before they parted.  

Irritated, Bourne left Cheshire without meeting Dorothy, and their introduction would not occur until an early Saturday morning two full months later when the three preachers—Dorothy, Dow, and Bourne—chanced to pass through the same village along the revival circuit.

Perhaps Bourne objected to Dow’s high-handedness in inviting another preacher to the revival. Less likely was Bourne’s objection to a female preacher representing the Primitive Methodists in this most historic of revivals, for Bourne frequently lauded women who assumed leadership roles—and even made public addresses—during the camp-meeting. He lavished praise on Kirkland, saying “truly she is a great preacher,” and called leader Miss Lealand “a truly pious woman, and of great talents. I rejoiced to see her.” Of Ruth Simpson of Loughborough, he wrote “truly she is out of the common way,” for “she stands up to speak, with good acceptance. O Lord, be with her. She appears to be a gracious young woman.” Similarly, of the female preacher at Hull, he
remarked that “the Lord gave us Mrs. Hannah Woolhouse, as a mother in Israel, and under her mothership the work of God went on in Hull and its dependencies.”

More likely, Bourne objected to Dorothy’s unchaperoned traveling with Dow. In their sketches of Primitive Methodism and its first gathering at Mow Cap, historians Wilkes and Lovatt do not doubt that Bourne perceived an impropriety about the maiden Dorothy traveling alone in the company of the married Dow—despite their spiritual vocation. “Knowing Bourne as we do,” they stated, “we may be very sure he would regard this traveling with a female as quite unseemly and a likely cause for scandal, a thing he himself would never dream of allowing . . . .”

Thus, Bourne objected not on theological grounds but on practical, "woman's sphere," grounds, obviously believing that unmarried women should not travel alone and unprotected—or worse, in the unchaperoned company of a married man.

Further evidence for this theory can be found in George Herod’s Biographical Sketches. Having offered a carriage ride to Dorothy, Dow and Bourne as they journeyed between revivals, Herod made note of Dow’s unorthodox view of marriage and observed Bourne’s disapproval: “At this interview we heard Dow contend for the superiority of Republicanism over other forms of government; he also had written and published a pamphlet upon the happiness of a married life; and some of the views it contained were now opposed by Mr. H. Bourne. The pamphlet that Herod referred to must have been Dow’s “Reflections on the Important Subject of Matrimony.”

Whatever the source of disagreement, Bourne’s journal revealed a decidedly cool regard toward Dorothy. While Bourne continued to sporadically name Dow throughout his journal, sometimes referring to him in complimentary terms, he mentioned Dorothy
only rarely and in the briefest of terms. For example, he recorded that he traveled twenty
miles to Nottingham in September, only to learn that Dow had also arrived “and that
Dorothy Ripley was come with him.”384 That Saturday morning, the three preachers came
face to face with one another at the home of one of Nottingham’s citizens. Even then,
Bourne’s mention of her was brief indeed, conspicuously devoid of the accolades he
conferred on so many other female religious leaders: “I saw L. Dow, and D. Ripley,—this
is the first time I ever saw her.”385 His lack of commentary upon meeting the famous
evangelist and missionary, one who hailed from his own country and had traveled
numerous times across the Atlantic to preach to slaves, natives and the imprisoned proves
revealing. Despite her persistent and important position in the revival, her name remained
conspicuously scarce in Bourne’s writings. Therefore, while the two men may have
reconciled their differences, Dorothy obviously continued to be a point of contention
between the two great evangelists.

Despite the discord that seemed to have lingered, Dorothy maintained a strong
leadership role in the revival. While she sometimes limited her activities to the post-
sermonic prayer, she often took center-stage alongside both Bourne and Dow. For
example, Bourne’s disapproval failed to hinder Dorothy’s activities that early September
in Nottingham. Between September 5 and 15, Dorothy delivered the primary address six
times and led the prayers at least twice. “The people flocked by hundreds to hear, and
scores were brought into the enjoyment of religion.”386

Attending one of the revivals was the stalwart Herod, a celebrated diarist and
artist, who wrote of his impression of Dorothy in the company of the dour Bourne and
effeminate-looking Dow. The two men dressed much as Dorothy did: somberly and with
minimal adornment. Dressed in their customary dark clothes, the three preachers must have presented quite a picture to observers as they criss-crossed the revival grounds and took center-stage, beckoning to the crowd to partake of their spiritual rewards. An observer that day, the Rev. Herod had occasion to witness the three evangelizing together and exclaimed that “the impression made by these three odd looking, and strangely clad individuals, will never be erased while life lasts.” Despite their differences, the trio spent much of their time together, traversing the revival circuit throughout that consequential year, covering hundreds of miles, and officiating over an unprecedented number of meetings with the offshoot sect.

Following the Nottingham camp-meeting, Herod encountered the three preachers early on a Sunday morning as they journeyed to their next revival in East-Bridgford, also in Nottinghamshire. There, the three dedicated and opened a chapel, and Herod considered himself fortunate to convey them to their destination, according him the opportunity to witness firsthand the power of the evangelistic trio. “This was the first time we were favoured with an interview with these important personages,” Herod recorded, and he proceeded to laud Dorothy for her exemplary missionary work, particularly among the natives in the former colonies. Although Herod slightly misrepresented Dorothy as a member of the Society of Friends, his was a common error, for even those closest to her often mistakenly identified her as a Friend. Herod furthered extolled her as “a noted preacheress . . . who had spent much labour amongst the American Indians.” Because of her open-air service, coupled with those of Bourne and Dow, in the “large room used by the Primitive Methodists . . . many souls were led to cry
Such high acclaim from a Methodist preacher esteemed in his own right must have been an occasion of vast import to Dorothy.

Indeed, her time in England with the Primitive Methodists must have been momentous for Dorothy, as she seemed to be returning home in ecclesiastical triumph, having made her evangelical mark in the world. While she never commented on it in her writings, she nevertheless must have felt an incalculable fulfillment in her principal role in the British revivals. To the missionary shorn of official sanctioning for her message of salvation in America, the first great camp-meeting revival of the Primitive Methodists must have appeared an unbridled success. Indeed, to this evangelist who had weathered the stormy adversity spawned from fractious ministers, the unparalleled success of the revival must have proven especially gratifying since two women, Dorothy and Sarah Kirkland, stayed the course from beginning to end.

On another level, the revival must have been heady work indeed to a woman so accustomed to being the outsider. During the great revival of 1817-18, Dorothy traveled in the company of other outsiders, messengers of God who had weathered storms so similar to her own, and at no small cost. Some of the Primitive Methodist preachers traveled with official sanction, yet many more worked freelance, linked to the revival by sentiment and not formal appointment. All knew the invigoration of revivalistic work, the tedium of travel and poor living conditions, and the indignity of taunts, threats, and arrests—all in the name of God.

Perhaps this brand of kinship explained the perplexing bond forged between Dorothy and Lorenzo Dow, arguably the greatest evangelical influence for Dorothy during her later years. Dow’s role in Dorothy’s life deserves greater mention for he
represents the perfect foil for Dorothy. They shared many common bonds, not the least of which was their total, uninhibited commitment to preach for the Good Shepherd, bringing his lost sheep back into the fold. Both spoke bravely against many of the evils of their day, but just as important as their speech, they ministered to the fallen, the pariahs, and the most bestial of their neighbors. They used their message of divine love to bind the wounds of men and women broken on the wheel of circumstance. Even while their impetus often differed, their goal remained the same.

Figure 2.7 “Lorenzo Dow.” Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C., LC-USZ62-28013

Dow commented in his journals that he first met Dorothy in Albany just before she commenced her six-week stint with the Oneida Indians. Dow, who had not yet
married his first wife, Peggy, had been in the Albany district preaching “against atheism, deism, Calvinism, and Universalism,” and he was both embraced and vilified there.391 Immediately the two established a rapport, for Dow himself felt a compassion for the Native Americans and spent time in their company during the western expansion of his mission.

The two encountered each other again in New York, just before Dow set off to meet with the Primitive Methodists at Mow Cap in 1807 to help that sect usher in its first stab at open-air preaching. Perhaps this subsequent meeting planted the seeds of curiosity that led Dorothy to accompany Dow when he commenced his second revival with the Primitive Methodists more than ten years later. By the time the two traveled together in the Great Midlands Revival, they had already crossed paths four times in their missionary work.392

Born in Coventry, Connecticut, just after the first revolutionary volley from the colonists to the redcoats, Dow elicited both veneration and disdain for his preaching career that spanned about 40 years, conducting approximately four hundred sermons annually, and travel of more than two hundred thousand miles on horseback. He carried his message of salvation from New England to the western extremities of the Union, to Canada and the West Indies, and thrice to England. While one historian lauded him as “made in the mould of heroes”393 another derided him as “Crazy Dow,” who was renowned in equal shares “for his witty deceptions in luring the faithless to the fold” and his nefarious machinations in “land deals, libels, and court cases.”394

Unquestionably, the critics write in accord regarding Dow’s impact on the people. He drew the populous by the thousands, pleasing the assemblage with a message and
style that spoke eloquently to the oppressed, poor, and spiritually deprived. When Dorothy and Dow opened the new chapel at Bingham, Dow stole the show with his theatrical performance:

On Lord’s Day . . . at half-past ten in the morning the chapel was crowded to excess; scores could not enter; and a mighty influence rested upon the people. In the afternoon Dorothy Ripley preached in the chapel, and Lorenzo held an open-air service in the market-place. The people had come for miles round to hear this wonderful man. . . . After delivering a very pointed and pithy discourse, (for it was full of Jesus Christ) he saw that a great many were deeply wrought upon by the Spirit and the word; he therefore immediately went into the centre of the congregation, and requested the people to draw back and form a circle; he then stood and invited the penitents to come forward, and receive the blessing of pardon; and in a few minutes the open space was filled; he then enlarged the space by requesting the congregation to go further back; but this was also soon taken up. —— we should judge that not less than two hundred were on their knees seeking pardon. He then commenced prayer, and very soon his voice was lost in the groans and cries for mercy; and in less than half-an-hour, we should suppose one hundred souls were brought into gospel liberty. At the evening service the chapel was filled; and after a powerful discourse, a prayer meeting commenced and was carried on until nearly midnight; and a great number were hopefully converted.
His deportment arrested attention. With his long hair, flowing beard, harsh voice, and wild gesticulation, he “looked like something out of the Judean wilderness and was likened to John the Baptist.”\textsuperscript{396} He exuded a rudeness that startled his conservative hearers, and one of his opponents described his manners as “clownish in the extreme; his habit and appearance more filthy than a savage Indian, his public discourses a mere rhapsody, the substance often an insult upon the gospel.”\textsuperscript{397}

Despite family and clerical opposition, Dow persisted in becoming a circuit preacher, and his life and mission paralleled Dorothy’s. Just as she experienced youthful dreams that led her to a life of evangelizing mission, Dow dreamed of the prophet Nathan and twice of John Wesley. In a common motif, both evangels experienced supernatural warnings to devote themselves to spreading God’s word through preaching. Like Dorothy, Dow sought official sanctioning—she with the Society of Friends and he from the Methodist establishment— but in both their situations, the institutions refused to condone such radical enthusiasm. Reluctantly, he followed the same path as Dorothy, abandoning all formal religious ties to develop an individualized mode of circuit preaching. As one scholar put it, “Hitching his wagon to his own star paid off.”\textsuperscript{398}

Certainly, Dow’s methods seemed unorthodox, and Herod recorded one event in East-Bridgford that highlighted his colorful preaching style. Holding an open-air service with Dorothy, both evangelists ministered to their flock, surrounded by hundreds of penitents. Suddenly, Dow singled his attention on one man, halting the revival in mid-swing. The instance struck the conventional Herod as curious.

\ldots{} In the middle of his discourse he made a rest, then came down, passed through the congregation to a young man who stood at the outside (and
who had recently been brought into the enjoyment of religion,) and laid his hand on his shoulder, and looking him in the face, said, “how long halt you between two opinions, respecting your call to preach the gospel? You are called of God; and woe unto if you preach not the gospel.” He then told him that he would meet with great opposition in life, &c., &c. At the close of his address, or rather prophecy, he laid his hands on the young man’s head, and offered up a fervent and solemn prayer. This to the congregation was completely new; yet the greatest decorum was maintained whilst the preacher was performing the ceremony of ordination. He then returned to his stand, and resumed his discourse. There was a gracious influence with his word; very many felt it good to be there.399

Significantly diverging from Dorothy, Dow evolved into a “popular, then notorious, then celebrated, then wealthy” preacher.400 He relied not only upon hard work, constant travel and endless preaching, but also on charisma and a keen business sense. Unlike the destitute Dorothy, Dow’s earnings sprouted from “deceit—elixirs, con games, land schemes, word play, and lies”—described by one historian as Dow’s “stock in trade.”401 His land speculations often landed him in court and his patented elixir eloquently labeled “Family Medicine” proved suspect indeed to his critics. Moreover, while Dorothy’s publication of her several works provided only enough money to further her mission or to permit a second printing, Dow drew large royalties from his many publications, including the numerous editions of his journal, History of Cosmopolite, or the Writing of Rev. Lorenzo Dow (1859).402 After his death in 1834, multiple printings
continued to provide a comfortable living for his second wife until her death thirty years later.403

Dow’s flamboyancy stands at such juxtaposition to Dorothy’s minimalist approach that the two preachers—and their approaches—seem incompatible. However, while their styles may have significantly diverged, the objective remained solid for both itinerants: the extension of God’s kingdom and righteousness in the world. For them both, evangelism stemmed from a divinely inspired compulsion, and their discipleship translated into a mission that stretched across continents and peoples. Despite their differing qualities, they shared a remarkable, intuitive understanding of the tastes, prejudices, and weaknesses of common, country people.

For example, the two evangels shared a common interest in their oppressed and enslaved constituency. Dorothy took her message from the poverty-stricken in New York to the enslaved of Charleston and Savannah. Similarly, Dow concentrated his message of spiritual and political reform in the South. At the very moment when cotton began to reign supreme, both Dorothy and Dow presumed to tell the South that slavery was an abomination in God’s eyes. Dow became the first itinerant to preach in Alabama, and he carried the gospel to all classes and races. He walked on foot for hundreds of miles in Georgia and South Carolina, as far as Mississippi, then on to the wild southwestern frontier, penetrating far into the western country of Native Americans. Dorothy traversed both the northern states and the Deep South, as far as South Carolina and Georgia, speaking to large crowds of whites and blacks, slaveholders and slaves. Dow concentrated his efforts on the black community when denied admission to white Southern churches because of his apparent fanaticism. To him, “slavery in the South is an
evil that calls for national reform and repentance” for “slavery must have moral evil for its foundation, seeing it violates the Law of Nature, as established by its author.”

Dorothy tackled the inhumanity of the institution from the gallows near Newgate Prison to the streets of Charleston and Augusta. Threats of bodily harm winged their way to both evangels, and under different circumstances, both fled for their lives when the heated emotions of Southerners bubbled over into violence.

Again like his female counterpart, Dow endured arrest for his radical message. New York authorities took Dorothy into custody for inciting a riot after her promenade down a main street during which her cries of the imminent end of the world spawned alarm in her listeners. Similarly, Dow suffered arrest for “an alleged libel against the peace and dignity of the State of South Carolina”—a vehement reaction to his abolitionist message. Later, police would drag them away from the Primitive Methodist revival when their fanatical message of salvation proved to be flashpoints for the religiously conservative in the British Midlands.

Finally, the two itinerants shared a common belief in antisectarianism. According to Dow’s biographer, the preacher "sneered at the idea of each church [being] the only true one. A variety of denominations was advantageous . . . for it prevented any one body from coming into undue power and showed, with each schism, that the search for truth was going on." His epitaph reads, “[A Christian] is a slave to no sect, takes no private road but looks through nature up to nature’s God.” Both itinerants invoke similar scriptures, continually referring to themselves in their respective journals as “a stranger.” A favorite text throughout both their careers was “The foxes have holes, and the birds . . . have nests, but the Son of Man hath no where to lay his head.” As agents of Christ, they
shared His homelessness. In a tract on “American Character,” Dow bitterly complained
of the harsh reception of strangers in most frontier towns, lamenting the “abusing,
insulting, blackguarding, swindling, cheating, imposing upon, and ridiculing” that he
endured. Dow and Dorothy each suffered from the rural expectation of mischief from a
stranger and often greeted them with preemptive strikes. “By necessity an outcast, he
may shed the stigma of stranger and be “at home” everywhere but only in a world to
come, not in this world.”408 Both evangels believed alienation to be the preacher's lot; in
the words of one scornful scholar, prophets (both legitimate and otherwise) “from John
the Baptist and Christ to today's televangelist on the skids, know the mileage to be gained
by flaunting that burden.”409 Certainly, the enforced solitude of the itinerant becomes a
dominant theme in both evangelists’ works.410

Champion or charlatan, Dow enjoyed a persistent popularity well after his death
and throughout Melville's most productive years. Dow's life and words had become “part
of the history of mind,” his ecclesiastical legend enduring up to the Civil War. For
example, as late as 1861, a woman claimed to have received “communications from the
Spirit World, given by Lorenzo Dow.”411 Four volumes of anecdotes, analects, and
sermons were also collected around this time, resulting in Dow’s entry into the popular
consciousness as an archetypal comic Yankee. In various tall tales, the legendary Dow
uses his paranormal powers, common sense and showmanship to crack criminal cases
and root out the villain. In one episode, titled “Raising the Devil,” the Yankee appears as
Satan to expose an adulterer; in another, he puts hot coals in a metaphysician's boot to
convince him that reality is not merely “the force of imagination.”412
The two evangelists continued their testimonies and preaching, teaming up again in Philadelphia. They stirred to fever pitch the religious fervor of citizens in Camden where, in an unprecedented move, the Quakers opened their meetinghouse to the evangelizing duet. Soon after, Dorothy journeyed to England and France, and she spent her final days in Europe penning the preface to her father’s recently rediscovered memoirs and insuring their publication. Soon upon the heels of her return to America, she died suddenly in Virginia. In his journal, Dow wrote: “She has closed this mortal career, and now is beyond the reach of the tongue of slander, where I have no doubt, the wicked shall cease from troubling and the weary are at rest; there to sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb for ever and ever, where the faithful in the Lord shall meet to part no more!”

Following Dorothy to the grave three years later, Dow rests in the Oak Hill cemetery in Georgetown, Washington, D.C.

What Dow, despite his grandiosity and his equivocal repute, accorded Dorothy was corroboration of the elements of her evangelical odyssey. While Dow’s eccentricity elicits condescension from some modern historians, the potency of his crusade and populism staunchly persist. Hence, his substantiation of Dorothy’s experiences in her narratives lend them greater authenticity: “Many things which she had been heard to relate in America, I saw; those which she had spoken of; and they related a corresponding testimony in England, of which country she was a native, in Whitby, in Yorkshire.”
When three times five years had roll’d o’er my head;
A fountain of tears were shed on my bed;
That good old Israel’s race, lay buried in sin;
While thousands by Christ’s grace were daily brought in.

Wide Africa’s climes, my soul fled unto;
Knowing their black crimes, cried, What shall I do?
A Saviour to find them, refus’d daily food;
Engaged to tell when, I must do them good.

Old satan now tried, to stop my career;
But Jesus defied, and spoke in my ear;
Tell poor Ethiopia, the year is at hand,
When Bethlehem’s Saviour shall travel their land.

I tell of His love, and mercy to save,
The vilest may prove He’s Life from the grave;
Where Satan did bind Him three days and three nights
Yet sinners do find Him, to make them new lights.

’Tis Jesus I offer, to every one;
His love I do proffer, as a sure crown;
And were I but stronger, my feet should me bear
Five times ten years’ longer, Christ’s love to declare.

— “A Hymn from My Nativity” (Address 13-20)

Chapter 3

Dorothy & America’s Slaves and Free Blacks

By the commencement of her second missionary journey, Dorothy turned from protesting the slavery of gender to the slavery of race, intuitively recognizing the affinities between the subordination of women and the enslavement of race. Although the initial impetus for her evangelical odyssey, the race factor had been relegated to a
secondary concern during her earlier mission as the heated objections against female preaching from clergy and male lay leadership hijacked her efforts. Her evangelism stymied by cultural criticism and the freedom of her missionary movements dictated by regional and clerical reception, the issue of slavery did not become a major focus until four years later.

However, by the time Dorothy returned to the United States in 1805, her commitment to women’s right to preach—and her resultant pugnacious reaction to such criticisms—had been tested and thoroughly established. She felt a renewed concern for America’s ignored populations—particularly the enslaved—and she matched action to sentiment. Like her attitude toward women’s right to preach, her dissent gradually assumed a more gladiatorial slant and became an epic battle, her mighty Christian ideals fending off the dark, villainous forces of slavery. For Dorothy, the shift from arguing for women’s right to preach to battling for the liberation of America’s slaves simply meant a mental and rhetorical adjustment to her questions of power.

Thus, Dorothy launched into a spectacular, yet short-lived religious debut in the Deep South early in 1806. Muddying the already murky religious waters of a female preaching was Dorothy’s penchant for impetuously wading into the turbulent political waters of the slaveholding South, intermarrying messages of evangelism and abolitionism. Men, and sometimes women, troubled by the sight of a woman presuming scriptural authority, were moved to outrage when that same woman introduced abolitionism into her message. Whereas Dorothy encountered skepticism in the North about her qualifications for preaching, in the South she faced deception, wrath, and thinly veiled threats of violence. Oftentimes, her message of free salvation, black power, and
equality in God’s eyes transmitted a double threat to the white Southerners who clung to self-proclaimed gender and racial superiority. The culturally awkward interruption of a female preaching in the South not only disrupted the clerical element but also elicited broad civic criticism over a woman’s mischievous meddling when that message of spiritualism turned to secular matters.

Still, whites, free blacks, and slaves alike flocked to hear her preach, turning out by the hundreds and thousands. Even state legislators numbered amongst her congregants, namely Sen. John Chambers of Maryland and Maryland’s Speaker of the House of Delegates Tobias E. Stansbury, a slaveholder (Bank 235, 237). While some listeners came out of a sincere desire to hear her message of salvation, others traveled great distances to marvel at the novelty of a female making an open spectacle of herself or to take advantage of the occasion to publicly disarm an abolitionist. Several times throughout Dorothy’s sojourn through the slaveholding states she feared for her life, the oblique threats of bodily harm and direct confrontations hampered neither by the public venues nor her status as divinely sent messenger.

Part of the white Southern aggression stemmed from the hotly contested crackdown on the religiosity of slaves. According to D.G. Hart and Harry Stout, “The coupling of religious, sexual, and political disorder in the mind of middle-class America may also explain the extraordinary resistance to the evangelizing of the African-American community in the white South.” Whites actively resisted evangelical efforts to bring the Word of God to the heathen slaves. Although white slaveholders appropriated the Holy Scriptures as a powerful resource in support of the slaveholding ethos, they also worried over missionaries’ usage of the Bible. White missionaries
bandied about biblical passages contradictory to their own narrow selection, and Southern planters chafed at the ever-present threat of slave insurrection born from divinely inspired definitions of equality and freedom. Thus, Christianity evolved into a political threat as well as a spiritual promise. “A mood of pious suspicion and psychic conformity when mixed with a commitment to white supremacy made being ‘Christian’ different for whites and blacks.”

Further, whites bristled at the idea of sexually and racially mixed assemblies to hear the itinerant preachers such as Dorothy. As Hart and Stout observed, resistance proved greatest when evangelicals assembled “promiscuous” congregations in which men and women, whites and blacks, assembled together. Such inclusive gatherings defied the unstated rules of Southern society in which racial lines were rarely crossed. In the collective Southern mind-set, an enormous division existed between black people and white people on what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham called the “scale of humanity”: “carnality as opposed to intellect and/or spirit; savagery as opposed to civilization; deviance as opposed to normality; promiscuity as opposed to purity; passion as opposed to passionlessness.” Such oppositions “were also central to the mainstream Protestant task of distinguishing respectable religion from its degraded evangelical variant.”

However, just as Dorothy never visualized herself as a pioneering feminist, neither would she have classified herself as an abolitionist activist in the anti-slavery movement. Her missionary work was concerned with souls, not with feminism or abolitionism. Although she saw life in terms of moral commitments, she served as part of the support system for slaves rather than an active organizer. Like most female preachers of her age, Dorothy challenged the inequalities between the races in religious terms,
demanding spiritual, and as a consequence, secular parity for all. Her objections to slavery took the form of public and private dissent, almost exclusively in the context of a communal sermon or private lecture. Although no evidence suggests she ever participated in rallies, street marches, or the Underground Railroad, she did assume a confrontational mode in her addresses and personal interactions. Rather than seek to persuade a change in governmental law, she sought a direct change in people’s attitude and behavior in regard to slavery based on spiritual law. Judging by the number of slaves and free blacks who flocked to her sermons, she could easily have been termed a freedom fighter; judging by the wide range of reactions from Southern whites, spanning the gamut from cool reception to angry denouncement to ostracism, she could have been called a rabble-rouser or even terrorist.

Even while her activism against slavery veered from the lobbyist approach of Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Fanny Wright, or Nell Painter, Dorothy’s addresses against the social and spiritual ills of slavery stirred the boiling cauldron of slaveholding. She trumpeted her message from the newly constructed White House and President Thomas Jefferson to the sympathetic Southern slaveholders and merchants who sheltered and assisted her in her ministry. Recognizing a ready, ecumenical audience, she argued among the slaveholding Christians of the incompatibility of public involvement in the institution and private conscience.

In her works, Dorothy presented her task as one of continuance, constructing her arguments on the solid Christian rhetorical foundations established by missionaries who predated her:
God only knows why my days should be lingered out in thus groaning for them, but certain I am that those tears I sow here shall water the seed sown by some, whom God appointed to preach the gospel before I was a resident among mortals. Well, let it suffice me then that my labour shall not be in vain, and let me also remember how many years of sorrow my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ endured, before he opened his gospel mission, and proclaimed liberty to the captive souls. (84)

Certainly, she knew of the objections of John Wesley, who proclaimed, “That slave-holding is utterly inconsistent with mercy, is almost too plain to need a proof.” And she may have even been familiar with the Quaker’s anti-slavery spokesperson John Woolman, especially since his death occurred only sixty miles from her hometown. Without doubt, she knew of the abolitionist sentiments and activities of her stalwart supporter David Sands, whose abolitionist efforts spanned the British Isles and America. Dorothy recognized the debt she owed to the missionaries who preceded her:

God only knows why my days should be lingered out in thus groaning for them, but certain I am that those tears I sow here shall water the seed sown by some, whom God appointed to preach the gospel before I was a resident among mortals. Well, let it suffice me then that my labour shall not be in vain, and let me also remember how many years of sorrow my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ endured, before he opened his gospel mission, and proclaimed liberty to the captive souls. (EC 84)

Not only does Dorothy build on the anti-slavery objections of the aforementioned men, but the themes she chose in her attacks served as frontrunners to those traditionally
touted by later female abolitionists such as the Grimke sisters, Lucretia Mott, Lydia Maria Child, and even Harriet Beecher Stowe. Like Wesley, Woolman and Sands, she stressed the incompatibility of Christianity and slavery, emphasizing that the horrors of slavery ran counter to the Christian ideals of love, respect, and purity of soul. She condemned the cruel treatment of slaves by their white masters. She underscored the corrosive nature of slavery to both white and black alike, having perceived the negative effects of the institution on both spiritual and social values. But, like the female abolitionists to follow, she often tailored her arguments to address white females, including her women congregants, patronesses, and readers. She equated white women’s positions as mothers, wives and homemakers, pointing out the similarities and the flagrant, and indelicate, differences. In defiance of cultural taboos on open scrutiny and public discussion of matters involving sexuality, Dorothy openly and vehemently denounced the practice of miscegenation rampant in the South. Uniquely, she protested the sexual inequality among the slaves themselves, equating the black subordination to whites and the subservience of black females to their male family members.

Finally, and most importantly, she stressed the bondage of all people—black and white—to sin. True freedom could only be spiritual, rather than physical. She believed that only God could bestow true liberty. To Dorothy, spiritual freedom represented the only true goal for all sinful humankind, the terminal end to any struggle for emancipation. Such was especially true in the Southern United States, where white and black alike seemed locked in eternal combat with sin:

The Spirit of the Lord has laid a necessity upon me to cry mightily to the Lord God, that he may arise and make bare his impotent arm, in defending
them and freeing them from the thralldom, which they are in; but above all, that he would unveil his glory to them as a nation, that they might believe in Jesus Christ, as their Redeemer from the cruel bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan, by whom they have long been captivated, to their shame. (EC 96)

And even this proved powerful in her battle against slavery, for white Protestant Christians used the Bible to defend and justify the reality of the debasing institution of slavery. White rationalization of slavery through the means of Africans’ unconverted state (permitting their characterization as heathens and sub-human) could only be combated with their baptism into the faith. Despite Southern laws prohibiting physical baptism as an escape route for slaves, blacks’ spiritual baptism into the cosmos-wide family of Christianity provided the strongest combative measure against racial arguments used in slavery, frontier expansion, and relentless pursuit of wealth. Thus, Dorothy’s was a “holy calling,” one meant to “signify to Ethiopia’s children, that this was the day, in which they should ‘stretch out their hands unto God;’ the fulfillment of David’s prophecy, when he saw by the light of the Lord, the Gentile race converted unto Him” (Address iv). In her conversion of the heathen Ethiopians, then, she would also convert the white slaveholders.

Hers was a mission to evangelize the South.

Historical Review

“I mourn, I sigh, and water my pillow night by night, while I pass along this desert land, where thousands are toiling to support luxury and haughtiness of spirit. What
a favour that I was not born in a land where the souls and bodies of men are priced, and bought, and sold, like so many cattle, who are driven by the whip” (EC 84).

During its first 50 years the United States transformed itself from a small Republic into an expansive democracy for white Americans. The nation tripled its population, doubled in size, and extended slavery to parts of the Western frontier. For black Americans, this same period was a contradictory mix of community-building for free blacks and entrenched enslavement for those not yet emancipated.

Slavery thrived as a legal and vastly lucrative enterprise for almost two hundred and fifty years of American history. Like all the abolitionists, Dorothy was acutely aware of the painful discrepancies between America’s recent Declaration of Independence and its legalization and perpetuation of slavery.

Good and gracious God, I beseech thee to give those blessed privileges of nature back again to this race, which a country has unjustly taken from them, and yet the people cry out, “We are independent, yea, we will be so.” I ask, “Who made you free/ who gained the victory for the country? Did not God?” Yes, verily, and as he has taken your yoke off, so he will do to those whom ye pollute, and make hewers of wood and drawers of water.⁴²⁶ (EC 96)

History has long recognized the irony of slaveholding by founding fathers such as George Washington, the icon of revolutionary freedom;⁴²⁷ Thomas Jefferson, drafter of the Declaration of Independence;⁴²⁸ Benjamin Franklin⁴²⁹ and John Hancock, the framer and inceptive signer of the Declaration of Independence, respectively; and Patrick Henry, the great orator who coined the famous slogan, “Give me liberty or give me death.”
Indeed, six of the first eight presidents were slaveholders. William Henry Seward, Lincoln’s anti-slavery Secretary of State during the Civil War, who became famous for his talk about the “higher law” of God which placed human freedom above all legal documents and manmade laws, therefore outranking the Constitution on the subject of slavery, was raised in a slave-owning family, amid neighbors who owned slaves. The family of Abraham Lincoln himself owned slaves. Plus, the new federal buildings erected in the patriotic aftermath of the Revolution—the physical monuments to the American ideology of freedom—were constructed by slaves. Maryland and Virginia farmers rented out their slaves for $5 to the new government, and they provided most of the labor. “Visitors 200 years ago wrote of the irony of slaves building the first temples of freedom, the Capitol and what was then called the President’s House.”

With such powerful figures sponsoring slavery it is little wonder that national and state law protected the rights of the slave owner while at the same time progressively restricting slaves. The Constitution of the United States, only recently ratified, specifically prohibited Congress from passing any law that abolished or restricted the slave trade until 1808. The language of the Constitution was unambiguous: the federal government could not tamper with the slave trade during the first twenty years of the nation’s existence. Although the slave trade legally ended in 1801 and Lincoln’s famous Emancipation Proclamation took effect Jan. 1, 1863, slavery did not officially end in the United States until the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution was ratified on December 6, 1865.

In 1781, the population of the United States hovered at about 3.5 million, of which 575,000 were slaves. By the time Dorothy arrived for the first time in the United
States, the nation’s population had grown by two-thirds, of which nearly one million were enslaved. By the time of her death in 1831, the number of Americans had skyrocketed to 12.8 million, but more than two million lived and toiled as slaves. With Eli Whitney’s 1793 invention of the cotton gin, the “cotton economy” of the South based upon slave labor boomed. Cotton became the backbone of the Southern oligarchy and reigned as America’s number one agricultural product. In turn, this flourishing Southern economy fueled the push westward, opening the Union doors for territories’ admission as slave-holding states.

In the face of the emotional drive of nationalism, the potent lure of wealth and influence, and the powerful motivators of legal, racial, and religious superiority, the issue of slavery presented a time bomb for any white evangelist—even a female one—who stirred the caste system of the South. Even so, as Americans went about their nation-building on the bedrock of slavery, Dorothy proclaimed herself willing to “hazard my life in the cause for the rights of the African nation” (EC 96). Recognizing that revolutionary rhetoric obfuscated the palpable reality that slavery, no matter how anomalous in purely ideological terms, remained deeply imbedded in the very structure of American society, Dorothy “mourned” for the new Republic as a whole. She prayed that God “would unveil his glory to [Americans] as a nation” (96). Certainly as an outsider, she recognized the multiple societal levels which remained impervious to revolutionary expectations. On behalf of white and black alike, she prayed “they might believe in Jesus Christ, as their Redeemer from the cruel bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan, by whom they have long been captivated, to their shame” (96).

And her efforts came at no small cost.
In the new capital of Washington, she became a pariah because of her outrageous suggestion of spearheading a school to teach slave children to read and write: “I had fixed on settling in this city, but some were very bitter against it, saying, ‘They should be overrun with thieves, and would not be able to keep any thing, if the blacks were brought there to teach’” (116). Others exclaimed, “It was not fit that they should be taught either to read or write: to teach them to work was all which was necessary’” (116).

The doors to Washington homes slammed in Dorothy’s face, and she wandered the streets of Washington for a full day before a kindly resident acknowledged (and showed mercy to) the spokesperson of God behind the abolitionist and offered Dorothy lodgings for the night.

Now if the Lord require me to spend my little strength for the promotion of his righteousness among them, I must obey the great and mighty God herein, not consulting whether it will please or offend individuals, whose interest it is to keep them in bondage to answer their desires, which may be either carnal or lucrative. I shall, therefore, by the help of God, proclaim unto them that this is the day which David saw, when he prophetically cried, “Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand to the Lord.” (96)

On the other hand, Dorothy offered detractors a ready pretext for dissension because of her penchant for traveling alone and her preference for associating with blacks. Not only did Dorothy frequently preach in black churches and to blacks in open-air services, but she also dined with them and, on at least one occasion, lodged with them. To complicate the issue, the invitation came from a black man. A white woman staying in
the home of a black man—whether free or enslaved, single or married—constituted a serious breach in culturally accepted racial barriers. Only rarely and then only in the direst of circumstances, did whites and blacks cross those mutually recognized lines. However, in 1803, on her last night in America at the end of her first missionary journey, Dorothy elected to stay with a black man who offered her lodgings, despite “the people [who] were solicitous about my going with them . . . as several were inviting me at once” (148). Dorothy wrote, “A coloured man [who] had engaged to let me lodge at his house, so he claimed me as his lawful property amidst so many gay persons, whom he contended with for his right” (148).

Even in her word choice, Dorothy flouts convention. Her characterization of herself (a white woman) as the lawful property of a black man violated every societal code of slave-holding America. Her readership—predominantly composed of white Americans who either profited from the business of slavery or were slaveholders themselves—would have taken great exception to such characterization. To her credit, her black benefactor remained nameless to her readership in an obvious bid to protect him from any form of retaliation. On a final note, to Dorothy’s pleasure, she “found every thing comfortable that I stood in need of to refresh tired nature” at the home of her unnamed patron (148).

Because Dorothy was raised in different environs, she had little experience initially with the horrific institution of slavery. She had not benefited from generations’ worth of acclimatization and psychological desensitization to inure her to the atrocities committed against slaves, particularly in the South.

Her awakening commenced one fine July morning in 1802.
Traveling in the humble conveyance of a horse-drawn cart as the guest of a young Quaker man, Dorothy took immense pleasure in the sparkling, bucolic beauty of the countryside near Fredericksburg, Virginia. The morning’s ride was redolent with the smell of the fecund fields, just ripening in their early summer splendor. Yet, the abundant beauty faded to barrenness in Dorothy’s eyes as she spied the slaves toiling in the fields. As the cart slowly plodded by them, she noted the obvious markers of a master more benevolent than many in the South, yet Dorothy felt the pleasantry of her earlier communion with Nature slip away:

On this side of [the town] it were four hundred and thirty-two acres of standing corn, just in flower, which was beautiful to the eye; and opposite it, on the other side of the road, were a number reaping wheat, well clothed, who appeared to have a good master. I counted thirty, men and women, who were all black. As we were riding along the road this morning, I felt very sorrowful in contemplating how many thousands of the poor Africans were sorely oppressed in those Southern States . . . . (79)

Assaulted by the sight and sound of human bondage, Dorothy sought religious sanctuary, obtaining relief through a prophetic vision of the American slave’s future state: “...while I was weeping and silently groaning in spirit, my mind was covered with awe, and I was fully persuaded of God, that in due time they should become possessors of this state where I am now sowing tears in abundance. I was also cheered by this . . . (EC 79).

In the meantime, Dorothy foresaw what anyone—mystically inclined or not—could envision: in 1802, death offered the only unassailable means for American blacks to escape the yoke of enslavement. “...Great has been my sorrow of mind in this place,
where many have been oppressed, but now are freed from the oppressor’s power—now are numbered with the dead; where the soul of the poor captive is as free as his master, and fares, it may be, much better in another world” (85).

As waves of information about the degradations, sexual perversions, and violent abuse of whites against enslaved blacks assaulted her, Dorothy displayed more frequent, more sustained bouts of depression and world-weariness. In the religious sentimentalism that characterized her age, Dorothy wrote of the drain on her emotional and spiritual fortitude: “. . . My spirit was almost sunk within me,” she wrote, “having mourned so grievously concerning the Africans, and me with so many things to impede my progress, desiring to be serviceable to them before I die, if it be the will of my Heavenly Father” (114). The more educated she became of the associated evils, and spiritual criminality, of slavery, the more hardened became her resolve to minister to the religion-starved slaves.

Thou hast given me an ardent solicitude for oppression to cease, and hast filled my soul with tenderness to all who are degraded by the tyrannical power of man. Any why am I concerned thus for the wretched situation of thy creatures? If thou will not aid me with ability to shew my hatred to sin and strife, which are contrary to thee, a God of purity and love, I know thou art well pleased with my compassionate regard for thy workmanship, who are despised and set at nought through the reigning power of individuals; therefore, follow with thy blessing my earnest prayers for the speedy deliverance of such as thou hast made me groan in spirit for from my childhood. (EC 45)
She liberally indicted both Southerners and Northerners in her denouncements against slavery. To the South, she pledged to evangelize where “barrenness of the land bespeaks the poverty and wretchedness of thousands of its inhabitants, who might enjoy the smile of Heaven, if they would learn to fear God and love their neighbor” (142). At the same time that she railed against the deep entrenchment of slavery in the South, she also solemnly recognized the deep-rooted racism of the North: “When comparing those States one with the other, what a vast difference there is between them, in the outward appearance of things” (142). Although she could “not avoid commending the citizens of New York and Philadelphia, for their help to those that have been greatly oppressed, driving slavery out of their States,” she also rebuked them for the “barren appearance” in the Northern states where “I have already travelled” (142).

Oblivious to her future safety during subsequent evangelistic missions to the South or her heavy dependency upon families who either benefited economically from the perpetuation of slavery or were slaveholders themselves, she equated anyone associated with the institution to “murderers” and “merchants of souls.” To Dorothy’s way of thinking, anyone who subjected a human to forced servitude of the sort she encountered in the South simply hastened the enslaved to an early grave—in effect, murdering God’s creation. And the guilty surely would face an ultimate and awful punishment:

. . . But what was this [if a slave died prematurely]? Nothing, if he had only paid his owner the price of his body, which he had given the merchants of souls, the poor creature might go into the ground, or down to the pit to meet him who is not worthy to be called master but murderer,
and many such murderers of this race, will be found out, judged and condemned by a Righteous God, who is sure to punish tyrants, with their own measure of cruelty, which they have unmercifully dealt out to any indigent creature, who has either servant or slave under them. I am not pleading my own cause, I am vindicating the Righteous laws of an equitable God, who will not regard the proud monarch, any more than the meanest peasant under Him; so likewise, a slaveholder who has a thousand slaves to till his ground, will be on a footing with the poorest wretch, that he despises, and scourges to fertilize the vineyard he owns, and nourishes his profuse sons and daughters, whom he never trains to think, or act for God, who might justly curse his seed, ground, and himself to Eternity.

(Bank 285)

Still, even in the swirling whirlwind of emotional destitution and vehement harangues occasioned by her enlightenment over the racial oppression she observed in both North and South, she found solace in prayer. Through the quiet consolation accorded by private communion with God, she discovered a revitalized moral commitment to evangelize to America’s free blacks and slaves. Moreover, through prayer, she perceived the restorative fact that, even while she seemed quite solitary in her mission, she did not fight the battle alone. “. . . A hope was given me to believe that many in the midst of their afflictions would seek help at the hand of the Lord; there being some in every city, praying to a gracious Lord in their behalf” (EC 79).
Evangelizing in the South

Although Dorothy traveled throughout the Upper South (Virginia and Maryland) during her first missionary journey, not until November 1805 did “my Master Jesus [call] me to set off in faith, as far as Georgia” (Bank 182-83). Armed with the divine promise that “He will bring me safe back from a land of slavery, and oppression,” Dorothy set off for those Southern states deeply rooted culturally, economically, and politically in slavery. And her travels commenced despite heavy opposition from the Quakers. Dorothy’s ardent supporter and friend, the Quaker minister David Sands, despaired for Dorothy’s safety while traveling to the depths of the Eastern Seaboard. As Sands prophesied, “I see a great black cloud over thy head, while thou art going to the Southward, nevertheless I believe thou wilt get safe through it;” Sands then prayed “in the most fervent manner, for my being safely kept, as under the shadow of the Almighty Wing” (182).

Perhaps Sands’ reservations were not misplaced. After all, Dorothy’s previous travels had taken her no farther than the upper portions of the South. Her travels predominantly centered in the upper and mid-Atlantic states, which abolished slavery before Dorothy traveled to the former colonies. In 1780, the Quakers helped push Pennsylvania to become the first state in the Union to end legal sanction of slavery, and Philadelphia emerged as a haven for fugitive slaves. By 1790, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont had become, through legislation or court decision, part of the First Emancipation. Also by that year, most of southern New Jersey’s black population lived free.
Even so, Dorothy certainly encountered the ill-effects of slavery virtually from the moment she set foot on American soil.

**Table 3.1 “Slavery in the Northern States.”** Statistics taken from Harper, “Slavery in the North.”

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<th>STATE</th>
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<td>1638</td>
<td>1620</td>
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<tr>
<td>FIRST RECORD OF SLAVERY 1629?</td>
<td>1645</td>
<td>1626</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>1652</td>
<td>1639</td>
<td>1626?</td>
<td>c.1760?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFFICIAL END OF SLAVERY 1783</td>
<td>1783</td>
<td>1799</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td>1780</td>
<td>1804</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACTUAL END OF SLAVERY 1783</td>
<td>c.1845?</td>
<td>1827</td>
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<td>1842</td>
<td>c.1845?</td>
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<td>PERCENT BLACK 1790 1.40%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PERCENT BLACK 1860 0.78%</td>
<td>0.15%</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>1.87%</td>
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<td>1.95%</td>
<td>3.76%</td>
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The above chart highlights the depth and apparent intractability of the slavery problem. Even while the Northern states had abolished slavery either before or shortly after Dorothy’s arrival in the former colonies, the actual removal of the institution from Northern soil—from an economic standpoint—occurred much later.
According to historian Douglas Harper, on the eve of the Revolution, slavery had become so intricately woven into the entire regional economy of New England, that it “formed the very basis of the economic life of New England.”\textsuperscript{436} Even after Northern states abolished slavery, Northern ships continued to carry thousands of Africans to the American South. Some 156,000 slaves were brought to the United States in the period 1801-08, and nearly all of them were transported on ships that sailed from New England ports. During the two-year period of Dorothy’s most ardent attacks on slavery, Rhode Island slavers alone imported an average of 6,400 Africans annually into the U.S.\textsuperscript{437} The foundation for the antebellum manufacturing boom was shipping, and the driving factor behind shipping was slavery. “Whether by importing Africans to the Americas, transporting slave-grown cotton to England, or hauling Pennsylvania wheat and Rhode Island rum to the slave-labor colonies of the Caribbean,” the institution of slavery provided the economic impetus for the Northern industrial revolution.\textsuperscript{438}

In fact, Northerners profited from slavery through diverse means up to the Civil War. Although the decline of slavery in the upper South is well documented, as is the sale of slaves from Virginia and Maryland to the cotton plantations of the Deep South, as Harper notes, “someone had to get them there, and the U.S. coastal trade was firmly in Northern hands.”\textsuperscript{439} Famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison struck his first published blows against slavery by printing attacks on New England merchants shipping slaves from Baltimore to New Orleans. Further, long after the U.S. legally ended the nation’s slave trade, Northerners participated indirectly in the more extensive movement of Africans to Brazil and Cuba. Slave traders continuing to bring human cargo to Brazil
and Cuba did so “in ships built for the purpose by Northern shipyards, in ventures financed by Northern manufacturers.”

Finally, despite the most tangible and enduring antislavery effects of the revolutionary mentality occurring in the Northern states during and immediately after the war, deeply rooted racism was endemic in the North. Despite the inspirational rhetoric of the revolutionary legacy that argued slavery was inherently incompatible with the republican values on which the Revolution had been based, the deep racial divisions clearly could not be swept entirely from the Northern landscape. Unlike the Northern immigrant laborer who had the immeasurable advantage of eventual absorption into the melting pot of America, a black person was distinguished by skin color. Persistent racist theories about people of color in post-revolutionary America included the insistence that, as Thomas Jefferson decided, blacks were “inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.” Also, the Northern belief that blacks were congenitally lazy, dishonest, and uncivilized endured. Finally, the Southern propaganda that all blacks were sexually promiscuous and black men lusted after white women infiltrated and persisted in the North.

Dorothy, then, already had encountered the institution of slavery indirectly before her journey to the Deep South. Undoubtedly, she realized—at least to some extent—how the uplifting vision of the Revolution turned out to be mostly a mirage for the person of color in America. The depths of the new nation’s dependency on slavery became ever clearer as she preached to, prayed with, and moved amongst the people in both North and South.
Dorothy & Thomas Jefferson

On April 6, 1802, Dorothy landed at her destined port of New York City, and immediately upon arrival she obtained letters of acquaintance to an abolitionist and set off for the Quakers’ Yearly Meeting in Philadelphia. Once there, she made the valuable contacts necessary for her entry into the world of abolitionism. She met Ann Mifflin, a Quaker long-involved in national and international emancipation and resettlement of enslaved Africans. To the astonishment of Friends in Philadelphia, Dorothy publicly stated her intentions to journey to Washington to confront Thomas Jefferson in his newly constructed White House.

Three weeks after her arrival, Dorothy set off for Washington in the company of Friends James Pemberton and Ann Mifflin. Other Friends and abolition sympathizers supported Dorothy on her Washington journey, while others refused aid because they “could not think of setting such an insignificant person forward to visit the President” (EC 65). Eight days later, Dorothy arrived in the new national capital, armed with a letter of recommendation to Dr. William Thornton. As if divinely arranged, a party was in full swing at the Thornton house, the guests of honor personages of no less merit than three governmental Secretaries, including James Madison, Secretary of State, and Gen. Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War. Most importantly for Dorothy, holding court at the party was the vivacious Quakeress Dolley Madison. Well-known for her gracious hospitality, Dolley immediately issued an invitation for Dorothy to reside with them while she stormed the White House to effect the emancipation of the nation’s slaves. General Dearborn offered to accompany Dorothy to Jefferson’s inner sanctum the following morning. Stunned at the providential meeting with some of the most influential people in
Washington—the very people who could ensure her entry to the White House—Dorothy exclaimed, “The Lord was gracious to me in preparing the way thus far” (EC 66-67).

Flanked by Dearborn, Thornton, and her staunch Quaker supporter William Canby, Dorothy gained the coveted admittance to the White House the next morning. The city itself, Dorothy declared, “seems a fine lot of ground,” but the “house where the President resides is a handsome freestone building, fit for any monarch in the world” (68).

Once there, she first met Vice President Aaron Burr “who conducted us to [the President’s] sitting-room, where [Jefferson] received us with handsome conduct, and listened to my tale of woe!” (67). Dorothy unleashed on Jefferson her impassioned concern “for the distressed Africans” and the holy command “to lay aside my own ease and happiness, to put forth an effort to promote theirs” (67). Despite Quaker misgivings about Dorothy’s proposal to corner Jefferson in his own home and the oddity of a female evangelist and her new arrival from the very country which Jefferson and the colonists had so recently fought against, Dorothy felt “free from all embarrassment” (68). In her view, “the cause was noble, and laudable to the religious mind, which seeks another’s good in every respect, knowing the Maker of us all rejoices in mercy, love, and truth” (68).

After her impassioned tale, Dorothy threw down a verbal gauntlet to the slaveholding Jefferson: “If possible, [I] also wish to have thy approbation before I move one step in the business, understanding thou art a slaveholder” (67).
To his credit, Jefferson extended to Dorothy his respectful attention—certainly a feat considering that the two entertained such divergent ideas on the fundamental issues of religion, slavery, and the education of women.

Firstly, Dorothy and Jefferson elementally differed in their view of religion, making his admittance of Dorothy into his inner sanctum surprising in view of his well-known aversion to Calvinist dogma. However, even after centuries of scrutiny, Jefferson’s religious stance continues to baffle historians. Jefferson’s political record and personal actions clash in respect to religion. For example, Jefferson spearheaded the effort to break the traditional link between religion and government with his authorization of the famous Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom. He also agreed while in France to support the Constitutional Convention and the strong federal government it created, contingent on the inclusion of a Bill of Rights in the form of ten amendments. The rights that Jefferson insisted upon included freedom of speech, assembly, and practice of religion (including its absence). At the same time, Jefferson was a devoted attendee of church services, frequenting religious services held in Congress’s hallowed halls, including Dorothy’s high-octane, revival-style sermon.444

As an avowed Deist, Jefferson believed in a divine creator who had set creation in motion according to a set of natural laws that required no further intervention by a deity in the universe. For Jefferson, God was not a personal savior, and he looked upon all established religions as cultural artifacts. Accordingly, he opposed the use of religion by government as a means of granting privileges or imposing duty upon the citizenry. Jefferson argued that such a misuse enslaved the human mind and thus violated the principle of liberty upon which a democracy should rest. He also feared that religion
would hinder the development of a national elite, a moral and ethical group of aristocrats who would lead the nation.

Thus, for Jefferson to invite Dorothy into the White House constituted a breach in his own standard regarding the interaction of religion and state. Even though Dorothy and Jefferson met in the President’s private receiving rooms, they did so in full view of Madison, Dearborn, and Canby. Even more egregiously, Jefferson later permitted Dorothy to preach before a seated Congress.

Perhaps part of Jefferson’s leniency toward Dorothy can be attributed to her association with the Society of Friends. In his Notes, Jefferson’s tone implied sympathy toward Quakers. He described the “poor” Quakers’ situation upon first arrival in the New World, as they were “flying from persecution in England. They cast their eyes on these new countries as asylums of civil and religious freedom; but they found them free only for the reigning sect.”445 Just a few sentences later, however, he indicted the church as co-conspirators in its perpetuation of persecution: “If no capital execution took place here, as did in New-England, it was not owing to the moderation of the church . . . .”446 Clearly, Jefferson approved of the Society of Friends’ doctrine, one that emphasized a person’s private, individual communion with a divine being rather than a connection between souls mediated by ordained clergy. As Jefferson observed in a letter to John Adams, “We should all, then like the Quakers, live without an order of priests, moralise for ourselves, follow the oracle of conscience, and say nothing about what no man can understand, nor therefore believe; for I suppose belief to be the assent of the mind to an intelligible proposition.”447
Despite his general religious disinclination, Jefferson showed an incongruent partiality to religious causes during his terms in office.\footnote{448} In addition to granting Dorothy an audience, he also subscribed considerable sums to churches in the Washington area. He donated money to the building fund of Christ Church, Washington city’s first Episcopal congregation. He also contributed to the building funds of Washington’s and Alexandria’s First Baptist Churches, to Georgetown Methodist Church, and to Trinity United Methodist Church in Alexandria, which needed a bigger building to accommodate a flood of members produced by the powerful local revival of 1802-4. In addition, an 1843 copy of the original records (now lost) of St. John’s Episcopal Church, Georgetown, showed that in 1803 Jefferson contributed through an intermediary to that congregation’s building fund. The records of the Georgetown Presbyterian Church revealed that Jefferson contributed seventy-five dollars to the expansion of its sanctuary. Furthermore, he donated funds to the Independent Protestant Church of Alexandria, where Dorothy Ripley preached in 1806 after the other churches closed their pulpits to her.\footnote{449}

Secondly, Dorothy confronted a 57-year-old man who, as a young politician, had argued for the prohibition of slavery in the new American territories, yet had never freed his own slaves. Dorothy recorded her shock upon first learning of not only Jefferson’s contradictory status as the head of a nation founded on freedom and a slaveholder:

“Enquiring how many slaves the president had, he informed me, that some time since he had three hundred, but the number was decreased” (EC 68). Historical records corroborate such a number. Jefferson inherited slaves from both his father and father-in-law. In a typical year, he owned about 200 people, about half of them children under sixteen years of age. About eighty lived at Monticello while the others lived on adjacent
Albemarle County plantations and on his Poplar Forest estate in Bedford County, Virginia.\footnote{450}

The incongruity of Jefferson’s status as state head and slaveholder becomes further complicated by his letters. In the year before Jefferson met with Dorothy, while in the thick of party conflict, Jefferson had proclaimed in a private letter, “I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”\footnote{451} He later justified his inaction on slavery in a dramatic letter to James Heaton\footnote{452} near the end of his life. He explained, “A good cause is often injured more by ill-timed efforts of its friends than by the arguments of its enemies . . . my sentiments have been 40 years before the public. Had I repeated them 40 times, they would only have become the more stale and thread-bare.”\footnote{453}

Perhaps this defeatist sentiment to the slavery issue explains his failure to respond to Dorothy’s accusations. However, his lack of response—whether a justification or merely attrition—never inhibited Dorothy from taking him to task upon hearing Jefferson reduce humanity to an indefinite number. “It now appeared a seasonable time to signify how my nature was shocked to hear of the souls and bodies of men being exposed to sale like the brute creation, and I implored his pity and commiseration” (EC 68). In a bit of audaciousness born from an ingrained sense of righteousness, on the heels of Dorothy’s grilling of Jefferson, she then enjoined his blessing on her evangelizing and liberating mission. Whether oblivious to the idiosyncratic nature of her request or else as a studied piece of political wrangling, Dorothy seemed on a quest for legal sanction of her mission. Perhaps she hoped that Jefferson’s approbation would signify her mission’s legitimacy to
the slaveholders she would soon encounter—as well as provide a measure of protection for herself.

Whatever their individual motivations during the course of their discussion, the dance of words and courtly manners appear almost comical, despite the underlying seriousness:

. . . I wish to have thy approbation before I move one step in the business [of abolitionism], understanding thou art a slave-holder. The President then rose from his seat, bowing his head and replying, “You have my approbation, and I wish you success, but I am afraid you will find it an arduous task to undertake.” I said again, “Then I have thy approbation,” to which he rose and performed the same ceremony over, repeating nearly the same sentence he had already done . . . . (67)

The two powers—one a leader established by earthly law, and the other an ambassador appointed by spiritual law—also debated the mental prowess of African slaves. In Jefferson’s opinion, Native Americans and African slaves “are [not] the same race, for their mental powers are not equal to the Indians” (67). Jefferson’s words to Dorothy are echoed in his Notes on the State of Virginia, in which he praised the Native American for imagination, oratory skills, and artistry. Native Americans, he wrote, “astonish you with strokes of the most sublime oratory; such as prove their reason and sentiment strong, their imagination glowing and elevated.” In contrast, about the African slave’s oratory and artistry skills, he disclaimed, “But never yet could I find that a black had uttered a thought above the level of plain narration; never see even an elementary trait of painting or sculpture.” Of African slave imagination, he wrote, “they are dull, tasteless, and
anomalous."456 Jefferson’s sentiments can be summed up in his line from Notes: “This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.”457 Historians view Jefferson’s reasoning as an example of how even the most brilliant of minds often fail to escape the cultural baggage and context of their age.

Dorothy countered Jefferson’s racial superiority claim with the argument that her British ancestors had suffered a similar denigration in ancient times. The potency of her argument stemmed from the fact that she, most probably like Jefferson, issued from those same maligned, antediluvian Britons.458 “God had made all nations of one blood, and that ancient Britons were degraded very much once in their powers of reason, and this people being neglected many centuries, their power of reason was dimmed from long abuse of the same” (EC 67). Interestingly, Jefferson mirrored Dorothy’s words in his Notes, stating that “It will be right to make great allowances for the difference of condition, of education, of conversation, of the sphere in which they move. Many millions of them have been brought to, and born in America. Most of them indeed have been confined to tillage, to their own homes, and their own society . . . .”459

Another twist in Dorothy’s meeting with Jefferson was the juicy piece of gossip on the political grapevine concerning the President’s alleged profligacy with one of his own slaves. For two centuries, the purported liaison has remained a subject of scrutiny and disagreement, and today historians utilize the scientific advances at their disposal to decipher the veracity of such reports.

Around the time Dorothy visited Jefferson, the claim that he had fathered children with Sally Hemings,460 a slave at Jefferson’s home of Monticello, circulated throughout
the new capital. Jefferson’s wife, Martha Wayles Skelton, had died in 1782, and Sally Hemings lived at Monticello as nursemaid and then companion to his daughters, Mary and Martha. Only four months following Dorothy’s interview, the rumors entered the national arena. Political journalist James T. Callender, a disappointed office-seeker who had once been an ally of Jefferson, published in The Richmond Recorder in September 1802, that Jefferson, “the man whom it delighteth the people to honor, keeps, and for many years past has kept, as his concubine, one of his own slaves . . . . By this wench, Sally, our President has had several children. . . . The African Venus is said to officiate as housekeeper at Monticello.” The nationally published article spread widely the story that previously circulated locally. Jefferson’s Federalist opponents seized on the article, having it republished in many newspapers for the remainder of Jefferson’s presidency.

With a general policy to refrain from public rebuttal to personal attacks, Jefferson apparently volunteered no explicit or private comment on his purported sexual liaison with Sally Hemings. Sally herself left no known accounts. Jefferson’s daughter Martha Jefferson Randolph privately denied the published reports. Two of her children, Ellen Randolph Coolidge and Thomas Jefferson Randolph, maintained many years later that such a relationship was impossible, on “both moral and practical grounds.” However, Madison Hemings, one of Sally’s offspring, publicly claimed Jefferson as his father. In 1873, the Pike County Republican ran a series titled, “Life Among the Lowly,” a memoir by Hemings, then a resident of Ross County, Ohio. Hemings stated that his mother Sally, who was the half-sister of Jefferson’s wife, Martha Wayles Skelton Jefferson and a slave of Thomas Jefferson, gave birth to five children “and Jefferson was the father of them all.”
Northern abolitionists, British critics of American democracy, and others sustained the Jefferson-Hemings controversy through the 19th century, and European travelers of the time recorded the immense national interest in Jefferson’s alleged liaison. Through the twentieth century, some historians countenanced the possibility of a Jefferson-Hemings connection and a few gave it credence, but most Jefferson scholars found the case for such a relationship unpersuasive. Through the years, the belief in a Thomas Jefferson-Sally Hemings relationship was sustained by two of Sally’s children. Both Madison and Eston indicated Jefferson fathered them, and this theory has been relayed through generations of their descendants as an important family truth. \(^{465}\)

Although Jefferson’s paternity of one or more of Sally Hemings’ children cannot be established with absolute certainty, the rumors circulating as such ran rampant through Washington society. Certainly Dorothy would have heard such rumors from the abolitionists and well-connected Friends who assisted her in her Washington trek. In fact, Sally gave birth to daughter Harriet the year that Dorothy visited Jefferson at the White House. That daughter, a light-skinned woman who lived her adult life as a member of white society, was freed by Jefferson in 1822. \(^{466}\) Madison Hemings wrote in 1873 that Harriet was Jefferson’s daughter. \(^{467}\)

Moreover, the rumors surrounding the genealogy of Sally Hemings added fuel to the fiery gossip. Sally’s mother, Elizabeth Hemings \(^{468}\) was the daughter of an African woman and an English sea captain, and she was the slave of John Wayles, Jefferson’s father-in-law. According to Madison Hemings and other contemporary accounts, Sally Hemings and some of her siblings were the children of John Wayles. \(^{469}\) If so, Sally Hemings would have been the half-sister of Jefferson’s wife, Martha. \(^{470}\)
Lastly, Dorothy and Jefferson clearly differed in their opinions regarding female education. Well-written and well-spoken, Dorothy benefited from a modest, yet sufficient, education through her parents’ efforts. Jefferson, however, advocated a radical system of free public education—for all white male Virginians. He proposed males should be educated to literacy at lower schools while the naturally superior of mind and talent should progress to higher education. These intellectually talented men would then rise as the natural leaders of the nation. Jefferson stipulated that the only barrier to a student’s admittance to the university should be his own intellectual limits. This overwhelming endorsement of education did not include, of course, women. Although Jefferson’s educational scheme for men was revolutionary and outpaced the general consensus of his time, his educational philosophy for women lagged considerably. In a letter to Nathaniel Burwell, Jefferson confessed, “A plan of female education has never been a subject of systematic contemplation with me.”471 His only prior consideration of it had been in regard to his own daughters’ instruction, and since Mary and Martha Jefferson were intended for marriage and childbearing, he considered it prudent to educate them only insofar as they could further the education of their own sons, “should their fathers be lost, or incapable, or inattentive.”472 Rather, women’s education regime should be confined to French, dancing, drawing and music.473 Thus Dorothy’s intellect and emancipated ideology must have rendered him as uneasy as did the women he had earlier encountered France, who stepped out of their roles as housewives and mothers to engage in politics. Jefferson’s experience with these clever and revolutionary women occurred while he was an envoy to France. As he wrote to George Washington, “The manners of the nation allow them to visit, alone, all persons in office, to solicit the affairs
of the husband, family, or friends, and their solicitations bid defiance to laws and
regulations. Further, he praised American women who seemed content to orbit solely
in the culturally prescribed “woman’s sphere.”: Few Americans can “believe in the
desperate state to which things are reduced in this country from the omnipotence of an
influence which, fortunately for the happiness of the sex itself, does not endeavor to
extend itself in our country beyond the domestic line.” For Dorothy to arrange a
confrontation there in the White House quarters, tackling such hotly debated issues as
slavery, the education of slaves, and the superior role of the church over state
undoubtedly discomforted and exasperated Jefferson.

Jefferson believed that women would waste the privilege of education in silly
pursuit of novels and poetry which had captures the minds of the female sex in the early
nineteenth century. And perhaps he was not mistaken. Certainly, the allure of the novel to
women cannot be disclaimed, for it suited the entertainment (and educational) needs of a
huge female readership previously denied a literary outlet. As Cathy N. Davidson shows,
the early novel “was the perfect form for this imperfect time: . . . The novel did not
rhyme or scan. It required no knowledge of Latin or Greek, no intermediation or
interpretation by cleric or academic. It required, in fact—from reader to writer—virtually
no traditional education or classical erudition since, by definition, the novel was new,
novel.” Jefferson’s objections stemmed from a conviction, “that fiction and poetry
were not conducive to higher ethical standards, especially in the female sex, towards
whom he always expressed the most gallant sentiments but of whose intellectual
capacities he thought little.” On the other hand, perhaps Jefferson’s omission of an
educational scheme for females stemmed from the fact that they were not voting citizens; hence, they simply did not need to be as informed as men.

At the conclusion of their meeting, Dorothy and Jefferson—firmly rooted in opposing ideals—parted amicably. In contrast to Jefferson’s noncommittal response to Dorothy’s evangelical mission and liberation proposals, Dearborn and Thornton proved openly supportive. They “seconded the same with their warm sentiments, which I felt thankful for: yea, they added that this plan would meet with the approbation of the well-disposed among all classes of people” (EC 67).

Dorothy left the White House that May morning confident that she had “excited [Jefferson] to seek the blessing of God, and have taken the first step in the direction of wisdom” and in her mission to evangelize and to help effect the liberation of the African slaves (68). And, she had, in fact. Jefferson’s lukewarm, albeit courteous, response failed to dampen Dorothy’s missionary zeal. She immediately conceived an idea for a slave school in Washington (157).

Seven days after Dorothy took Jefferson to task for owning slaves, Dorothy supped with Elizabeth Drinker, apprising the older woman of her intent to set up a school for female slave children. Following her meeting with the president, Dorothy traveled through Baltimore, Wilmington, and Philadelphia in the company of several Quakers. William Canby, who had accompanied her to the interview with Jefferson, left Dorothy in the care of the abolitionist Ann Mifflin. Heavy rains hit Philadelphia in mid-May 1802, and Dorothy took refuge at Ann’s home. There, she made the acquaintance of Elizabeth Drinker, whose diary has evolved into a monumental reference for contemporary historians. Drinker’s diary, covering the years 1758-1807, mainly concerns private and
family matters, although some entries for the period of the Revolutionary War include
detailed information on the treatment of Quakers and on the British occupation of
Philadelphia. The private entries present a particular appeal for their descriptions of the
illnesses of Elizabeth’s family, medical treatment, and the Society of Friends in
eighteenth century Philadelphia.

Drinker’s journal entry dated May 12, 1802, confirmed Dorothy’s intentions to
establish a school for slave children. Elizabeth wrote, “Nancy Mifflin [sic] with Dorathy
Ripley and Chamless Wharton were here this evening. DR. Ripley lately from Great
Britian [sic] under a sense of Duty to go to the City of Washington, there to set up a
school to instruct young Negroes in reading, writing &c—she has been to Washington
and has received encouragement from Jefferson the Presedent [sic], and others—Willm.
Camby [sic] went with her—she seems inclined to unite with friends, and that they should
unite with her, ’tho not a member—Othniel Alsop sup’d here—Molly Rhoac’s better.
cloudy.”

Dorothy’s plan called for a school for sixty slave children, around the age of
seven. Not surprisingly, considering her particular concern for girls because they were
exposed to the “vile passions of men,” as well as her revolutionary ideas of equality of
the sexes, her design targeted the female offspring of slave women (EC 67). Each child
would abide “a term suitable for their improvement,” and would be supported by public
contributions from “the humane, who are always willing to strengthen the hands of the
diligent, from a sense of duty to God, their great Creator, and love to all objects placed in
misery through the oppressor’s power” (68). She depended on God to stimulate “hearts of
all in his hands” to “dispose whom he sees meet to forward such an undertaking, which
no doubt will bring glory to the Universal Parent of all nations, and be a praise to all who may throw in their mite, if it be even as small as the ‘poor widow’s,’ in our Lord’s time” (68).

During her interview with Jefferson, Dorothy secured his approval for such a venture. She wrote, “It was to the credit of the president, that he did not object to such a design,” but rather he “wished me success, which was according to my faith, from this weighty testimony that awed my mind all the way previous to my visit . . .” (69).

Further, the establishment of a school for slave children would test the theory Dorothy advanced to Jefferson. If, as Jefferson suggested, slaves’ “power of reason was dimmed from long abuse of the abuse,” then the remedy lay in their active participation in an educational scheme. Unlike Jefferson, Dorothy believed that “to train them up with the view that they were not the same race, would prove only a curse to the land” (68). As Dorothy enunciated, “I was inclined to think if the present generation of children were separated from their parents, and educated by virtuous persons, who would teach them habits of industry and economy, they might then prove a blessing to the country” (67).

Unfortunately, while Dorothy’s scheme offered an avenue of freedom for children otherwise sentenced to a lifetime of servitude, her plan seemed flawed in its excision of consideration for the children who would be ripped from the arms of a loving, supportive slave community or for the parents, who constantly lived under the threat of family division by slaveholders. To have the children and parents separated by the very source which sought to aid them seemed ironic, indeed.

Still, the evidence suggests that Dorothy’s vision for a school for slave children arose out of humanitarian ideals. Without doubt, her enduring concern for the female
children who would be helpless against the licentiousness of white rapists served as an
impetus for her idea. However, her plan may have had additional impetus as a
consequence of her inaugural encounter with an African slave. The unnamed slave was
captured with his sister when they were eight and nine years old and sold into a lifetime
of slavery on foreign soil. The story of the kidnapped children—a tale of innocence
betrayed and the origins of the debasement accompanying the deprivations of identity and
freedom—moved Dorothy to champion the utterly helpless slave child:

They . . . were stolen away by wicked kidnappers, who hurried them from
the soil of their forefathers, and brought them to encounter with the
hardships of a captive’s life, exposed to the basest insults that nature can
be degraded with: but there is an Eye, that marks all actions, and who will
punish every man-stealer according to the severity of His Righteous Laws,
which He gave unto Moses, to confirm the lives of the people unto, and
our lives also from one generation to another; for the lord God in this day,
writheth the Holy Law on the heart of man, I verily believe. (Bank 298)

Although a lack of funds prevented realization of Dorothy’s dream of a school,
she evidently never relinquished her hopes that it would come to fruition.

**Evangelizing in the Deep South**

The first stop of Dorothy’s mission to the Deep South was Charleston, South
Carolina, the stronghold of the Confederacy. According to the national census before
Dorothy’s first arrival in the U.S., South Carolina had a slave population three times that
of Georgia. Her time in Charleston, like her later efforts in Beaufort and Savannah,
proved problematic for Dorothy, and the toll on her spiritual and emotional fortitude commenced immediately.

En route to Charleston, Dorothy shared the sloop *Mary* with a white woman traveling with her female slave. Encountering one of her own gender in commission of the disturbing emotional manipulation that characterized slavery, Dorothy felt no compunction about immediately wading into direct confrontation with white slaveholding society. The two women—one white, the other black; one free and the other enslaved—“occasion[ed] me great uneasiness,” Dorothy wrote (Bank 272). The white woman, “hung about with gay clothes and ornamented with bracelets and rings,” displayed a flirtatious, vivacious air when men shared her company. By contrast, the female slave who accompanied the woman “was so meanly clothed” that the stark difference raised Dorothy’s ire.

According to Dorothy, God’s voice instructed her to deal more compassionately with the slave than had her insensitive mistress, and she complied “with as much pleasure, as when the greatest favour is conferred upon me” (273). Not only did Dorothy gift the black woman with “the strongest gown I had” (273), but she also shared her meal with her. Realizing the woman’s owner exhibited no intention of feeding her slave, Dorothy “spread a slice of my bread with butter” for the servant; and,—despite the fact that Dorothy herself suffered from a socially inferior position—she insisted the white woman fetch a cup of coffee for the servant to have with her meal. Obviously unaccustomed and equally unwilling to serve the servant, the white woman responded “with an air of disdain” that the slave could “wait till I have done” (273). As Dorothy herself was unaccustomed to such blatant evidence of racial superiority, she snapped
back that the woman “took more upon herself than [Dolley] Maddison, [sic] the President’s wife did; for I heard her, call her old black nurse to come and see me, and then she with humility told her, to take a tart, or cake, off the side-board and help herself with a glass of wine” (273).

Clearly, Dorothy was not above indulging in a bit of name-dropping, for her obvious allusion to a personal acquaintance with the wife of the sitting U.S. President was meant to “mortify the mean pride that I perceived lurked in her heart” (273). Obviously, Dorothy did not interpret her social one-upmanship as a demonstration of the deadly sin of human pride.

Perhaps it was the slave’s fear of imminent sale to a Georgia plantation which fueled Dorothy’s anger to such fiery pitch. The slave accompanied her mistress on a final journey to the auction block in Georgia, surely any slave’s nightmare. With the advent of the cotton gin in 1790, cotton gave slavery a new lease on life. Once a slave was of no further use to his or her slaveowner, the slave was not set free but sold to the Lower south, where the agrarian need for slave labor thrived. That meant many of the slaves born in Virginia, Maryland or South Carolina were likely to die in Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama or Louisiana. According to Deborah Gray White, the sale and transportation of Black people within the United States thus became big business. To be “sold down the river” to a Deep South plantation was one of the most dreaded prospects of the enslaved population. Some destinations, particularly the Louisiana sugar plantations, had especially grim reputations.

But it was the destruction of family that made the domestic slave trade so terrifying and, arguably, posed the most traumatic aspect of slave trading. Francis Fedric,
who was born in Virginia and sold away in Kentucky, recalled the scene of divided families: “Men and women down on their knees begging to be purchased to go with their wives or husbands . . . children crying and imploring not to have their parents sent away from them; but all their beseeching and tears were of no avail. They were ruthlessly separated, most of them for ever.” Traders bought selectively, without regard to family, selecting individuals based on their predictions of yielding the greatest profit. “Bills of sale show that they almost never bought husbands and wives together, and such records indicate that the trade would have disrupted one in five marriages of all slaves in the selling states. The trade also separated about one-third of the children under fourteen from one or both of their parents.

Slaveowners frequently wielded the threat of being “sold down river” to a Georgia or Louisiana plantation as a means of keeping slaves well-heeled. The back-breaking toil, lack of food, and barbarous treatment to be found on a Southern estate—as well as the requisite separation from family—rendered plantation slavery a productive threat. When the slave woman journeying with Dorothy onboard the Mary learned of her doomed future as a plantation slave, she could “do nothing but bemoan her future hard fate!” (273). Dorothy “comforted her as much as I could by telling her that God might provide a better master for her, and assured her that He would if she only prayed to Him for mercy, and were a good faithful servant; which she promised to be; and was very thankful to me for the present I gave her” (273).

The occasion became the first of Dorothy’s firsthand exposure to slave families being ripped apart at the slaveowners’ economic whim. Compounding the fear of being traded and separated from family was the insidiousness of how it was effected. The slave
woman aboard the *Mary* mourned her inability to say a final farewell to her family, her mistress having forbidden any opportunity for goodbyes, despite the overwhelming odds that the enslaved family members would ever again see each other. Dorothy found the vindictiveness too much to comprehend: “She had been so cruel as to bring this poor creature away without bidding her mother or friends farewell, which distressed her beyond every thing” (273). In a ploy to ensure the slave’s compliance with the least amount of fuss, the wily white woman had fabricated a necessity for her slave to board the ship. Tricked into believing that she was merely “to carry my mistress’s box,” the slave woman found to her horror that the ship unexpectedly pulled away from the dockside, leaving her no chance to bid her loved ones an eternal farewell.

Rivaling the horrific poignancy of the slave woman’s tale was Dorothy’s experience aboard a slave ship immediately upon her arrival in Charleston in February 1806. When Dorothy’s ship *Mary* pulled into port, a ship from Guinea passed by with a full cargo of slaves. The floating prison of humans on their way to a lifetime of bondage “raised certain emotions in my breast, that language cannot describe,” Dorothy wrote. In full sail, the ship passed by quickly, but “Ah! It was as the gates of hell to me; for I compared it to that justly, feeling hell in the breast of those horrid traffic merchants of soul and body,” (Bank 278). The ship represented the final surge of American slavers to legally import Africans to be sold as slaves. Within the year, the United States passed a law officially outlawing the importation of slaves or participation by American citizens in the overseas slave trade beginning 1 January 1808.\footnote{488} This did not, of course, prevent intra-national slave trading nor did strict enforcement accompany the new law. Of special note is that Thomas Jefferson signed the bill on March 2, 1807, five years after his private
meeting with Dorothy and only one year after he welcomed her as the first female speaker before the U.S. Congress.\footnote{489}

After a morning spent preaching to “what are called genteel persons,” Dorothy felt compelled to investigate her first horrified glimpse of slave trafficking. In an extraordinary case of verbal irony, Dorothy wrote of her fruitful search for “a merciful slave-holder” to escort her aboard some of the Guinea ships docked in the port (\textit{Bank} 279). Warned that she “must not take any that were very religious with me, or it would create uneasiness” among the investors of the slave ship and its cargo, she sought the aid of a member of the slaveholding society. White missionaries, treated equally with suspicion and misgivings by white slave owners and traders, were suspected of indoctrinating a sense of unrest among the slaves with religious ideals of equality and liberty. While on board, Dorothy moved among enslaved men, women and children and “gratified my curiosity” (279).

Her last sentence seems uncharacteristically uncompassionate until one considers the next passage in her narrative. Upon exiting the slave ship, she encountered the captain, who unashamedly announced his role as “part owner of the slaves and the ship” (279). Dorothy’s tour occurred on the slave ship \textit{Lydia} which brought 250 slaves into the Charleston harbor that February after a six-month round-trip voyage. After a “frolic,” the ship’s captain, doctor, and five sailors had died on the coast of Guinea. At the peak of the Atlantic slave trade, slavers took about 90,000 captives per year out of a total population of around 25 million in just Guinea, where the vast majority originated.\footnote{490}

But the cost of life to the slavers did not stir Dorothy, a firm believer in the Old Testament proverb of “an eye for an eye.” Rather, her now-familiar temper fired at the
knowledge that twenty slaves perished during the infamous Middle Passage of the *Lydia*. Worse, another three African captives died after reaching Charleston harbor, where medical provisions and professional care were readily available. Such blatant disregard for human life outraged the missionary. A heated diatribe against the ills of slavery followed, in which Dorothy “wounded [the captain’s] feelings in the most poignant manner that I could” (279). Exhibiting the same attitude of righteous right that permitted her excoriation of Jefferson followed by her demanding his approbation, she demanded admittance to the belly of the slave ship. She planned to witness firsthand the pitiable quarters accorded the African captives during the passage.

What she found there drained her righteous anger as the circumstances proved even more degraded than she imagined. As usual, the slaves “had been confined in fetters” throughout the Middle Passage, and the evidence of the barbary still littered the ship floor. The reduced height of the ship’s belly had been lowered so that even Dorothy was prevented from “being able to stand upright” (279). Instead, she was “obliged to stoop with great pain” (279) for the duration of her tour.

The minimized height between below decks was a common tactic among slave ship owners. In order to achieve maximum profits from each transport, slave ship owners divided the hull into “between decks,” thus doubling the number of slaves transported. Yankee ingenuity and thriftiness discovered that the slave ships proved most economical “with only 3 feet 3 inches of vertical space to a deck and 13 inches of surface area per slave, the human cargo laid in carefully like spoons in a silverware case.”

This bit of resourcefulness led to indescribably unhygienic conditions, and consequently, staggeringly high mortality rates. Only the most robust survived the
voyage from the African coast to America. Often the ships transported hundreds of slaves in a single voyage, with the captives chained tightly to plank beds. For example, the slave ship *Henrietta Marie* carried up to 300 men, women and children in one trip, the slaves chained in the half-decks during the voyage from Africa to Jamaica. Sometimes, women were allowed brief spells above deck although they remained under constant guard to prevent their jumping overboard. Slave men, generally posing a greater physical danger, rarely enjoyed release from the poorly ventilated, cramped quarters. Stacked in ships like goods in a warehouse and benefiting from minimal rations, nominal fresh air, and no waste facilities, the kidnapped Africans expired of disease, illness and malnutrition. And, of course, in a bid to maintain absolute control, slavers administered routine beatings and tortures. Slaves deemed too troublesome for the journey were simply tossed overboard.

Unable to endure more than a brief period in the hunched position and amid the lingering stench of death, unwashed bodies, sickness, and bodily waste, Dorothy escaped to the main deck and the blessed fresh air above the slave quarters. Dorothy harbored no delusions about “how wretchedly I should have been, if I had sat there” for the six to eight weeks of the Middle Passage journey (279). Even above decks, however, Dorothy found little relief from the horrors of a slave ship. Once topside, she witnessed the living evidence of the wretchedness wrought by the Middle Passage. There at the entrance to the hold sat two men, ancient and infirm and “unsaleable” (279). Both men suffered from malformed limbs, “one having his head turned half round his neck; the other, one of his feet twisted in the same manner” (279). Moved by compassion that the captain seemed to lack, she yearned for the money to purchase the men herself. As a
penniless missionary, however, she had nothing to offer the captain in exchange for the doomed men, and the captain felt no compunction to release them into her care, hoping that a buyer could yet be found. Obviously desperate to be purchased by the compassionate woman, the African men indicated their wishes to the captain:

... When this question was put to them, ‘Will you go with that lady?’ they both smiled, and gave us to understand they were willing: but alas! I had neither money to purchase them to make them free, nor yet an habitation to take them to; yet I had an heart filled with sorrow, and a disposition to buy every soul present, had the Lord given me ability. (279)

Dorothy’s account accords the modern reader a glimpse of the slave trade beyond the human element. She also opened a door to the commercial dimension of a bargain struck between slave trader and slaveowner, as well as affording a view of the general state of the merchandise to be sold.

Dorothy recorded, for example, that in 1806, slavers docking in Charleston had to dress newly arrived Africans (however shabbily) prior to parading them before would-be buyers. Charlestonians wanted to avoid offending the delicate sensibilities of white women who, in a depressingly ironic turn, were not offended at the sight of humans being sold into bondage, or even at the idea of purchasing these humans themselves. Slavers typically provided short trousers and a coarse shirt for men; they gave women an unornamented, serviceable gown of undetermined length. Dorothy mentioned neither shoes, hats nor caps for the men or women. Neither did she mention what provisions, if any, were made for children.
She also described the crude adornments forced upon the slaves—an uncompromising pronouncement of their new status in the Americas. Each slave was required to wear a plaquard around the neck, the slaver’s expedient measure of announcing the individual price of a slave. Adults and children alike were made to wear the simple paper plaques, their prices scrawled prominently across the front.

[The *Lydia* slaves] were all dressed in red and blue flannel, with their price on a piece of paper, tied round their necks, exposed for sale. The value of children was one hundred and sixty dollars. Men boys, two hundred and fifty. Prime Men and women, from two hundred and eighty, to five hundred dollars. . . . There were some of the men, whose faces had seven double stripes of blue on each side, from the brow to the chin, marked I suppose after the same manner, that an old Indian king shewed me he was distinguished to be a warrior by, which he said, was done by pricking the skin, and laying powder on it that made him shriek out. (280)

Dorothy’s account accords the contemporary reader a means of determining the equivalent value of an 1806 slave. For example, a male or female slave in their prime would bring roughly $4,058 and $4,246 today. Slaveholders could command $2,320 for children and $3,623 for young boys. 497 The slave trade, indeed, proved lucrative for many.

Later, she would escoriate a white Southern congregation about the barbaric practice of pricing humans. Before a group of 2,000 white worshippers, many of whom indulged in the practice, Dorothy denounced any system which valued a person only in terms of the labor to be produced. With the full rhetorical power of her spiritual and
physical position, she thundered from the pulpit that any in the crowd who participated in such a practice were no different than the Jews who persecuted Jesus. Her parallel insinuated that, just as the Jews used bribery in their capture and crucifixion of Jesus, so too did Americans attach prices to humans they meant to control.  

I told my hearers, that I had been reading the prices of men, women, and children; but I saw no one valued at so small a price as the Lord Jesus, who submitted to fulfill this prophesy concerning Himself by Zechariah, who foretold His being sold for the small sum ironically spoken of, when the Prophet lost with astonishment saith, “A goodly price that I was prized at of them,” which I signified was “Thirty pieces of silver,” entreat ing all the captives of Africa present to submit to the Providence of God, who yielded up His Only Son for our sakes, who was betrayed by Judas His disciple, and sold to the Jews through envy, or hatred, begging all the slaveholders present to remember every slave they possessed were so many talents committed to their care to occupy and wo [sic] be to that man, who did not take care of the talents of God: for they should give account to Him for every slave in their power.” (283)

Dorothy’s account also revealed that slavetraders suffered no compunction about kidnapping and transporting pregnant African captives. She wrote, “Some had been born on board, which I took in my arms, and blessed them, offering to Jesus my sacred charge” (280). The infamous horror of the Middle Passage must have been magnified unbearably for a heavily pregnant woman. Dorothy could provide no insight into mortality numbers of fetuses delivered during the voyage, nor of the number of women
who died in childbirth. Since corpses would have been cast overboard by the slavers, Dorothy would have had no record to rely on. Also, one must speculate on how many of the women were already pregnant before their capture and transport or became pregnant during the voyage. Clearly, the possibility of rape aboard ship by the white sailors who controlled and manipulated the slaves presented an ever-present danger for women, and even men and children.

Guided by the fervent belief that true conversion to Christianity would mean the end of slavery, Dorothy coaxed the slaver captain, whom she called “this awful merchant,” to recant his wicked profession and lifestyle. Ever the evangelist, she exhorted his compassion to the slaves and urged him to attend her sermon planned for the evening (280). And he agreed. He vowed to attend the meeting and end his involvement in the slave trade—immediately after he had “fetched two cargos more, that were at this time stowed in warehouses on the Coast of Africa” (280). Appalled, Dorothy learned for the first time about the stockpiling of slaves in warehouses—just as is done with any other commodity.

Upon establishing a trade in Africa, a slave trading company made arrangements to construct a joint fort, holding facility and trading station. One of the first buildings to go up would be a “barracoon,” a warehouse where slaves could be restrained until the voyage across the Atlantic. More euphemistically, the British called their warehouses, “castles,” but they were little more than warehouse dungeons. For two centuries, the castles served as holding centers for enslaved Africans, as well as depots for sugar, coffee, cotton, rice and rum. Warring tribes from the interior of Africa carted their defeated enemies to the shores to sell to the white slave traders, who exchanged rum,
guns and food for the human plunder. White slave traders herded their merchandise into
the castles to await transportation to the West Indies or Americas. As Dorothy learned,
sometimes the slaves spent months in the warehouses, awaiting their unfortunate turn.

“This shocked me so much that I was almost confounded in their behalf, feeling
as if it were their very pangs and groans; while they were to lie stowed together as dry
goods, till they were sent for in two voyages!” (280). Reeling from the new information,
Dorothy felt compelled to expand her mission of mercy by touring another vessel nearby.
Her fortitude failed her, however, for she refrained from boarding and observed the
misfortunate souls from the dock. The slaves transported by this second, unnamed ship
were allowed fresh air on deck; otherwise, their situation proved as dire as those of the
*Lydia*: “a number of them [were] on deck, standing and laying naked to sweeten
themselves in the fresh air; which looked awful in my sight, when I considered that
covering was first introduced to hide the shame of our First Parents, who poluted their
bodies, or defiled the temple of the Lord” (281). Unlike the slaves transported by the
*Lydia*, these Africans were just being readied for sale, so they had not yet been issued
their “sale clothes.” In Dorothy’s eyes, their nakedness served as a metaphor. She
envisioned the natural body, devoid of clothing, to signify their innocence in the slave
trade; the clothing they were soon to don was the tangible proof of the slavers’ guilt. Like
Adam and Eve, the slavers resorted to the protective shield of cloth to hide themselves
from the view of their Creator, whom Dorothy insisted would be angered by their
inhumane actions against the Africans.

Incensed at the mental image, she sought her victim, and there he stood—the
ship’s captain—waiting on shore by the gangplank to the vessel, graciously greeting
would-be buyers. Without hesitation, she descended on him. Upon initially spotting Dorothy as she stalked toward him, the man’s face suffused with courtly abashment. After all, a lone female buyer presented a rare enough sight, for usually a white woman only traveled escort when embarking on her slave trading. Doing business with a female—and one dealing in human flesh—moved him to shyness. Still, he planned to bargain with her.

His gentlemanly demeanor eroded, however, when Dorothy descended on him like a virago, her cheeks suffused with blood from her anger, a frown mottling her face. The young men standing next to their captain “all changed their gay countenances, and put on a sober look” when they foresaw the scene about to unfold at the beginning of market day (281). Dorothy, a compassionate woman and a fervent Christian, nevertheless lost control that day, loudly crying out to all within earshot of the wickedness she had witnessed aboard the slave ships. In her most righteous—and most likely, shrillest—voice, she prophesied to all within hearing distance that a day of reckoning approached, one in which the degraded Africans she had seen that day would own the very land they were destined to till:

“It is sin that defiles thy mind and thy body also; but God hath restored my soul from the fall, therefore do I stand here viewing a prophesy fulfilled, respecting Ethiopia’s sons and daughters being led away captives, naked and barefoot. Believe the Scriptures,” said I, “thou that seest it fulfilled, and remember, those brought thither will at length possess this Land, which will be experienced to the sorrow of many.” (281)
Even while Dorothy prophesised the providential intercession that would liberate the enslaved, she seemed to also foresee secular intervention in the form of civil war. Less than sixty years and more than 600,000 deaths later, the Africans forcibly brought to America and their offspring would indeed be on a path to owning the land that they currently tilled for their white owners.

On the heels of her revelation, and by sheer dint of will, Dorothy forced her frown into a smile of encouragement that day as she hailed the Africans from the wharf. She “wept silently in [her] heart,” even as she smiled “with love and approbation, evidencing I looked on them as my brothers and sisters by creation” (281). Concluding the horrific tale, Dorothy stated that she had learned “sixteen thousand captives have been brought into the Southern States, since 1804 commenced, though the number in the public paper, states only fourteen thousand!!!!” (282).

The hard emotional hits of her first encounters in Charleston made a lasting impression on Dorothy. The fire of her evangelical conviction fueled by the visual reinforcement of the horrors of slavery led her to the pulpit. That evening, she preached to a white congregation of more than two thousand, and there her fortitude again underwent a strenuous test, for many of the congregants and those still partying outside the church doors reeled from the merriment and drunken indulgence of the day’s races. Dorothy frankly admitted to her fear in preaching a sermon liberally laced with abolitionism before an intoxicated white Southern audience:

. . . I was discomposed at seasons, from the noise without, that was occasioned for the want of a larger place, to hold those who were just returned from the races, intoxicated with pleasure, and strong drink.
Sometimes fear seized me for a moment, then again, holy joy would fill me with boldness, so that I felt uncommon strength, which made me cry aloud and spare neither bond, nor free, rich, or poor; believing God had brought me there to testify of His Power. (Bank 282)

Her sermons did indeed alienate many people in the South, yet she also won key converts during her time in Charleston. John Hoff, a printer, and his wife, Maria Margaret Hoff, a Presbyterian of German descent, not only provided room and board for Dorothy immediately upon her arrival in the Charleston harbor, but they also found suitable venues for Dorothy to begin disseminating her message of salvation and abolitionism to the Charlestonians. Perhaps they readily embraced Dorothy because the couple had recently moved from the more culturally diverse Philadelphia, with its large population of free blacks and the general air of acceptance emanating from the Quakers. The Hoffs then were spared the generations-old layering of discrimination and racial hatred that became the birthright of native southerners. Dorothy’s narrative showed that the Hoffs acted in Dorothy’s best interests on multiple levels; however, despite their wholehearted, and even public, embrasure of Dorothy, John Hoff never published any of Dorothy’s works. Hoff did, however, produce a work of his own which furthered Dorothy’s goals: he provided her with a valued letter of introduction to Doctor Morse of Savannah, Georgia, which lent her the relieved assurance that she had a bed awaiting her upon her arrival there and would not be forced on the streets.

Dorothy made her way to Savannah on Feb. 21, 1806. In order to reach the city, Dorothy had to cross the Savannah River, which makes up most of the South Carolina-Georgia border. In order to accomplish her goal into Savannah, then, Dorothy had to
contract passage across the river, and the only means available was anathema to Dorothy. Plying their trade along the river was a white man and his six male slaves. For a price, he would conduct passengers across the twenty-five-mile river in his canoe-boat. To Dorothy’s chagrin, she had to contract the slaveholder’s services. Thus, like the overwhelming majority of the whites in the Deep South, she relied on slave labor to achieve her goals. Although slaveholders made up only a tiny percentage of the Deep South’s population, non-slaveholders generally approved of the institution as well. The non-slaveholding small farmers, small businessmen, teachers, preachers, clerks, lawyers, and white laborers, many of them desperately poor, made up three-fourths of the Southern population. And even though they did not own slaves themselves, they knew only too well that the end of slavery could visit calamitous effects on their heads. Some aspired to be slaveholders, the labor provided by slaves increasingly elevating them above the economic constraints which they had previously overcome. Countless others feared the economic, social and romantic competition of the freed slave. And still others harbored terrors perpetuated by the propaganda of violence, chaos and bloodshed conjured by pro-slavery politicians. Finally, slavery served as the central cog in the Southern economical wheel, and poorer whites relied on slaves for a multitude of urban necessities, including shop labor, blacksmithing, food supplies, clothing, and transportation.

Thus, when Dorothy found herself in a bind, forced to cross a river with no other means to accomplish it, she too turned to slave labor.

We got into a canoe-boat, nine yards long; and were rowed twenty-five miles by six African men, who had no one to help them but their owner, a
white man; who sat at the helm to steer the canoe. I looked with pity on
those forlorn creatures, who had an hard servitude, which would destroy
the health of the finest strongest youth, in five or six years . . . . (Bank
285)

Once in Savannah—the southernmost city in her second missionary journey—
Dorothy made the acquaintance of three ministers who would alter the course of her time
there. The white ministers Dr. Henry Holcombe and Joseph “Judge” Clay opened the
doors to white churches and homes alike for Dorothy; the black minister Andrew Bryan
eased her way into Savannah’s slave community, supporting her emotionally and
professionally.

Andrew Bryan served as a living symbol of the heart of Dorothy’s mission: the
conversion of the slaves. The founder of the First African Baptist Church, Bryan was
born enslaved in 1737, on a plantation outside of Charleston. He served as coachman and
body servant to Jonathan Bryan, who along with his brother Hugh and several other
planters, was arrested for preaching to slaves. Jonathan Bryan’s plantation became the
center of efforts by dissenting group of planters to evangelize their slaves.

In 1782, George Liele, the first black Baptist in Georgia and licensed to preach to
slaves along the Savannah River, converted Andrew Bryan, baptizing both him and his
wife Hannah. When Liele and hundreds of other blacks left with the British later that
year, Andrew stayed behind, preaching to small groups outside of Savannah. With his
master’s encouragement, he constructed a shack from where he ministered to a small
flock, including a few whites. Although he brought hundreds into his church, 350 others
could not be baptized because of their masters’ opposition. Some masters, fearing slave
uprisings and desertions to the British, prohibited their slaves to attend Bryan’s sermons. Even slaves who had passes were stopped and whipped. Members of the church, both slave and free, were harassed, brutalized, and jailed. Bryan, and other black religious leaders, endured public whippings meant to serve as a warning to keep their black worshippers “in line.” Bryan also suffered incarceration, and only when his owner and several other sympathetic planters protested was he released. Imprisonment, however, did not stop Bryan, who continued to preach in a barn on the Bryan plantation, between sunrise and sunset, in accordance with the law.

Supported by several prominent white men of Savannah who proclaimed the positive effect of religion on slave discipline, Bryan was ordained and his church certified in 1788. Upon the death of his master, Bryan purchased his freedom. In 1794, he gathered sufficient subscriptions to erect a church in Savannah, calling it Bryan Street African Baptist Church. His was the first black Baptist church in Georgia and, historians concur, probably the first in the United States. Further, his was the first Baptist church, black or white, in Savannah.

By the time Dorothy arrived in the new Republic, the church had grown to about 700. The church reorganized as First Baptist Church of Savannah, permitting the dismissal of 250 members so they could establish a branch outside of Savannah. When Dorothy preached at First Baptist, the church boasted 554 members (Bank 287), and Bryan had seen seventy-seven years.

In the only depiction of its kind in any of Dorothy’s works, she furnished a physical description of the former slave. Although the description—and the assumption of Bryan’s persona that Dorothy appropriated as the voice of the Christianized former
slave—crossed into the realm of religious sentimentalism, she nevertheless revealed a deep respect for the aged minister who “preache[d] the doctrines of Jesus Christ” (287):

This minister is seventy-seven years old, having his head almost as white as snow, and the kingdom of heaven in his heart; which in my eyes, made him look beautiful; yea, in the words of Scripture, I say in his behalf, “I am black, but comely O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Soloman [sic]! Look not upon me” with disdain, “Because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of vineyards.” (287)

On the heels of her description, Dorothy informed the reader the horrific ordeal that Bryan underwent on his odyssey to Christianization. Her unapologetic harsh starkness achieves the goal of ultimate shock value, and her indictment of Georgians—indeed, Americans—at large demonstrates her unfettered belief in the security of her righteous armor:

When this man was baptized twenty years ago, he was cut exceedingly with the whip, by the authority of the legislator, and his body all round is now full of hard knots, where the whip brought out a piece of flesh with every stripe, while his master wept over him and could not prevent the lash on any account. Here was a law of barbarity, not of liberty! Did England teach thus? O ye citizens of Georgia! but this did not make him fear long; no, God invested him with a love to His righteous cause, and excited him to come forward to testify of His Power: therefore, in the
Name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, he plunged the people also, which enraged the enemies of the blacks so much, that they stood over this veteran with drawn swords, and the gun loaden, testifying that they would either slay him with the sword, or shoot him: but calmly he defended his cause, by opening his breast that had been striped, and cried out, “Here is my life, take it; but my religion I will never renounce.” (Bank 288)

Given the clear similarities in their stories, Bryan’s account serves as a frontrunner to the fictionalized “Uncle Tom” of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Both the real Bryan and the fictional Tom were saintly black men mercilessly flogged and yet still prayed for their tormentors. Bryan’s prayers for the person who severely beat him touched a compassionate chord in some whites and secured many black converts. Both the real Bryan and his fictionalized counterpart converted to Christianity, both admired and respected by the other slaves as a religious figure; both succeeded in bringing others into the Christian fold; and both were born in the Upper South, only to be sent “down river” to large plantations in the Deep South.505

There is every possibility that Stowe had encountered Bryan’s story, as it circulated through the ministerial and anti-slavery circles such as those in which the Beecher family moved. In fact, Stowe insisted that many parts of her novel reflected true accounts from slaves and fugitives, and literary scholarship frequently cites her familiarity with the autobiography of escaped slave Josiah Henson.506 Although she never mentioned Bryan in her chapter on the origins of Uncle Tom in *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she stressed that her characters evolved from “a collection and arrangement of real incidents, of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered . . .”507
Although “Uncle Tom” has, since Stowe’s publication, become a byword of racist complicity, in Bryan’s case, the same appellation can hardly be applied. Dorothy found an abundance of reasons to admire Bryan, not the least of which were his ecclesiastical and secular activities. Additionally, the reality of his suffering for Christ’s sake, with the tangible proof of the stripes crisscrossing his back, elevated him to the level of sainthood in Dorothy’s eyes:

His silver locks, and heavenly smile, cemented my heart to his, knowing his body had been all wounds for the Gospel’s sake; for he told me himself what I here record, that “The lash brought large pieces of flesh out with every scourge; as an example to others, by the authority of the State . . . . Above twenty years, this man hath stood firm; fearing neither the wrath of men, nor devils. His experience he related to me, which evidences he is born from above, by the Power of God, effectually calling him to lead his brethren into the way of holiness. As he stood firm on the Rock, the Lord Jesus made him a free man, and His servant, and son; having heirship through His most Precious Blood, which He spilt freely for all on the Cross. (288)

At the same time that Dorothy admired Bryan’s religious skills, she also admired him for his secular endeavors as well. According to Dorothy’s account, Bryan had amassed a modest fortune of his own, and he used that wealth, ironically, to purchase slaves—most notably children:

This minister is not only free, but God has made him possessor of five or six thousand dollars, which is encouraging to men of colour, who are
slaves; and will be religious in spite of sin and satan. He purchases
children, and trains them up in the fear of the Lord; and I was informed at
this time, “There is not any man more respected in the City of Savannah,
than Andrew Bryan, the black minister.” (Bank 288)

Dorothy’s description of Bryan as a slaveholder—but one who purchased slaves
as a lawful means of releasing them from hard labor and a lifetime of servitude—
reinforces critical claims that free blacks purchased slaves for just such purpose. Until
recently, pre-Civil War census reports that listed free blacks as slaveholders baffled
historians. Recent scholarship, however, has deciphered that blacks most often purchased
other blacks in an effort to circumvent the strict laws governing the manumission of
slaves. The purchase of slaves by free blacks sometimes presented the only opportunity
for family members to escape slavery. For example, as Dorothy traveled through Virginia
during her second mission, the state legislature repealed a previous law that looked
favorably on emancipation of slaves. By the year of her first journey to the Deep South
(1806), white slaveholders disposed to emancipate slaves in a last will and testament had
to do so against overwhelming legal and financial odds: “It shall be lawful for any
person, by his or her last will and testament, or by any other instrument in writing under
his or her hand and seal . . . to emancipate and set free his or her slaves . . . . Provided,
also, that all slaves so emancipated, not being . . . of sound mind and body, or being
above the age of forty-five years, or being males under the age of twenty one, or females
under the age of eighteen years, shall respectively be supported and maintained by the
person so liberating them, or by his or her estate.” In addition to excising a
considerable segment of slaves from the possibility of freedom, the law also placed the
full financial burden of any freed slaves squarely on the shoulders of the slaveholder. The survivors of any slaveholder issuing such a will often found the cost too great. The law, then, provided for a wife to contest her husband’s will by reversing stipulated emancipation arrangements: “And . . . a widow who shall, within one year from the death of her husband, declare in the manner prescribed by law that she will not take or accept the provision made for her . . . [is] entitled to one third part of the slaves whereof her husband died possessed, notwithstanding they may be emancipated by his will.”

Moreover, because Virginia law did not acknowledge the slave family unit, a freed slave found it nearly impossible to remain near a spouse, children, or other family members still enslaved. The law required that a freed slave promptly depart the State or else reenter slavery: “If any slave hereafter emancipated shall remain within this Commonwealth more than twelve months after his or her right to freedom shall have accrued, he or she shall forfeit all such right and may be apprehended and sold.” Other states quickly found reason to admire the hardened Virginia slave code. Yet, even in the face of overwhelming economic and legal odds, Bryan still managed to fund the “freedom” of slaves by owning them himself.

Evidently, Bryan approved of Dorothy as well, for he offered his church for her to hold an afternoon meeting on the day of their introduction. The word spread throughout the slave and white communities, for more than double of Bryan’s 554-person membership filled the church, the congregants unable to squeeze through the doors filling the doorway and front yard. Certainly, the slave congregants must have been fascinated by the idea of a white missionary speaking to an exclusively black congregation.
Although whites and blacks sometimes attended the same religious meetings, only rarely did white ministers grace the pulpits of black churches.

And she did not disappoint them. Her powerful message that afternoon assured them of spiritual reward and at the same time promised divine retribution against their foes. Her promises of life eternal, unfettered and free to all upon conversion, rang throughout the church, and she emphasized that slaves were no exception to God’s covenant. As reassuring as the promise must have been, the fear of white reprisal loomed large as Dorothy lapsed into an indictment of the slaveholding citizens of Georgia. One can only imagine the shock of the enslaved congregants as they heard the white woman breach the societal taboos governing suggestions of black power triumphing over white superiority—whether of divine inspiration or not.

Filled with the righteous power of the afternoon, Dorothy continued her message that evening at Holcombe’s Baptist congregation, her engagement there drawing hundreds in an unexpected mixture of white and black. Undoubtedly, some of those in the congregation that evening came with the singular purpose of investigating the white evangelist. Such was the case at every sermon Dorothy delivered. Word of her afternoon meeting with Savannah’s slaves must have circulated like wildfire among the planter elite and the less affluent who nevertheless benefited from the institution.

This may explain Dorothy’s decision to excise any mention of slavery to the mixed congregation. In her narrative, she stressed, “I did not say any thing about slavery in my sermon” (Bank 289). Instead, she cunningly narrowed her sermon to advice for the worshippers: invest in the “merchandise of Wisdom” which would be “profitable to them in this life, and the world to come” (289). Yet, even while the abolitionist words
evaporated from her message, the implication remained the same. The veiled references to the lucrative institution of slavery could not have been lost on the mixed Southern audience. Her advice implied that the buying and selling of human beings could not be valued against the profitability of life everlasting. Wisdom, the true merchandise which they should crave, compile and hoard, would lead them to eternal treasure.

She took a further daring step by lecturing the children—the white youngsters in line to inherit the same black youngsters sharing the same religious sanctuary with them: “[I] endeavored to extol Wisdom as an excitement to the blooming children, whom I felt dearly attached unto; ardently desiring they might be adorned with all her graces, that are the possession of the saints of God in all Ages” (289).

Thus, in her oblique allusion to slavery—by extolling the grace of “wisdom,” and its concomitant virtue of love to fellow man, as practiced by God’s saints—she adhered to both secular and spiritual law. She could remain within the law of the land which prohibited language deemed inflammatory and, at the same time, circumvent it to satisfy her divine mandate to evangelize to the enslaved. Even while she trod a fine line between inciting the tempers of superior-minded whites and inviting divine retribution at a minimalist approach to her mission, she somehow managed to avoid a prison stay.

At the end of February 1806, Dorothy’s evangelical conscience prodded her to hold another meeting among Savannah’s slave community. Having escaped unscathed after her previous sermons, she evidently decided to stir the proverbial pot. Her goal this time violated legal and societal boundaries: she planned a night service for the slave community.
Aware of the precariousness of her continued welcome in Savannah, she immediately sought the permission of a higher power—a secular one, this time. She took her request to John Y. Noel, Savannah’s mayor. In a serious breach of Southern law and cultural convention, Noel granted Dorothy’s request. She secured his permission to meet with the 290 black members of Pastor Henry Cunningham’s church after dark (Bank 291). Cunningham served as pastor of the Second African Baptist Church, founded four years before Dorothy’s nocturnal service there. First and Second African Baptist Churches earned historical importance for having trained more black preachers than any other early church. It was at Second African Baptist that General William T. Sherman made his famous “Forty Acres and a Mule” promise to the newly freed slaves.

Dorothy viewed Noel’s concession as a victory of holy law over secular law; undoubtedly, so too did slaves and free blacks—long denied the opportunity of worshipping except from sunup to sundown (and even that occurred only at the whim of individual masters). The event marked a distinctive historical moment in the aggregate of Savannah slaves’ religious experience. Certainly, the thrill and import of the momentwarred with the gravity. Dorothy immediately felt the weight of holy responsibility on her shoulders, for she perceived the event as a prime opportunity for vociferous dissenters to attack on a multitude of levels: her person and mission, religion among slaves generally, and female preaching specifically.

Characteristically, she sought strength and solace in prayer: “May the Lord enable me to discharge my duty to black and white, who may watch my words, as the Jews did the Innocent Jesus, who they tried to bring many accusations against, and at last condemned Him to death” (291). Also characteristically, Dorothy’s apocalyptic
foreshadowing and parallel to the martyred Jesus evolved into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dorothy was a maverick, if nothing else. The combative element to her personality, insulated by a zealous belief in the righteousness of her calling and the equally fervent conviction that slavery represented a moral stain on humanity, was destined to reawaken from whatever slumber it had eased into during her address at Holcombe’s white church. Dorothy, however misguided she may or may not have been by the fervent conviction of divine sanction, believed herself fundamentally immune to error and hostility alike.

On Feb. 25, 1806, Dorothy became one of the few evangelicals—male or female, white or black—to hold religious services with black congregants after sunset. The church filled to overflowing, attesting to the fact that word of Dorothy’s evening services had raced through the slave community. The depth of the religious fervency swirling in the sanctuary was matched only by their unease. The sanctity of spiritual communion, however, shattered at the abrupt and noisy entrance of secular interference. Savannah Sheriff Thomas Robinson, dispatched by nervous Southern whites, halted the services in mid-stride. As the scene unfolded, fraught with tension, the black worshippers sat frozen, the potential for violence against them imminent and brewing. Blacks congregating after dark—whether free or enslaved—were punished with the lash, imprisonment, or death. The white participants feared as well, for whites abetting slaves in lawbreaking suffered through physical punishments, financial ruin, and loss of social standing. And the white evangelist, Dorothy Ripley, stood shocked, horrified, and discomposed by the sheriff who represented the legal right to haul her to jail for the culturally perceived threat of insurrection. To Southern whites, Dorothy operated, not as a medium for spiritual salvation, but as an instigator of threatened slave insurrection.
Luck must have been on their side, for the Baptist minister Judge Clay, a slaveholder himself and influential member of the religious and secular community, stepped forward in public defense of the meeting and the evangelist. Clay, who at the moment of interruption occupied the pulpit, stood up “and demanded peace in the name of the lord, saying, ‘We are in the Presence of God, and have come here to worship and wait upon Him, and I will lift up my hand to the Universe in defence, that she has not said one word contrary to the Law of God, therefore I demand that no one shall disturb us” (291). Another white in the congregation, an unnamed lawyer, voiced his disapproval at the interruption as well, signifying, “It is an unhappy circumstance, that the Sheriff has been called, and much to be lamented, as it was an untimely call, but hope the lady will proceed, as nothing has been said to cause such an interruption” (291). At the Sheriff’s initial command to halt the proceedings, Dorothy had taken refuge in kneeling prayer, a posture that had saved her three years earlier when a drunken soldier burst in on her sermon at a church of free blacks. In Savannah, as earlier in Philadelphia, the congregants watched Dorothy in fascination, her prostrate position indicating her obeisance not to secular law, but spiritual authority. With supine hands, she cried aloud for deliverance: “that God would hold me in the hollow of His Hand, that no weapon formed against me might prosper, as he had given me this promise before I had left Philadelphia” (291).

Every one seemed surprised, and were waiting for the consequence, expecting to see me dragged out of the pulpit for discharging my duty to the poor sufferers present, who were my greatest concern. I advised them to stand as a Lamb dumb, as did Jesus Christ when He was betrayed and mocked . . . . I felt not afraid, when I knew my mouth was only occupied
by His Spirit, that called out aloud for Ethiopia’s sons and daughters, to
“Stretch out their hands unto the Lord,” who had sent me there to draw
Ethiopia to Him . . . . (291)

Sheriff Robinson, in an equally unprecedented move, accepted the word of Judge
Clay and the unnamed lawyer that Dorothy had the prior approval of Mayor Noel and had
committed no overt act toward insurrection. He permitted Dorothy to proceed with her
address.

If her social and legal defiance that night, by convening free and enslaved blacks
after dark, did not seal her fate, then her choice of sermon certainly did. In her very
choice of sermon topic she set the city’s whites on edge. As her focus, Dorothy selected
the Old Testament emancipation story of the Israelite slaves who escaped the bondage of
the cruel Egyptian pharaohs. In the famous account of slave liberation, the Egyptians
overpowered the quickly multiplying Israelites, subjugating them to enforced servitude
and exercising complete ownership and control over the Israelite nation. The Israelites
endured slavery for about 400 years before the Hebrew child Moses mistakenly was
admitted into the Egyptian royal house after his mother and sister successfully shielded
him from Pharaoh’s genocide. The adult Moses, acting on divine instruction, forced the
powerful Egyptians to release their slaves after holy retribution in the form of ten
plagues. Cowed, the Egyptians liberated their slaves, and the Exodus began. In a fateful
change of heart, the Egyptian army pursued the Israelites, only to suffer military defeat at
the Red Sea.

The similarities between the Savannah situation and the Old Testament story were
unmistakable. A favorite among evangelicals preaching to American black congregants,
the biblical emancipation story serves as the first detailed account of a movement to free slaves. Like the American slave’s situation, Egyptian taskmasters oppressed the Israelites with forced labour, murdered babies in organized slaughter, and opposed divine commands to release the captives. The more oppressed the Israelites became, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites, imposing harsher penalties to ensure complete subordination. Again like the American situation, losing all that slave labor would have constituted an economic catastrophe for the Egyptian government.

Additionally, the story of the Israelite slaves demonstrated liberty gained despite the sustained and mighty, yet ultimately foiled, efforts of a world-dominating power. Dorothy’s use of the Exodus story raised Southern hackles for its anti-slavery implications of divine destiny, empowerment of the enslaved, hope, divine retribution, and insurrection with a promised liberation—and all at the expense of a powerless majority. The biblical account addressed freedom from the shackles of oppression, braving the unknown, and letting faith guide the lost to a brighter future.

Further, as white slaveholders saw it, her equation of them to the murderous Pharaoh, and of America’s slaves to the enslaved Israelites, served Savannah’s slaves a ready pretext for insurgency. As Dorothy notes,

... I told the slaveholders, that Pharoah, and six hundred chosen chariots of Egypt were overthrown in one night; and six hundred thousand hebrew men delivered, and led through the red sea, at the same time; besides women, and children; and so sure as God delivered Abraham’s posterity, after four hundred and thirty years, so sure would he deliver those, whom
they had made hewers of wood and drawers of water; entreating them to wait patiently for the Lord’s time, that He might deliver them with His Outstretched Arm, that overthrew Pharaoh. (Bank 292)

Adding insult was Dorothy’s explicit references to black power. At the conclusion of her sermon, in full view of the Sheriff, Judge Clay, the other whites present and all the black congregants, Dorothy advised the black constituents to refrain from avenging any cruelties done to them. She cautioned them to leave retribution to God, for He would avenge the enslaved and punish the oppressor: “. . . Avenge no cruelties done to [you] by [your] oppressors; for God said, “I will deliver you,” and your masters will have to answer for your souls and bodies, if they do not take care of them with their own” (292). Further, she thundered from the pulpit a “warn[ing to] every vile oppressor, who add cruelties to bondage, while the merchandise of their souls and bodies feed the tyrants with the luxuries of the world” (292).

Her seditious implication that blacks’ possessed any power over whites ignited shock, horror, and outrage. The Exodus story and the American story paralleled each other two closely for whites to meekly accept Dorothy’s usage of the passage. The circumstances—the sermonic implications of insurrection, the unmonitored congregating of blacks, and the darkened setting which suggested secrecy, clandestineness, and potential mutiny—posed too much of a threat to Southern white stability. The threat of a successful slave rebellion were just too great. After all, between 1800 and 1810, the slave population in Georgia had grown from 59,699 to 105,218.515 Thus, slaves comprised 42 percent of the overall state population.516 Although she escaped legal retribution that evening in the Second African Baptist Church, her daring sealed Dorothy’s fate in
Savannah. Her threats of divine retribution galvanized whites’ self-righteous indigation. Her audacity in circumventing Georgia law and meeting with free blacks and slaves at night roused white defensiveness and menace.

Repercussions were immediate.

Although Dorothy “awoke with extatic [sic] joy,” certain that she would have been arrested overnight, her elation proved to be short-lived. The public outcry over her nocturnal services gained momentum as the day progressed. Her ardent support, Joseph “Judge” Clay, a slaveholder himself, gathered an arsenal of disapproving leaders to confront Dorothy at his house the following morning. Clay did not mince words in his desire to impress upon Dorothy the direness of her situation, for he knew the folly of rousing white anger at her insinuations of black empowerment:

. . . He informed me that my address to the slaves, was not approved of by their masters, because I had advised them to be patient under cruelties, revenging not any thing; but leaving that to God. I felt amazed when he told me that to suppose they had power to avenge, or were cruelly treated, was a crime of large magnitude, which enraged them much against me: for this he said, was death by their law: however, I may give him credit so far as this, that I believe God made him an instrument to quell the fury of many; and perhaps brought him there to hear me as a means to preserve my life; but all the glory I give to Him, who has made me willing to endure many afflictions for the sake of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, and precious souls knowing life, peace, and joy, will be the result. (Bank 294)
Clay’s cohort, Holcombe—the imminent Baptist minister who introduced Dorothy to Savannah as a “Phoebe” like the one who ministered with Paul—also frowned on her temerity. After her sermon, her “friend, who conducted me there, seemed like one thunder-struck, which astonished me much” (293). Holcombe underscored his reproach with the rebuke that “If I had said one half of what you have said, they would have torn me limb from limb; and I never should have come alive out of the Meeting-house” (293).

To her surprised dismay, Holcombe impugned her further, challenging, “Did you speak in the same manner in Charleston?” (293). Finally comprehending the magnitude of her friend’s denouncement, Dorothy fired back, “Yes, my mouth is a mouth for God to speak through!” (293). She turned to the gathered slaves and cried out, “Every slave [i]s a talent, and wo [sic] to that man who did not take care of the talents of the Lord” (293).

Holcombe apologized for the “critical situation” she now found herself in, assuming Dorothy little understood the necessity of “that required prudence” which must accompany any address to America’s slaves.

Unwilling to allow Holcombe to misunderstand that she fully comprehended the inevitable backlash to her actions and words, Dorothy assured him,

\[\text{. . . My life I would lay down for a slave, as well as a free man, I trust; for God hath made all Nations of one blood; and all nations are my brethren by God’s Creating power, and the Redeemer’s Love endears all souls to me, since I believe He lay down His Life for all; Tasting death for all, and is the Days-man between the Father and us. (293)}\]

Finally convinced of her disregard for her precarious legal standing and physical safety, Holcombe and Clay stood at a crossroads in their evangelical dealings with
Dorothy. Faced with the censure of their fellow Savannahians, coupled with whatever ostracism or retribution facing themselves and their families in retaliation of their support of the upstart evangelist, both men elected to desert Dorothy. Their abandonment, in turn, signaled the death to her ministry in Savannah. With their evangelical and financial support withdrawn, their shield against legal retribution retracted, they rendered Dorothy resourceless and vulnerable to Southern white hostility.

I rejoice I am not dragged off to prison by the outrageous [sic], who stood gaping for my life, and was only withheld by my God, who assured me before I came hither, no arm should touch me, or chain be able to hold me from the effects of His Power that should arise in my heart, to scatter and confound my enemies. I write this to honour my God and the Name of Jesus, who hath hitherto preserved a defenceless woman from the violence of wicked men in every city. (293)

In a final bid to secure a financial foothold in Savannah, Dorothy made arrangements to conduct one last sermon. Although many of the slaves “were afraid” and distanced themselves from her, others accompanied her to the almshouse later that morning and then followed her to the church that afternoon (292-93). The death knell sounded, however, as her return to the pulpit was characterized by a repetition of her seditious rhetoric of the day before. Her inspired utterances simply compounded her secular infractions:

. . . My Master Jesus enabled me to pray vehemently for a blessing upon all the hewers of wood and drawers of water; who were in bondage, scattered up and down, all over the world. I was determined to do my
work completely, so far as I engaged in it; leaning on my beloved Spouse for His Divine Help, in this critical hour; when danger appeared to be on all sides. (292)

When one of the few whites congregating with the slaves tried to curb her verbosity by striding to the pulpit and bidding her “Come down,” Dorothy sidestepped the order with a vague promise to do so “‘soon,’ and therefore kept him waiting some time” (292). Dorothy prayed long and passionately, cutting short her holy entreaties only out of consideration for the slaves congregated there. She “would have abode [there] much longer, if I had not felt it necessary to be cautious of keeping them too long, lest the lash should [sic] be the consequence, laid on them by merciless fangs” (292).

Even while some free blacks and slaves avoided Dorothy out of fear, others made a concentrated effort to personally applaud her efforts. In particular, a black woman braved the storm, seeking out Dorothy at her lodgings. Perhaps the woman felt emboldened by the persistency of the female evangelist’s message, which remained unadulterated by societal and legal pressure. Echoing the sentiments of Phillis Wheatley in her controversial “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” her fellow sister declared to Dorothy:

I have lived to see three Baptist Churches established in this city, and was one of the first who was baptized to repentance; and I remember the Spirit of God working with me when I was a child in Africa, my own land, though I did not know then, I had a soul to save, or what it was, that was striving with me. (293)
In return, Dorothy’s spirits must have been bolstered by the living proof that “His Glorious Work” thrived even “when darkness is upon the face of the inward earth, or man’s soul” (293). As became her custom, Dorothy refrained from naming the woman in her publication, identifying her merely as “an African woman” (293). Clearly, her experiences in Savannah taught her that fear of reprisals must accompany any rhetorical treatment of slavery.

On the third night following the delivery of her inflammatory sermon to Savannah’s slaves, Dorothy felt convinced of her imminent danger, “for my Master Jesus commanded me to flee for my life, and told me, ‘Thou hast given them a great blow, and canst do no more now; therefore come on them again unawares, at another time’” (297). At midnight on Feb. 28, 1806, she fled Savannah’s fury in the dead of night, seeking refuge in South Carolina, which waited just across the river.

Her forebodings about continuing in Savannah began earlier that day. Several “dear sisters,” including the commiserating wife of Holcombe, scavenged fifty dollars and placed them covertly in Dorothy’s hand. Unused to such bounty, Dorothy could not fathom the mysterious impetus behind their patronage. She described the sudden pinch to her soul: “An awful distress covered my soul as with deep melancholy afterwards, which continued all the day, so that I seemed in perfect misery, not being able for some hours, to discover why I was thus plunged in sorrow?” Her confusion cleared later when the Reverends Holcombe and Clay placed into her hands “letters of recommendation.” In the visionary insight with which she characterized her unique communion with God, Dorothy experienced a premonition of deception: her former friends worked in concerted effort to
deceive her, having penned false letters of recommendation. She knew then her life was in peril:

At last two letters were put into my hands, one inclosed in the other, which were to Beaufort, South Carolina, from Henry Holcombe, and Joseph Clay, who were the two Baptist ministers, whom I apprehended to be displeased with my address; as the clamour of the rigorous indicate I am an opposer [sic] of cruelty to the Africans. When I took hold of those letters, I appeared to fall down into a pit that was full of mire; and the Spirit of Christ sounded in my ears, “They have wrote against thee,” so I depart from Savannah, in Georgia, with my life in my hand, saying, “Wo! Wo [sic] to the oppressors in this State, if ye do not establish righteousness by the foundation of mercy in each heart!” (296)

Deserted and friendless, Dorothy departed “this land, where I have ploughed, sown seed, and watered with briny tears” (296). At midnight, following her premonition of Holcombe and Clay’s fraud, Dorothy slipped down to the waterfront. Wary at the possibility of ambush, Dorothy “sometimes looked behind to see if no one were following me, to do me mischief” (296). Her departure marked by “no other person but H. Holcomb’s black servant; who drove me there in his master’s chaise,” Dorothy sorely felt the desertion of her former supporters and friends (296). Rather than risk reputation and safety, Holcombe commanded his servant to escort Dorothy to the waterfront.

Undoubtedly, in the face of flagrant white wrath, the black servant would have relished any duty over that of accompanying Dorothy to the wharf. Dorothy, too, understood the rejection implicit in Holcombe’s charging his servant with the duty:
As I was going without white man or woman, I said secretly, “Alas! Is there no kind friend to go with me to the river side, to see me safe into the canoe; though I have left all to come thousands of miles to visit the most wretched? well, into the Hands of my God I commend my distressed soul, and afflicted body, to take care of; and, an Eternity of Glory will compensate for all my painful sensations occasioned by my solitariness this night . . . . (297)

Certainly, one would have been hard-pressed to find two more vulnerable, frightened creatures along Savannah’s wharf than the frail, white, female evangelist and the legally defenseless Georgia slave.

Compounding the sorrow, fear, and disconsolateness of Dorothy was the unavoidable necessity of engaging the same white slaveholder who had transported her to Savannah only the week before. Then, she had shared her meal with the six male slaves he forced to row his canoe. Reluctantly, she had allotted a small portion to the slaveholder too. This night, she again reluctantly contracted the slaveholder’s services, but this time, her righteous indignation had been cowed into something resembling gratitude. Despite his questionable character as an owner of men, the white captain accorded her the means to preserve her life. As before, the slaves rowed the twenty-five miles upstream to Beaufort. For seven hours, their strong strokes unceasingly propelled the boat through the stygian darkness and capricious river water as Dorothy, mired in misery at the back of the boat, lamented at such “a melancholy night, that I knew not how to live through it!” (297).
Intensifying her heartache was the mournful song of the slaves as they rowed upriver. Their chant broke the stillness of the dark night, magnifying Dorothy’s solitude as a lone white woman isolated with six unknown black males and one white slaveholder. Although such circumstances certainly would have overwhelmed most white women of the age, Dorothy wrote not of fears magnified by the racial and gender differences between those rowing and herself; rather, her words stemmed from compassion for the slaves and their forced, back-breaking labor:

. . . My spirits were sunk with the songs of the six poor Africans, who rowed all those hours. I never heard such a song before, which was, “Ladies and Gentlemen, we are going from Georgia to South Carolina, to get hoe-cake and bacon, hoe-cake and bacon, hoe-cake and bacon,” and then they set up a yell, which made the trees in the woods echo on both sides of the river: Georgia being on one side, and South Carolina on the other. (297)

Her fortitude severely tested by her friends’ desertion, the laborers’ sorrowful chant, and her own, freely chosen solitary religious path, Dorothy spent that night of travel in deep contemplation of her lonely estate, the oppressive solitude of her calling closing in on her. She lapsed into the biblical language favored by her father and the early Methodist lay preachers, conjuring a warfare metaphor of Armageddon-like proportions. Seeing her detractors as the emissaries of Satan and herself as the earthly champion of Jesus Christ, she envisioned the struggle in Savannah as one of epic spiritual battle:

Any who know the fine feelings of an heart arrowed up already, may form some faint idea, what I was likely to feel in the shades of the gloomy night
of horror, when the adversary had been hunting after my life, and filled with rage at me, because every weapon failed him, that he had designed should be my ruin in the field of battle, when engaging in the warfare for the Prince of Peace, who is my glorious Sovereign, and who at last brought me safe on shore. O! the painful feelings that my mind was assaulted with, when the prince of the air asked me thus, “What wouldst thou do in Africa? See a specimen of that clime here in these poor savages, that are just come from thence,” and then he would by his suggestions cause them to yell, and call hoe-cake and bacon, hoe-cake and bacon, till my ears rang again with the re-echos [sic] of the woods. (297)

Her visions of apocalyptical struggle with Satan persisted throughout the night, with the mournful accompaniment of the slave song, until she landed in South Carolina. Following the seven-hour canoe trip, she boarded a stagecoach for the fifty-mile land trek to Beaufort and then made her way to Beaufort’s Baptist minister Joseph Cook. In serious doubt of the reliability of the letter by Holcombe and Clay, Dorothy presented Cook with the earlier letter written by the Philadelphia printer John Hoff, her patron in Charleston.

Evidently, Dorothy made a wise choice. Ignoring her initial impulse to dispose of the clergymen’s letter of introduction, Dorothy relinquished the correspondence to her Beaufort patron Thomas Fuller, another slaveholder who opened his home to her. The letter, sealed within another, warned Beaufort citizens of Dorothy’s “indiscreet expressions” to slaves (Bank 302). It further cautioned Fuller that if Dorothy “were invited into the Baptist meeting, they must enjoin my not speaking on the circumstance of Slavery, lest such who patronized me, should be embarrassed with myself; in case there
should be present those, whose hearts would not bear the truth told them” (302). Dorothy indicted both Holcombe and Clay for their “duplicity to a sister in the Lord, whom [they] strove to shackle with the power of [their] reason; and also to destroy the good which might be done by so feeble an instrument” (302). When Dorothy appealed to Fuller to return the letter, her new friend contemplated it, but ultimately refused, believing that Dorothy “had drawn a conclusion, which no forcible argument could unfix” (302). Thus, in Dorothy’s eyes, he too became “guilty of a breach of trust” to the female evangelist, “fear[ing] the wrath of men, more than Him who has power to deliver His children from all evil that wicked oppressors can design against them” (302).

Perhaps Fuller realized Dorothy had no intention of returning the letter to him but instead planned to keep it as evidence of a hard-learned lesson about the impenetrable brotherhood of slaveholders. In fact, Dorothy fully intended to include it in her published memoirs “if I could have prevailed” against Fuller (303). However, he merely reinforced her revelation about the cabalistic nature of the slaveholders’ bond. Reluctantly surrendering the letter to an insistent Fuller, Dorothy proclaimed, “This is the last letter I will carry which is kept from my eyes by a signature” (303).

In contrast, Hoff’s letter revealed a decidedly more favorable view of Dorothy, and the Rev. Joseph Cook immediately opened his church to her. She soon learned, however, that her notoriety as a rabble-rousing abolitionist had preceded her to Beaufort. Most of the city turned out to “hear what a woman was able to say” (298). The atmosphere took a festival-like turn as the crowd took derisive aim at the woman speaking publicly and authoritatively about scripture. “Some scorned, others laughed, while a third class admired” as if suddenly struck by their unfaultable verdict that the
upstart female evangelist had been “weighed in the balances, and . . . found wanting” (298). Consciously squelching her fears, she braved the patriarchal-minded, slaveholding denizens, insulated by the certain knowledge that their disdain resulted from derision at a lone female endorsing an end to slavery rather than denigration of her spiritual mandate: “I suppose a female hath not ventured here before alone, for this is an open port for the merchandise of souls and bodies” (299). By day’s end, she drooped from weariness because of “the fatigues of the day, from an ardent solicitude to be rendered serviceable to the slave-holders, who have watched my words narrowly” (302).

Despite the open animosity of the crowd, Dorothy further dared to use her center stage as an opportunity to take the Baptist minister and his flock to task for their excommunication of two sinners earlier in the day. Dorothy charged the church members with their transgression, shouting over the resulting outcry to embrace other brethren within the crowd who had been summarily rejected by the church:

I told them, Justice in the sanctuary had cut off two of their brethren, who were members of the Church yesterday, but to-day, were given over to the buffetings of satan by the pastor, who had publicly excommunicated them in my hearing this morning, for sin; which made me weep excessively, fearing others were in the same situation, who were present. (298)

Whatever doubts Dorothy may have harbored clearly receded when she observed the sobriety of assorted listeners, who had initially sported “an air of vanity” and “smiled at the novelty” of a female daring to tread in male-dominated clerical and political domain. Her righteous anger ignited by such wholesale condemnation, she detonated the crowd with a final, prophetic blast, foretelling the day when they would “weep at the
foot-stool of our Lord Jesus Christ; and obtain His Mercy . . .” for God himself had “prepared my way among the people” (298-99).

Fearing the crowd, her friends hustled her off to a plantation fifteen miles away, far enough to ensure her safety. After a brief stay, she left the Deep South altogether. Her pockets upon her departure, however, were decidedly fuller than when she arrived. Just as the women of Savannah had done, the women of Cook’s congregation, led by Dorothy’s patroness Elizabeth Fuller, placed in her hands the considerable sum of $26, which converts to about $412 today (301). Once again, the women of the Deep South seemed to use money as a means of stilling their troubled consciences.

**Slavery & Religion**

In the words of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States of America, slavery “was established by decree of Almighty God . . . it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation . . . it has existed in all ages, has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts.”

The quotation by Jefferson Davis reflected the beliefs of many Americans in the nineteenth century. Slavery was seen as “sanctioned in the Bible,” Pro-slavery advocates argued that biblical passages recognized, controlled, and regulated the practice. As evidence, they pointed to such passages as Exodus 21:20-21: “If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished, but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property.” When extracted from its historical context, the Bible seemed to permit
owners to beat their slaves severely, even to the point of killing them. However, as long as the slave lingered longer than twenty-four hours before dying of the abuse, the owner was excused from any charge of criminality because, as defined by Hebraic law, the slave existed as his property.  

By the time of Dorothy’s death, even her ecclesiastical constituents maintained the biblical authorization of the enslavement of blacks. Across the ecumenical board, ecclesiastics upheld the scriptural interpretation of biblical condonation of slavery. For example, despite their initial support of John Wesley’s strong anti-slavery stance and general denunciation of the slave trade and slaveholding, American Methodists later yielded to economic and political pressures. Unable to separate their dissent without separating themselves from American culture, American Methodists, especially in the South, denied that slaveholding constituted a sin. By the time of Dorothy’s death, Methodists had on the whole fallen silent and neutral on the issue of slavery. In 1843, about 1,200 Methodist ministers owned 1,500 slaves, and 25,000 members owned 208,000 slaves. That same year, clergy and laity of the Methodist Episcopal Church left to form the Wesleyan Methodist Church in America. At the heart of the split loomed the slavery issue. The church had reneged on an earlier decision to forbid members to own slaves. Critics charged that, in their blind desire to inflate membership numbers, Methodists had backpedaled on an earlier premise of abolitionism, “sacrifice[ing] the doctrine that made them the most countercultural and, in the eyes of slaves, the most Christian.”  

Likewise, the Baptists evidenced the symptoms of denominational decline by softening their stance on slavery. The Reverend Richard Furman, a Baptist pastor from
South Carolina, went so far as to proclaim in a statement to the Governor, “The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example.” Between 1841 and 1844, the Baptists maintained a strained peace by carefully sidestepping discussion of the topic. In 1840, however, an American Baptist Anti-Slavery Convention spotlighted the issue, and Southern delegates protested the abolitionist agitation. The Southern members withdrew and formed the Southern Baptist Convention, which eventually grew to become the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. In a similar split, in 1838, the Presbyterian Church divided over slavery.

In the late eighteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church’s Sacred Congregation of the Index placed many anti-slavery tracts on their Index of Forbidden Books to prevent their being read by an undecided public. By the middle of the following century, the Pope had condemned slavery—solely in the case of unjust capture. Roman Catholic bishops in the United States determined the prohibition did not apply to American enslavement of blacks.

In their tragic concessions to Southern membership, widespread ecclesiastical abandonment of opposition to slavery threatened to undermine Christian faith. Many of America’s religious denominations defined themselves not by spiritual integrity, but rather by worldly power or the size of their membership tallies. Although Dorothy had traveled the five thousand miles from England to convert the “Ethiopians,” she increasingly came to the conclusion that white and black both suffered from a desperate want of salvation. Accordingly, her tone assumed an ever-increasing militant slant. At the onset of her first missionary journey, her words to white slaveholders and enslaved blacks resembled the mild rebuke of a parent to child:
The Spirit of the Lord groaned in me for the redemption of master and servants, which are all equal in his sight, and I do earnestly intreat [sic] the God of all grace to follow them each with his convicting love, that their spirits may be made contrite and humble in his sight, and clothed upon with the covering of Jesus Christ’s righteousness, who cancels the debt of every enormous sinner that sincerely repents. (EC 91)

By the conclusion of that first mission and throughout her second—in pace with her progressive immersion in slaveholding society—her tone took on an ever sharper edge. Her utterances assumed a righteous authority and contentiousness that resembled warrants of retribution more than promises of grace.

For example, disturbed by her perception of the corrosive nature of slavery on spiritual values, Dorothy castigated white slaveholders for their failure to inculcate a religiosity among the enslaved (EC 125). She “could not help agonizing” on the behalf of “such who are in the Southern States prohibited from hearing the sound of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (125). The white prohibition of education—and hence, the first-hand interaction with the Holy Scriptures by the act of reading—denied blacks an equal religious inheritance while at the same time ensured eternal damnation for their oppressors. In South Carolina in 1740, legislators imposed a penalty of one hundred pounds to anyone teaching a slave to read or write or to employ one as a scribe. For the same crime, Georgia limited its penalty to twenty pounds. By 1800, South Carolina invested local authorities with the right to forcefully enter any place used for “mental instruction” of “slaves, free negroes, mulattoes, mestizoes” even when “in company with white persons;” violations of the code allowed authorities to impose a penalty of twenty
lashes to slaves or free negroes discovered at such an assemblage. No one was allowed to impart mental instruction to these populations “either before the rising of the sun or after the going down of the same.” Virginia’s 1819 slave code called for local authorities to forcefully enter any building where blacks congregated for mental instruction and imposed a penalty of twenty lashes on anyone teaching them whether day or night. In addition to state law, corporate towns and cities frequently issued ordinances prohibiting teaching of slaves. For example, in 1818, the city of Savannah imposed a fine of thirty dollars for each offense of instruction. Any person of color who maintained a school to teach reading or writing would be fined thirty dollars or imprisoned ten days following a whipping of thirty-nine lashes. In 1829, Georgia enacted a similar statute, upping the penalty to five hundred dollars and imprisonment for a white offender and flogging for a black. “Of course, a father may be flogged for teaching his own child.” In Louisiana, the penalty was a year’s imprisonment. As a Virginia lawmaker in the House of Delegates announced in 1832,

We have, as far as possible, closed every avenue by which light might enter [the slaves’] minds. If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light, our work would be completed; they would then be on a level with the beasts of the field, and we should be safe! I am not certain that we would not do it, if we could find out the process, and that on the plea of necessity.

Dorothy emphasized that, because whites had the Holy Scriptures, they enjoyed a ready resource to lead them in dealing honorably with their black brethren. With the legal prohibition of learning, blacks were denied any private communion with scripture. With
their sole access to the Holy Scriptures, she argued, whites had to assume full
responsibility to edify those not given the right to read scripture. Slaves did not possess
“so much light into the law of God, as they who have been taught the scriptures, or have
them in the land, to inform them how to live in the fear of God, and to teach others whom
they have the care of, how they should conduct themselves towards God, their great
Creator” (EC 85). Rather, Dorothy “exhorted them to repent of their iniquities, and
encouraged all who had light, to let it shine before those who are in gross darkness”
(Bank 283).

Conversely, instead of inspiring spiritual change, the evangelizing efforts of
itinerants like Dorothy helped open the floodgates to a tide of legal measures to halt the
distribution of Bibles and scriptural readings to the slave population. For example, the
year of Dorothy’s death, North Carolina lawmakers not only prohibited instruction of
slaves but subjected a fine of thirty-nine lashes for a black offender and two-hundred
dollars to a white guilty of giving any book to a slave. In the preamble to the statute,
lawmakers defined their reasoning: “. . . Teaching slaves to read and write tends to
dissatisfaction in their minds, and to produce insurrection and rebellion.”536 To enforce
the law, “patrols” were ordered to “search every negro house for books or prints of any
kind.” Bibles and hymn books received particular mention as prohibitive texts.537
Dorothy did not live to see the legislature of Louisiana pass measures outlawing not only
instruction of slaves but also the prohibition of “any person using language in any public
discourse, from the bar, bench, stage, or pulpit . . . having a tendency to produce
discontent . . . or insubordination among the slaves.”538 This statute extended to “any
paper, book or pamphlet”—such as the Bible—having the same effect. The penalty upon conviction was imprisonment or death.

And an element of truth existed in such fears. As Frederick Douglass learned early on in his life, literacy was power. Whether in the slaveholding South where he lived under the yoke of slavery or the free North where he delivered many speeches on the abolitionist lecture circuit, Douglass used language as a weapon. Douglass’ reading of the Bible and published polemics not only helped to mold his later ideas and writing style, but also served as part of the unstoppable impetus to his escape to freedom. In his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), Douglass faced the dual nature of literacy—both a “curse” and a “blessing”:

As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! that very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. . . . It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me.”

To Dorothy, slaveholders’ denial of the human right to literacy had even more subversive qualities. Slaveholding states’ legislative machinations encroached on the fundamental right of worship—a founding premise of the new Republic: “How horrid the crime of slavery is, when wicked legislators add barbarity thereunto, in order they may
prevent the Africans, or any other professing to fear God, and work righteousness!” (Bank 288). Dorothy proclaimed that white resistance to black spirituality ensured eternal damnation “which many are preparing themselves for, by breaking his righteous laws, and violating the sacred rights of the human mind, which God has made free to all nations, of every colour.” (EC 86-87). On the heels of her indictment, Dorothy offered a means for amnesty: imitation of God’s inclusionism.

. . . When we think how equitably God deals out his spiritual and temporal blessings, we should learn to imitate him in goodness, mercy, and love, that we may be approved by him at the last, and counted worthy of his honour, which he will most assuredly confer upon such as have made his example of righteousness their standard and model of their lives, through the aid of the Holy Ghost, which is given to every one to profit withal. (EC 87)

Dorothy also maintained, in the same manner as later vociferous abolitionists who followed her in the 1830-1850s, that slavery presented a danger to whites as well. Most especially, Dorothy worried for the moral values of white children raised in slaveholding households. She believed that the instantaneousness of having their needs met paved a path to laziness. Further, the insidiousness of slavery inescapably seeped into the moral and spiritual fiber of those immersed in it:

How wretchedly placed do I suppose the dear children, of parents who have a large number of abject persons to depend on! What a favour that I was born to lay myself out for the benefit of the most wretched! for had I been cast on this soil, I am fearful that the prejudices which prevail over
the citizens in the Southern climate, would unavoidably have had an
ascendancy over me; because example often destroys the best resolutions
formed in the mind of God, in the morning of life. (Bank 300)

Further, slave-owning parents did their children a disservice by inculcating a
white superiority in their children. The young, naturally following the lead of their elders,
were sure to be swept up in the vortex of racial and social injustices, becoming
complicitous in the evilness underscoring human bondage. As a contrast, Dorothy held up
her own father’s actions as an exemplar of benevolent heritage:

I was taught to be useful to my fellow-creatures when a child, by the
precepts of a pious father, who by example led me step by step to follow
Jesus, whom he made the guide of his life, and placed us all (by faith)
under the shadow of His everlasting Wing: therefore, I must render my
double thanks to God, not only for my line of inheritance, but that I was
taught to have no confidence in the flesh; no dependence on any but the
preserving Arm of Jehovah, who has withheld me from trusting in any
thing, except His immediate Power. (300-01)

Dorothy would later write of her relief at leaving Beaufort, South Carolina, because of
the moral and spiritual corruption she perceived among whites as a result of their
submersion in slavery. Because of their unfamiliarity with seeing to their own needs,
slaveholding Beaufort residents naturally proved inadequate to attend to an itinerant’s.
Instead, the whites she depended on—for lodging, religious venues, and transportation—
instructed their slaves to attend her, placing the equality-minded Dorothy in
uncomfortable situations: “To this place I came under disadvantages, and my situation
has been very trying, being among such who have not been in the habit of waiting upon the Lord’s children, but have a large number of slaves at command to shew them attention” (300).

One example occurred during her time in the Fuller house in Beaufort. Elizabeth Fuller, while an ardent and merciful patroness to Dorothy, nevertheless shied away from performing any manual services for Dorothy. Instead, just as she indulged her own needs, she directed the house slaves to serve the evangelist. While in the Fuller home, Dorothy suffered from a serious malaise with an aftermath of general weakness and localized pain. Temporarily bedridden, Dorothy depended on the aid of her friend. Yet, when Dorothy requested her “kind friend Elizabeth Fuller” to assist in her toilet, the lady slaveholder turned to her black nurse with the command “to wait of me” (304). Disturbed at the thought of another person ordered to help her (and that person in no position to refuse), Dorothy gently rebuked her friend: “‘Thou must learn to wait on the Lord’s servants,’ I said, so she with complacence attended on me” (304). Yet, the damage between friends was done, and Dorothy “alone all the time I could, pray[ed] and we[pt] that I might return in peace from this place, where slavery abounds” (304). In her parting words the next day, Dorothy—ever the evangelist and social reformer—forewarned Elizabeth that when the Lord sent another female among them with the Gospel, to attend her more than they had done me, for I assured them I had not found the sympathy which my debilitated soul and body required, which Elizabeth Fuller seemed sensible of, pleading her bashfulness as an excuse: but I told her it was occasioned from being accustomed to others waiting upon her, and not having the Lord’s followers by her, to set her an example. She
sweetly said, (weeping) “I shall know how to wait of you better next time when you come again, and you must come to stay with us.” (304-05)

Dorothy’s self-righteous impatience does not bespeak her long-suffering Christian love; yet, the missionary did not place the blame on her friend personally but rather on a system of enslavement which, through its very insidiousness and putridity, infected the healthiest and most robust of God’s spiritual children. Elizabeth, Dorothy decided, suffered from the slaveholding-born malaise of cultural superiority and its symptomatic condition of indolence. And if the hardiest could not withstand such contagious infection, certainly the less moral and unredeemed among the Southern population languished in disease and decay.

Such blatant promulgation of anti-slavery sentiment went to the very heart of Southern fears, spurring the harsh penalties in the years following Dorothy’s first mission to the South. Even before the legal proscription, Southern anxieties over black religious fervor resulted in heightened resentment of white evangelists. Sensitive to the increasing severity of white proscription of black religiosity, Dorothy sometimes preferred to address blacks separately from her white adherents. In Annapolis, Maryland, for instance, Dorothy gently refused the Methodists’ offer to use their church when she realized the black Methodist component maintained its own separate venue. “The Methodists offered me their Meeting House, but as they had a House of their own, I chose to have them separate from the whites . . . [for] my lot was to comfort many coloured people, who were in bondage” (Bank 236). Despite the fact that Maryland was one of only two slaveholding states not to expressly forbid slave education, Dorothy realized that addressing the separate entity also permitted her to speak pointedly about the freedom
that awaited the converted. “‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand unto God,’” I took to impress their minds with: for I wanted them to understand this was the day of fulfilling that prophetic speech, which David the King uttered through the Inspiring Influence of the Holy Ghost, that shall be felt by the whole World, when prophesying ceaseth, and the knowledge of the Righteous God covereth the Earth” (237). Moreover, her comments pointedly addressed their particular state of servitude, emphasizing that steadfast faith would help alleviate the concomitant miseries. “The sufferings of Jesus, I laboured to unfold to them, that their grief might be assuaged when they were in calamity: and also set Him forth as the Redeemer of Ethiopia’s children, every where, who were scattered all over the nations” (237). Proof that the hundreds of enslaved congregants appreciated her evangelizing efforts that day can be found in the cacophonous response—the intensity of their faith rivaled only by the sheer volume: “It was a time of tears, sighs, and groaning; while thanks, praises, and shouts of joy and sorrow, prevented my voice at seasons: so I silently worshipped Him, who had in mercy to them, brought me there to console the helpless” (237).

At other times, Dorothy felt the mingling of the races in worship enriched the experience for both. In Boston in September 1805, Dorothy “had a meeting with the coloured people, where a number of white genteel men, and women, convened with them for the purpose of hearing me” (165). For more than an hour, Dorothy stood before the racially and gender-mixed congregation, preaching on the “mocking and scourging” of Jesus Christ “for our sakes” (165). Dorothy offered the Bostonians—white and black alike—“a free, and full Salvation” (165). A pregnant silence followed Dorothy’s address, and she filled the gap with a prayer that “this people [will] be ready for the Coming of
this Great and Mighty God, who would require of us all according to our light, and privileges on earth” (165). Dorothy concluded her sermon with a charge to the “free men and women in Boston” congregated there that day:

. . . Your superior advantages, will require you to walk orderly, keeping in remembrance the distress of many of your afflicted brethren, who are prohibited this favour of worshipping, one with another. If you conduct yourselves wisely, this may be a means of stirring up others, to try to alleviate your brethren; but, if you do not value your privileges, God will perhaps reverse your situation, and take away your blessings from you: for He punishes the neglect of Mercies whatever they be, or whoever does not improve, them. (165)

Their was the privilege of attending worship services, an immunity denied many Southern slaves. The Boston congregants served as a model, Dorothy expounded, for slaveholders to witness the spirituality and innocence of such a gathering. Those who took for granted the right to congregate for worship, Dorothy warned, invited God’s correction; He would strip them of the mercies he had granted them. For white and black alike, the threat may have struck a sensitive note. For the white, the Revolution was not such a distant past that many attending could not have served in some way. God, indeed, had been merciful in granting their freedom from royal tyranny. For the free blacks, the warning held a more insidious threat: they could be restrained again under the yoke of slavery at any time. Such a threat would not have been unreasonable. Although the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was still a half-century away, at the time of Dorothy’s sermon, escaped slaves could be seized by their former masters without a legal warrant.
Sometimes, whites attended Dorothy’s services with blacks in a blatant effort to discover first-hand what she included in her message to the free blacks of the city. In Philadelphia in November 1805, Dorothy addressed the members of the Rev. Absalom Jones’s church, “where many white people mixed with [the black] to hear what I would say to the Coloured Race” (Bank 187). Characteristically, Dorothy did not mince words, passionately attacking the unfeeling, insufferable hauteur of Philadelphia’s rich and their disdainful contempt for the plight of the poor. The free blacks comprised the overwhelming majority of the poor and indigent in the city. Thus, Dorothy left the blacks in no doubt as to their right to denied aid by the whites who had shirked their communal responsibility. The general acceptance of Dorothy’s accusation testifies to the enthusiasm for liberty inherent in Philadelphia’s past and present. There in the shadow of the city’s Liberty Bell and Independence Hall, as well as proximity to Betsy Ross’s home in downtown Philadelphia and nearby Valley Forge, Dorothy’s charge incited neither the outrage nor the repercussions of her equally fervent accusations against Southerners.

However, no investigation of Dorothy’s protests against slavery would be complete without a closer look at her touted religious panacea to slavery. Even in the midst of her protests against the institution, a deep strain of religious conservatism combined with Dorothy’s radicalism. In a paradigm of bewildering proportions, Dorothy advised slaves “faithfully to serve their masters, whose property they were by purchase, to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah, who became an awful sign to them, ‘Walking naked and bare-foot for three years,’ because they would not obey God, but gloried in their shame” (Bank 237). Dorothy built on the prophecy by Isaiah regarding Ethiopia and Egypt’s enslavement by the Assyrians. According to Isaiah 20:
In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to Ashdod and attacked and captured it—at that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah son of Amoz. He said to him, “Take off the sackcloth from your body and the sandals from your feet.” And he did so, going around stripped and barefoot. Then the Lord said, “Just as my servant Isaiah has gone stripped and barefoot for three years, as a sign and portent against Egypt and Cush, so the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks bared—to Egypt’s shame. Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be afraid and put to shame. In that day the people who live on this coast will say, “See what has happened to those we relied on, those we fled to for help and deliverance from the king of Assyria! How then can we escape?”

Judah’s apostasy and their reliance on earthly deliverance rather than a spiritual one caused God to send them a prophetic sign. Between 722 and 620 B.C., Judah had looked to Egypt and Ethiopia for protection from the Assyrians, instead of supplicating God’s mercy. Isaiah understood the possible consequences of an erroneous political orientation of the leaders of Judah, and at the direction of God, walked like a dervish, unclothed and barefoot. In the Bible, walking barefoot signified some deep conflict or calamity, and the bared limbs of a person indicated shame and embarrassment, or politically speaking, a state of lawlessness and insubordination.

Dorothy detected a parallel between the mistaken faith in earthly deliverance by Judah, Egypt, and Ethiopia, and the enslavement of the Africans in America. Their bodily
captivity, in Dorothy’s view, should have elicited much less concern than the spiritual one they might remain in eternity. As Dorothy preached to the slaves and free blacks in Absalom Jones’ St. Thomas Church in 1803, “[I] encouraged such present as were servants, to be faithful to their situation, and seek the blessing of God, that at the last day they might be happy in the enjoyment of his love for ever. Supplicating the Throne of mercy in their behalf, my spirit was deeply humbled, and I felt power to plead with the Father on account of the Africans every where, who were captivated by the oppressive power of men” (EC 138). According to Catherine Brekus, such a conservative view was not uncommon among female preachers. Even the black female evangelist Zilpha Elaw, one of the first outspoken black female preachers in the new Republic, acquiesced to the conventional religious norm. As Brekus noted, even while Elaw denounced slavery as one of humanity’s deepest sins, she criticized the “impatience” for freedom displayed by slaves. On the heels of chastising a slave preacher in Maryland who “seemed to manifest an undue anxiety for his freedom,” she urged Africans to be “unconcerned” about their earthly bondage. Perhaps, like Elaw, Dorothy possessed “little faith in human progress” and feared that “Americans were too innately sinful to ever willingly abolish slavery on their own.” Thus, Dorothy relied on a spiritual solution to their enslavement and counseled them to do the same:

On my knees, I besought the Lord to preach powerfully in the hearts of all present by His Spirit; and to hasten the day when Africa’s climes should embrace the Lord; and universally read the Holy Scriptures, to the profiting of their precious souls, and the Glory of His Great Name, whom
all Nations shall acknowledge as the Lord of lords, and King of kings, and who will be revered by all as the Governor of the World. (Bank 237)

Rather than view Dorothy’s approach to slavery as subversive to black dignity and worth in its emphasis on black docility, one must view Dorothy’s advice to slaves in the context of spiritual values. Just as Dorothy excoriated slaveholding whites for the violence perpetrated against slaves under their abusive control, so too did she discourage slaves against lawbreaking. She believed nonviolence to be necessary for their immortal souls. Certainly, she subscribed to the Quaker tenet of pacifism, so naturally she would have inculcated a sense of passive resistance for the slave. Unlike the more radical Quakers who assumed an active, yet clandestine role in abolitionism—most notably those who aided escaped slaves along the Underground Railroad—Dorothy fostered a resistance rooted in Christian ideals and secular reformism. While Friends’ participation in the railroad’s success enjoys wide celebration today, Dorothy would have sided with the majority of Friends of the time who would have found such systematic law-breaking reproachable. “These Friends cautioned against deciding for ourselves what truth should be, rather than simply stating only what we know.”Rather, Dorothy emphasized for the slave the power of prayer, self-examination, repentance, and martyrdom. For Dorothy herself, her resistance took the form of secular reformism, by advocating women’s public intervention into issues commonly deemed political and, ipso facto, male.

Most importantly, Dorothy believed that God would accomplish the retribution that enslaved blacks would have been incapable of achieving and which would have been profoundly imprudent for them to attempt. Although it “appeared marvelous” to Dorothy
that “the judgments of the Lord do not pursue such with unlimited vigour in this life,” she had no doubt of the horrific divine retribution to come:

\[\ldots\] He hath reserved them for his vengeance to be exercised on in the world to come, when the wickedness and cruelty of every one shall be brought to light, in order that the justice of the Almighty may conspicuously appear before all nations in that great day of his wrath, when Christ shall sit Judge of quick and dead, and render to every individual according to his works of mercy or cruelty, which have been manifested on those in his presence, when “all flesh shall see his glory together.” (EC 90).

This eternal doom, Dorothy prophesied, would descend upon slaveholders “in a decisive manner,” one “not to be reversed for there will be no pleading with him then to lessen our weight of punishment, should we be found guilty; and every crime committed will strike the mind with new horror, when shuddering on the brink of ruin” (91). Dorothy seemed to foresee the horrific, nation-dividing war that loomed on the horizon for this new Republic.

Thus, she advised “the African race” to wait until that time when they would be granted celestial “witness against their hard and cruel tormentors” who had “no feeling for [the slaves] . . . under [their] despotic power” (90). Those slavers who “exercised, unduly, the scourging lash,” would find it turned back onto them “by the scourge of a just God.” Until that time, Dorothy advised, “I wish then those miserable creatures may not avenge their wrongs, but patiently wait till the Lord returns vengeance on their unmerciful masters; for the Lord seeth all injustice, and observeth the ruling hand of the
oppressors every where” (90). For Dorothy, stoicism rooted in faith evidenced black people’s extraordinary strength, both spiritual and physical, rather than their capitulation to white owners’ superiority.

It is important to note that at the same time that Dorothy cultivated a certain religious triumphalism, she also demonstrated a shrewd apprehension of the helpless legal state of the slave. Perhaps her advice of restraint for slaves stemmed not only from a care for their spiritual preservation, but also their secular state of continual and imminent mortal danger. She evidenced a deep empathy born of a perception of the degradation, atrocities, and miseries resulting from enslavement.

Further, she exhibited a keen awareness of the increasingly tight surveillance whites exercised over blacks. The nineteenth-century criminal law concerning slavery included statutes ostensibly designed to protect slaves from violent white abuse. However, the law actually had a “legitimizing” purpose and effect; the lawmakers of Virginia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama decriminalized white violence to the extent that they deemed necessary in regulating slavery. For example, by law, white masters were not to be held accountable if a slave died as the result of abuse. In 1705, Virginia adopted a slave code that “If any slave resist his master . . . correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction . . . the master shall be free of all punishment . . . as if such accident never happened.” The ancient law, instituted long before the colonists established the legal principles set out in the Constitution, resonated throughout Dorothy’s years evangelizing in the South, and indeed, up until the Civil War.
By contrast, state codes permitted a “slave death penalty” for a disturbingly wide range of offences, real or imagined. Despite their obvious commercial value, slaves could be, and were, summarily executed by slaveholders for murder, rape, burglary, arson and assault upon a white person. The main idea behind these codes was to keep the slaves under the tight control of their owners. Plantation owners believed that severe discipline would make the slaves too frightened to rebel. Further, Southern political pressure culminated in the Fugitive Slave Acts: in 1850, the law required anyone who came upon an escaped slave, even in the North, to relinquish the slave to authorities which would then see to a return to his or her “owner.” The fact that many fugitive slaves lived as free for many years did not deter authorities from returning them to slavery. Reprisals came swiftly for those who resisted. The original Fugitive Slave Act, enacted in 1793, allowed whites to seize blacks without a warrant. This act compromised the positions of free blacks such as those addressed by Dorothy in the Northern free states. It “fueled a huge and vastly profitable underground industry that took full advantage of the inferior legal status of free and enslaved blacks.”°552 The law made it possible for a white person, particularly slave speculators (or slavers) to purchase legally the rights to runaways, capture them, and then resell them at a generous profit. However, many times, they laid claim to any black person as a fugitive and placed the burden of proof on the captive.

Thus, free blacks living in Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and other cities that lay along the borders of slave states, lived under especially vulnerable conditions. The importance of these political initiatives is underlined by the temporary seizure of the eminent black minister, A.M.E. Bishop Richard Allen. Although Allen was born and lived free, he was temporarily seized in 1806 as a fugitive slave, demonstrating that even the most
prominent Northern blacks could not rest easy in their freedom.\textsuperscript{553} Ironically, Dorothy and the Quaker abolitionist Arthur Howell had cautioned Allen’s congregation of free blacks only the year before Allen’s kidnapping, never to forget the “situation they were in fifty years ago, when men, women, and children were put in one mass naked together, to be exposed for sale to them who were disposed to give the most for them: and requested them present, who were the children of those mentioned, to improve their superior privileges which were enjoyed by them now” (Bank 191). Little could they imagine their prophetic words would come to pass in only a few months’ time. The slave speculator who “captured” Allen found himself in debtors’ prison, charged with attempted kidnapping, false accusation and perjury by the Methodist bishop, who dropped the charges several months later.

Not until the closing of the international slave trade in 1808 did a slight, yet noticeable improvement in the treatment of slaves occur, and that came more as a result of economic necessity than any concerted change in attitude. Due to the curtailed influx of new slaves, and the concomitant increased value of slaves, less branding and limb dismemberment took place as punishment. The shutdown of slave importation gave rise to a new paternalistic self-image. Slaveholders created a literature of racial superiority which stressed caring for their slaves.\textsuperscript{554} However, Virginians eclipsed the religious argument in practice, if not in theory. The 1705 Virginia law that demanded the lifelong servitude of all imported African slaves unless they were Christianized was later repealed in favor of a new statute that made African Americans’ conversion to Christianity irrelevant in determining their freedom.\textsuperscript{555}
Interactions with Slaveholders

Part of Dorothy’s action plan for secular reformism centered around slaveholders. Even while she vilified them in her sermons and public harangues, she also depended on their financial patronage and communal influence to open doors and religious venues. Without the support of rich slaveholders, Dorothy’s movements in the South would have been severely curtailed, if not halted.

Despite their complicity in the institution of slavery, slaveholders’ generosity enabled Dorothy to reach greater audiences, particularly slaves. Since so many slaves lived and toiled on plantations isolated from the city centers where most churches were established, by necessity Dorothy had to travel to these small pockets of slaves to evangelize. And that could only be done with the blessing of the slaveholder. At the same time that she curried slaveholder favor as a means of entry into the isolated, plantation slave communities, she made great use of her time with individual slaveholders. Her private audiences spawned moments of religious opportunity, and she used her full religious sway to apply pressure for the plantation slaves’ emancipation. Therefore, she utilized to her advantage the very system that she fought.

One such opportunity arose during her stay with the Snowdon family of Snow-Hill, Maryland. Invited to dine at the home of Samuel Snowdon, Dorothy thankfully accepted the offer. Whether she realized Snowdon’s status of a slaveholder remains ambiguous, but her distaste at the taint of slavery eclipsed what enjoyment she found in the “elegant supper” (EC 114). As Dorothy lamented, “. . . The thoughts of their possessing a vast number of slaves embittered our sumptuous feast” (114). In fact, the
Snowdons owned so many slaves that when Dorothy inquired of her benefactor how many they numbered, he replied, “I do not know the number” (115).

With an initial caution accompanied by “pray[er] that my way might be directed in [God’s] wisdom,” Dorothy carefully lectured Snowdon for enslaving humans: “. . . It is a pity thou shouldst be a possessor of slaves” (115). Pleasantly surprised that Snowdon did not react with the anticipated anger, Dorothy “endeavoured to shew the injustice and base consequences that attended slavery” and embarked on a private lecture of the institution’s evils (115). In an uncommon reaction for a slaveholder, Snowdon “appeared pleased at my freedom, and was willing that I should take liberty in addressing him, bearing with me patiently” (115). When Dorothy departed Snow-Hill, she did so in peace, desiring in my mind, that they and their children might be brought to the knowledge of the true God, which will teach them to deny themselves of the pomp and vanity of this world, ‘choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season,’ which are transient and not to be compared with those joys that are eternal, appointed for all who sustain the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, as a reward for their suffering patiently, and doing whatsoever he requires of them, while probationers in this state of mutability. (115)

The Snowdons’ benevolence proved of further value to Dorothy because the patriarch provided Dorothy with the transportation she needed to the city. There, she could attend the Friends’ Yearly Meeting: “God appointed this rich slave-holder to conduct a poor worm to the city where she wished to worship him in spirit with his people” (114). She acknowledged her heavy dependence on white slaveholders: “I was much pleased with
the handsome behaviour of this family, and an obligation to God binds me to insert this to
his honour and credit” (114). By including a line of gratitude, Dorothy provided a much-
needed balance for her readers. Even while she sought to convert the white slaveholding
readership with her shocking revelations of horrors perpetrated against the slave, neither
could she afford to alienate them. So, while her acknowledgement of the debt to the
Snowdon family was sincere, it also served the purpose of soothing ruffled white
feathers.

In July 1802, Dorothy brought together a group of young Virginia Baptists who
had been supportive to her ministry. Then, upon the heads of her unsuspecting
benefactors, she applied full religious pressure for their recantation of socialized attitudes
of white superiority. “Many young Baptists were present when I supplicated the throne of
mercy, and they also were melted into tears, and wept much that they were born in a land
of oppression, fearing the blood of their fathers would be on their heads, as their parents
were slave-holders” (EC 79). Moreover, she required their atonement by their solemn
vows to manumit their slaves upon their inheritance. “They all vowed in my presence,
that when they came to inherit their property of slaves, that they would free them, that
they might free themselves from the curse of their fathers; or, as they expressed it, ‘Their
blood, which was upon their fathers’ heads’” (79). Whether her efforts produced results
remains unanswered.

Dorothy also bolstered the newfound religious and social convictions of former
slaveholders who had emancipated their slaves. “The sister to the person who gave me
the invitation had yielded up all her slaves from a sense of duty, and had united with the
Quakers about two years ago . . .” (114). To help stymie possible backsliding and to
foster the woman’s fledgling connections to Quakerism, Dorothy solicited the woman’s attendance at the Friends’ Yearly Meeting held in the woman’s hometown of Baltimore that year, 1802. The woman’s first attendance at the principal denominational meeting “was a comfortable, solid opportunity” with possible far-reaching effects for the fledgling Christian (114).

Dorothy also took her message of emancipation to the more powerful, including Thomas and Elizabeth Fuller family of Beaufort, South Carolina. The Fullers kept twenty slaves in their home in the city of Beaufort and another one hundred at their plantation, about fifteen miles from the city. It was the Fuller plantation to which Dorothy fled after stirring Beaufort citizens to outrage.

Although the Fullers had converted to Christianity three years previous to Dorothy’s lodging with them, they had failed to manumit their slaves. Before she chastised Elizabeth Fuller for her unreasonable dependence on slave labor, Dorothy exercised her ministerial right to take the patriarch Fuller to task for his slave-holding. Dorothy seemed oblivious to the fact that she resided in their home and ate from their table. Rather, as an emissary of God, her duties included not only edification about salvation but instruction on a godly life: “I told my friend Fuller, that I was exceeding sorry for his being a slave-holder, for his family’s sake; knowing the inconveniences which attend such, as are not taught industry; especially if they are not immensely rich” (Bank 300). To Fuller’s credit, he continued to house and feed Dorothy, though she continued to lecture him privately about the shortcomings in his spiritual values. She also confiscated enough time to pen a concluding prayer for—not the enslaved—but the enslavers, who counted themselves among God’s converted after hearing Dorothy’s
address. Her prayer exposed her unmitigated certainty that true faith and slaveholding were mutually exclusive, and only with the Fuller family’s renouncement of their lucrative oppression could the members attain true spiritual deliverance:

Three years ago, this man and his beloved wife were unconverted; but now they profess to be born from above; or having received the gift of faith, believe they are of Jesus Christ’s flock; therefore, I hope they will go from one degree of grace to another, till they view Him face, to face, who has called them to be examples of holiness in this place, where many are sitting as under the shadow of death; and are resting in their sins, while the Mercy of God is continued unto them; and His bountiful blessings forgotten by them, which will one day augment their misery, if they do not repent of their base ingratitude before their measure of iniquity is filled up.

(Bank 299)

Despite Dorothy’s best efforts, the powerful Fullers never released their slaves. They did, however, ultimately bequeath a Godly heritage to their offspring, for several of their children developed reputations for their religiosity. Their ninth child, Richard Fuller, was born the year following his parents’ conversion and evolved into an influential theologian in Beaufort and Baltimore. In Beaufort, he served the Baptist church as its minister for fifteen years. In 1847, Fuller left his native South Carolina to become pastor of the Seventh Baptist Church in Baltimore. The younger Fuller is perhaps best-known in historical records as a staunch supporter of slavery. Having inherited slaves, he believed that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible, and engaged in a famous newspaper debate in the mid-1840s with fellow-Baptist and Brown University president
Francis Wayland.\textsuperscript{558} The debate was published in the book \textit{Domestic Slavery Considered as a Scriptural Institution} (1845). In this public discussion between friends, Fuller argued—and Wayland conceded—that the Bible never prohibited slavery. Wayland, however, asserted that there existed in Scriptures principles which necessitated the extinction of the practice.\textsuperscript{559}

Like so many of his contemporaries, Fuller’s stance on slavery reflected the teachings of his parents and a society which depended heavily on a slave labor force. Despite the generosity and kindness extended by Thomas and Elizabeth Fuller to the wandering Dorothy, the powerful Fullers ultimately chose economic stability as slaveholders rather than financial destitution as converted Christians without slaves.

Finally, another opportunity that Dorothy took advantage of had a more sinister undercurrent. In Richmond in July 1803, Dorothy accepted the generous offer of rich plantation owner P. Younghusband to tour his estate and interview his slaves. Most likely, this fledgling slaveholder was Pleasant Younghusband, who owned a plantation named Cockermouth in Henrico County, Virginia. Only six years before Dorothy’s arrival, the 422-acre plantation, along an Indian trail called by local residents “Old Cockermouth Road,” was deeded to the young man.\textsuperscript{560} Younghusband, “who may be called a merciful man when compared to many who hold them in bondage,” owned forty slaves on his plantation (EC 91). After escorting Dorothy around the row of slave huts and permitting her to conduct religious services for his slaves, he found himself on the receiving end of a lecture on the evils of slaveholding:

My spirit hath been bowed down on their account . . . As this young man is merciful to them, I hope God will shew him the evil of exposing himself
to temptation among them, and give him repentance unto life eternal, for the sins which he has already been guilty of in his early days, which I told him he must answer for unto a righteous God. (91)

And evidently, the young man was indeed “guilty” of sins in his early days. The Younghusband family owned a male slave named Isaac, who fought enslavement with frequent escape attempts. Overseeing Isaac’s return was Younghusband’s relative, also named Isaac. The Younghusbands treated their slaves cruelly, as evidenced by the lacerated back of Isaac. And they proved a formidable force to any one—white or black—who attempted to assist the black in fleeing to the North.

The Younghusbands published a reward for the slave’s return in the Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser:

RAN away, a Negro Man named ISAAC, nearly six feet high, about twenty-two years of age, has a better countenance than is common to thieves, but having been often whipped for his villainy, his back is the manifest of it. He is a well made fellow and sensible; a good hand in the crop, mows and reaps well.—I will give THIRTY SHILLINGS to any person delivering him to me in Richmond, or TWENTY for securing him in any jail so that I get him again—And I forewarn any person from carrying him out of the state. ISAAC YOUNGHUSBAND. Richmond, June 25, 1794.561

When Christmas approached and the slave remained at large, Pleasant Younghusband’s family posted another advertisement for his return, this time in the Virginia Chronicle in Norfolk:
Ten Dollars Reward. Ran away from Isaac Younghusband, in May last, a likely Negro Fellow, about 24 years of age, rather squints with one eye, he is a vile thief and has been often whipped as his back will show—he has relations living with the Widow Jordan, in Norfolk, and is supposed to be there or on board some vessel. I will give 10 Dollars to any person who will deliver him to me near Richmond, or Five dollars if secured in any goal, so that I get him again. ISAAC YOUNGHUSBAND. Dec. 15, 1794.562

A final advertisement about the runaway slave Isaac appeared in the Jan. 12, 1797, edition of the Norfolk Herald. This one, subscribed by the jailer John Branan, announced Isaac’s incarceration in the Norfolk jail, along with two other black men.563 It is unclear if the slave Isaac ran away more than once or if he remained at large for the three-year period. The significance of the last classified lies in the identification of Isaac as the “property” of Pleasant Younghusband:

Committed to Norfolk Borough Jail, the following negroes: ISAAC, of a dark complexion, 22 years old, 5 feet 10 inches high, the property of Pleasant Younghusband, Henrico county near Richmond.564

Evidently, when Isaac could not be contained in the city of Richmond, he was sent to the more isolated Younghusband plantation in the country. Such a solution to troublesome slaves proved effective for many slaveholders. For example, when a recalcitrant Harriet Jacobs refused to give in to her master’s sexual advances, he sent her from his city home to his more remote plantation as a punishment. As a further punishment, her owner planned to take her children from the care of their free maternal grandmother. Flight
became the only available recourse to saving her children from becoming plantation
slaves.\footnote{565}

Further damaging Dorothy’s classification of Younghusband as a “merciful”
slaveholder was his participation in the proceedings of a Court of Oyer and Terminer, a
special court in which slaves were tried without benefit of jury. In Henrico County on
Oct. 6, 1800, Pleasant Youngblood served as a justice in the trial of Gabriel Prosser, the
same slave whose execution Dorothy lamented in her early journeys through Virginia.
Gabriel Prosser led a rebellion that rocked the Deep South, and the reverberations from
“Gabriel’s Rebellion” could still be felt a year later when Dorothy first coursed through
Virginia.

It remains unclear if Dorothy knew of Younghusband’s involvement in the
judgment and execution of Gabriel Prosser, but she failed to mention the connection in
her account of touring Cockermouth plantation. One of six judges, Younghusband found
Prosser “guilty of the Crime with which he stands accused and for the same that he be
hanged by the Neck untill he be dead.”\footnote{566} Clearly, Younghusband’s slaveholding status
had an ominous beginning, and Dorothy had just cause for rebuking the “merciful”
slaver.

**Gabriel’ Rebellion**

In July 1802, Dorothy encountered the horror of slavery’s debilitating impact on
black and white alike. While journeying through Richmond during the warm, halcyon
days of summer, she passed the deserted blacksmithing work-shops of Solomon and
Gabriel, “the ringleaders of the blacks who determined to destroy Richmond” (EC 80).
The shops, “desolate and almost falling to the ground,” stood as silent monuments to the bloodshed and repression that followed one of Virginia’s most notorious slave uprisings (86).

The slave Gabriel had led his revolt earlier in the same year that Dorothy began her initial evangelical odyssey. While Dorothy made plans to depart England on a mission to convert the slaves in America, Gabriel Prosser made plans for a slave insurrection that sent earth-shaking fissures of fear and violence through the fertile lands of Virginia, North and South Carolina and Georgia. In fact, the year 1800 proved to be one of the most fateful in the history of American slave revolts, for it saw the birth of famed slave insurrectionists Nat Turner, John Brown, the purchase of his own freedom by Denmark Vesey, and the planning and implementation of the massive Gabriel Prosser slave revolt.

The geographical scope of Gabriel’s Rebellion made the insurrection the most far-reaching slave uprising ever coordinated in U.S. history. As many as six thousand slaves across at least two states conspired in rebellion in August, and the bloody backlash of terrified white slaveholders not only took human life but also led to more virulently stringent control of slaves.

Gabriel was born in 1776, to Thomas Prosser, “a man that owns many hundreds of poor wretched slaves” (86). Prosser’s tobacco plantation in Henrico County, Virginia, not far from the Younghusband plantation of Cockermouth, was one of the most successful in the state. When he was about ten, Gabriel and his brother Solomon began training as blacksmiths. Although virtually nothing is known about Gabriel's parents, his father likely worked as a blacksmith since skills typically passed from generation to
generation in Virginia slave families. As a child, Gabriel was also taught to read and write.

Unusually intelligent and unusually large, Gabriel had attained by his twentieth year, a height of six feet, two or three inches tall, with enormous, strong arms from his years of smithing. His lofty stature, impressive build, sharp intelligence, rare educational abilities, and innate leadership skills made him a natural-born leader. Even older slaves looked to him for guidance. One contemporary historian called Gabriel “a fellow of courage and intellect above his rank in life,” who had intended “to purchase a piece of silk for a flag, on which they would have written ‘death or liberty.’”

Prosser died in 1798, and his son Thomas Henry Prosser, at the age of twenty-two, became the new master of the family’s 2,000-acre Brookfield Plantation. History has labeled Thomas Henry a cruel and economically ambitious master, and he likely pushed his slaves too hard. In a custom common in Virginia at the time, the younger Prosser also hired out some of his skilled slaves, including Gabriel and Solomon. This common practice allowed slaves greater mobility than some Virginians could tolerate comfortably. Despite state laws attempting to curtail hiring out, local merchants and artisans continued to rely heavily on the cheap labor available from hired slaves as opposed to white tradesmen.

Given his master’s permission to hire himself out to masters in and around Richmond, Gabriel gained access to a limited freedom, as well as money. Because he was hired out, he was able to form ties with fellow hired slaves, free blacks, and white laborers. Strong bonds formed among these groups who worked and socialized together. This proved especially threatening to wealthy Richmond whites, for they were the clear
minority. This circumstance gave rise to laws curtailing socializing between slaves and free blacks, and interracial grog shops became frequent targets for raids.

In September of 1799, Gabriel and two other slaves stole a pig. When a white overseer moved to take them, Gabriel wrestled him to the ground and bit off most of his ear. In court, Gabriel was found guilty of maiming a white man, a capital offense, but he escaped execution through a loophole called “benefit of clergy,” that allowed him to choose public branding over execution, if he could recite a verse from the Bible. Gabriel recited his verse; in open court, authorities branded his left palm. Historians contend that the branding, as well as the month he spent in jail, was the final shame in a chain of offenses that pushed him toward rebellion.

Inspired by the successful revolt in Saint Domingue and spurred by working-class rhetoric of an egalitarian society, Gabriel decided to act. His plan involved the seizure of Petersburg and Capitol Square in Richmond by the men living there. At the heart of the attack plan was the kidnapping of Virginia Gov. James Monroe to be used as a hostage and bargaining chip with city authorities. According to later testimony, one of the conspirators also “was to go to the nation of Indians called Catawbas to persuade them to join the negroes to fight the white people.” They also were relying on a French army supposedly ensconced at South Key, which they hoped would come to their aid. Their banner would bear the motto “death or Liberty,” the battle cry of Saint Domingue.

Despite the tight formation of the plan, rumors apparently reached Governor Monroe, for he wrote in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, dated April 22, that “fears of a negro insurrection” were spreading. As noted earlier, Jefferson remained ambivalent
on the question of slavery, and so too did his cohort Monroe. The two men elected to take no action to follow up on the rumors.

Gabriel conveyed his plan to Solomon and Ben, another of Prosser’s slaves, and the men began recruiting soldiers, including slaves, free blacks and even a few poor whites. Women comprised no part of their army. Two Frenchmen and militant abolitionists\(^576\) even joined the ranks as leaders. The conspirators recruited rebels from Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, Albemarle and other Virginia towns. After some difficulty, they were also successful in recruiting slaves from their home area, the Henrico County countryside. Almost certainly, some of the recruits included Younghusband slaves, in which case, Pleasant Younghusband’s involvement in the trial and sentencing of Gabriel Prosser corrupted any attempt at justice.

After amassing homemade weapons,\(^577\) the rebels put their plan into action on Saturday night, August 30, 1800. As the lieutenants delivered news of the date to the outlying areas, whispers of an insurrection floated to the ears of Richmond whites, who reported it to Monroe. Again, he ignored it.

Torrential rains ushered in an inauspicious start to the revolt. James T. Callender, in jail for violating the sedition law, described the inclement weather as “the most terrible thunder Storm . . . that I ever witnessed in this State.”\(^578\) Ironically, he was the same disappointed politician who later published the rumors of a sexual liaison between Jefferson and Sally Hemings, and he corresponded with Jefferson while an inmate at the Richmond jail.\(^579\)

Despite the rain on that fateful night, about “one thousand slaves, some mounted, armed with clubs, scythes, home-made bayonets, and a few guns, did appear at an agreed-
upon rendezvous six miles outside the City.” The quickly rising water convinced them, however, that key roads and bridges impassable, and they decided to disband until the following evening. Before the conspirators had a chance to execute their plan, slaves in two different locations buckled under the pressure and revealed all to their masters. This time, Monroe could not ignore the alert, and white patrols and state militia began combing the countryside for the rebels. Gabriel and another rebel leader disappeared. Others eluded capture for several days, but by September 9, thirty of the slaves were jailed and awaiting trial in Younghusband’s court of “Oyer and Terminer.”

Although Gabriel remained at large, the trials began on September 11. White authorities had had no idea of how extensive the insurrection had been, but as the trial progressed, terror swept through white Virginia as they realized their close brush with death. One white fear that reared its head during the trial was the recurrent phobia that black men planned to attack white women.

In order to elicit corroboration, white authorities offered a full pardon to a handful of slaves willing to submit testimony against their fellow conspirators. Two key witnesses made such a deal, turning state’s evidence. One of Prosser’s slaves provided testimony resulting in hangings for a number of slaves from his area, including Gabriel’s brothers Solomon and Martin. On September 14, a slave hoping to obtain the $300 reward offered for Gabriel alerted white authorities to his whereabouts.

Gabriel’s trial at Younghusband’s Oyer and Terminer court commenced on Oct. 6. Although several witnesses testified, Gabriel refused to make a statement. Monroe personally interviewed him, but as the future president lamented, “From what he said to me, he seemed to have made up his mind to die, and to have resolved to say but little on
the subject of the conspiracy.\textsuperscript{586} Younghusband and five other judges found Gabriel Prosser guilty of insurrection and conspiracy and sentenced him to be executed the next day. In a bit of deliberate cruelty on the parts of the slaveholder Younghusband and his fellow legal accomplices, they tricked Gabriel Prosser regarding his hanging. Although the judges sentenced him to hang on Oct. 9, Gabriel made a final request that his sentence be delayed until the following day, so that he could be executed along with six other slaves scheduled for hanging. The court agreed, but on that day, they hanged the slaves in three different locations. Gabriel was hanged alone on the town gallows.

In all, the trials lasted almost two months, and authorities hanged twenty-six slaves; one more died by hanging while in custody. Of the sixty-five slaves tried, some were transported to other states, some were found not guilty, and a few secured a pardon. By law, slaveholders had to be reimbursed by the state for lost property, so in cases where slaves were executed or transported, their masters were reimbursed for their total worth declared by the court. Virginia paid more than $8,900 to slaveholders for the executed slaves.\textsuperscript{587}

Solomon, Gabriel’s brother and a leader in the unsuccessful rebellion of 1800, was one of nearly 30 slaves captured near the Prosser family’s Brookfield Plantation and imprisoned in Richmond in the week following discovery of the conspiracy. Although Monroe doubted that the plot extended beyond state lines, aftershocks of the insurrection were felt elsewhere. Rumors of rebelliousness in North Carolina surfaced, but no revolts materialized.\textsuperscript{588} “It is difficult to say just how many slaves were involved in this conspiracy. One witness at the trials said two thousand, another six thousand, and a third ten thousand. The Governor of Mississippi Territory said fifty thousand.”\textsuperscript{589}
Shock waves rocked the Southern white population at the idea of such a massive slave rebellion, and the aftershocks could be felt months later when Dorothy traveled through the Virginia countryside to preach to slaves. In an attempt to crush any mimickers, states imposed stricter measures for regulating slave activity. In South Carolina, for example, days before Dorothy’s departure from England, lawmakers made it more difficult to emancipate slaves. Up until 1800 a slave could be manumitted by will or deed. With the new law, freeholders of the neighborhood had to certify that the freed person could support his or her family.590

That pleasant summer day, as Dorothy traveled in the cart with her kindly Quaker driver, she stared transfixed at the barely standing, wooden monuments to Gabriel’s Rebellion. The juxtaposition of the dilapidated slave workshop with the luxurious home of the Prosser family—a two-story mansion sporting five bays and flanked by one-story wings591—fused into a poignant reminder of the human desire for freedom, regardless of the possible bloody consequences. One thing became painfully obvious—the violence and brutality which undergirded slavery became most apparent when slaves chose to rebel.

The bloody aftermath of the stymied revolt led Dorothy to protest that the Oyer and Terminer court should have been moved to leniency. To her, the revolt’s failure should have prohibited the forfeiture of insurrectionists’ lives: “. . . I think, as God prevented the destruction of Richmond, by the rain which destroyed the bridge they had to pass over, [white retaliation] ought not to have destroyed so many lives” (EC 86). Because God had protected the white population from violence that night, Dorothy argued, white authorities should have shown an equivalent mercy to the rebels: “. . . for it
may be the Lord may leave them without his help when they are in distress again, as they
avenged so far after the Lord’s kind interference by shewing mercy to this people, and
walking humbly before him who so sigually [sic] delivered them from the jaws of death
and eternal damnation . . .” (86-87). The vision of Gabriel and Solomon’s blacksmithing
workshop—in its symbolism of slave desperation and white brutality— lingered with
Dorothy throughout her Virginia trek.

To her overwhelming and painful abhorrence, Dorothy not only confronted the
specters of slave abuse and violence, but witnessed the brutality firsthand. Nearly a year
after her encounter with the reminders of Gabriel’s Rebellion, she again made an
evangelizing tour through Richmond. On this trip, she saw the firsthand the inhumanity
of which slaveholders were capable. An enraged slaveholder lashed his slaves so severely
that several died. To Dorothy’s outrage, no legal penalties had been brought against the
murderer: “My feelings have been pained exceedingly from the cruel treatment of one of
the slaveholders, who has lashed his slaves himself, till they had scarcely any skin left on
them, and that by his severity they have died soon after; yet he himself hath escaped the
punishment of men thus far (EC 90). Although the slaveholder, as owner of the property
of which he disposed, escaped earthly punishment for his murderous actions, Dorothy
warned her readers that a powerful day of reckoning awaited him and others of his ilk:

What a God is he that no one can escape his notice in any dark corner of
the globe. O that all would learn to fear him whose judgments are so
tremendous that I tremble for every oppressor! For every one who deals
hardly to any of God’s creatures; knowing it will be repaid back again by
him who hath a love for every thing which he hath made . . . . (91)
Abolitionist Themes

Throughout her works, Dorothy focused on slavery and its crippling effect on the slave, both physically and spiritually. Three dominant themes coursed through her commentary on slavery: the physical and sexual abuse inflicted on slaves, the separation of slave families, and the question of racial equality. In her treatment of each theme, she used religion as a starting point to springboard her into abolitionist rhetoric.

First, of deep concern to Dorothy was the exposure to sexual perversity that enslaved African women endured. For women, slavery not only proved fundamentally dehumanizing and oppressive, but also rendered slave women as particularly vulnerable to depravities.

Despite the long-standing cultural strictures against interracial sexual relationships, whites and blacks had sex under a range of circumstances, and a population of mulattos began to grow. In fact, Harper notes that by the early eighteenth century, “Connecticut and Massachusetts had to recognize mulattoes as a separate race classification. Exact numbers from colonial times are difficult to pinpoint, but Rhode Island did make a specific census in 1782, which found that, of 3,806 non-whites in the colony, 464 or one-eight were mulattoes.”

Thus, every mulatto served as proof that the color line had been crossed, and enslaved young girls could do little but hope that they would make it through adolescence and young womanhood unscathed by sexual abuse. As Harriet Jacobs observed about female slaves, “If God has bestowed beauty upon her it will prove her greatest curse,” because “that which commands admiration in the white woman, only hastens the
degradation of the female slave." One of the few narratives by a slave woman, Jacob’s tale also presented a rare view of the sexual exploitation that occurred during slavery.

In the South, mulattoes became living symbols of rape and concubinage. As one slaver noted, “There is not a likely looking girl in this State that is not the concubine of a White man . . . .” And because offspring retained the legal status of the raped, enslaved mother, white slaveholders bolstered their labor force through breeding. A slaveholder claimed that there was “not an old plantation in which the grandchildren of the owner [mulattos] are not whipped in the field by his overseer.”

Aside from their spurious use as sexual objects and means to an increased labor force, women raped by their masters produced offspring that fetched higher prices at slave markets. According to the historian J. C. Furnas, in some slave markets, mulattoes and quadroons commanded top dollar because of their desirability as sexual objects. Although all slave women (and men and children) were vulnerable to their white rapists, some slavers nevertheless preferred slaves of mixed blood because they “found dark skin vulgar and repulsive.” The mulatto or quadroon—with her lightened skin—approximated the white ideal of female attractiveness. The female mulatto afforded the slave owner “the opportunity to rape, with impunity, a woman who was physically White (or near-White) but legally Black.”

Gary B. Nash summarized the slavery-era relationship between the rape of black women, the handling of mulattoes, and white dominance. He noted that skin color assumed increasing importance with each passing generation, and by “prohibiting racial intermarriage, winking at interracial sex, and defining all mixed offspring as black, white society found the ideal answer to its labor needs, its extracurricular and inadmissible
sexual desires, its compulsion to maintain its culture purebred, and the problem of maintaining, at least in theory, absolute social control.”

Rapist slaveholders excused their behavior with the depiction of the mulatto woman as a seductress whose beauty drove white men to desire her. Thus, these criminals took refuge in the obvious and flawed attempt to reconcile the prohibitions against interracial sexual relations or “miscegenation” with the reality that whites routinely used blacks as sexual objects.

Perhaps the slave woman’s powerlessness is best summed up by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who observed:

Those whose personal morality did not restrain them believed that they had a right to enjoy that sexuality without anyone’s by-your-leave. To argue that their very sexual advances implicitly recognized slave women’s womanhood misses the point. Their advances above all reflected their appreciation of a sexuality freed from the constraints of social and gender conventions, freed from the bonds in which sexuality is normally embedded and through which it is normally experienced. Sexual advances by slaveholders did not differ significantly, in their underlying rationale, from the separation of mothers and children, the assigning of women to ‘men’s’ work, or physical brutality. All subjected slave women to a sense of atomization. As a slave woman and her master confronted each other, the trappings of gender slipped away. The woman faced him alone. She looked on naked power.
Dorothy believed part of the divine purpose in her mission to African slaves was to shed light on the sexual perversions that white male slaveholders practiced on the females under their legal control. “[I] groan in secret for the poor Africans, for whom my spirt [sic] is pressed this day, seeing so many coloured women in the cities who live for no better purpose than to gratify the passions of vile white men” (EC 95). In her descriptions of the perversities slave women often endured, Dorothy highlighted a tabooed subject, one rarely tackled by any writer, but most particularly a white woman.

Dorothy furthered her point by establishing an elemental parallel between white and enslaved women. Knowing that many of her readers would be white women, some of them slaveholders, Dorothy sought to mediate between the two races, highlighting their essential similarities as women, mothers, and homemakers. By helping her white female readership identify with the enslaved black woman, Dorothy found a powerful literary and political weapon. With an emotional connection, Dorothy could inspire white female readers to a wide range of responses benefiting the slave, from simple awareness to public action. Yet, even on the heels of pointing out their similarities, Dorothy warned against conflation of the black and white situations. The fundamental element separating the two, Dorothy consistently revealed, was slavery. Thus, in each identification, highlighting the congruencies led to an emphasis on the conflicts.

For example, in regard to sexual relations, Dorothy equated the enslaved women to their white counterpart, demonstrating that both sought to protect their virtue. As she pointed out, given the freedom of choice, black women “are disposed to be virtuous” (EC 95). However, unlike white women, slave women had no remedy to the unwanted sexual advances of their white masters. Dorothy stipulated that their inferior legal status
positioned them for such depravity, for rape was a fundamental consequence of slavery: “. . . They are compelled, having no [legal] power to resist; for soul and body are not theirs but their master’s, who can buy as many as he pleases” (95). Their powerlessness was complete in that masters’ coerced their compliance by “threatening to starve them, which has been done frequently . . .” (95). Further, age played little role in sexual deviation for both victim and culprit. Female slaves were forced into sexual perversity at tender ages, and oftentimes by youthful offenders: “I know those who have bewailed their shame to me, when compelled to evil by wicked youths before they were sixteen years old” (96).

Most importantly, her white readership would not have suffered the degradation of public sale, particularly when the determiners for a female’s worth centered around youth, beauty, and skin color. While Dorothy herself had been the subject of sexual innuendo and intimidation, she was horrified at a slave market upon witnessing the avaricious appetites of predatory buyers solely interested in procuring a sexual object: “How many purchase those young girls with no other motive than self-gratification, which is a horrible thing in the eyes of every chaste woman, and I believe such will repent it to eternity, if God is a pure being, which I know he is, from what he requires of me” (95).

Dorothy’s stress on the similarities of white and black women can be noted in her treatment of a second theme, the separation of families. Like most abolitionist writers, Dorothy preferred to accent the cruel and frequent break-up of black families bound under the slavery system rather than the cohesiveness and resiliency of black kinship and encouragement. The claim that slavery did not sabotage black family life was a
“slaveocrat” contention, and Dorothy sought to disarm the argument by equating white and black female experience.

For example, both white and black women knew of the joys to be found in marriage and motherhood. As Sally G. McMillen notes, family was “the principal source of strength in black and white women’s lives,” yet simultaneously it “placed some of the greatest demands on their emotions, time, energy, and health.” White and black women both drew emotional and material support from their kinship networks. The extended and nuclear families in which they revolved bolstered them in times of need, despair and overwork.

Yet, Dorothy sought to point out how slavery damaged or even severed the essential ties. Slave women found the longevity of such dictated by the whims of their masters. To illustrate, she published in her conversion narrative, a letter from an anonymous member “OF THE AFRICAN RACE” (EC 147). The letter lent her white readership a first-hand view of the atrocities visited on the wives and mothers who composed the female slave element: “[We] are dragged from our native land, in our old age, or in our infancy, and sold as the brute to the planters; the infant dragged from its parents, and the husband from wife and children, and hurried into the cane field, to give independence to their owners, and annex abundance to their riches” (146). The psychological crippling of slave women by the selling of husband and children often rendered the women suitably broken and complacent to slave life. And if the slavemaster did not rip a child from its mother’s arms, Nature often did. The death-rate amongst slaves was horrifically high.
The horror of separation can be seen in the slave narrative of Charles Ball, a runaway slave from Georgia. At four years old, he witnessed his mother’s sale by a cruel slave speculator while the Ball family still lived in Maryland.

My mother had several children, and they were sold upon master’s death to separate purchasers. She was sold, my father told me, to a Georgia trader. I, of all her children, was the only one left in Maryland. When sold I was naked, never having had on clothes in my life, but my new master gave me a child’s frock, belonging to one of his own children. After he had purchased me, he dressed me in this garment, took me before him on his horse, and started home; but my poor mother, when she saw me leaving her for the last time, ran after me, took me down from the horse, clasped me in her arms, and wept loudly and bitterly over me. My master seemed to pity her; and endeavored to soothe her distress by telling her that he would be a good master to me, and that I should not want anything. She then, still holding me in her arms, walked along the road beside the horse as he moved slowly, and earnestly and imploringly besought my master to buy her and the rest of her children, and not permit them to be carried away by the negro buyers; but whilst thus entreating him to save her and her family, the slave-driver, who had first bought her, came running in pursuit of her with a raw-hide in his hand. When he overtook us, he told her he was her master now, and ordered her to give that little negro to its owner, and come back with him.
Ball’s account of his mother’s anguish accented the maternal horrors faced by slave women:

My mother then turned to him and cried, “Oh, master, do not take me from my child!” Without making any reply, he gave her two or three heavy blows on the shoulders with his raw-hide, snatched me from her arms, handed me to my master, and seizing her by one arm, dragged her back towards the place of sale. My master then quickened the pace of his horse; and as we advanced, the cries of my poor parent became more and more indistinct - at length they died away in the distance, and I never again heard the voice of my poor mother. Young as I was, the horrors of that day sank deeply into my heart, and even at this time, though half a century has elapsed, the terrors of the scene return with painful vividness upon my memory.⁶⁰⁶

Another account, this time delivered by a Baptist clergyman who lived in North and South Carolina and served as the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina’s general agent to the Baptist churches within its bounds. Rev. Hawley described the onset of delirium that accompanied a slave woman’s witness of her child’s sale to a negro speculator:

One of my neighbors sold to a speculator a negro boy, about 14 years old. It was more than his poor mother could bear. Her reason fled, and she became a perfect maniac, and had to be kept in close confinement. She would occasionally get out and run off to the neighbors. On one of these occasions she came to my house. She was indeed a pitiable object. With
tears rolling down her cheeks, and her frame shaking with agony, she would cry out, “don’t you hear him—they are whipping him now, and he is calling for me!” This neighbor of mine, who tore the boy away from his poor mother, and thus broke her heart, was a member of the Presbyterian church. 607

Lastly, both white and black women suffered from male domination of their movements. In the early nineteenth century, males governed the activities of women, relegating white females to “women’s sphere” of house and family, and black women to servitude to white masters as well as serving their own families. Unlike Dorothy, who relished her role as “a free woman, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ,” women in general—both white and black—were heavily restricted in their movements. Yet, their circumstances differed in that slave women came under the absolute control of both white master and then her slave husband or partner. Prior African socialization, as well as the accepted gendered hierarchy in America, would have made it probable that black males responded to female members of their families in the same manner as white males. Male domination of women, Dorothy learned, crossed all racial boundaries. 608

Further, while white women maintained order over their own homes and instructed their children so as to raise the nation’s next generation of leadership, such was not the case for slave women. Most often slave women lived in communal barracks, their family’s “home” a space assigned to them by mutual agreement of their fellow slaves. The more humane slaveholders built slave huts. According to Dorothy, slave women tended their slave quarters with the same eye toward tidiness shown by white women. Upon visiting the slave huts on the Cockermouth Plantation near Richmond, Virginia,
Dorothy discovered that the “little huts . . . are clean and neat” (FC 91). However, unlike their white sisters, black women rarely ate their meals with the male members of the family. In New York, Dorothy was disconcerted to find that she was the sole female to sit at dinner in the home of the free blacks she visited. Each of the seven times she dined with “the coloured families . . . the women act[ed] as servants,” eating their meal only after the others had finished (148). On all seven occasions, she instructed the males that “they must let their women sit at table with them” (148).

Certainly her encounters with the sexual perversities and inequalities visited on slave women played a strong role in her enduring desire to establish a school for the female offspring of slaves. Equally, her detailed knowledge fortified her conviction of hearing “the voice of Christ [which] commanded me to proclaim in the principal cities, ‘this is the day that Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto the Lord’” (157).

**Evangelizing with Free Blacks**

Despite the overwhelming majority of blacks who existed in bondage, some black Americans lived free. The census of 1790 revealed that 59,000 free blacks lived in the United States—about 27,000 in the North and 32,000 in the South. By the time of Dorothy’s death in 1831, the total number of free blacks had risen to more than 319,000, with 150,000 living in the North.²⁶⁰⁹

Although most African Americans lived in poverty, others became financially solvent, forming a middle class. Black entrepreneurs primarily investing in property formed an elite class of blacks. During the first forty years of United States history, free blacks formed vibrant communities in many urban areas. These communities sought full
participation in society by building institutions such as churches and mutual aid societies and fighting for the abolition of slavery.

Of the most famous of these free African Americans were Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, ministers and leaders of the free black communities. Jones and Allen became the first two black Americans to receive formal ordination in any denomination. Both men evolved into ardent supporters of Dorothy’s, opening their churches and pulpits to Dorothy for recurrent sermons spanning at least fifteen years.

However, despite these ministers’ later endorsement of her, the beginnings of their dedicated religious arrangement with Dorothy sprang from denominational discord. And discord proved to be the same impetus that propelled black church leaders to form their own denominations at the end of the eighteenth century.

The primary city in one of the first slave-holding colonies in North America, Philadelphia reigned as a bastion of Quaker tradition and a leading center of black conversion and religious activity. The city also boasted one of the largest free black communities in the land. However, the catalyst for the foundation of an African American denomination came not from popular sentiment within the black community, but rather from friction within St. George’s Methodist Church in 1787. The incident served to spotlight the blatant racism that Dorothy discovered as she evangelized throughout the Northern states, long after the abolishment of slavery there. Further, the schism had far-reaching effects not only for the free blacks of Philadelphia but also for the success of Dorothy’s evangelizing mission.

The undercurrents of white discontent swirled ever faster as the active evangelism of Jones and Allen rapidly increased black membership at St. George’s. The ratio of
black to white alarmed vestry into segregating black membership, relegating them to an upstairs gallery without prior notification. In the midst of a Sunday service, white church leaders refused blacks the right to worship and pray in the same pews as whites. When ushers attempted to remove them, in the middle of a prayer, the black congregation resentfully walked out as a group, many of them never to return.\textsuperscript{612} They “were filled with fresh vigour to get a house erected to worship God in.”\textsuperscript{613}

When black worshippers first left St. George’s, they debated what type of church the new group would found. Amidst internal division, they elected to establish the non-sectarian Free African Society.\textsuperscript{614} However, the debate continued, as some worshippers wanted to maintain the spirit of Methodism, while others “were offended by their previous treatment and wished to abandon Methodism altogether.”\textsuperscript{615} Most of the churchless worshippers then formed the independent Episcopal church that would become St. Thomas Episcopal, led by Jones.\textsuperscript{616} A smaller group meanwhile established Bethel Church as an independent Methodist congregation, with Allen at the helm.\textsuperscript{617} And there at Bethel, as observed by Allen in a letter to Dorothy, the members “live[d] in love and harmony with each other” (EC 145).\textsuperscript{618} A still smaller group of the black worshippers remained with St. George’s for several more years before they too departed to found a mission church in 1796 known as Zoar Methodist.\textsuperscript{619}

At their founding, St. Thomas and Mother Bethel boasted modest memberships. In 1794, St. Thomas recorded 246 members and Bethel recorded 108. However, within a year’s time, St. Thomas had nearly doubled its membership to 427, while Bethel recorded a modest increase of thirteen members. About one-third of the black population in Philadelphia in 1795 attended one of these churches, a rate equal to or greater than the
rate of church attendance among white Philadelphians. Membership in the two churches continued to boom, and by the time Dorothy preached there in 1803, St. Thomas reported 500 members, increasing to 560 by 1813. By contrast, Bethel recorded nearly 200 members in 1798, 211 in 1799, and 457 in 1803. With such a boom in membership, Bethel soon outgrew its wooden building and, by the time Dorothy returned to the church in 1805, members had constructed a brick “roughcast” church in the place of the old building.

Just before Dorothy stepped into Bethel’s pulpit for the first time, Bethel listed more baptisms than St. Thomas. This trend would not be reversed in the history of the two churches. Bethel continued to pass St. Thomas in size and influence throughout the early nineteenth century so that by 1813, Bethel reported 1,272 members, more than double the size of St. Thomas.


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<th>UPON DOROTHY’S VISIT IN 1803</th>
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<tr>
<td>ST. THOMAS</td>
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<td>BETHEL</td>
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<td>ZOAR</td>
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These three churches formed the backbone of the organized black Christian movement in Philadelphia. Dorothy frequently assumed the pulpit as a visiting preacher at all three of the churches during the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Dorothy first preached to Philadelphia’s black community after making a request to Jones. In May 1803, after two weeks in Philadelphia attending the district meetings of the Society of Friends, Dorothy felt that she needed a stronger connection to the African community.  

Although Dorothy’s emissaries appealed to both black ministers on her behalf, it was the elder Jones who immediately welcomed Dorothy, inviting her to address the St. Thomas congregation that Sunday evening. Jones appreciated the dissent Dorothy faced as one who worked, counter culturally, for the kingdom of God. He recalled his own angst at divine appointment, writing to Dorothy later, “And I do assure you, that when I was called to the task, I trembled at the idea, and was ready to say, ‘Who am I?’” To Dorothy’s request, he applied the same spiritual reasoning he had lent to his own situation: “But when I consider[ed] that God can send by whom he will, and as you very justly have observed, he sometimes makes use of the feeblest intruments [sic] for the promotion of Truth” (143). Believing that God would perfect strength in weakness, Jones had “cause to believe my labour has not been altogether in vain” (143). Likewise, he willingly extended to Dorothy the chance to prove herself.

Evidently, his faith appeared well placed, for Dorothy enjoyed a tremendous success during her first foray into Philadelphia’s black churches. As Dorothy observed, “[It] was a solid time, where many were deeply affected with the softening power of the
Lord, who unloosed my tongue to proclaim of his love and goodness to the children of men, without respect to person or nation” (EC 137).

Her entry into Allen’s Bethel Church proved a bit more arduous. Not unlike its white parent organization, the African Methodist Episcopal church underwent a change of attitude toward female preachers during its transition from sect to church. It seems that, after they have passed their revolutionary period, sects turning “respectable” became more concerned with gaining the regard of the establishment than maintaining that which brought them about in the first place. Such internal transformation can be detected among the various sects that Dorothy tussled with, including the Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and the African Methodist Episcopal. 623

Front and center to the Bethel Church controversy was Dorothy.

The issue first arose nearly two weeks after Dorothy’s emissaries first approached Allen. After conferring with Bethel’s trustees, Allen politely but firmly rebuffed her in a brief, polite, albeit firm, letter:

Madam,

I have proposed to the Board of Trustees, of Bethel Church, your request, respecting your speaking in our Church; they have candidly considered the same, and after due investigation, the Board unanimously concludes, that as it is diametrically opposite to the letter and spirit of the rules of society in particular, and the discipline in general of the Methodist Episcopal Church; they, therefore, are sorry to inform you, that it is not in their power to comply with your request.

I am, madam,
Female preachers, he wrote, were “diametrically opposite to the letter and spirit of the rules of [our] society in particular, and the discipline in general of the Methodist Episcopal Church” (138).

Certainly, part of Allen’s refusal stemmed from the precarious position that Bethel held in 1803. Both Allen and Jones struggled to found their independent churches against a difficult climate in Philadelphia. Although both churches received enormous support from the Society of Friends and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, most white Philadelphians disliked the idea of organized independent African-American churches. Although Pennsylvania had abolished slavery more than twenty years earlier, as Nash has observed, most whites perceived African-Americans as either inherently impaired or irreparably debased by the experience of slavery. “The idea of blacks actually holding their own church services was as foreign as the idea of blacks holding political office or running independent businesses.” Plus, the recent slave revolt in the French West Indies and Gabriel’s Rebellion resulted in growing resentment among religious whites toward the “prideful endeavor of establishing an independent African American church.” In the wake of the rebellions and the concomitant swell of public unease, Allen naturally hesitated to flout Methodist tradition by opening his pulpit to Dorothy. Additionally, the growing sentiment against women’s preaching had escalated to such a point that following John Wesley’s death, the Methodists officially barred women from preaching except for the benefit of small groups of women or in an extreme case of an
“extraordinary call.” So, despite Methodist Bishops Asbury and Whatcoat’s approval of Dorothy just the month before, Allen’s hesitation to admit Dorothy as a preacher seems justified.

As historian James T. Campbell observed, Allen never questioned the legitimacy of Dorothy’s call. Unlike so many white religious leaders, Allen accepted Dorothy’s proclamation of a divine call. Allen would later rescind his refusal and welcome Dorothy without reservation. In fact, Allen and other black ministers, including the influential Daniel Payne, shared the pulpit with Dorothy at the first A.M.E. camp meeting in 1818.

Unfortunately, Campbell eclipses Dorothy’s contribution to Bethel, misinterpreting her role there in 1803. Campbell asserts that Allen’s admission of Dorothy to Bethel’s pulpit in 1803 was for her powers of exhortation rather than preaching: “Within the church itself, however, the best [Allen] could do was offer a compromise, welcoming Ripley as an unlicensed exhorter, a position that allowed her to lead prayers and to expound whatever scriptural lesson the minister had chosen. The actual right to preach—to select and interpret a biblical text—remained a male prerogative.” Although white ministers jealously guarded the exclusivity of the right to preach, such was not the case that day with Allen. Dorothy did not serve as an exhorter on her two addresses to the Bethel congregation that May, but rather chose her own spiritual text and claimed full sermonic rights. Then, and later during subsequent meetings at Bethel throughout the years, Dorothy delivered—to use her own term—a “sermon” (Bank 191).

Perhaps Allen’s change of heart came at the hands of divine and denominational
intercession. After receiving Allen’s denial, Dorothy heard the commandment of the Lord to “stand still, for I should most assuredly have his place to testify his goodness there” (EC 139). Unquestioningly, she tipped Allen’s letter into her pocket and awaited providential intervention. That same day, two unnamed men called on her at the home of James and Phoebe Pemberton, where she lodged. Although Dorothy does not name the men as Quaker leaders, in all likelihood they were members of the Society of Friends, considering the substantial backing of Quakers for black religious advancement in Philadelphia, as well as the men’s ready admission into “Evergreen,” the Pemberton home near 23rd and South Streets in Philadelphia. James and Phoebe Pemberton were long-standing and influential members of the Quakers and noted abolitionists. These men pressed Dorothy to relinquish her desire to address Bethel’s congregation, but Dorothy persevered, presenting Allen’s letter to them. After reading it, they assured her they would consult Allen themselves. The men—undoubtedly white—pressed Allen, who capitulated.

Or, perhaps, Allen—having so recently rebelled against religious prejudice himself—was incapable of denying aid to dissenters in his own midst. As he later wrote to Dorothy in a letter dated June 24, 1803, “I see the beauty of nakedness to be far superior than to be clothed with rags of self-righteousness” (EC 144). In the end, the multi-faceted impetus for Allen’s reversal resulted in his allowing Dorothy to speak to the Bethel congregation the next evening.

That first day, Dorothy’s address followed Allen’s, whose “short methodist sermon” was “very instructive” (139). However, Dorothy took her own text, preferring to spotlight the “conversion of a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch, of great authority, under
Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship” (139). Her choice of text “pleased [Bethel’s congregants] so much that “they were willing that I should have another meeting” the following evening (139).

Allen’s approbation of Dorothy can be read in his letter to Dorothy, which she published in her spiritual biography Extraordinary Conversion. Allen conferred on Dorothy, as he had on all the members of Bethel Church, the title of “communicant,” meaning a member of the family of Christ (145). As such, not only was she entitled to the holy communion established by Christ, but also a secular communion of love and respect tendered by Bethel Church. Theirs became an inextricable link: “There is a communion of saints which exceeds all formality, and which even the Apostles were ignorant of, when they gave an account to their Master, on their return from their mission, and old him, ‘We saw men casting out devils in thy name, and we forbade them, because they followed not us’” (145). In Luke 9: 49, the disciple John recounted to Jesus their proscription to non-followers who assumed authority in Jesus’ name. Jesus answered, “Forbid him not; for he that is not against you, is for you.” By referencing this story of inclusionism, Allen reinforced his welcome of Dorothy. Further, because of its reprint in both Extraordinary Conversion and Letters Addressed to Dorothy Ripley, he also obliquely invited her readers.

Later, Allen articulated his support in his The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In this statement, he extended the right to preach to anyone who professed to be moved by the Holy Ghost. The deciding factor, he determined, would be an appropriate response to three salient points:
1. Let them be asked the following questions, viz. Do they know God as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire and seek nothing but God? Are they holy in all manner of conversation?

2. Have they gifts (as well as grace) for the work? Have they (in some tolerable degree) a clear, sound understanding, a right judgment in the things of God, a just conception of salvation by faith? And has God given them any degree of utterance? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?

3. Have they fruit? Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God by their preaching?

As long as these three marks concur in any one, we believe he is called of God to preach. These we receive as sufficient proof that he is moved by the Holy Ghost.  

Although Allen used the pronoun “he,” the minister extended the same test of faith and privileges to women. As he wrote to Dorothy, “a salutation of love to thee, with desires for thy growth and increase in the increase of God,” and he extended his wish that “God [will] bless and make thee instrumental in promoting his glory and the good of souls” (EC 145). Not only did he open the pulpit to Dorothy, but he also eventually lent his backing to Jarena Lee.  

The first female preacher of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of America, Lee earned official sanction to preach from Allen following her pious exhortation during a visiting minister’s sermon. Like her frontrunner, Dorothy, Jarena spent many years walking the entire country, preaching the gospel. In addition to being the first African-American woman officially recognized as a preacher
by an established church, she carved a niche in history as the first African-American woman to publish an extended account of her own life. Her autobiography, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (1836) was followed by an updated version titled *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (1849). Church records also reveal that Juliann Jane Tillman possessed evangelical and teaching gifts, which Allen allowed her to exercise at Bethel.633

Perhaps Dorothy’s appeal to Allen stemmed not only from her evangelism efforts, but also from her message of spiritual equality—and the whole was delivered by a white female. While the combination could have proven combustible for the fledgling African Methodist Episcopal church, it also presented a formidable package. Dorothy’s addresses attracted a widely diverse following: Quakers, free blacks, abolitionists, legislators, and white women. And certainly her religious messages, liberally doused with abolitionist rhetoric, probably appealed to Allen even while he worried over the fallout. The A.M.E. church, quite obviously, held the issues of equality and slavery close to its denominational heart, as Allen enunciated in his *Doctrine*:

**Quest. WHAT shall be done for the extermination of slavery?**

**Answ. We will not receive any person into our society, as a member, who is a slave-holder; and any who are now members, that have slaves, and refuse to emancipate them after notification being given by the preacher having the charge, shall be excluded.**634

Further, Allen unconditionally excluded from the A.M.E. church not only slaveholders, but also any one who actively engaged in the slave trade, such as negro speculators, slave drivers, overseers, and slave ship merchants and investors.
It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation. First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced [*sic*]: such as, the taking the name of God in vain; the profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein, or by buying and selling drunkenness: or drinking spirituous liquors, unless in cases of necessity; *the buying and selling of men, women, and children, with an intention to enslave them.*

Dorothy conducted several meetings at African Zoar, established in 1796 and traditionally the oldest African-American congregation within the United Methodist Church. The founders—eighteen free African-Americans—separated from the white-dominated St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church; however, they chose to remain in Methodism with its traditions of early opposition to slavery, evangelical style of preaching, and ministering to social needs. Although the early founders first worshipped from house to house then in an abandoned butcher shop, members erected a church ten years prior to Dorothy’s preaching there. Not recognized as a separate church until 1811, the white St. George’s supplied its pastors. However, the church obviously welcomed unordained ministers, as Dorothy preached there at least twice in November 1805. Perhaps the membership approved not only of the white Dorothy’s willingness to preach to black congrégants, but also approved the abolitionist tones of her spiritual messages. The church served as a link on the Underground Railroad helping to conduct runaway slaves on a fast-track to the free North.
Interestingly, even while Dorothy’s works have fallen out of print and faded into historical oblivion until recent efforts to resurrect and digitize early nineteenth-century women’s works, Allen and Jones’ letters to Dorothy have been circulated in separate printed issues since 1916. The Journal of Negro History excerpted the august A.M.E leaders’ letters to the white female evangelist as printed in Dorothy’s Extraordinary Conversion and Letters Addressed to Dorothy Ripley. They were then published in the October issue of its inaugural year. Also of note, Dorothy’s ardent supporter and occasional companion, the itinerant Lorenzo Dow featured in the Journal that first year of publication, as well. However, neither Dorothy nor her letters have been the subject of any sustained literary interest since that first year.

Even when Dorothy confined her efforts to well-established churches such as Bethel, she sometimes ran headlong into trouble. Such a crowd turned out to see Dorothy preach on her second visit to Bethel in May 1803 that the black congregants filled the doorway and spilled outside to the lawn. Despite the rocky beginning, Dorothy enjoyed great success at Bethel during her first sermon, and as a result, a massive crowd turned out for her second address.

All progressed well throughout the service until, suddenly, a raucous, intoxicated white sailor pushed his way through the black worshippers filling the doorway and burst into the sanctuary, “interrupting us in our solemn engagement with God” (EC 140). The obscenities spilled from his lips, fouling the sacrosanct with the profane, and his drunken violation of the hallowed environment shocked the reverent black crowd, the white Quakers, and the sermonizing Dorothy. All were “unsettled, fearing lest the house would come down upon us; and for my part, I was actually afraid of Satan’s malice, lest we
should perish in this storm, which he raised in a moment” (139). Alarmed by the imminent potential for violence, Dorothy stood immobile for a moment, “the disquietude of the people ma[king] me tremble and shake every limb, not knowing what course to betake myself for the preservation of us each” (139). Dorothy’s encounters with angry slaveholders, hitherto, had been limited to veiled threats and intimidation; by contrast, the fury of the sailor presented a real and present danger to the legally vulnerable slaves, the pacifist Quakers, and the defenseless female evangelist. Any attempt to halt the sailor could only end in disaster, especially for the black crowd who, although of numerical superiority, dared not lay hands on a white man under any circumstances, even in liberal Philadelphia.

Dorothy resorted to the only weapon she possessed—the power of prayer. “I therefore gave up speaking; but this only encouraged the accuser of the brethren, who had come there in the hearts of many, as well as in the poor drunkard” (140). In a technique that she used on many occasions—and to the same effect—Dorothy dropped to her knees in public supplication, crying out for her listeners to follow her lead. Shouting to be heard over the din that had erupted in the church, she trumpeted a plea for divine protection for the frightened congregation, shaking all the while. “Pouring out my soul to God, I vowed to serve him yet more faithfully, if he would quell the rage of the adversary, and cause us to depart in peace . . .” (140).

After he had terrorized the black worshippers a bit longer, the sailor “was taken away and confined” (140). Because the violent encounter had been snuffed without physical assault or legal repercussions for the black congregants, Dorothy interpreted their reprieve as divine deliverance. Dorothy remained on her knees, this time in a prayer
of gratitude for their rescue, praising God who “in the midst of this tempestuous storm . . . instantly caused a calm, so that no one received harm” (147).

Level-headed in the face of white-directed violence, Allen again assumed the pulpit, reasoning with the crowd that “it was no new thing which had happened to us then; for in the days of old, when the sons and daughters of God met together, Satan presented himself also, to interrupt their peace” (140). For the benefit of her readers, Dorothy emphasized the compassionate quality of Allen’s rational appeal: “I was much pleased to hear what was advanced, as it shewed the preacher (although a coloured man) to have a knowledge of divine things, and able to attack the enemy of our souls in a suitable degree” (140). Once again, she took literary advantage of an occasion to demonstrate the spirituality, compassion and level-headedness of the black race.

Thus, the white female evangelist and black male bishop formed an enduring respect and support for each other. Two and a half years after the incident, Allen again welcomed Dorothy, who often reflected on the tumult and clamor of that day. In hindsight, she realized that, although the situation proved dire at the time, the interruption actually accorded the participating whites to witness first-hand the racism, hostility, and violence that free blacks faced. The disturbance presented a “dismal situation [for] many, whose curiosity had brought them thither to hear me; for they were more confused than any present” (Bank 191).

On Nov. 18, 1805, the same day that Lewis and Clark achieved their exploratory goal of reaching the Pacific, Dorothy returned to Bethel Church to resume her unfinished sermon. The number of worshippers on her subsequent visit outstripped even those first occasions. “A mixed multitude of about two thousand, from black to white” turned
out that autumn day (190). In contrast to her first engagement there, her second visit was a time “sweetly centred in the Kingdom of God” (190). Dorothy brought to the pulpit with her, Arthur Howell, a minister described as “feeling and upright”\textsuperscript{639} by his contemporaries and one of the signees to the 1783 Quaker petition to the U.S. Congress calling for a halt to the practice of slavery in the country.\textsuperscript{640}

Dorothy also returned frequently to St. Thomas, and as he had from the very beginning, Jones supported the white female evangelist. One occasion of note occurred in November 1805, when Dorothy felt a renewed compulsion to revisit St Thomas to “deliver the burthen of the Lord to some Ethiopians” (203). An interesting parallel between Dorothy’s sermon and her life lurked within the sermon. She likened the free blacks congregated there that day to the Old Testament heroes who rescued Jeremiah when the King’s minions tossed him down a well and abandoned him there to die.

[You will] draw the Lord’s Prophets out of the miry pit, as Jeremiah of old was by good Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, in the days of Zedekiah King of Judah, whose eyes were put out by the King of Babylon. Some would understand the burthen of the Lord which has oppressed me much, and, I have longed for the night to approach, that I might deliver my solemn charge, and be clear of the Lord’s work this day, before I retire from my spiritual labour, and exciting the children of Ethiopia to seek mercy, and preserve their spiritual life, even, as Ebed-melech who was faithful, and merciful, and so had his natural life spared in the time of affliction, when many were killed by the sword; and had the brains of their little ones dashed out. (203)
Dorothy’s message may have had a subtext. In addition to a rigorous schedule of sermons at churches and meetinghouses throughout Philadelphia, she also struggled against prohibitions from vociferous dissenters and the well-meaning advice of supporters. Even her stalwart companion, Arthur Howell, had taken Dorothy to task earlier that day because her prayers did not fall in line with Quaker convention. The solemnity of her chosen text—with its dark allusions to murder, anarchy, persecution, and oppression—seemed to suit her depressed spirits as much as the dismal situation of America’s slaves.641

More importantly, a further subtext addressed prejudice among her white readership. Once again, she took advantage of an occasion to underscore to white readers the spiritual values of the black congregants. From her view as a white woman preaching from the pulpits of Philadelphia’s black churches, Dorothy could venerate the spirituality of her black audiences. In her descriptions, the black worshippers possessed the desirable qualities of a worthy congregation: deep faith, piety, orderliness, cleanliness and a thirst to know more about God. “There was a respectable number of coloured people, well dressed, and very orderly, who conducted themselves as if they were desirous of knowing the mind of the Lord concerning them” (137). And she praised the black congregation of St. Thomas’ for their financial labors to erect a hard-won house of worship—another endeavor Dorothy presented as evidence of black worthiness to her predominantly white audience. To the free and enslaved worshippers at St. Thomas’s, she proclaimed, “To see them have this good house for worship, I told them, rejoiced me much . . .” (138). Thus, Dorothy wrote in line with the avowed aspiration of antislavery writers of both races: to compel white readers to recognize the humanity of a people they otherwise construed as
subhuman. Her political and rhetorical interpositions interweave with spiritual admonitions as a means to convince her white audience to entertain a more favorable view of black Christians.

Dorothy preached among many black congregations during her various missions to America. The first record of her attendance at black services was along the Mason-Dixon line, between slave-state Maryland and free-state Pennsylvania. There, on a Sunday evening in April 1803, she attended an unnamed “African house for worship” and marveled at the “large number of coloured people assembled, which rejoiced me, to see them have such a good inclination to draw night to hear the sound of the Gospel . . .” (EC 122). Encouraged by the strong evidence of such religiosity already existing among a race of people she had traveled so far to bring salvation, she set about organizing a preaching opportunity with Baltimore’s black community. Ten days later when she journeyed to the countryside to preach, she fretted that rural slaves could not make the trek to the city and back without stirring slaveholder backlash. Swinging wide of Baltimore, she preached sermons to “the coloured people . . . with great affection from those words of David: ‘Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hand unto the Lord’” (125). In return, black worshippers schooled Dorothy in the depth of their religiosity. As she wrote, “The groans, sighs, and tears, with their fixed attention, moved me . . .” and “my spirit was humbled on their account” (125). At the close of the meeting, the worshippers descended on Dorothy “gratefully acknowledg[ing] my sympathy and ardour of spirit for their best interest, and I felt fully convinced that I was authorized by Jehovah to proclaim liberty to the souls and bodies of men” (125).
Thus began a lifetime of religious service among America’s free and enslaved populations. Although progressive prohibitions on religious involvement reduced her worshippers among the enslaved, she delivered numerous addresses to free black congregations. In addition to her ecclesiastical missions in the South and her concentration in Philadelphia, she conducted a whirlwind tour of the black churches in Washington, Baltimore, and New York. In those cities, each with its own large population of free blacks, she preached to “Africans, much to my satisfaction” in their churches, homes, and public streets.

In New York, she braved the urban terrors of the Bowery, a section of the infamous Five Points district, to preach among the black congregations there. In Albany, she held three meetings “with the Africans, who principally were slaves, who rejoiced at the sound of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was much satisfaction to me” (Bank 56). These slaves lived in New York more than six years after the state abolished slavery, and Dorothy recognized the need for a ministry among an enslaved people isolated in a free state.

In 1818, Dorothy returned to the power of revivalism, but that year, she teamed up with a group of black ministers. In an attempt to bring the message of God to rural blacks and slaves, isolated from urban churches and preachers, they conducted the first camp-meeting of the A.M.E. Connection. The revival, held in the woods owned by “Squire Hibbs,” at Ben-Salem, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, began Aug. 12, 1818, “with the following ministers present: Richard Allen, Jacob Tapsico, James Champion, Dorothy Ripley (a female preacher from England), William Lambert, Rev. John Gloucester (of the Presbyterian Church), Sampson Peters, Edward Jackson, Charles Corr. The Lord was
present, and nearly one hundred souls were converted.” Dorothy was the sole female among the council of ministers and, more than likely, the only white as well.

Just as Dorothy brought promises of spiritual relief to America’s free blacks and enslaved, so too did they reinforce her conviction of her own personal eternal reward for the sacrifices she willingly assumed in their aid:

Many have already tried to suppress and damp the ardour of my soul, by withholding help from me; but Jesus’s sweet voice whispers, “Peace on earth and good will towards men,” and assures me his strength shall be equal to my day, and saith that he will maintain his own right and his Father’s glory, and his Spirit shall arise in me and aid every endeavor with his blessing; so that I shall cease to mourn on their account, and have as much joy as I have had sorrow, as much prosperity as I have endured poverty for them; yea, friends as numerous as my foes have been. How good is God to encourage me thus, lifting me above all the fear of man, and making my faith and love stronger each trial I pass through in their cause. (EC 96-97)
Seven times I’ve passed o’er Atlantic’s great tide;  
Love and Faith have me bore, to see Christ a bride;  
From sinners so numerous, I cannot them tell:  
But Grace is so glorious, to save men from hell.

I go into Prison, and the lowest cell;  
Thus rebels are risen by Power that does fell  
Them down to the earth, that they may begin  
Their heav’nly new birth, and cease from all sin.

The Hospital sick, I visit around:  
And cut to the quick, with arrows I’ve found;  
In Jesus’s quiver, fast bound to my heart;  
Then plunge in the river, to heal their sore smart.

The Poor-house then next; I hunt for the blind;  
Deaf and dumb are my text, and those out of mind;  
I shew them the Saviour, by faith I do pray;  
And tell them His laver, will wash sin away.

The rich, and the great, I pass them not by:  
And some of the meet a daily supply  
From Jesus, the Lover of all Adam’s race,  
And Christ the Great Prover of free Sovereign Grace.

The deists I find wherever I go;  
But am of this mind, they do not yet know  
My Jesus, the Father of this Universe;  
Though millions of others I might now rehearse.

— “A Hymn from My Nativity” (Address 18)

Chapter 4

Dorothy & America’s Disenfranchised Populations

To imagine America’s major urban centers such as New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, in the post-revolutionary years is, as historian Christine Stansell put it, “to conjure up the figures of the eighteenth-century picaresques: tattered
beggars, silk-stockinged rich men, pompadoured ladies and their liveried footmen, leather-aproned mechanics and shabby apprentice-boys, sleek coach horses, pigs." The economic and social changes which swept the fledgling country as a result of the independence won by war wrought a work of contrasts. Nowhere was this disparity more obvious than in America’s rapidly growing cities, where the riotous plethora of the laboring poor and immigrants contrasted sharply and increasingly with the tiny enclaves of the wealthy and urbane. Poverty increased apace with success in America’s cities. The triumphs of the early manufacturers and shipping industry came, at least in part, at the expense of the working poor who suffered from inadequate wages and scarcity of work. As Stansell observed, the early nineteenth century associated poverty with the inability to work, especially among the crippled, the old, and the very young, and the age witnessed impoverishment connected to the changing structure of employment itself.

Concomitant with this transformation was a decrease in tolerance for America’s poor. Patrician confidence in urban benevolence gradually waned in the years between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. By the end of the first quarter of the century, it collapsed. The calm acceptance of social responsibility gave way to a general fatigue in coping with pervasive poverty. The almshouses and poorhouses that sprouted up in America’s urban areas exploded in populations and expenditures, and taxpayers felt the pressure of the unending burden of the poor. Philanthropic exasperation and disaffection with benevolence, keenly felt by Dorothy during her second missionary journey throughout America, spelled the downfall of philanthropic meliorism and ushered in active reform. And Dorothy would be in the vanguard.
Perhaps Dorothy’s personal and intimate experience with poverty stimulated her lifelong concern with the poor and infirm and led her to pursue a calling of spiritual and earthly concern for America’s disenfranchised populations. She well understood the anxiety, desperation, and worry that poverty inspired, for money was always in short supply in both her childhood in a poor Methodist lay preacher’s home and in her adulthood as she roamed as an evangelizing outsider in the new Republic. Once, Dorothy’s lowly circumstances forced her to sell her Bible to procure travel money to reach the prison in New York City. To her great relief, a benevolent soul later returned it to her (Bank 47, 55). At another time, a fellow itinerant preacher, Johny Edwards, exhibited such dismay over Dorothy’s “very shabby coat [which is] not fit for a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ” that he tried to gift her with twenty dollars to purchase a new one, as well as offered her lodging for a week (184). Dorothy refused, but Edwards nevertheless pressed on her eight dollars—the exact cost of her fare to Philadelphia where she planned to evangelize in the prisons and almshouses (184).

Nonetheless, in Dorothy’s view, her meager clothing, desperate circumstances, and lowly estate—all a result of sacrifice due to her vocation—merely presented tangible evidence of a heavenly award awaiting her. She fervently believed that any cost here on earth would be amply returned in the afterlife:

> Although Jesus Christ has ascended up into heaven, he still marks what is cast into the treasury for the poor, it being lent unto the Lord till the judgment day, the time of general retribution, when every one shall receive back again an hundred fold of what they gave to the poor, with a view to have his approbation, and alleviate the wretched situation of the
miserable of every description of people, who are the workmanship of his admirable skill, divine love, and power. (EC 69)

Thus it was she spent the majority of her life ministering to the spiritual and bodily illnesses of her heavenly Father’s lost sheep. The compassionate work she began at her father’s side when she was but a girl in Whitby, England, evolved into the reformist, evangelizing work of a zealous, holy woman of God: “Through the large cities of America, I went and proclaimed the joyful tidings of salvation, offering my life for theirs, who could not defend themselves” (Letters iiv).

The Mission in America’s Almshouses

Dorothy’s evangelistic efforts took on a new dimension and greater proportion when she first entered the nation’s almshouses and poorhouses in 1805. There, she encountered many of America’s impoverished, sick, insane, and needy, overwhelming numbers of them women and children. In the face of the helplessness she witnessed, she comprehended how seemingly bereft of mercy was the new nation she had adopted; she recognized that, to a republic which prized industriousness, ingenuity, success, and autonomy, the wandering poor, sick, and insane presented a serious liability. She liberally chastised post-revolutionary America’s wealthy component, whom she felt had abdicated from its civic and religious responsibilities to the disenfranchised populations:

. . . You had better be a poor beggar, like Lazarus, than a miser, who is counting his stores of merchandize, withheld [sic] from the blind, and lame, deaf, dumb, sick, and poor prisoners, who have coveted his cursed
treasures, which will condemn his own soul for ever, unless he speedily repents of his idolatry: for, his god is the world, or his money. (Address 3)

The widespread unemployment sweeping through America’s cities as agriculturalism and craftsmanship waned and immigration soared, sent many to the poorhouses and almshouses where they cast themselves on the mercy of the city’s more prosperous. Poorhouses, designed to deter the working class from asking for poor relief, became “the ultimate defense against the erosion of the work ethic in early industrial America.” Depressingly dark and stark as well as badly and sometimes fraudulently managed, poorhouses were notoriously underfunded institutions which failed to meet any of the goals so confidently predicted by their sponsors. According to historian Michael B. Katz, irreconcilable contradictions spelled the doom of the almshouses. While meant as a refuge for the helpless, the poorhouse also served as a deterrent to the able-bodied. Although meant for the humane care of the poor, it also discouraged them from applying for relief. Although a voluntary institution, with the catalyst being starvation or the cold, the almshouse also became, in some cases, a penal institution for vagrants and beggars. “In the end, one of these poles would have to prevail,” Katz averred. “Asserting that poverty was not a crime, almshouse sponsors protested against the inhumanity of existing poor-relief practices such as auctioning the poor or shunting them around from town to town. At the same time, their own comments confounded crime and poverty.” The public expected these institutions, meant solely for the housing of the most helpless and infirm paupers, to be exemplars of industry and productivity; yet, “if the almshouses worked, the aged and infirm would be held hostage to the war on able-bodied paupers.”
In essence, social policy advocated isolating the old and sick, shutting them away from friends and relatives to deter the working class from seeking poor-relief. For the aged, the transfer to these institutions became a permanent situation, and many died within the dreary confines of America’s first almshouses. The younger ones sometimes escaped poor relief, using the almshouse as a refuge during the desolate winter months when expenses were highest, the streets were coldest, and employment was at an ebb.

In June 1805, Dorothy visited the almshouse in New York, where roughly seven hundred men, women and children languished. Accompanied by her stalwart companion, Abigail Eames, Dorothy made five visits and conducted three services. To those confined or too sick to attend her religious “meetings,” she made personal visits. “I went from room to room, consoling the blind, lame, deaf, and sick, who were rejoiced to see me; while the blind and lame went after me, from one place to another, till I was astonished at the love they manifested” (Bank 48).

The pain, desolation, and inevitability which faced America’s disenfranchised populations became encapsulated, for Dorothy, in the form of an “aged, handsome woman” whom she encountered at the New York Almshouse. The embodiment of human beauty corrupted, the woman and her simple needs particularly moved Dorothy, caught in the vice of her own destitution and unable to alleviate the suffering so manifest in the hovels called poor-relief houses. Instead, Dorothy offered this woman, and so many others, something of far greater value to her: a doorway to spiritual redemption.

Shortly after Dorothy began preaching at the almshouse, the frail, elderly woman approached her, begging for a handout of clothes. The woman had only the heavy flannel
provided by the almshouse, unsuitable attire for the sweltering June heat. Dorothy
described the initial encounter:

When I first was among the sick, an aged handsome woman, requested me
to “Let her have a cool garment,” thinking I was the Matron, as they had
got a new one: but, my compassionate Jesus bid me tell her thus, “Thou
wilt have a robe of righteousness put upon thee, and wilt never need
another change of garment after: as Jesus has prepared it for thee, by His
Agony and Bloody Sweat;” which made her look steadfastly at me, being
much surprised at the salutation: notwithstanding I said, “I will tell the
Matron to send thee linen, she having a red flannel raiment on, and feeling
the excessive hot weather to burden her. (49)

Deeply affected by the “remains of beauty and past prosperity,” Dorothy recognized in
the woman vestiges of her mother’s inner beauty and kindness as well as the loss of
earthly treasures such as home and supportive family. Her psychological connection to
the woman revealed itself in Dorothy’s words of “thankfulness to my God, that my aged
mother was resided in His Glorious City above” (49). Like this woman, the elder
Dorothy Ripley had had no place to call her own, having lost her family home in a
landslide of the cliff where her house rested. Also like this woman, the Ripley matriarch
was forced on the goodwill and benevolence of townspeople, without whom she would
have been relegated to the desolate environs of the almshouse. Perhaps this identification
with her mother initiated the missionary’s lasting concern with the pitiable woman,
explaining the rare, intricate description of their encounters, detail which Dorothy
normally would have excised in the interest of space.
On the heels of this psychological association, Dorothy felt a mystical revelation of the woman’s imminent death. Again resembling Dorothy’s mother, the impoverished woman would soon collapse under the weight of her burdens. As if reliving the pain of her mother’s death, Dorothy assumed a familiar posture adopted in moments of great fear or despair: she dropped to her knees in violent, fervent supplication for God’s mercy on the woman. “I fell down on my knees, and petitioned Mercy, and the Robe of Jesu’s Righteousness to be put on this suffering daughter, that she might fall asleep in the Lord, and be for ever at rest in Zion; and then went and told the Mistress, to be kind to her, and supply her with cool raiment, according to her request” (49).

To Dorothy’s great dismay, upon her return at the end of the week, she beheld the same sick woman dressed in the same uncomfortably hot flannel. This “so distressed me, that I [again] fell prostrate before Jehovah, and solicited Him to cut short His work in mercy, and adorn the soul of this my sister, in the saint’s pure white linen, or the garment of salvation, for the sake of His Only Begotten Son, whose Merit was my plea, knowing the ability of the Father to save” (49). Even as Dorothy prayed, the woman took her final breath, closing her eyes against the flies attracted by the stench of sickness and death:

[The sight] affected me exceedingly when I opened my eyes [from prayer] to look at her; therefore I continued praying till she breathed her last, waving my hand to keep off those troublesome insects, that waited to devour the corruptible body. In half an hour her spirit took its flight, without causing the flesh once to groan or sigh: for she never seemed in pain after I begun to pray, which astonished all present, as well as myself,
who had besought the Lord to put upon her His Righteousness before I left
the room, and receive her soul into the mansions of peace. (49-50)

As news of the woman’s death spread through the almshouse, other impoverished women
raced into the room to mourn their fallen friend. As the women watched, Dorothy
performed a final compassionate service for the woman: she tied her jaws closed. Filled
with power born from grief, Dorothy prophesied to the women huddled around the body,
“that if they would serve the Living God, He would send at the last, some of His servants
to perform this office for them, as he had in rich mercy brought me there for the purpose
of praying the spirit of our sister into Life Eternal” (50). The moment being ripe for a
sermon, Dorothy earnestly exhorted to the women to relinquish lives of indifference to
God, so that “many tears were shed” (50). For her part, Dorothy

rejoiced with a glad heart, that another had entered into the saint’s rest,
believing the Lord was Gracious and Merciful to this soul for His Name’s
sake, whose Spirit moved upon my spirit to utter this language . . . “Lord,
put upon her thy Righteousness, and receive her soul into thy Kingdom,
before I leave this room.” It was the prayer of Faith, which brought
deliverance to the creature who had been subject to bondage all her
days . . . .” (50)

As Dorothy left the room, the woman’s body lay there, still clothed in the hot, red flannel.

In Boston, the scene proved much more calming to Dorothy’s solicitous heart.

The third Boston Almshouse opened in 1801 on Leverette Street, opposite the present
Spring and Barton Street, and, at least in the words of one historian, the townspeople
could be free of the disturbing sight of the desperate poor. As Nathaniel B. Shurtleff wrote in his *Historical Description of Boston*:

> No more will the staid townsman or the jocund youth, proceeding to the Common on Election or Independence Days, be interrupted by the diminutive hands thrust through the holes in the Almshouse fence, or stretched from beneath the gates; or by the small and forlorn voices of the children of the destitute inmates, entreating for money. Nor will the cries of the wretched poor in those miserable habitations be heard calling for bread, which oftentimes the Town had not to give.  

The Boston Almshouse stood three-stories high and measured two hundred and seventy feet in length and seventy feet wide. It sported a chapel, garden, bathhouse, and work buildings. “The edifice and appurtenances are handsome and the whole establishment is in the highest degree creditable to its founders and superintendents,” wrote one visitor, Edward Augustus Kendall, who toured the almshouse the year after Dorothy’s visit.

Dorothy must have concurred with Kendall’s estimation because in her journal she wrote how the almshouse “was well conducted, and kept very clean and neat, considering the size, and the workhouse interfering with it” (*Bank* 162). At the time of Dorothy’s visit, three hundred lived in the almshouse, over which a group of overseers governed and a master and matron supervised on a daily basis. In the sizeable chapel, Dorothy conducted services for those well enough to walk to the room, and for those too ill, she performed a room-to-room ministry. “They have a very good place appropriated for worshipping God... and the people behaved well during the time I sat with them”
Despite a full day there, the sheer size of the Boston Almshouse “did not permit me to continue my visit among the lame, blind, sick, dying, and such as were deranged, who were alone, and objects of the greatest distress, which filled me with pity, for each different calamity” (163). On the other hand, “the largeness of the rooms, and the good air, which is free, must contribute to the health of the [almshouse] family, who are under the care of an aged man, whom I wish may have a father’s love to all who look to him daily” (163). Further, she prayed that the almshouse leaders would “set [the residents] an example of righteousness that they may fear the Lord and prepare to meet Him, when He calleth them out of time to enjoy the comforts of His Kingdom of Glory; having their poverty in this life, which deprives them of all the luxuries of the rich, that they gratify themselves with” (163).

In Philadelphia, Dorothy made a point to seek out the widows and misled women in the Poorhouse. In December 1805, after conducting a “public meeting with the poor at large,” Dorothy sought out the widows on the “incurable ward” of the poorhouse (Bank 219). There, thirty-three women “were diseased and alone, some blind, others lame, while many lay in bed not able to move, from nature being exhausted” (219). Several of them had been confined for debt while others made their home there out of necessity. Still others resided there because of a lack of any who cared about them. One woman had fallen into a fire while intoxicated and suffered such serious burns over most of her body that she was not expected to live long. “My misery was so great before I went to see her, that I was almost like one going distracted” (221). The sight of so many broken women, crippled by physical deficiencies and hopelessness, “moved me the most” of any she had beheld (219), and although she hid her anguish from the women she ministered to,
Dorothy agonized at the misery she beheld in the almshouses: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, who are groaning with the whole creation, for deliverance from the bondage of the corruptible bodies of sin and death. How loathsome is the flesh, when the finger of satan touches it! . . . I am constrained to love, pity, and pray for all that are in distress” (221). For her part, Dorothy fought to refresh them some small whit by reciting the biblical tales of their widowed counterparts in the Bible. She told them of the widow who showed compassion to the prophet Elijah and was granted bottomless jars of flour and oil for her kindness, and she regaled them with the tale of a mother’s joy when the prophet Elisha enabled the widow to pay her husband’s creditors as the men sought to sell her two sons into slavery in repayment. She attempted to buoy spirits with her reminder to look to Jesus for eternal respite from their earthly pain: “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (219).

Dorothy also targeted the large number of prostitutes and degenerate poor who made the public-relief quarters their temporary homes in-between bouts of iniquity. Because the almshouse was not a penal institution, inmates virtually could discharge themselves at will, spawning a class of poorhouse recidivists: “The door swings . . . outward or inward with the greatest ease.” As a result, the almshouse became a temporary refuge for the profligate, “a winter resort for tramps . . . a place where the drunkard and the prostitute” recuperated “between debauches.” The nineteen “harlots” who resided in Philadelphia’s almshouse “in deplorable condition” elicited Dorothy’s particular concern (195). The women surrounded the female missionary as she related to them the story of Jesus’ compassion and redemption to a Samaritan woman. They “cried out for mercy” at the biblical account, “as if it were in my hands to dispense [mercy] to
them” (195). Fainting and weeping greeted Dorothy’s words that “it was no wonder that they were despised and shunned by virtuous women,” for all knew that any woman who associated with the fallen would be “considered as some of them” (195).

Perhaps this concept of contamination by association led Dorothy to clandestinely meet with the prostitutes at Philadelphia’s prison a month later. Dorothy aimed to avoid offending the group of Quaker and Methodist ladies who accompanied her during her visitation and who disapproved of visiting the promiscuous women of the prison populace: “I slipped secretly from my kind friends, and paid my last visit (for the present) to the base women, whom I confirmed of my love and ardent solicitude for their eternal happiness” (220). Dorothy discovered an uncommon receptiveness among these “base women” and “not one of them appeared to scorn, or trifle with my tenderness” (220). Rather, “tears streamed from their eyes and mine, as from a fountain; and real awakenings were to be seen” (220). Dorothy moved freely among the women, her fondness for them obvious by her vocal prayers that they would “deny themselves of the lust of the flesh and take up their daily cross henceforward” (220).

Dorothy’s efforts to aid the poor did not begin and end at the institutional door. Dorothy spread a message of Christian responsibility among the parishioners in America’s churches and the civic leadership she encountered in her travels. When she preached before affluent crowds, she spared neither their feelings nor their wallets. Such was the case in Brooklyn at the Episcopal Church in May 1805. On the heels of preaching to the prisoners at the New York State Prison and witnessing the growing impoverishment of many in New York, she was primed to take the rich to task: “I faithfully warned the rich, by testifying “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole
world, and lose his own soul?” (44). Her belief in the rich’s responsibility for the poor became a common theme in her writing. Even sixteen years later, she continued her message of civic responsibility. In a quiet moment of wakeful repose at Mythe, near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, in 1821, Dorothy wrote of her certainty that the strong must aid the weak. In particular, she targeted Christian believers, cautioning them not to abandon their “duty” to the poor (Address 4):

Those who are professed Christians, should be careful not to neglect their duty to their fellow creatures; seeing we are one family formed by God’s inimitable hand, who wisely gives knowledge to each after his own will, that they, according to the capacity given, may faithfully occupy His gifts, till our Lord shall call us from our labour of love on earth, to the sweet employment of worshipping him above among glorified spirits, who are the companions of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. (4)

Similarly, she addressed the poor and desperate carving a pitiful existence for themselves in America’s streets. Both a spiritual invitation and an ominous warning, her utterances extended Christ’s offer of pardon for sins while at the same time cautioning the impious that the invitation meant a total and irrevocable relinquishment of their former iniquitous ways:

Having visited prisons, hospitals, poor house, and the sick, many years, I have been led into sympathy, with all classes of my fellow creatures, whom I have encouraged, warned, reproved, comforted, and have at seasons fed, and provided fuel for, out of the treasury of my God, who always gives me a mite to spare for the purpose: because I pray to him for
all I want; and am supplied out of His abundant fulness [sic]; therefore I know God will watch our returning wants daily, when we live in His fear, and keep His commandments. I therefore invite all sorts of necessitous persons, to try for themselves this Gracious and Good God, as a Master worthy of their best service; and the worst of my fellow mortals may draw near to Him in the name of Jesus, whom God has appointed an High Priest, to atone for the sin of all the world. But there must be a forsaking of evil, as he is an Holy Being, and requireth us to live in uprightness before Him. (Address 8-9)

The Mission to America’s Sick & Spiritually Lost

Dotting Dorothy’s spiritual autobiographies are her many visits to the sick and dying of America. The disease-ridden, pain-laden, bed-bound wretches who could not afford proper medical care and often suffered alone without family, friends, or clergy always drew special compassion from Dorothy. Visitation and ministry to the sick and dying comprised her first evangelical efforts as a young girl, and throughout her life, she took special pains to render what spiritual comfort she could to those in need. Perhaps her Methodist background accounted for the great concern she showed toward the ailing. Reared in a Methodist lay preacher household, Dorothy would have been aware of the emphasis that John Wesley placed on caring for the infirm.

In his Sermon 98, “On Visiting the Sick,” Wesley used Holy Scripture to support his premise that works of mercy comprised an essential element to means of grace. He assured his followers that, while reading and hearing Scripture, receiving the sacrament,
public and private prayer, and fasting present worthy efforts of piety, so too did works of mercy. He stressed that works of mercy were necessary to salvation, for Jesus himself instructed us so.\textsuperscript{656} Wesley quoted the Gospel of Matthew in support of his supposition: “Come, ye blessed children of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat: Thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”\textsuperscript{657} And Wesley reminded the Methodists that Jesus promised “inasmuch as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”\textsuperscript{658} By contrast, he pointed out what Jesus promised those who failed to perform works of mercy: “Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat: Thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: Naked, and ye clothed me not: Sick and in prison, and ye visited me not. Inasmuch as ye have not done it unto one of the least of these neither have ye done it unto me.”\textsuperscript{659} Wesley also admonished his followers not to backslide in their works of mercy: “Is it not strange, that this important truth should be so little understood, or, at least, should so little influence the practice of them that fear God?”\textsuperscript{660} And Wesley accepted no excuses for failure to adhere to his advice, for visiting the sick was “a plain duty, which all that are in health may practice in a higher or lower degree; and which, nevertheless, is almost universally neglected, even by those that profess to love God.”\textsuperscript{661}

With such indoctrination to visiting the sick, it is little wonder that it became a prominent feature in Dorothy’s missionary efforts in both her homeland England and her adopted land America.
While performing works of mercy figured prominently throughout Dorothy’s life, one segment particularly stands out from the rest. During the month of September in 1805, Dorothy made a whirlwind round of visits to America’s declining and debilitated. On the ship *Victory*, bound for Boston, Dorothy reported feeling a distinct movement of the Spirit, calling for her compassionate mission to the ailing. Perhaps her continued sense of alienation in America, born from her nomadic lifestyle and uncertain acceptance, fueled her renewed concern. Perhaps the moment simply seemed ripe to take a brief hiatus from her ministry to the institutionalized. Or maybe, her narrow escape from the yellow fever that ravaged New York upon her departure from that city revitalized her ministry to the debilitated. Whatever the impetus, many sick and dying in New England benefited from her transformed focus to the infirm. As Dorothy observed in a letter to her friend, Abigail Eames, “The Lord has called me from a comfortable habitation, to minister, spiritually, to those who sit under the shadow of death, and are buried in the grave of unbelief” (Bank 126). Later, she continued:

> When at first I came into this land, all were strangers, whom I never saw before; but being on the Lord’s Message, my way cleared before me: so I have hope again, as I am answering His Purpose, in going to deliver, not only my own soul from the burning fever, but I verily believe some soul from the burning gulf, through the “Effectual fervent prayer” of the Spirit of God, in that part of His Vineyard which my feet have never yet trod. The reward I ask is peace to my own soul; and a blessing to attend this small endeavor: so that some may be gathered to Thy Fold of Love. (130)
In September alone, Dorothy made a career-record number of visitations among the diseased, sick, and dying. She visited a crippled woman who anxiously sought her out, and Dorothy wrote of her steadfast belief that the woman would “possess miraculous faith, if she would exercise it on the Power of God; then the lame would walk, and praise God as they did when Jesus cured in the days of His Flesh” (136). She ministered to a heartsick, estranged mother and daughter who “had not spoke [sic] to one another for months” (137). Dorothy “thought it my duty to call on both, to reconcile [the] two,” and she counseled them “each to forgive as little children” and wished “their dreadful prejudice may be removed” (137). She attended a woman “distressed in mind,” and, recognizing the lack of any earthly remedy for the insane, comforted her with the promise that “I should meet her in Heaven” (137). Dorothy felt “united to her in sweet love and sympathy,” and the two “had a precious time in supplication” (137).

In fact, the frequency and sincerity of Dorothy’s compassionate visits earned her a measure of notoriety. People increasingly turned to her for spiritual guidance, comfort, and kindness. In response to her growing demand, the captain of the Victory agreed to linger in the Rochester port of call two additional days before Dorothy had to reboard for her continued journey to Boston. Dorothy commended the captain for his humanity in “accommodat[ing] the people, who were not willing to part with me” (137). Dorothy made the most of her extra time, and like the lost sheep that Dorothy likened them to, the people trailed after her: “If I went out of one room into another, they all followed me, so that I could not be alone a few minutes if I were ever so desirous of it” (137). The great need of the people for spiritual direction and their wholehearted acceptance humbled the missionary:
Sometimes I thought if an angel had come from heaven, they could not have shewed greater respect than they did to me, which made my tribulated spirit both humble and glad; for satan was not permitted to raise lies, or inflame the minds of any against me. . . . Surely ye are bought with the price of His Precious Blood, spilt on Calvary for all nations, without exception. (137)

Also during that month, Dorothy took a giant leap across cultural lines by flouting social convention to officiate at the funeral of a converted Indian. Unburdened by the need to appear respectable, Dorothy instead concerned herself with authenticity. When none of the white clergy in Rochester, New York, stepped forward to minister to the Indian woman as she lay near death, the woman’s family sought out Dorothy as soon as the Victory landed, begging the missionary to see the dying convert. Aghast that the dying alcoholic “had made no preparation to meet God” but believed she would “be saved by the prayers of the righteous,” Dorothy readily agreed (Bank 133). “If she has Faith to believe that she will be saved by prayer, I have Faith to believe she will be saved through prayer,” Dorothy responded. The missionary believed she had been set ashore there “to be the blessed means, in His Hands, to struggle by prayer, for Eternal Life for this sinner” (133).

To her dismay, she found the regenerate heathen writhing in the death throes of gangrene. Despite her long-time experience with the sick and dying during her childhood visits to the infirm and her work in prisons and almshouses throughout New England, Dorothy’s recoiled in horror at the sight and stench of the putrefied flesh. A mass of corruption, the woman’s foot had attracted flies which had long since deposited offspring
matured into larvae, and the whole crawled unchecked through the dying flesh. Dorothy was “filled with dread awe, having never seen human nature thus far degraded” (133). Swallowing her revulsion, she dipped deep into her well of spiritual fortitude to summon biblical consolation for the woman’s grieving sisters as well as to recall the familiar promises of eternal life for the dying convert. In complete disregard for the deplorable state of the floor, Dorothy fell to her knees in supplication for the soul of the heathen:

I . . . interceded for Jesus Christ’s sake, that God would have mercy on her, feeling her very sins in my soul and body, which made me pray vehemently unto the Father of all flesh, to look in pity upon this condemned sinner, who was at the point of death. When I arose I told her how able Jesus was to save her, and with dread awe cried out . . . for faith assured me, the Lord would save her. (134)

Dorothy’s blatant unmindfulness of the unsanitary conditions of the house is characteristic of her missionary efforts and her overall disregard for social convention. Few early eighteenth-century white women, of any economic class, would have visited the home of an indigent native, and certainly not one of questionable vices and hygiene. Having dispatched her religious duty, Dorothy could easily have moved on, leaving the woman to face her certain death. Yet, even after a full day visiting other sick and spiritually needy, Dorothy disregarded her own fatigue to return that night to the dying woman’s bedside. Certainly, in the face of such weariness, the natural human desire to seek her own comfort in the form of a prepared bed and meal tempted her to delay a second visitation, but Dorothy responded faithfully to a direct address from God: “Thou hadst better go now, she will be dead in the morning,” Dorothy wrote of the divine
forewarning. Until the wee hours of the night, the missionary kept a death vigil with the 
grieving sisters, alternating between hours of prayer and silence. What next transpired 
seemed to the missionary a spiritual reward to both the dying penitent and to Dorothy 
herself:

While thus occupied [with prayer], I heard the most delightful music that 
can be imagined, and was informed by my Master, that angels were 
hovering round her, to convey her spirit, as Lazarus’s was, to the regions 
of peace and joy, where she will see that Jesus who paid her debt, and 
suffered ignominiously in her stead. (135)

Magnifying Dorothy’s interpretation of this rich, mystical reward was the deathbed 
conversion of the godless woman, which the evangelist saw as nothing less than a 
fulfillment of biblical prophecy concerning the conversion of the pagan: “He shall take 
the heathen for His Heritage, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His Possession” 
(135) The woman’s conversion marked a defining moment in Dorothy’s ministry.

I suppose others were appointed to care for the body [after death], while 
the weight of her soul lay on me, as an instrument to bring her to God, by 
faith and prayer, through the Merit of the Merciful Intercessor, who met 
this squaw in her own way, she believing in the prayers of the righteous, 
prevailing with the Father, who constrained her, by His Spirit, to utter this 
language also: “O! how much has my dear Jesus suffered for me!” I hope 
her four sisters will obtain mercy, and let this proof of God’s Love work in 
their hearts a mighty change. (136)
Having seen to the soul of the dead Indian woman, Dorothy turned to the still-unconverted sisters. Even as she rejoiced at the woman’s deliverance, Dorothy focused on the four souls which remained lost. While the grief-stricken women cried for their dead sister, Dorothy prayed that the woman’s death might instigate a similar spiritual change in the four Indian women surrounding her:

Two of her sisters, who, weeping so much for her that was dead, I tried to comfort them with the words of Jesus, (when the women “Bewailed and lamented Him,”) “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children,” signifying she was at rest, and not to be wept for, having repented of her sins, and obtained mercy, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (135)

Dorothy paraphrased the words of Jesus in Luke 23: 28, when he rebuked the “daughters of Jerusalem” who wept copiously at his crucifixion. Jesus chastised the women for their tears, for their crying signified their lack of understanding about his divine mission. Whereas the women of the city bewailed the earthly injustice of an innocent man’s death, Jesus advised them not to weep for him, whose death was foreordained, but for those who remained unconverted. Similarly, through her use of Jesus’ reprimand, Dorothy sought to illustrate to the women that their sister’s death was a triumph rather than a sorrow, a victory rather than a failure. Their tears, she thought, were best saved for themselves, who unlike their sister, remained in an unconverted state.

The general indifference Dorothy witnessed from the religious and civic communities in regard to the Indian woman’s death became one link in an increasingly long chain of evidence indicating the urban tendency to disregard the needy, especially in
times of exceptional woe. That same year, 1805, when the yellow fever ravaged New York, Dorothy noted how those with the financial means fled the city. In their wake, they left the vulnerable and resourceless to suffer the ravages of the disease. In return, the character of the laboring poor evolved into an attitude of impudence rather than gratitude. Even while wealthy New Yorkers fled the fever, the poor rushed to the almshouse, leading the institution’s superintendent to complain that too many exploited charity, applying for it not out of true need, but rather because, “as they generally termed it, they would have their share of it.”

This sweeping dismissal of the needs of the poor led Dorothy to chastise New Yorkers’ hardness: “Many of your citizens . . . shelter themselves, and leave the poor to perish among the arrows of death” (147). Ironically, Dorothy too had fled the city, a premonition having forewarned her to save herself for the sake of others. As recompense, she lent her services not only to the living, but the dying. Twice, she conducted funeral services for the poor and unwanted when no one else stepped forward to bestow a final blessing over their graves (Bank 211, 214).

Another group which Dorothy particularly characterized as spiritually lost was mariners. Because she often traveled on the water, Dorothy came into frequent contact with sailors, and whenever she journeyed by ship, she often made an effort to conduct services among the crew and passengers.

However, one on notable occasion, the sailors sought her out rather than the other way around. During her quarantine off Rainsford’s Island at the entrance to Boston’s harbor, an “aged captain from Philadelphia” came aboard the Victory on Sunday morning and asked Dorothy to lead a motley group of sailors in worship. “All the captains were gone ashore,” Dorothy recalled, “and were determined that I should come and preach to
them . . . at the Inn” (Bank 160). Her initial reluctance—attributable to unease at the
seindness of the inn and the rowdy and often unprincipled marine population—warred
with her deep-seated desire to bring the spiritually lost into the converted fold. As
Dorothy wrote, “I knew not what to think” (160), yet her strong motivation to evangelize
swayed her to fulfill her purpose. She “believe[ed] it my duty to let my light shine, even in
this dark place, where it is likely no woman before hath undertook such important
business being alone” (160). Past experience had taught Dorothy not to heed the fear and
doubt that often tempted her to escape a solitary and sometimes dangerous life-
undertaking; rather, she had learned to rely on the unfailing spiritual guidance from God.
“I did not confer with my fleshly reasonings; no, being sensible it was my Father’s good
pleasure, I obediently rose, and went” with the sailors (160). Just as she would experience
several months later while in the Deep South, Dorothy felt the Spirit prompt her to
minister to the spiritually lost; therefore, despite the overwhelming odds against her
personal safety, “in the Name of the Lord I went” (160).

To her frank surprise, the worship service with the sailors proved rewarding,
indeed. Whereas she had anticipated a raucous, reckless crowd, she found a room of
patient, albeit unconvinced, participants. In addition to the family who operated the inn,
filling the room were about “twenty captains, and a number of mates, and sailors, who
with passengers, made a large company” (161). Dorothy identified many of them as
Deists, a group she particularly aimed to spiritually transform.

Dead silence greeted her entrance. After only a moment’s hesitation, she assumed
her favored position of kneeling prayer, and she did so within “the midst of them” (160).
In the tense moment, “the darkness of some present greatly affected me, so that if I had
not restrained my tears, I should not have been able to proceed for weeping, having such a view of the Love of the Father to gather them to Him, by the means of His Son’s Redeeming Power, which was manifested when He gave His Life for the world” (160). Resuming her seat after the prayer, Dorothy again allowed silence to fill the room before commencing her message. When the Spirit moved her to speak, she loosed a charge against the Deists in the crowded room, “testifying that it was God who was in Christ that suffered for their transgressions: but it would not avail them any thing, unless they believed in the Virtue of His Death; and that they could not do if they denied the influence of the Spirit, who alone unfolded the Mystery of Jesus Christ being Lord” (160). The solemn reception of her severe words never daunted her, for she believed that “lasting impressions . . . [were] made on some who came there to gratify a curious mind or to spend an idle hour” (161). Upon their departure, the mariners “offered their hands freely, and many thanked me for the advice, others saying, ‘We hope good will be done by your labour’” (161). Later that night, ensconced in the safety of her berth, she returned to her prayerful entreaties for the sailors:

In the most fervent manner my soul hath prayed for you this night since I left you; that the Blessing of God may follow you, and sanctify my small labour of love for your everlasting profit, that ye may also be standard-bearers for my Master, who saith His increase shall be given at this time, that the seed may not be sown in vain in your hearts; and I have faith to believe, that my night’s wrestling will be crowned with success on your account. (161)
A second group of sailors approached Dorothy for a meeting, and this time, the youthfulness of the seamen lent a measure of reassurance regarding her safety. In fact, this group proved so obsequious to Dorothy they pledged to “fix seats in a large new house” and “inform the people of your intention” (134). Dorothy interpreted the enthusiasm of the sailors as a sign from God that she had been sent there “to instruct the ignorant” (134). As promised, the sailors collected a mass of people in one hour’s time, and they “were peaceable beyond my expectation, which afforded me solid comfort to see such a goodly number” (134). Although Dorothy did not document her sermon topic for the day, she noted a particularly strong movement of the Spirit within her as she spoke to the crowd, which she found endearing in its somewhat childlike eagerness to hear the word of God: “As my mouth was for God to speak through, I trust it will be a blessing to the people; then he will receive the thanks due unto His Adorable Name, for bringing me here” (134).

Other groups of spiritually lost sought Dorothy’s ministerial guidance, and among them were a “number of dear children” from a local school who invited Dorothy to preach during the school day. Even while Dorothy commended the children for being “attentive to my advice, and remarkabl[y] still” during the service, she looked ahead to the possibility of enticing the parents of her young assemblage to a second service: “[This] prepared my mind to desire a meeting with their parents, if possible; and silently breathing to the Lord, that the way might be prepared” (134).

For the young generation, Dorothy fretted at what she considered an undue fascination with frivolities. As she noted, “poor unstable mortals are drawn aside by trivial things” (Bank 147). In particular, she recognized the vulnerability of the youthful
to the allure of the spiritual and secular prohibitive: “How many of you, my beloved friends, will part with the carnal mind which is the means of excluding you from this great blessing, that every believer enjoys, who know that their life is hid with Christ in God, being born from above” (Letters 34). She continued, “Few, I am afraid, live each day for eternity, who concern themselves with the trifles of time, and engage with the world eagerly” (34).

As a young child, Dorothy had adopted a religious life filled with long prayers, dedicated scripture reading, and heartfelt worship. She put aside her toys at the tender age of three and embraced Christian faith as her girlhood companion. The frivolity of the fledgling Americans, blithely happy in their indulgent ignorance, not only appeared to Dorothy as a waste of national resources but also a misuse of spiritual assets:

Ah! little think the young and gay, the wild disorder that shall pain their minds, when they have taken their fill of sensual bliss. Believe me then, ye sporting sons and daughters, who part with months and years, as though your days were trifling, as the silly toys that steal away your hearts from God, your moments wasted, never can be recalled; and those you have, are a thousand times more valuable, than all the sparkling gems, or precious stones, you can procure on earth. (Bank 152)

On the heels of her scolding, she issued a challenge to the young, daring them to grasp the opportunity for salvation before the moment escaped them for “how this peaceable kingdom is to be obtained must be your first concern” (Letters 34). Her challenge erupted into a full-fledged sermon, alternately invoking the twin leverages of fear and promise:
Will you then, hearken to a friendly admonition in time? Will you relinquish your foolish gaieties, and your licentious hopes, which have already plunged millions into the burning gulf, through your debased minds, working mischief in every shape? Will you renounce the pride of this world, for the immortal pleasures of the just? (Bank 152)

Dorothy beseeched them to “submit to His power” which “alone can cleanse an unholy thing, and make of it a pure temple fit for the lord to bring in all his grace and glory” (Letters 33-34). With this capitulation to God’s will, “the man of sin may no more have dominion over you; neither lead you into the spirit of rebellion against the Father and Fountain of all Good” (34). She urged “every high mountain to come down from the pinnacle of vain glory; that they may walk henceforward in the valley of humble love, and lowly fear” (34).

She advised the young to “be satisfied with a small portion of sublunary goods, that your hearts may be at liberty to ascend upwards to your God, who requires you to secure treasure in his city, where all the saints shall at last dwell” (34). She considered the cost of the fleeting pleasures of secular pursuits dear indeed when bought at the sacrificial price of eternal life:

The easiest way to live, and die, is to possess little in time, and much in eternity; a lesson which we must learn, if ever we make progression in the hidden life. Then for the honour of God, who impoverished himself for your sakes, imitate the spotless Master who is gone before us, teaching by example and precept, that holiness is the King’s highway to permanent bliss. If you tread in the steps which he walked in, you have nothing to
fear from the world, the flesh, or Satan; for nothing shall overcome you; 
but you, on the other hand, shall be mighty in battle, and vanquish over the 
opposers of your faith, and finally tread down your outward enemies under 
your feet, by the strength of him who subdued you. (34-35)

To those brave enough to abandon secular excess in exchange for eternal bliss, 
she assured them they had no reason to fear either the inevitable backlash of worldly 
disdain or the devil’s impotent wrath:

If so, fear not the rage of persecuting sinners, nor the enmity of the carnal 
mind, which shall be slain by the Word within, who shall also chain down 
satan’s power, and cast him out of his kingdom of darkness; overturning 
his empire in you to the ground; so that there may be a foundation laid of 
Righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost, whereon the 
Kingdom of Jesus Christ shall stand on the solid basis of Mercy, and Love 
Divine: then, O happy souls! Ye will complete your work on earth, by fear 
and trembling; yes, I tell you, that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of 
Wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.” (Bank 152)

To reach these young and frivolous, those preoccupied with earthly pleasures, 
Dorothy dared entry into the seediest streets of America’s large cities, where want warred 
in equal parts with misery. The most notable of her work occurred in New York’s 
infamous Five Points district, in particular its eastern section called The Bowery. Also 
known as the Boston Post Road, the Bowery led to Harlem and boasted a dismal 
collection of flophouses, rookeries, gambling joints, dance halls, saloons, and brothels. It 
also teemed with animated street life, fashionable theaters, political clubhouses, bull-
baiting hideaways, bare-knuckled prize-fighting dens, and legendary bums. The Bowery’s first residents were ten families of freed slaves who produced a poor but respectable part of lower Manhattan in 1645. By the time of Dorothy’s arrival, however, the area had begun its decay into a world-famous slum. Contributing to its descent were several factors: a shift from handcrafted to mass-produced goods, affecting cost and the apprenticeship system which provided room, board, and steady work for families; an overwhelming influx of poor immigrants, with landowners subdividing buildings for apartments with a blatant disregard for safety or sanitation; and rampant and unrelieved unemployment. Children of working-class families, normally busy learning trades, were left to roam the streets and instigate mischief. The buildings divided into tiny apartments were the size of a small bedroom and windowless. The bottom floor of many of these buildings housed a saloon, groggy (combination of groceries and cheap liquor), or brothel.664

Within the Bowery, Dorothy sought to sacralize the most profane spots. She roamed from house to house ministering to the poor, decent common folk trapped by immigration, poverty, lack of education, and a plethora of other debilitating factors. She targeted the immoral and depraved, loitering in the streets and dallying in the decadent, questionable businesses flourishing along the walk. She preached her message of salvation to any and all who would listen, proselytizing at numerous worship services performed at whatever local spot she could secure for the moment.

And when the denizens of New York’s nightlife did not come to her, she sought them out. In particular, she took her exhortations for a renewed, converted life in Christ to a New York playhouse. Her bid to save souls targeted, not so much actors, managers,
and theater staff, but rather the prostitutes who plied their trade within the theater’s confines (Bank 124). Although Dorothy failed to name the playhouse, most likely it was the Park Theatre built in 1798 on Chatham Street (now called Park Row). Up to 2,000 spectators could fit into the theater’s roomy pit, four stories of private boxes, and top gallery. During its fifty-year existence, The Park attracted an eclectic audience, with each class occupying specific sections. “New York’s Park Theater, despite a reputation as an elite house, had a relatively large room that permitted the masses to govern the stage,” observed historian Lewis A. Erenberg. “Each class had its own part of the theatre, but all attended—mechanics [the working-class] in the pit, upper classes and women in the boxes, and prostitutes, lower class men, and blacks in the balcony. The rowdy audiences often yelled, stamped, drank and smoked during the performance.”

Most of the noise generated from the raucous commoners in the uppermost gallery tier; they freely fired missiles of fruits, vegetables, and nuts whenever the hapless entertainers below displeased them. Prostitutes, attracted by protection from the elements accorded by the theater and by the ready assembly within, openly performed their services in these balconies. New York’s woefully understaffed police force offered no objections to either the entertainment on stage or in the balconies. According to historian Timothy J. Gilfoyle in City of Eros (1992), “Leading establishments like the Bowery, Chatham, Olympic, and Park theatres permitted prostitution in the uppermost tier of seats. ‘Public prostitution [in the theater] is not noticed by law,’ admitted one observer. First-time middle-class visitors incredulously conceded that they ‘had not even dreamed of the improprieties then publicly tolerated in the third tier and galleries.”
To these hot beds of illicit sexual activity and urban immorality, Dorothy brought a spiritual presence in September 1805. At her relentless urging, “a number of the vilest sinners” who “were polluted as the ‘Woman of Samaria’” turned out to hear her message of salvation (124). Her weeping, entreaties for change, and dire forewarnings at their continued licentiousness characterized her “melting testimony” (124). Later, she wrote to her sisters Sarah and Catharine Ripley in her hometown of Whitby, that “[I] took [as] my text, Come see a man, which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?” The women, she wrote, listened assiduously and some even responded positively to her aggressive evangelism. Whether the prostitutes followed through on their promises to repent Dorothy did not reveal; however, she noted with satisfaction and relief that during the following week the “[play]house was taken down” (124), and she “was glad to hear [of its demise] . . . for it appeared to me as a sink of iniquity, where many base crimes had been committed” (124). Unfortunately for Dorothy’s aims, the theatre later reopened under new ownership and management.667

Of particular concern to Dorothy was the often-unavoidable tendency of impoverished women to resort to sexual deviation or deception as a remedy to their destitute state. Some women set up “disorderly houses” or “bawdy houses,” providing a gathering place for the poorer patrons. Bawdy houses sold cheap liquor, sported dancing, and encouraged high times. In some cases, they evolved into near brothels, catering to sexual appetites, indulging male rowdiness, and renting rooms to prostitutes.

Dorothy wrote, “There is one class of mortals whom I feel for beyond all others in this world, and this is females who are lost to all sense of honour, virtue, and shame; having debased their minds below the brute creation” (Address 5-6). Since these
pleasure-seekers rarely attended services on Sunday mornings, by necessity Dorothy went to them instead. She entered the squalid, debauched, and corrupt environs which they inhabited. Casting aside any measures for her own safety, Dorothy ministered to these fallen women in both public and private arenas in some of the most pitiable areas of town:

> I go where I will, I meet those in the streets; in the hospitals; in the workhouse; in the prisons; and sometimes I follow them to their private dwellings, where they are languishing in the most deplorable condition, without food, fire, clothes, or friends, save such direful creatures as themselves are, who can afford them no hope, no comfort, or bring salvation to them. I pity those, because many are depraved from infancy, by corrupt fathers, or mothers, who train them up in licentious practices, and they have no advantages whatever to bring themselves out of this pit of misery save one, the great Redeemer’s dying love, which they never think of (perhaps) till they can sin no longer, by reason of all their strength being spent in the shameful acts of uncleanness and night revellings [sic].

(Address 6)

During this time, Dorothy teamed up with another evangelist Johny Edwards, an independent preacher whom most labeled an enthusiast and some termed a charlatan. Together they peppered the Five Points streets with a fiery message of spiritual doom and redemption. Most notably, in 1810, Dorothy and Edwards led an outdoor revival in the Five Points area that “ended in mob violence.” In none of her works does Dorothy describe the events of the day, but a few historians have noted that the uproar caused by
the evangelists led city officials to enact stringent ordinances restricting street preaching. The law prevented “disorderly assemblies of persons in the City of New York.” Historian Diane Winston learned that Dorothy “sought to test the stricture [and] city officers dragged her off to jail.” Later, city officials amended their earlier stringency, modifying the law to allow licensed clergymen to preach in public after being granted official permission. “This compromise,” Winston remarked, “safeguarded religious tolerance while allowing officials to rebuff zealots with an incendiary message.” The incident joins a long list of attempts by religious and secular establishments to curtail Dorothy’s evangelistic efforts.

As usual, however, Dorothy emerged with an undampened strength of purpose, for she liberally chastised in her published works the spiritually lost who spent their days in pursuit of earthly pleasures, blithely forging paths of self-destruction. Usually she tempered her criticisms with the optimism of redemption, but in rare moments she focused on humankind’s excesses and the darkness of sin, lapsing into haunting depictions of the plight of the damned. The sheer power of her imagery seems reminiscent of such greats as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, as she conjured frightening depictions of sinners treading a cosmic precipice of disaster. Spelling their apocalyptic downfall, Dorothy warned, was “the odoriferous scent” marking the “toys that allure those minds” of the weak spirits (Bank 174). These souls “who lavish out their golden days, in search of what the sensualists call pleasure” helplessly “drown their cares, and sorrows, till deep remorse plunges them into despair, having no hope of immortality” (174). With great despondency, Dorothy “marked the fall of many such heroic sons who scorned to tread the lowly path of virtue” and “mock[ed] the silent
sorrow of the righteous with opprobrious language, not thinking he is adding fewel [sic] to consume himself” (174). She forewarned that a wide gulf separated these “voluptuous,” “heedless sinners” and the “self-denying Christians, who live for others, not themselves” (174-5). At “that awful conflagration” that posed such imminent threat, the godly ones’ “celestial bodies will pass unextinguished through the flames, which will consume our globe” even while the flames devoured “every proud daring one, who boasted of his wantonness, and refused the Yoke of Jesus Christ our Lord” (175).

**The Mission to America’s Unprotected Females**

As the nineteenth-century marched on, the gulf between urban wealth and poverty, the affluent and the indigent, the resourceful and the needy widened. As historian Richard Bushman noted, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, “polite society isolated itself more and more from the coarseness of ordinary city life.” America’s cities became staging grounds for capitalist development that created a class of elite, swelled the ranks of the laboring poor, and propelled urban migration. In turn, this metamorphosis ushered in gender and familial problems as well as class issues. At the heart of this change was the erosion of the traditional, colonial family structure of male provider and female homemaker. For many laboring families, the “disruption of household economies fostered new forms of insecurity: for women, uncertainties about men’s support and commitment; for men, the loss of accustomed kinds of authority within their households and workplaces.” As family livelihoods became less certain, women increasingly entered the labor force and men were forced to search farther and wider for work, and both were driven to the cities in attempts to find employment. As a
consequence, many women found themselves completely uprooted from their former lives. Falling on hard times with the declining fortunes of the men in the family, many women were deserted in the cities, solely responsible for hungry children, unemployed or earning substandard wages, and isolated from family and resources. War widows, sailors’ wives, the frail and infirm, destitute daughters of indigent mothers, divorcees, and abandoned, abused, or scorned women found themselves at the capricious mercy of urbanites who increasingly resented shouldering the burdens of the poor.

Dorothy’s work with these poor became a lifelong mission, and in particular, she cared for the impoverished women of the new Republic. Her works reveal a partiality for the young women trapped in a social and economic vice, leaving them vulnerable politically, financially, and sexually.

The despair and desperation characterizing the lives of the very poor can be glimpsed in an encounter in July 1805 when Dorothy shared her meager fortunes with a destitute woman and her three children because the more fortunate seemed unmoved by compassion. That summer night, as Dorothy took shelter at an inn following a ninety-six-mile stage ride northward to Utica, New York, “a poor woman” entered the public house. Obviously distraught, the woman begged the innkeeper for a “drink of water” for her children, but he summarily dismissed her. Feeling the spirit of her Lord direct her to assist the woman, Dorothy responded to the beggardedly family’s need:

My merciful Jesus bid me rise and carry this woman a glass of water, which I did immediately: and while I stood by her, a solemn awe clothed my mind, which when I sat down, affected my heart so much, that it seemed like a dagger run into me. I enquired of my Master Jesus what
ailed her, and He replied, that “She has no money, and thou must go and see in the yard for her.” I went directly, and saw her wringing her hands in the yard, crying out, “Whatever shall I do? Whatever shall I do?” “What is the matter with thee?” said I, to which she answered, “I am here a stranger, and know not any person, and I have not one shilling in the world, and have one hundred miles to go, to my husband, who is at a new plantation. I have come one hundred miles, where we have moved from, and yesterday I had my pocket-book, with my money; but have lost it, and yet I know not how or where!”

Whether the woman truly lost her purse or merely duped Dorothy with a clever ruse remains uncertain, but the compassionate missionary immediately sought to relieve the woman’s despair. As the woman completed her tale, Dorothy was called by the innkeeper to sit down to the evening meal. Dorothy’s dining companions consisted of “eight merchants, and one female,” and Dorothy approached the privileged group with details of the woman’s plight, fully expecting their immediate and unrestricted sympathy and response to her “arguments of wo, to alleviate the wretched situation of this poor woman, and her three children” (57). Much to her outraged dismay, the Americans proved insensitive to the woman’s exigency for, as Dorothy put it, “no impression could be made on any heart” (57). Moved by sympathy, Dorothy opened her own purse to the woman, sharing her unusual bounty of fifteen dollars, gifted to her by some female supporters where she had recently proselytized. Ever the evangelist, Dorothy also shared with the woman instructions for a godly life: “I can but tell thee of one Friend, and that is God; take this money, and He who has provided this for thee to-day, will provide for thee
to-morrow: trust in Him” (57). The woman must have been visually shocked by such a gesture from a woman as clearly poor as herself, for Dorothy commented that the woman looked “as much astonished as she could be” (57). With gratitude, the woman and her children disembarked from their wagon; with the money, both she and her children had a place of rest for the night.

For her readers’ benefit, Dorothy concluded her tale with a thankful prayer for His beneficence. In times of great need and woe, she wrote, He opened doorways to unexpected charity: “What a compassionate Friend is our Heavenly Father! and how mindful is he of all His creatures, who are scattered up and down over the earth! having always servants at hand, to do His Work for Him” (57-58).

In early nineteenth-century America, few opportunities for waged employment existed for women. Domestic service became the most common form of employment. Many poor women worked as “help,” performing the same household routines they had executed in their own homes during an earlier, more prosperous time. Other women took in lodgers in their boarding houses, letting transients sleep on the floor for a few pence a week. Women also found employment as laundresses, hawkers, street vendors or peddlers, seamstresses, midwives, fruiters, teachers, nurses, tailoresses, milliners, and tavern or coffeehouse keepers. According to Stansell, nearly three hundred women comprised about 15 percent of the total people employed in these occupations in 1805 in New York. 675

In addition to unemployment, single or impoverished women often suffered from a lack of protection that kin, neighbors, and community usually provided. Thus, they often found themselves vulnerable to men’s sexual propriety. As Stansell noted,
“Seduction, even debauchery, remained sources of male self-esteem in antebellum years,” and “being on one’s own was, in general, a very risky business.” Sexual exploitation and misogynistic abuse thrived in both the crude dwellings in the dark underbelly of the city and in the fancy shops along lighted boardwalks. Gentlemen rakes as well as working class thugs viewed women as targets for seduction and rape. Even when young women benefited from familial support the stakes were high. Opportunities for establishing and testing sexual boundaries flourished. Indeed, one favorite activity of courting couples was “bundling”—which allowed courting couples to sleep unchaperoned in the same bed. Often, the man proposed, in keeping with his expected social role. At other times, the blurred definitions of dating and romance opened dangerous doors for forced sex in courtship.

Equally horrific to Dorothy was the harm that sexually vulnerable women and hapless victims of unscrupulous males inflicted on themselves or others:

There are many beautiful women also betrayed by false lovers, or enchanters, [sic] who follow their prey till they are ensnared with their delusive baits and then they seek revenge upon innocent youths, or any whom they can drag to their secret dens of filthiness, where shamelessly in the sight of God, they abuse themselves, who are designed to be His sacred temples for the Holy Ghost to dwell in for ever, to fill them with celestial pleasures. (Address 6)

Separating itself from the plethora of tales about women falling sexual victim to amoral men was the infamous case of Juliana Elmore “Ellen” Sands, New York’s first murder mystery. Deceived, abused, and allegedly murdered by a deceptive lover, Sands
became the focus of a story producing mass and lurid excitement and creating an urban legend.

The physically attractive Sands disappeared on Dec. 29, 1799, her body discovered four days later in a well. An inquest determined she had been murdered, and her reputed fiancé, Levi Weeks, became the chief suspect in the crime. The young Sands had fixed her marital hopes on Weeks while he boarded in her Quaker family’s home. The couple reportedly had consummated their courtship many times before, and the family presumed the sexual activity presented proof of the pair’s commitment to marry. According to legend, Weeks arranged to meet Sands late one night, luring her with the promise of wedlock. Dressed in her bridal clothes in anticipation of her elopement, Sands “fell a sacrifice to his indignity, which has marked his life with infamy” (Bank 179). The murdered Sands, still clad in her wedding dress, was pulled ten days later from the bottom of a well of the Manhattan Water Works.

. . . The Sands murder also became a magnet for popular fantasies and fears. Hundreds of people came to view the girl’s body; rumors swirled about the murderer’s identity and the details of the killing; peddlers hawked handbills which conjured up “ghouls and goblins . . . dancing devils . . . accounts of witchcraft . . . strange and wonderful prophecies.”

The murderer’s escape from worldly punishment compounded public outrage and fueled Dorothy’s indignation, especially as a relative of the slain girl was a beloved friend and supporter of Dorothy’s. Fully believing in Weeks’ guilt, Dorothy decried the court’s decision of not guilty, believing a crafty, “earthly Barrister” (179) permitted Weeks to circumvent justice. To the female evangelist, nothing less than divine
retribution was in motion when the defense attorney met an untimely demise. During open court, Dorothy’s friend had testified that, since the crafty barrister had “let the guilty go free, the blood of the innocent shall be upon thy head” (179). Dorothy recorded in her narrative that the attorney and his son were killed shortly thereafter in two duels.

Of course, Dorothy referred to the eminent Alexander Hamilton and his son. The elder Hamilton, along with his own killer Aaron Burr and Brockholst Livingston, served as defense attorneys for Weeks in what one historian described as “one of the greatest criminal trials in New York history.” The defendant won acquittal before a session of the Court of Oyer and Terminer in the spring of 1800. Authorities never determined who caused Sands’ death, although the contention was advanced and denied that the woman suffered from melancholia. Weeks reportedly “lived out his life under the burden of gossip and suspicion that never entirely died away.”

Five years later, just before quitting New York City for a southward journey, Dorothy delivered a public address by the well where the atrocity occurred, near the present juncture of Spring and Greene Streets. The appointment, arranged by a friend, was one of the few times Dorothy exhibited a keen disinclination to address the people. She later wrote of the “solemn, awful time, which made me almost desire death before the hour” of her homily (180). She felt

so sensible of the presence of the spirit of the murdered young woman, that I knew not how to support myself, for three hours previous to my opening my mouth! Which was occasioned by an oppressive sickness, that I could not have sustained under, unless the Lord had mercifully aided me in proclaiming, the man who had been the murderer of this dear blooming
creature, should be as Cain, “A fugitive and vagabond” on the earth; and marked with God’s vengeance. (180)

Accordingly, Dorothy took as her text the idea “if thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,” which Dorothy identified as the “language of the Father to Cain before he slew his righteous brother Abel” (180).

Despite her preceding hours of sorrow and despair at the murdered girl’s plight, Dorothy’s delivery and message proved one of extraordinary inspiration and power.

Stirred by the Spirit, she rejoiced that her mouth was as a trumpet, for the Voice of my master Jesus to speak through in this my day; there being present many of the spirit of Cain, who persecute the nature of righteous Abel, who was a Type of Jesus, the Son of the Living God, who excites all to holiness, by His Obedience to the Righteous Laws, that were broken, not only by Cain, but also this hypocritical deceiver, who had pretended to take this innocent woman to marry; but prepared a watery grave; where she was concealed for twelve days, before her death was clearly brought to light. (180)

The horrific story notwithstanding, Dorothy felt the strong response of the crowd, their spirits “being revived” and the minds previously closed against her being “awakened” (180). Dorothy concluded with a prophesy that referred to both the murdered girl and herself: “I expect [many there] will remember a poor pilgrim as long as they continue on earth” (180).

The Sands case demonstrates the dangerous sexual territory that unprotected women trod in the early nineteenth century. Even as they rejoiced in the newfound
freedom and mobility created by weakened social strictures and financial independence, they also became more vulnerable to male entrapment and abandonment.

Perhaps Dorothy’s zeal to assist unprotected and defenseless females stemmed from her awareness that their situation mirrored her own. Many times, she deflected the unwelcome, lecherous attentions of men thinking to take liberties with a lone female. The alarm Dorothy experienced on these occasions—usually occurring during her travels through the isolated wilderness that still dominated the American landscape—coalesced into an empathetic commiseration for females equally powerless before a physically, legally, and culturally superior male. The “heavy trial” of fending off male advances qualified me more abundantly to feel for the unprotected females, who are frequently compelled to yield up their chastity to the base passions of sordid minds, whose delight is the ruin of every virtuous woman, to their shame, which they will boast of in the sight of God and man; but these base miscreants will find judgment without mercy, where their passions will torment them according to the indulgence of their sensual desires while in the flesh . . . . (EC 71)

Dorothy, however, was no stranger to violence. Although reared in the relatively tranquil home of a Methodist preacher, Dorothy nevertheless deliberately placed herself in turbulent situations. She often accompanied her father as he ministered to the sick and poor whose wretched living conditions were exacerbated by domestic and social violence.

The most traumatic of these occasions transpired “in the morning of” Dorothy’s life (Address 6). On her way to worship services in Whitby at seven on a Sunday
morning, the 20-year-old Dorothy encountered a group of raucous, intoxicated sailors who had just stripped, tarred, and feathered a beautiful girl (6). The unfortunate victim “had been the means of bringing some of them into great suffering,” one of the sailors having been “hung for stealing on her account” (6). The woman’s downfall came after she, being a stranger in Whitby, went “into a house that she knew not was of ill-fame” and became embroiled in schemes to manipulate and rob unsuspecting victims (6).

Dorothy’s mother, witnessing the unfolding atrocity, discarded all caution for her own safety and confronted the twenty inebriated sailors, demanding the brutalized woman’s release. Dorothy, who had watched horror-stricken from a hiding spot along a side street, recalled the scene with agonizing clarity more than thirty-four years later:

[The girl’s] groans were so penetrating to my soul, in the street, that I had no power to move further, till the inhuman youths threw her bundle of clothes at the request of my honourable mother, who heard her dismal cries; but knew not that her daughter was standing between the men and woman as a screen to hide her shame, while I lifted up my eyes to Heaven, and asked, Why is this not me Lord? But for thy grace, O God! this might have been me! In this humble state of mind, I became servant to this miserable female, helping to dress her in a passage close by, while I remained dumb in her sight; and I must acknowledge that I spent the day in weeping, lamentation, and wo! wo! wo! Whenever I have thought of this circumstance, I have been thankful to my Creator, that my heart was filled with mercy, which made me servant to one, whom Jesus Christ died for before she was born. (7)
Her newfound solidarity with vulnerable women enabled her to perceive a common enemy—immoral men. Since that time, Dorothy “visited thousands of unprotected women of this description, and many I hope of penitents, will meet me in Heaven, who found Jesus to be their Balm of Gilead when all hope was gone” (7). Her purpose in recounting the painful tale, she proclaimed, stemmed from a “hope [that] young females will take care where they make their home in villages, towns, and cities, when they leave their own places of abode; and avoid all company who would lead them into vice, by seeking the help of God Almighty, who is every where to protect such as desire to love, serve, and obey their Maker” (7).

From the incident, Dorothy also learned of the impetus behind fallen women’s solicitation of younger women into the business of prostitution, robbery, and deception. “Some women who have been deceived, not only delight to avenge themselves of men; but, delight to ensnare children, from the tender age of seven, to seventeen. What can be done for such vile persons? Who can pity such, who delight to plunge others into the ruin they have fallen into!” (7-8). Even while these women stirred her pity and despair at their ruined lives, she sternly admonished them that they too would be judged by the same avenging God who wreaked havoc on the heads of their own ensnarers:

Here, I would observe, that God has all your iniquities in store, to condemn you at the last, when your frolicking days will be no more, if you do not repent, forsake your sins, and turn speedily to God, to seek salvation through the Great Redeemer’s merit, who died in your stead. I advise you to think timely, ere you are in the burning lake: for it is positively declared by, “Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, I
will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh, shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death. (Address 7-8)

Only by their repentance could the women ultimately save themselves. The Revelations passage that Dorothy chose for her illustration specified that those who “overcometh” the miserable hand dealt to them in this life would inherit an everlasting life that fully compensated for their earthly woes.

Dorothy well understood the challenges of remaining virtuous in an age of increasingly relaxed morals, poverty, displacement, and perversity. In particular, she realized the inability of slave women to protect their virtue since they were the legal chattel of their abusers. She believed that their vulnerabilities began at tender ages, since slave children were rarely clothed in the warmer months. The practice saved the slaveholder money otherwise spent on clothing and shoes, but also served to desensitize whites to the humanity of black children. Her introduction to the denial of basic human needs to slave children came in July 1802 when evangelizing in Fauquier Courthouse, Virginia:

On our way I had seen five or six wretched children naked, from the age of two years up to nine, who were boys and girls; and I was told that some [slaves] were not clothed till they could work for themselves. This was a shocking sight to me, and sufficient to affect my heart, although many will
say to me, “They are happier than you are, why do you distress yourself about them?” Why do I? because a gracious God leads me to feel for them—weep for them—and pray in faith also for them; that they may be blessed with the same blessings which are poured down upon my head and others, who groan in spirit with me for their redemption from sin and thralldom of the oppressors. (EC 77)

When Dorothy later witnessed the nakedness of slaves being readied for sale, she realized the similarities in their dehumanizing situations. Begun in infancy, and continuing throughout their adulthood, slaves’ nakedness became a metaphor for their invulnerability. Just as they were unprotected from the elements, so too were they legally exposed to their masters’ whims. This became degradingly true for slave women.

In light of her revelation, she always made a point of cautioning young black women not to succumb to the allure of a provocative lifestyle. In particular, she advised young free black women to refrain from visiting questionable, yet popular haunts, such as the theatre. In their message to the black congregation of Richard Allen’s Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia, Dorothy and Quaker minister and abolitionist Arthur Howell warned the young black women to avoid the evil and danger of the theatre, which Howell termed “Satan’s school” (Bank 191). Dorothy and Howell feared the women “were liable to be led away through the deceitfulness of the white men, who would polute [sic], and make their shame appear in a short time to their sorrow” (191). The two preachers advised the black congregation to remember “the situation they were in fifty years ago, when men, women, and children were put in one mass naked together, to be exposed for sale to them who were disposed to give the most for them” (190-91).
Likewise, Dorothy recognized the formidable barriers to poor white women in maintaining their chastity. Dorothy despaired for women who fell victim to the twin pitfalls of beauty and vanity. In separate cautions in her works, Dorothy warned women of the danger of investing too much importance on their physical looks, fretting at her repeated encounters with women who “set an improper estimate on favour” (97). Dorothy counseled her female readership that beauty in the eyes of the Lord, rather than man, represented the only true goal for a virtuous woman. She quoted the proverbial description of a worthy woman: “Respecting the virtuous woman, favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates” (EC 97). She instructed women to strive for “beauty of the mind, which is neither vain nor liable to fade away” (97). A pureness of mind and heart, manifested in “works of faith, love hope, and obedience,” reflected “God’s glory, stamped by his power” and emphasized “fear of the Lord, and not man” (97). With such beauty, Dorothy promised her female readers, they would be created “anew in his beauteous mould, that fashions according to his glory for ever” (97).

**The Mission to Rose Butler**

The poor of every class I feel for, wherever I come, knowing the many disadvantages their lives are exposed to, especially when their line of inheritance is to be born of irreligious parents, who neither fear the Lord nor regard man: but, our Heavenly Father, has placed them thus: well, let it be remembered, although they are the prey of the servile; and despised
by the ungodly upper ranks of mortals, the Redeemer gave His life for them, that they might be restored from their degraded state, and comforted with His joyful presence, when the lost are found of Him, and those dead in trespasses are quickened by His Almighty power and sovereign grace.

(Address 2)

In her work with poor young women, Dorothy found, to her dismay, that one of the most powerful agents of their subordination was “respectable” white women, ones who wielded their superior economic and class status as a means of subjugating politically weak females. With the ever-widening gulf between affluent and working women, the friction between the two groups not only became inevitable but also prolific.

A poignant example of these class struggles among the female gender is the tragic case of Rose Butler, a young black New Yorker who was tried and executed in 1819 for the attempted arson of her mistress’s home. Like many of her day—and since—Dorothy took a particular interest in Rose, whom she met on July 8, 1819, the day prior to the woman’s execution.

Still incarcerated at New York City’s Bridewell prison, Rose was to have met her doom a month earlier on June 11, but a last-minute reprieve from Governor DeWitt Clinton granted her temporary clemency. However, no respite came on July 9 when she was publicly executed on a makeshift gallows at the Potter’s Field. She became the last person hanged in New York City for the crime of arson, the electric chair introduced as the promised solution to what The New York Times called “the barbarities, the inhumanities of hanging.”
The beginning of Rose’s end occurred years earlier in the fast-paced world of a changing turn-of-the-century New York. The commercial and industrial revolution of the city was rivaled only by its gregarious lifestyle. Bawdy houses, theatres, dance halls, and taverns lined the streets in a panoramic display that helped spawn a youth culture of sexual and commercial pleasures. Characterizing the age was a new group of young, single women who earned their livings outside the household setting, putting money of their own making into their pockets for the first time. “Patriarchal controls over young women’s leisure, time, earnings and sexuality weakened accordingly,” asserted Stansell. In many ways, these women, departing from a centuries-old pattern of dependent female moving from household of the parent to the household of a mate, found themselves simultaneously liberated and vulnerable. The special promise and allure of rowdy pastimes in what essentially remained a rough maritime town spelled doom for many of these young, impressionable girls.

Such was the case of Rose Butler.

After a week of work, Rose joined her friends for frolic and amusement. Often, this involved excursions to the countryside by mixed parties of men and women. These trips included Sunday ferry rides to Long Island, boat trips on the East River, and carriage rides to the rural retreats of northern Manhattan. These jaunts, of course, required money, something always in short supply for Rose. And, just as contemporary journalist Mercer Berger had accused her, Rose resorted to thievery. She pinched money from her mistress’s purse to pay for the outings, once even stealing enough to take some friends carriage riding. Another time, on the Fourth of July, she “went with some girls, on board the steam-boat, on a party of pleasure, and paid the charges,” and spent the
remainder at a bawdy house “on a frolic.” In her chronicle of her descent into crime, Rose admitted, “It was in this manner I squandered away the money I had stolen—in frolicking and rioting in the dance-houses and other places.”

The harsh conditions facing poor females in New York were magnified for black women such as Rose. After the Revolution, many rural black women, faced with the necessity of supporting themselves, migrated to northern towns and cities where work could be found more easily. However, most former slaves and indentured servants found their standard of living little improved, and few opportunities emerged to raise that standard. Under both slavery and freedom, women worked from dawn to dusk, usually as domestic servants. According to Stansell, while most employed white women worked in neighborhoods, black women were more likely to find employment in the households of the elite. “. . . Slave owning at the turn of the century was still sufficiently widespread to make the black skin of a servant, either freedperson or slave, a sign of the employers’ (or owners’) influence.”

The inferior wages paid to women meant that, despite the long hours, few earned enough to do more than exist from payday to payday. As one New York charity observed in 1817, “The great disproportion which exists between the prices of labor of men and women is a matter of serious regret.” Few black women boasted the resources to move into their own homes, forcing them to live in the houses where they labored. Further, as a means of controlling behavior, many whites insisted that their servants reside in their homes, making it a condition of employment. Essentially, they were confined to their owners’ homes during both work and leisure hours, for most recreational activities required money.
For women like Rose Butler, looking toward imminent emancipation, their freedom would little change the daunting work and living responsibilities.696 And, like so many other poor working women, Rose chafed against the tight supervision, substandard salaries, and excessive hours. The ever-widening gulf between mistress and servant gave rise to the archetype of “the lady of the house,” who acted as household manager and ensured that those “beneath” her performed their duties properly. These heightened racial and class tensions naturally led to resentment from the servant and arrogance from the employer. Rose complained that her mistress “was always finding fault with my work, and scolding me.”697 With working conditions so trying and cultural definitions of the free black woman becoming so restrictive, the relaxed ethics behind Rose’s treatment of her mistress become more easily understood.

So too does the mistress’s response to Rose’s entreaties to visit her in Bridewell prison, as she awaited execution. Her employer refused to enter the prison, nor would she deign to respond to her former servant’s apologies and pleas for forgiveness. “. . . I was very sorry that she would not come to see me when I sent for her,” Rose confided to Dorothy (4). Instead of dwelling on the white woman’s refusal to forgive, Dorothy turned Rose’s thoughts to administering forgiveness rather than receiving it: “I said, ‘Canst thou forgive thy mistress who sent thee here?’ Rose answered, ‘I forgive every one, and hate nobody’” (4). Dorothy reassured Rose that, in lieu of her former mistress, she and Abigail Eames had been sent by God: “Well, thou seest the Lord has sent us instead; and I know thy heart was hard; for I never had faith to believe for thee, and come to see thee, till yesterday” (4).
The notoriety surrounding Rose’s circumstance, both then and now, points to the racial tensions underscoring national and penological history. In the nineteenth century, Rose’s infamy highlighted white anxieties that black people would be lawless when slavery ended. Today, modern historians often utilize Rose’s case as a springboard for discussion of the legal system’s treatment of people of color. Her actions and subsequent penalty for those actions spotlight both black rebelliousness and bitterness that white New Yorkers feared and the class inequalities that helped to fuel that frustration.

Part of the problem stemmed from Rose’s uncertain position in a swiftly changing world. She was neither slave nor freed woman, neither an indigent nor middle class, neither accepted nor totally rejected by legal or societal conditions. And, in fact, many people then and now seem confused in any effort to classify Rose who lived during the transition period between slavery and freedom in New York. Modern historians alternately refer to Rose as slave, indentured servant, and free woman.\textsuperscript{698} Born after the emancipation law had been passed, Rose was obligated to serve an indenture for 25 years before she could claim her rights to freedom. Tragically enough, that freedom seemed within her grasp, only six years’ distance from the time of her execution.

Some contemporary accounts label Rose as more than a simple arsonist and thief, but rather place her within a wide theft ring encompassing freed blacks, indentured servants, and whites. “Apparently, for most of her short life she had stolen from whites to whom she was indentured and had fenced certain items to at least one Black accomplice,” noted historians Edna Greene Medford and Emelyn L. Brown.\textsuperscript{699} “Her failure to escape capital punishment probably resulted as much from her refusal to name the accomplices to her thefts than the crimes themselves.”\textsuperscript{700} The New York Evening Post reported in its
July 9 issue that Rose “was respited for a few days [via a governor’s stay], in the hope that she would disclose some accomplice in her wickedness,” but at her stubborn silence to point to someone else, “was executed yesterday at two o’clock near the Potter’s Field.”

In connection with the arson case, authorities had pressured Butler to name two white men, accomplices who facilitated her thefts and allegedly burned the house to the ground while Butler sat in jail, “apparently in an attempt to deflect suspicion from her.” Rose herself corroborated the involvement of others in the arson, telling Dorothy on the day of her execution that, while she considered herself guilty, so were others who had orchestrated her criminal activities: “I do not think that I was so much to blame as them who put me up to it; for I was young and ignorant; but never mind. Justice will find them out as well as me someday. I did set fire to it; I am not going to deny it, and tell a lie about it” (Account 4-5).

Butler’s catastrophic end occurred months before her hanging in the potter’s field in July 1819. She had been arraigned, tried, and convicted of setting fire to her mistress’s home. In actuality, her failed attempt to burn the house only consumed three steps of the stairwell where she had scattered hot coals. One New Yorker, Charles H. Haswell, described Rose’s crime and punishment in colorful early nineteenth-century language: “In July Rose Butler, a negro wench who had been convicted of arson (inasmuch as she had maliciously set fire to some combustible materials under a stairway, which was readily discovered and extinguished) was publicly hanged in Potter’s Field.”

Dorothy’s An Account of Rose Butler (1819) generally resembles the structure and themes common to execution sermons, a genre that accounted for much of the
published writing of the colonial and post-revolutionary years. Samuel Danforth’s *The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into* (1674) and Increase Mather’s *The Wicked mans Portion* (1675) are recognized as the first “execution sermons” of the New World, a combination of the offender’s confession with the warning of eternal doom. Mather’s *A Sermon Occasioned by the Execution of a Man found Guilty of Murder* (1686) expanded the literary form by including the complete confession of condemned murderer James Morgan, who used the occasion to caution the public that his execution be “a warning to you all.” The second edition of *A Sermon* (1687) added a discussion between the prisoner and minister, designed to introduce a greater degree of realism. Emotional extravagance laced them all.

The sermons in this genre generally underscored the dramatic conversion of the condemned, which Jonathan Edwards outlined as a three-stage process: fear, angst, and sorrow at one’s wickedness followed by total subjugation to and reliance on the “sovereign mercy of God in Jesus Christ” and finally relief from suffering under conviction of sin and ecstasy at being accepted by God. The Great Awakening and subsequent revivalism emphasized this process and focused on execution sermons as a form of spiritual confession, and the sermon became the focal point of worship either the Sunday or Thursday prior to the execution, or more frequently, as the headliner of the execution event itself. However, a subtle change occurred after the Revolution. Rather than a sole focus on religious arguments that sought to justify the death penalty, deter crime, and reconcile the sinner to God, a new element reflected the changed direction of societal concerns for the common good and preservation of liberty and property. As
legal justifications for executions began to creep into these sermons, the more altruistic components correspondingly faded away.

Even while Dorothy’s account remains didactic, utilizing some of the rhetorical strategies common to early and later execution sermons, hers also stands apart in its sensitive rendering of the condemned’s final days. Dorothy’s interpretation, while still addressing the religious and even legal elements characteristic of execution sermons, reveals its author’s goal to paint a portrait of not only a repentant sinner but also a contrite citizen. Unlike typical execution sermons which paid little attention to motive or catalysts to the crime, Dorothy’s account attempts to explain Rose’s criminal actions through psychological means. Thus, her sensitive account of a woman performing the rituals prefacing imminent death seeks an emotional and sympathetic response from her readership. She attempts not only to convince readers to turn from their own sinful ways but also to sway them toward a harsher view of the death penalty. To emphasize this, Dorothy underpins her tale by reprinting published articles emphasizing the inhumanity of capital punishment.

When Dorothy first visited Rose, she found the younger woman crippled with fear and dread. Although a doctor had been summoned to attend her, Rose admitted to Dorothy, “I believe it was nothing but my burthen of sins that was the cause of my sickness; but I did not know what was the matter with me” (Account 3). Eager to relieve both the woman’s physical and spiritual pain, Dorothy ministered to the girl for the remainder of the day, alternately praying and counseling her. Before Dorothy quit the Bridewell to return to her lodgings that night, she and Rose made a pact: “I agreed with her to pray all the last night at home, if she would in prison” (3). By praying in concert
with Rose, Dorothy established a vital link that helped ease Rose’s emotional, if not physical, separation from the rest of humanity. When the day of execution dawned, Rose appeared “resigned and ready to meet her fate like a lamb,” and more readily responded to Dorothy’s conversation (4). Rose testified to the emotional release triggered by the joint prayer: “I have sat up most of the night, and I felt lighter, and my burthen go off at twelve o’clock. I fell into a doze when I lay down at day-break; and I thought I heard beautiful singing this morning” (3).

The evangelist continued her counseling for the remainder of the day. For the next seven hours, Dorothy stayed at the prisoner’s side, praying three times, assisting her with final preparations, and assuring her of eternal reward.

The hanging itself comprised part of a larger ritual including a procession to the gallows, an official sermon, and a final speech by the condemned. “Hanging day was a dramatic portrayal, in which everyone could participate, of the community’s desire to suppress wrongdoing,” noted penology historian Stuart Banner. A prolonged event of up to several hours, the ceremony began at the jail that housed the prisoner. In a last bit of vanity, female prisoners usually liked to look their best for their executions. When they could afford it, many bought or made a new outfit; for those too poor, friends, townsfolk, or even the sheriff often would provide them with new clothes. Often they donned special robes for the occasion, such as that worn by Rose on her execution day. Her “shroud,” drawn over her own clothes, consisted of a “long white robe, drawn round her neck, and tied with black ribbons behind and before” (5).

Rose donned her shroud just moments before her departure from the Bridewell at one in the afternoon. Shortly before that time, Dorothy and Sheriff James L. Bell
gathered in Rose’s cell, and they formed a compassionate team in overseeing Rose’s final preparations. The sheriff, proving uncommonly kind to his youthful inmate, provided physical comfort while Dorothy, troubled for the state of Rose’s soul, bestowed spiritual comfort. After helping the prisoner to dress, Dorothy reassured Rose that “the merciful Jesus would array her soul also with the robe of His righteousness; for He was offered up a sin-offering to complete her sanctification” (5). When the sheriff put the halter on Rose’s neck, Dorothy consoled her, “Jesus was bound for thee” (5). When the sheriff placed the gallows cap on Rose’s head, “trembling while he fixed it,” Dorothy proclaimed to Rose, “Jesus had a crown of thorns stuck into his temples” (5). The sheriff elected not to bind Rose until “the time was at hand when we must leave the prison” (5). When he did step forward to fasten cords around Rose’s wrists, the visibly distraught Dorothy burst out, “Don’t tie her tight,” and the sheriff solicitously inquired, “Rose, does it hurt you?” (5) The sheriff also provided a coach for the travel to Potter’s Field, granting the condemned woman his permission to “take any of your friends with you” (5). When so many stepped forward to accompany Rose to the gallows, more than could fit in the single coach, he provided an additional one. In a final humane gesture, he gave Rose a “piece of a fine orange,” and Dorothy highlighted the positive moment in the otherwise ominous occasion: “Rose, the Lord is very good to thee to give thee such kind friends, and a coach to ride in, to which she answered, ‘Yes; for I thought that I should have to ride in a cart there’” (7). Dorothy’s description of the events, while highlighting how the sheriff-missionary team served Rose’s final needs, also brings Rose’s humanity into sharp relief. In this way, Dorothy humanized the faceless prisoner to her spatially and emotionally distant readership.
As was typical at hangings, a large crowd accompanied Rose on her journey from the jail to the execution site. The sheriff and his deputies, several ministers, a visiting physician, the deputy keepers of the prison, and Dorothy filled the two carriages that Sheriff Bell supplied.

In a benevolent effort to relieve the terror of the condemned, authorities sometimes administered a sedative to the prisoners, and Rose’s attending physician dispensed several doses of medication intended to “create in her an insensibility to her woe” (11). However, despite the heavy sedation, or possibly because of it, Rose keenly felt the import of the moment: “My head feels wild,” she told the physician. For just such reason, the masses generally frowned on the condemned’s sedation. As Dorothy noted, “many would have been incensed against her, by obtaining mercy” (11), for such insensibility not only insulated the prisoner from a full exposure to the penalty for stepping outside legally acceptable boundaries but it also threatened to hamper the masses’ thorough enjoyment of the day’s entertainment.

Apprised beforehand of the time and route of the procession and hoping for a closer look at the prisoner, spectators often lined the trail to the gallows. At the execution’s staging area, a larger crowd awaited. On the afternoon of Rose’s execution, a curious throng lined Broadway Street, as “old and young were in the broiling sun” of the July afternoon (6). Thousands more perched in windows, doors, trees, and even on rooftops in order to get a better view of Rose as her processional moved down Broadway. When she saw the massive crowd gathered, Rose seemed surprised by the numbers who had turned out to see her die. She exclaimed to those in the carriage, “What a sight of people have come to see one woman! O what a dust there is!” (6). An execution alone
was enough to stir great interest, but the rare sight of a woman being hanged proved an extraordinary event indeed. According to Dorothy, and corroborated by the New York Daily News, more than 10,000 spectators turned out to see Rose meet her doom that July afternoon. Of such proportions was the crowd that day that it ranked among the largest that New Yorkers—indeed, Americans—had ever seen. Just five years later, a record fifty thousand onlookers turned out to see murderer John Johnson hanged in New York City, and a further five years later another thirty thousand gathered to see Jesse Strang hanged in Albany, New York. Execution crowds far outnumbered those gathered for any other purpose.

The size of crowds attending the festivities of a hanging posed a dilemma for city leaders. “Hangings had to be in open spaces that could accommodate several thousand spectators, but they could not be so far from settled areas that mass attendance would be impractical.” In 1784, execution crowds trampled the property along Chatham Street and Tyron Row, causing residents to demand a remedy from the Common Council of the City of New York.

Perhaps Rose herself understood the morbid fascination of the public with executions. After all, she herself had been drawn to the sinister event, once joining a group of friends as they set off to a hanging. On the day of her own execution, Rose denied any fascination with the macabre affair. Dorothy asked, “I supposed if she had been as one of them, she would have gone too; but Rose replied, ‘No, I do not think that I should, for I never went but once, and then I was put up to it’” (6-7).

One reason executions proved so popular was the ability of spectators to participate in the gruesome event. Attendees in the back most likely could not see, much
less hear, the grisly drama played out on the scaffolds; however, those closer to the front “had a degree of contact with the condemned person that would be unimaginable today." A position near the scaffold enabled spectators to question the prisoner and sometimes receive an answer. Or, they could join in the hymn or prayer. Loved ones could take a final leave of the condemned. Sometimes onlookers could even inspect the body after the dead was pulled down.

Also accounting for the popularity of executions were the racy speeches and sermons delivered from the scaffold. In general, nineteenth-century public addresses rarely became indelicate; at executions, however, the risqué revelations of the condemned’s private life provided titillating glimpses into behavior that the general community rarely indulged. Often, the ministers’ sermons addressed the wicked, lurid, and erotic, which in turn prompted the ministers to persistently remind the crowd “that a hanging involved more than just entertainment.” The frequency of these reminders, claimed Banner, suggests that “the ministers themselves had some doubts about how the spectators were profiting from the event.”

Once at the gallows, the ceremony took a religious bend. After the sheriff read the death warrant, sometimes adding his own commentary, a worship service of sorts followed. One or more ministers delivered exhortations to the condemned in a final bid to secure repentance, after which the prisoner usually delivered a few final words, most often centered around a theme of repentance and redemption. Those on the scaffold typically led a prayer and sang hymns. Afterwards, a hood was lowered over the prisoner’s face, the executioner pulled the lever, and the condemned’s body dropped.
“The whole ceremony was public, outdoors, and as conspicuous as any event could possibly be.”\textsuperscript{721}

Penitence and salvation played important roles in the closing days of the prisoner’s life. Sometimes a long line of lay ministers, clerics, evangelists, and reformers paraded in and out of the cell. “A condemned person’s final days could thus lack time for what they were intended to accomplish—reflection on a life of crime and proper preparation for death.”\textsuperscript{722} In Rose’s case, in addition to Dorothy, “ministers of various professions enquired into her state, and prayed also with her that God would be gracious to her soul” (5). Four black preachers attended Rose, singing and praying “with great solidity, being much affected” (5).

As Banner observed, a fine line existed between Christian fellowship and curiosity, commiseration and badgering, compassion and moralizing, and nowhere could this be more evident than during the days immediately preceding the execution, when curiosity seekers and well-meaning (and sometimes, not so well-meaning) reformists encroached on the condemned’s solitude.\textsuperscript{723} As Dorothy recorded, “Many were concerned for [Rose], and had visited her before we went” (4). Besides ministers, many others often paraded through the prisoner’s cell. Virtually anyone from the public could visit, providing both comfort to the usually disconsolate felon and misery at the unending intrusions. As the time for the execution drew nearer, the numbers of visitors grew larger. “Many visitors badgered the condemned person for a confession, not to facilitate the criminal’s repentance but to provide gossip for themselves.”\textsuperscript{724}

The visiting ministers, who considered themselves indispensable advisors, sometimes presented the most formidable opponent to the condemned. Since repentance
required acknowledgement and declaration of one’s crime, clergy pressed the condemned to confess, “but for those who believed themselves to be innocent, such persistence felt more like accusation than comfort.”

On the ride to Potter’s Field on hanging day, one of the ministers in Rose’s carriage badgered the prisoner during her final moments:

“What [do you think] they did in Heaven?” answer, “I suppose they sing; and such like.” He added, “Do you think there is any sin there, Rose?”

“No, I do not think there is sin there!” she said. “Do you think there is any pride there?” Rose again answered, “No.” Rose, what do you think Heaven is like? said the preacher, to which she replied very discreetly, “I do not know.” (7)

Even Dorothy, whose pity toward Rose cannot be in doubt, plagued the prisoner for a full confession and forced the disconsolate woman to articulate her sins. Dorothy repeatedly needled Rose about her “hard heart,” believing that the younger woman could not achieve a full pardon of her sins without enunciating her guilt:

At another time, we asked her, ‘if she had not an heart that was hard?” she replied, “I know I had an hard heart, but it is not so hard as it was.” We enquired, “Rose how long since it was softer?” to which she answered, “Two weeks; and I am thankful that god put it into their hearts to get me a reprieve; for had I died then, I know I should have gone to hell.” (3-4)

Again on the morning of the execution, Dorothy subjected Rose to a battery of questions, all with well-meaning intentions, but certainly of a distressing nature to one who would be hanged in just a few hours: “I said, art thou willing to die? She said, “Yes.” Dost thou think it is just for thee to be hung? “yes,” she again said . . . How old art thou? answer,
“Nineteen.” (4-5). Rose’s exchange with Dorothy reveals the mind-set of the condemned woman and points to the ineffectiveness of such harrying from the ministers. Had Rose been executed on June 11 as originally planned, she would have gone to her grave unconverted. Only two weeks later did Rose express any interest or consolation in divine forgiveness, despite the constant stream of visitations from a bevy of ministers seeking to convert the unrepentant Rose Butler.

Perhaps this “hardness of heart” accounted for Rose’s rough reception by one insistent minister. Evidently, the clergyman deemed Rose insufficiently contrite for her transgressions against her former mistress and her dissolute life, for he took a particularly harsh stand with her, pronouncing “You are sure to go to hell” (4). More than likely this was Rev. John Stanford, the city-paid cleric for New York’s almshouse, Bridewell, and state prison. Because of his sustained contact with the city’s incarcerated, Stanford certainly had accrued knowledge, wherewithal, and possibly desensitization in dealing with hardened criminals. Whoever the unidentified clergyman was, Dorothy freely criticized the man’s “want of faith,” for she doubted any agent of God would spurn the surest means to Rose’s salvation (4). While not one to shy away from utilizing the threat of God’s wrath as incentive for recantation of sin, Dorothy was clearly appalled that a minister would employ that approach with the condemned. To Dorothy, such a minister surely seemed more misguided meddler than affective advisor. So “grieved” was Rose by the minister’s insensitivity, that she vowed, “I do not think he is fit to preach; for he is not a gospel minister” (4). Rose much preferred the kindhearted words of a minister identified only as “Mr. Strong,” a more compassionate holy man who prayed “better than him, for he speaks so comfortably to me, and encourages me” (4). Most likely, this was
the Rev. Nathan Strong, a Congregational minister of great influence in his day, who grew to disapprove of the macabre entertainment to be had at public executions even while he considered them a necessary evil. As Strong told a mob during an execution sermon in 1777, “curiosity is but a poor motive for collecting on such an occasion—the person who can go and look on death, merely to gratify an idle humour, is destitute both of humanity and piety.”

Unfortunately for Rose, Stanford’s municipal position accorded him the opportunity to deliver the official sermon on execution day. Stanford held court outside the prison doors, directing his execution sermon to “the unfortunate female” who was “destined immediately to suffer an execrable death” (18). His callous oration, delivered immediately preceding the trek to the gallows, castigated Rose as being “in the bloom of life, loaded with crime, insensible of her state, and now ready to plunge into an awful eternity!” (18-19). The nightmarish speech, with its allusions to the eternal fires of damnation awaiting her, caused Rose to grow weak in the knees. “I supported poor Rose,” Dorothy later recalled, “for she had scarcely strength to stand till he finished his mission by prayer” (6). In the address, Stanford summed up the nation’s fear of the crime of first-degree arson and why it—alone of all felonies—reaped the same secular punishment as the crime of murder:

The crime of Arson, or burning, for which she is to suffer, is estimated to be more malignant than that of murder. For, a man meeting his enemy, drawing his sword, and piercing his fellow’s heart, only affects the life of that individual; but, the crime of burning, not only meditates the death of an enemy, but involves the unconscious, innocent family, in one common
conflagration; and at the same time, not unfrequently hazards the lives and property of an whole neighbourhood. (18)

Despite the fact that Rose failed to inflict significant property damage and to jeopardize lives, the courts found her guilty by virtue of her intent rather than success. Yet Stanford found her guilty of an even greater crime against “her offended God” and implored Him to “grant her mercy and pardon” for her actions and “graciously prepare her soul for the dreadful scene” (19).

In addition to arsonist, Stanford criticized Rose as an ungrateful bonded servant who flouted the freedom imminently offered by a state which recently abolished slavery. The ingratitude expressed in her actions toward the white family who owned her—and by extension the white-controlled state—spurred Stanford’s next comments:

The wings of the Constitution of America are extended to defend and to foster the property, the liberties, and the lives of all its citizens, without exception. In this inestimable privilege, our fellow-citizens of color enjoy a mutual share with us; and this unquestionably should dictate to them a correspondent spirit of gratitude and the practice of every social virtue. It is therefore deeply to be regretted that persons of color should either envy or attempt to destroy the safety and comfort to which we are justly entitled. We cannot but sincerely wish that the present example now to be made by this ignominious death of this unhappy young female, may create a due impression upon the mind of every class of citizens, whether black or white, and deter them from the commission of such atrocious [sic] and destructive crimes. (18)
The weakened Rose required support to get into the carriage. Dorothy ascended into the vehicle first and held one of Rose’s arms while an officer held the other. Together, they assisted Rose into the coach, where the doctor and officer flanked her and the minister Strong and Dorothy faced her. Dorothy’s friend Abigail Eames accompanied the four black ministers in the second carriage.

Later, as the execution processional moved down Broadway and the multitude became visible to those in the carriage, Stanford’s hopes of pedagogical value in Rose’s tragedy seemed confirmed. He exclaimed, “You see, Rose, what a number you have brought out to look at you! Do you not wish them to be profited by your being made an example?”(6) With sin and its consequences at center stage, and the thousands of eyes trained on them, Stanford most likely saw the unparalleled opportunity for spectators to recognize their own precarious positions in a sinful world. And his goal seemed to have been accomplished, for Dorothy noted that Rose’s disposition “changed from perverseness to meekness, by the love of God at last” (6). Dorothy observed how the “tens of thousands [were] beholding how [Rose] would conduct” herself at the end.

By the time the procession traveled the mile and a half to Potter’s Field, the passengers “were covered with dust,” and Rose appeared ready to collapse, her lips bloodless, her skin clammy, and her throat dry and parched (6). Her pallor must have alarmed the attending physician, for he checked her pulse several times and twice ordered water for her, his eyes “brimful of tears” (7). Rose and Dorothy both drank from the doctor’s offering, and the female evangelist reminded her charge “of the Fountain above, by saying, ‘Rose, I hope we shall drink living water together in Heaven.’ She answered, ‘I hope so’” (7).
The sheriff, deputy, and one of the black ministers assisted Rose as she climbed the ladder to the hangman’s knot. Dorothy stood by Rose’s side while another black minister sang and prayed. The sheriff denied Dorothy’s request to remain there as Rose “was swung off, to launch her soul into Eternity” (8). Evidently, he feared Dorothy would fall with Rose because the trap door “would fall like a two-leaf table, to let her down; that she might swing round as an example to all the thousands that had come to pray for her; or gaze at her unfeelingly” (8). Bell untied the ribbons on Rose’s shroud and used them to bind her feet. He then “put the halter on the hook, and pulled her cap over her face” (8).

Dorothy bid the younger woman a final farewell, promising a repeat of the simultaneous prayers of the night before: if Rose would pray “Lord, receive my spirit” through the final moment, so too would Dorothy from just below the gallows. Rose agreed, and Dorothy proudly noted that she did so “without shedding one tear; with all the patience, or resignation of a fortified christian” (8).

After descending from the gallows, Dorothy fulfilled her promise to Rose, “shouting aloud for the Lord to receive her spirit; and continued praying till her soul was gone! or the struggle of nature was over!” (8) Once the body finished its death throes, the soldiers, some mounted on horses, fought to keep back the swarming multitude, and in turn, prevented Dorothy from immediately reaching Rose’s side or from delivering a post-execution sermon. Dorothy stayed as the body was cut down and put into a coffin, paying a last “respect to her lifeless clay” (8).

With the body removed, the crowd dispersed, city workers began dismantling the gallows, and the frenetic pace of New York City resumed. Despite the plethora of ministers, doctors, city officials, and other visitors who paraded through Rose’s cell in the
days preceding the execution, the aftermath held little attraction for them. No one appeared to conduct the burial of Rose Butler. The combination of Rose’s legal and spiritual condemnation, as perceived by the ministers displeased by Rose’s desultory confessions, meant “she was not counted worthy of burial service, after the manner of the day” (8). As a result, the responsibility of burial services fell to a willing Dorothy who “committed her body to the ground, by supplication, in faith and hope, that God would raise it at the last” (8).

Burial took place in the same city green where Rose was executed: the Potter’s Field, “where lay the bones and ashes of strangers, of almost all nations; who had died in the yellow fever” (7) and which today makes up Washington Square Park. The prevailing anatomy and pathology practices of the day caused Dorothy to fret that Rose’s body would be stolen. Before cadavers were legally available for dissection and study by medical students, the illicit activity of body snatching proved both profitable and widespread. Snatchers, called “resurrectionists,” were active from about the early eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth. The practice particularly flourished in New York after citizens, in 1789, outlawed body snatching, creating a favorable climate for trafficking in stolen bodies. Buried in unhallowed ground without benefit of burial by ordained clergy, the body of a black female felon presented a particularly vulnerable target to grave robbers. Dorothy sensed that the best defense she could muster in Rose’s behalf was to conduct religious services over her grave “in case they would let it lay undisturbed” (8). However, if “the medical men separate her flesh from her bones (according to my expectation) I signified the Lord would find her out at the last when the Trumpet shall sound and the dead hear His voice” (8-9).
Today, Rose Butler and the harsh penalty she suffered for what was, essentially, a minor fire capture the imagination of scholars of penology, history, African-American culture, and feminist studies. One poet, Jill McDonough, wrote a eulogy to the condemned woman, published in Memorious:

To be sent in a cart to State Prison, to climb the stairs
To the attic, where the women are kept, and left
There, left in that close heat with strangers, their children, their filthy bodies. Charged with theft, say. Rats. Fleas. Cholera, buckets of shit, and years spent fighting, trapped there, forgotten till you died.

The preacher visits her holding cell and swears
She’s sure to go to hell. The Sheriff’s kind:
Gives her an orange, a ride in a coach, at last,
To the gallows. She’d dreaded a cart. They tie black bows
At her feet and neck, tie her white shroud, and ask
Would you rather go to the State Prison, Rose?

Just curious. She stood there like a lamb, still, dumb.

She thought of the cart. No. I had rather be hung.\textsuperscript{731}

Thus, Dorothy’s eyewitness account has produced a new wave of readers to become vicarious witnesses to Rose’s death. Unquestionably, execution accounts enjoyed immense popularity in the weeks and months following capital punishment cases;
however, in Rose’s case, accusations of legal bias attributable to racial and class
inequalities have generated unending curiosity and tremendous debate.

The Mission in America’s Prisons

Dorothy’s compassionate and staunch care of Rose Butler stemmed from a
lifelong engagement with the disheartened, disillusioned, and soured. Her spiritual labors
among the criminal—those who trespassed not only against God’s law but mankind’s—
began once she journeyed to America and solidified into an enduring prison ministry that
she cultivated throughout the largest cities in the new Republic. Dorothy firmly believed
that even the most hardened of criminals, or troubled youth offenders, could be touched
and forever changed by the power and love of her Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Besides
her sermonic contributions, she also counseled and encouraged not only repentant
convicts and juveniles who wanted to turn from their pasts and live for Jesus, but also for
incarcerated new believers and backsliders who struggled in their Christian faith.

Dorothy’s prison ministry began in May 1805 when she made an inaugural visit
to New York’s only state prison, Newgate, “the first Prison my feet have entered, never
having strength before for such an arduous undertaking” (Bank 48). She spent two days
at Newgate, exhorting to the four hundred and thirty-seven prisoners housed there,
believing that God gave “His Special Blessing to this work” (48). Newgate presented a
particularly challenging first foray into prison ministry for Dorothy, for it housed only
convicted felons, New York’s most hard-bitten criminals.

Named for the famous British penitentiary and virtually unremembered today,
Newgate did not operate long, only eight years old by the time Dorothy first visited and
closing twenty-three years later when the new Sing-Sing prison became operational.  
Begun with high hopes as the solution to the problem of crime, Newgate suffered from an inadequacy to the task, which became apparent almost immediately. Its first steps proved to be fatal ones. Unlike penitentiaries of the twenty-first century, Newgate primarily targeted punishment rather than rehabilitation although some measures sought religious reform. Instead of loss of liberty, convicted criminals served heavy sentences characterized by hard labor and/or solitary confinement, at the judge’s discretion. The original design by celebrated penal reformer Thomas Eddy stressed faith, reformed sentencing laws, more humane treatment, and milder punishments; yet, Eddy’s vision of a “rational penitentiary system” revealed itself as “hopelessly naïve” as corruption and disruption multiplied. “It was inevitable . . . that convicts and guards alike would adjust in unfortunate ways to the mild system established by the Quakers: as the novelty faded, keepers relaxed their discipline; inmates took advantage, provoking increasingly brutal countertactics.” In response, the Quaker policies later were outvoted in favor of stricter control through more severe punishments.

Nevertheless, Newgate enjoyed an auspicious beginning. The prison compound covered four acres of rural land on the east bank of the Hudson River, about two miles from City Hall in what is now Greenwich Village. The main building, which Eddy called “pleasant, airy and salubrious,” contained fifty-four rooms designed to hold eight inmates each, and fourteen solitary cells with windows eight feet from the floor, for a total capacity of 446 prisoners. Obviously, even from its beginning, overcrowding proved a powerful motivator for its downfall. By the time Dorothy visited in the prison’s infancy, Newgate nearly housed its maximum capacity, only nine prisoners short of its upper
limit. Another particular downfall, noted by Eddy, was the housing of two inmates to a
bed, promoting conspiracy, promiscuity, rape, and physical abuse. Shortly before
Dorothy’s arrival, Eddy realized that, had the rooms been constructed for occupancy by a
single prisoner, “the chance of their corrupting each other would have been diminished,
and escapes would have been more difficult.”

Nevertheless, unlike its predecessor and model, the Walnut Street Jail of
Philadelphia, a large room for a chapel was set aside, and each housing block featured a
Bible and several religious books. Religious and moral instruction occurred every Sunday
in the chapel, which accommodated five hundred people. Usually, a prisoner read prayers
and led the incarcerated worshippers in song. However, Dorothy joined a tiny list of
preachers who actually ministered to the imprisoned flock. Although sermons were
delivered by volunteer preachers “of every Christian denomination,” they numbered a
relatively few. Not until two years after Dorothy’s services there did a chaplain perform
routine services there. John Stanford, an elderly clergyman and the presiding minister at
the execution of Rose Butler, assumed part-time, unpaid duties at the prison. Like
Dorothy’s, the main burden of Stanford’s work involved preaching, private exhortation,
and visits to the sick and dying. Not until 1812 did the legislature formally authorize the
institution to have a part-time chaplain, and even then, the spiritual needs of the inmates
could scarcely be met for the city hired Stanford to serve as chaplain not only for the
municipal penitentiary, but also for the Bridewell debtors’ prison, the public almshouse,
and the city hospital.

That Sunday morning in May, three hundred and fifty prisoners gathered to hear
Dorothy (Bank 43). Despite the solemnity and respect of the crowd, the female evangelist
experienced the fear and doubt of a novice prison minister as she found herself
overwhelmingly surrounded by the state’s most hardened felons. She later likened the
experience to stepping “into a horrible cloud of black darkness,” and she felt “ready to
faint for twenty minutes” (43). Both she and the crowd “sat in an awful silence” until
Dorothy, as she later mused, felt God open her heart and mind with understanding and
empathy, making her feel like “a condemned criminal in their behalf, before the Bar of
the Eternal Judge of quick and dead” (43). Rising from her seat behind the pulpit, she
began a prayer on behalf of those who, like the malefactor who shared the gruesome
death of Jesus at Calgary, wished “Lord remember me when thou comest into thy
Kingdom” (43). Using rhetoric that aped their incarceration position, Dorothy testified
to the inmates of “the willingness of God to save all present who believed on Jesus
Christ, the Son of God, whom He sent into the world to seek and to save such hell-
deserving sinners as they were under the condemning Power of His Righteous Laws”
(43).

Among the free Americans, Dorothy often experienced dissension about a
woman’s right to preach. However, in the prison, surrounded by felons whose
incarcerated state boldly proclaimed their immorality and criminality, she found
acceptance. The prisoners in New York’s state penitentiary enthusiastically and
unconditionally welcomed Dorothy as spiritual leader and counselor. Dorothy felt
gratified at their “utmost attention” to her sermon, as they watched her “steadfastly”
through “streaming eyes” (43). In an unusual display of responsive emotion when in the
pulpit, Dorothy reflected their candidness and sincerity in her “ardent solicitude for their
Redemption . . . evidencing it by sighs, groans, and tears” (43).
She directed her final sermonic comments to the non-believers in the crowd who “refuse[d] the offers of love tendered them by a feeling heart” (43). She reassured them of her understanding of the desperation and despair which drove them and her powerful urge to alleviate the pain or distress at its source—their spiritual vacuum:

[She] knew what sore temptation was, and the vileness of the fallen nature of all who “Choose death rather than Life,” by resisting the sacred influences of the gathering Spirit of God, who diffuses His Love and Goodness through all His work; but more especially to man, the image of His Maker’s Mind, that is Immortal. (43)

And, of course, she did. Dorothy was intimate with poverty, doubt, melancholy, and, once, had even balanced along the precipice of self-destruction. Once as a teenager, mired in depression and walking the cliffside in Whitby, she had contemplated throwing herself into the sea; only fear of eternal damnation had stayed her. Even more importantly to Dorothy, hers had been the experience of spiritual struggle, one born of a desperate desire to accept the proffered salvation and yet in doubt of her worthiness of it. The prisoners rewarded Dorothy’s empathy with emotional and visible acceptance of both her and her message:

My earnest supplications are treasured up in Heaven for them, and I know my labour was not in vain in the Lord in behalf of individuals, who will praise God and the Lamb with me, in the Kingdom of Glory . . . . Standing up in the pulpit, when they withdrew, each of them lifted up their eyes to gaze at me, and with bedewed cheeks, took their last glance of me, which
pierced me to the quick, and stamped the remembrance of them all on my soul. (43)

After Dorothy quit the prison, she exhorted among the Universalists, who “benefited by my sorrowful spirit, which had been much abased the former part of the day for the prisoners” (43). She felt the lure of the prison calling to her, despairing for the “many bright Englishmen” who numbered among the residents of the prison “unknown to their friends, or families” (43). As her sole consolation, she clung to the fervent belief that “God sees [her countrymen], and I hope will assuage their grief and heal their souls of the malady of sin” (43).

Such an impression did Newgate form on Dorothy that, early the following month, she revisited the state prison at the invitation of Nicholas Roome, one of thirteen “keepers,” at the prison. Newgate’s administrative scheme placed the day-to-day maintenance and order of the prison in the hands of a principal keeper, a deputy keeper, and eleven assistant keepers. In addition to a modest salary, the keepers were given lodging, food, and laundry service. Thus, when Roome invited Dorothy “home” with him, he literally opened the prison doors to her, enabling her to spend a full day amongst the fifty sick prisoners housed in two rooms set aside as an infirmary:

I laboured with [them] to my great satisfaction, and hope they will keep my sympathy in remembrance while they are continued on this stage of action. Oh! the pity that I felt to those poor dying mortals, who were all tendered by the ardent supplications, which through the Redeemer’s Love in my heart, were presented unto the Father of us all through Faith, in the Obedience and Merit of the Son of God. (46)
Dorothy also seized the opportunity to inspect the workshops that lined the back of the prison complex. There, prisoners labored on Eddy’s two primary goals: inculcating “habits of industry and sobriety” and making “an indemnity to the community for the expense of the conviction and maintenance of the offender.” Thus, inmates worked on trades such as shoemaking (the first trade inaugurated), the production of nails, barrels, linen and woolen cloth, clothing, woodenware, brushes, spinning wheels, clothespins, bobbins, spools, butter churns, and whips. Others worked in the vegetable garden or kitchen, and female felons did the washing, spinning, and sewing. Under Eddy’s “frugal and efficient management the penitentiary soon became a relatively prosperous industrial unit.” By 1803, the Newgate shops yielded a tiny profit, even after the prison’s expenses had been paid:

It is a tribute to Eddy’s skill in handling men that he was able to employ a working force consisting of many who were “hardened, desperate, and refractory, and many ignorant, or incapacitated through infirmity and disease,” and achieve satisfactory results. He did this, interestingly enough, without imposing the harsh and unmitigated slavery which later came to characterize penal labor under the Auburn system.

Nevertheless, Newgate emphasized hard work rather than reformation. Despite Eddy’s stress upon humanitarian treatment, he “stripped the regime at Newgate of anything resembling frills or self-indulgence. As soon as an incoming inmate had been bathed, provisioned, and interrogated, he was assigned to a prison shop and made to realize that his convict life would be one of hard work.” The new Newgate prisoner wore a prison uniform of shoes and stockings, flannel shirt, and brown jacket and trousers for a first
offender, with second offenders distinguished by the dual colors of red and blue. They ate
meals of coarse but ample food, consumed during enforced silence. Detailed descriptions
of appearance, crime, and “whatever may enable them to form a judgment of the degree
of his depravity” was entered into a book. Each inmate paid for his clothing, the
expenses of transportation to the prison, and fifteen cents a day for maintenance. An
inmate clerk kept a record of each prisoner’s labor and earnings, which were credited to
his account.

Dorothy approved of the regular labor and exact temperance required by the work
program initiated by Eddy, who resigned the year before Dorothy ventured there. As she
passed through the “house,” she witnessed the male inmates at work as “blacksmiths,
weavers, tailors, [and] shoe-makers,” and the women “Carding and Spinning with the
greatest order, as if all were attended to minutely . . .” (46). Dorothy further applauded
the separation of “every different branch of business” into separate workshops “so as not
to interfere with each other” (46). The shoemakers that Dorothy witnessed, however,
numbered far fewer in 1805 than they had in the past. Three years before Dorothy’s
arrival, the prison contracted with an outside shoemaker to sell prison shoes. Strong
opposition from private manufacturers and labor simmered at the competition from
prison labor, and within two years, the state legislature responded with the requirement
that all Newgate’s boots and shoes be branded “State Prison” in order to discourage their
purchase. Further, to limit prison production, the legislature stipulated that only one-
eighth of the prisoners could be trained and employed at shoemaking.

With a soul filled “with pity and love unto all” and determined “to pass by none,”
Dorothy spent the bulk of her day ministering to Newgate’s most egregious criminals. In
the uppermost level of the three-story prison were chained and isolated the felons deemed uncontrollable, escape risks, and in need of sterner punishment. In the sixteen months separating Eddy’s resignation and Dorothy’s visitation, severe and even abusive changes had been adopted, either as a cause or result of the escalation in escape attempts. Dorothy’s observations highlight the detrimental transformations of the system in the absence of the philanthropic reformism of Eddy: “Three rooms, in the highest story of the Prison, were the men put in fetters, which I suppose were brought out of the lower cells, to make it more pleasant to my sorrowful heart, which was pierced to the quick, by the scene of those fallen sons of Adam, who were purchased by the Redeeming blood of King Immanuel . . .” (47). One man, to whom Dorothy particularly felt drawn because of his youthfulness, complained bitterly of his treatment at the prison. Enchained, denied fresh air, and in pain from the scrape of the iron fetters against his skin, he repeatedly defied the prison’s strict rule of silence. His anger flared at Roome as the keeper accompanied Dorothy through the prison, and he decried the injustice of keeping the windows closed, preventing any stir of a breeze. Raised windows, even with their protective shield of iron bars, would have allowed a breeze to stir the May heat trapped in the uppermost story:

I looked among some who were in fetters, which appeared to be angry, and full of rage, accosting the Keeper thus, “Won’t you let us have a little air? we shall not eat the grates,” the glass windows being shut down. This youth who then spake was full of malice because he had been disappointed in making his escape over the Prison wall, when his seven years were almost up, and therefore had the same term to serve over again, loaded
with dreadful irons, which caused his ankles to swell, and be very much inflamed. (46-47)

As Dorothy noted, escape attempts from Newgate were not uncommon. In 1803, 40 men burst from the housing area into the prison yard, destroying property. When half of their number attempted escape over the prison walls, the keepers opened fire, killing four. Nearly one year to the day of Dorothy’s visit, a number of convicts broke out after locking several keepers in a building and setting it ablaze. “A remorseful convict mercifully opened the door, sparing the keepers’ lives.” Responding to the desperation motivating such breakouts and the harsh repercussions against those foiled in their attempts, Dorothy exclaimed, “Any one who has a heart to feel must suppose my mind would be overwhelmed with this scene of misery . . .” (47).

Moreover, in the rule of silence that prison keepers enforced, she glimpsed inmates’ demoralization. Not only were prisoners prohibited from speaking, but visitors had to secure a special permit before addressing inmates: “This scene of misery . . . was added unto by not having liberty to say one sentence unto them, for want of a special permit which I did not know was necessary” (47). Without funds, Dorothy could not purchase the city permit; as a last resort, she sold her pocket Bible and enlisted her friends’ influence in procuring the permit. Although she lamented the loss of her pocket-Bible, which she carried not only as a resource for her sermons but as a comfort in trying circumstances, she felt the loss “led [her] into fellow-feeling with the dishonest characters, who had a claim particularly upon me” (47). To Dorothy’s great pleasure, an apprentice later gifted her Bible back to her. Daniel Anderson bought the Bible for three dollars “and returned it to me again as a present from him, saying, ‘I hope you never will
sell your Bible any more’” (55). The young man further earned Dorothy’s gratitude by presenting her with “all his over-money which he earned after he had done his master’s work last week, which was twelve shillings” (55). In the only means of returning Anderson’s kindness, Dorothy named the benevolent young man in her memoirs, noting that he “wrought very hard” for his money (55). Since apprentices were little more than indentured servants in the early Republic, the lad’s generosity did indeed merit special note. As Dorothy observed, “The circumstance would not have been so remarkable, had his master done it” (55).

Responding to the debasing conditions of prison life, Dorothy offered Newgate’s inmates the only consolation she could in the face of their physical, legal, and spiritual bondage, and which to Dorothy constituted the most powerful weapon the inmates could hope to wield: their conversion and salvation:

In those three rooms I offered up ardent supplications at the entrance, and exhorted them to repent, and be baptized with the Holy Ghost; testifying that Jesus, the Saviour of the world, stood with Open Arms to Receive every returning sinner; that they might be made an heir of God, and a joint heir with Him of the celestial Regions, where no tempter would assault or tempt any one to sin. The most outrageous among them, pensively sat with the utmost attention, weeping with a contrited spirit, I verily believe . . . .

(47)

Reminiscent of her message to the enslaved, Dorothy reassured the imprisoned that their trials on earth assured their comfort in heaven, if they only repented. Although the world exacted a dear price for their crimes, she stressed, any heavenly punishment
would far outstrip that which they suffered on earth. With their repentance, “they would see good brought out of the present evil; and be glad that they had met with justice in this life while others, who escape the justice of men, are to be brought before a Righteous Judge, who will say to them, at His Sovereign Bar, ‘Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’” (48).

Dorothy felt rewarded by the two-day effort although she recognized that some remained beyond her reach, still angry, depressed, and vengeful. She sought comfort in those who reacted favorably to her message of salvation, and their response solidified her future in prison ministry. “Some whose minds I saw filled with indignation, were made measurably calm,” she wrote, “I felt richly compensated for my sympathy towards those miserable transgressors” (48).

Interestingly, while the leaders of New York State’s only prison gladly opened its doors to the evangelist, the city’s much smaller Bridewell rebuffed her initial efforts to mission there. Begun as a workhouse, the Bridewell had evolved into a debtor’s jail, its prisoners generally lacking the violence and hostility of the inmates at Newgate. While Newgate impressed its felons into hard labor, the Bridewell used simple confinement for its paupers, orphans, debtors, the debilitated, insane, and others deemed nuisances by society. Suspected wrong-doers pending trial were also confined at Bridewell.

“Knowing the wretchedness” at the Bridewell, the head keeper, Thomas Hazard “politely sent word, ‘That it was not suitable for a female to see the deplorable creatures there, for it was not decent’” (50). Long used to male dismissal by the year of 1805, the female evangelist, abolitionist, and reformer entertained little hesitation at the gaol keeper’s qualms. Dorothy immediately sent Hazard’s messenger back to him with her
insistent reassurance that she “had seen human nature debased as much as possible; therefore was prepared for the scene, if it were ever so degrading to the mind; and must come there!” (50). Perhaps recognizing the iron will confronting him, Hazard acquiesced, promising to “make the house as decent as I can” for the female evangelist (50).

The Bridewell building stood in New York City Hall Park near Broadway, a stark reminder of its sinister role in the Americans’ fight for Independence. Work on the Bridewell had begun in 1775, but the Revolutionary War interrupted construction of the two-story, dark-gray, stone building. During occupation of the city, the British commandeered the Bridewell as a prison to incarcerate American prisoners of war. By the time of Dorothy’s arrival, New York City’s population had exploded to more than seventy-five thousand, and like the municipal almshouse and Newgate, the Bridewell proved inadequate to the city’s needs to house or confine undesirables. One famous story indicates the intricacies of New York’s almshouse and Bridewell, demonstrating the fine line that existed between a sanctuary for the poor and a jail for the criminal. Philip Arcularius, a rising and successful master artisan who also played an active role in the religious and civic life of New York, served as superintendent of the almshouse while Dorothy visited there. The post, a prominent one implying public trust, became the means for Arcularius’ political and professional downfall as he epitomized the city’s broad allegiance to procedure rather than compassion for the poor. The scandal began Nov. 27, 1805, six months after Dorothy’s visit. That day, Omey Kirk, a free black woman in the throes of labor, begged for admittance to the almshouse but was turned away because she could not produce the required permit from a magistrate. Forced back to the streets, she gave birth to a mulatto boy in a nearby yard and abandoned the baby.
there. Police hunted down Kirk and committed her to Bridewell for abandoning her infant. Two days later, The New-York Evening Post published an account of the incident, blaming the almshouse superintendent. Although Arcularius denied any knowledge of the woman’s pregnant condition, his reputation was effectively destroyed, and he was removed from his position. Never recovering from the humiliation, Arcularius disappeared from public life.

By the time Dorothy entered the gates of the Bridewell in June 1805, she had already witnessed the wretchedness of New York’s disenfranchised populations. Her labors with the poor and her protestations to Hazard notwithstanding, she remained unprepared for the desolation which greeted her there. Her initial stop was the women’s ward, where resided “seventy or eighty of them, placed close to the wall, each sitting on the floor, from the age of sixteen, to fifty years old” (51). Despite the spaciousness of the room, “young lewd girls” were housed with “those of advanced years,” and Dorothy lamented the practice of subjecting the infirm to the intimidating whims of the depraved (51). While she addressed the “unhappy mortals” that huddled in the corners and wept, “others gloriéd in their shame, smiling at me for the sorrow of heart which I felt on their account” (51). Drawing herself up, Dorothy lectured the women on their boldness, understanding their bravado to be the result of a dissolute life unguided by a “virtuous mother and pious father” such as that which she herself benefited:

I fixed my eyes on those who laughed till they wept; and then I implored mercy at the Hands of a Gracious parent, who had filled my soul with love unfeigned, and Faith to gather such as desired to forsake their sins; testifying to all what my Master Jesus declared, how that “Publicans and
harlots shall enter into the Kingdom,” before such as are wise in their own eyes. (51)\

From there, she investigated the men’s ward, again shocked at the deplorable state of its inhabitants. The men huddled near the walls, “having an old blanket on, or tattered garments; a sight which was enough to shock the most callous mind” (51). Despite the dirty, smelly conditions of the jail, and the lice, mites, and vermin which crawled around more freely than the prisoners, Dorothy ignored inmates’ pleas not to kneel as she broke into prayer:

They told me as I entered, they were filthy, and requested me not to kneel down if I prayed, but I had another master, who assured me, that those loathsome insects, were one of His Plagues, that were brought upon the Egyptians for their gross rebellion, and I had nothing to fear, for they should not come near me in this place: so I fell down in profound humility before him, who made man, and the waster to destroy, having all things at command, to answer every purpose except rebellious man, who is ever seeking his own misery instead of the Glory of his Creator . . . . (51-52)

After regaining her feet, she “walked by every one, and shook hands with each, imparting to such of them, as I had a message from God, and felt [sic] myself clear of the blood of all, whether they are saved or lost” (52). Later, standing outside the jail’s gates, several Frenchmen hailed Dorothy in gratitude for her merciful gestures. “The scene was so affecting . . . [they] cried aloud with streaming eyes, at seeing a female among such a number of vile creatures, and pronounced me ‘Blessed of God for ever,’ because they said, ‘some of my Nation is there’” (52).
Dorothy also visited that day a third company of prisoners, and ironically, her movements among this group drew more hesitancy from Hazard than her earlier efforts. The most “genteelly dressed” prisoners who occupied “a decent apartment” were the Bridewell’s most “notable transgressors” whose “crimes were most heinous” (52). While poor vagrants, misfortunate debtors, and petty thieves comprised most of the prison’s population, these “refined” prisoners sported among their numbers murderers, pimps, and pedophiles. Hazard urged her to make that final visitation only “if I thought proper,” and Dorothy “readily agreed, having a little strength still remaining, and a hope [that] my labour had not been in vain” (52).

One prisoner, a pedophile, particularly caught Dorothy’s attention; not only was his crime heinous but also he had callously betrayed the confidence and faith invested in him because he was a physician. Parents had entrusted their children’s medical care into this doctor’s hands, and he in turn, had “led away nine girls under twelve years, polluting each to his own shame” (52). So shocked was she by the actions of the fifty-year-old pedophiliac that Dorothy interrupted her written tale to directly address her readership, urging parents to diligence in regard to their children’s welfare: “Parents ought to watch over their dear children, who are subject to the insults of such ravenous beasts” (52-53). Although Dorothy freely chastised the immoral and corrupt, she rarely condemned them as she did the convicted physician. Likening him to an animal, she foresaw that his actions would “humble him exceedingly in this world, or that to come” (52).

At the close of the day, having spent many unrelieved hours moving among some of the most wretched and most depraved of the city’s despised, Dorothy felt “humbled to the dust, with spiritual sackcloth about my loins, being thankful that I was not one of
those forlorn objects of pity, whom my Merciful Jesus commanded me to look after” (50). In one of the mystical visions that characterized her evangelism, Dorothy prophesized, “[As I] had taken a glance of the wretched inhabitants, my eyes were saluted with a vision of all Nations, standing naked before God, at the Bar of the Great Judge; therefore, this was a small part of the miserable creatures, which I was going to labour to war for that terrible day which will come as a thief in the night” (51).

After her first efforts in New York City, Dorothy’s prison ministry escalated. She journeyed to Albany, Boston, Philadelphia, Savannah, and Baltimore with the expressed purpose of visiting their prisons, “to console the afflicted and warn the rebellious” in both men and women’s wards (Bank 218). As she had in New York, she usually met with reluctance from the keepers, who balked at admitting a “respectable” woman into the dismal cells, “wishing me not to see the wretchedness of the place” (163). On each such occasion, Dorothy assured them of her “great distress for the miseries of those in the gaol; and nothing could divert my mind, or allure me from my duty to those, whom sin had plunged into affliction” (163). In Boston, the sheriff granted her request, but only at her agreement to “be locked in if you go there” (163). Dorothy firmly assured him that she “was not afraid of being locked in with the prisoners” (163). During each visit, she “laboured to fill up my time, to the best advantage, being prepared for my work, by great humiliation of spirit, and the assistance of my Gracious Master, whose Compassionate Regard extends to the vilest” (164). Once inside the jails and faced with the prisoners’ gamut of reactions from disbelief, hostility, rejection, and acceptance, she reassured them one and all that God had sent her to extend His offer of salvation and not to judge: “Neither would He have one perish, for lack of knowledge, sending one servant here, and
another there, in every direction, and corner of His Vineyard, to convince, enlighten, rebuke, encourage, and build up His people; and seek the lost sheep, scattered abroad over the face of the earth” (164).

This new element to Dorothy’s evangelism accorded her a glimpse into the darkest recesses of human depravity, bestiality, and prejudices. In Boston, for example, she met the city’s most infamous of inmates, a woman who had strangled her illegitimate baby in an effort “to hide her shame by her barbarity to the helpless infant” (163).

In Savannah, her evangelizing efforts to the “offenders of [the] city” furthered heightened Dorothy’s awareness of the racial hostility in the Southern climes (289). Her listeners there included four white men, twenty-three black men, and four women, but because guards refused to allow the inmates to congregate together in fear of an uprising, Dorothy was forced to address them in five separate sermons. The white prisoners listened attentively one February morning in 1806 as she preached to them of their promised salvation if they would turn from their wicked ways; however, when she proselytized in a separate address to the black inmates, the white convicts raised such a ruckus that the black penitents could not hear Dorothy over the noise:

Two of the white young men took the liberty of kissing my hand, with tears in their eyes; although when I was in the lower story, they made as much noise as they could, to disturb me while I was praying with thirteen coloured men; but I exercised my patience, and bore with their indecent conduct; and then the Lord made me sound an alarm in their ears, that tendered their hearts, and humbled them before my eyes. (290)
Her prison ministry also acquainted Dorothy with the Americans’ restraint in the usage of capital punishment, particularly in Boston. Lawbreakers convicted of the most heinous of crimes were often sentenced to life imprisonment, whereas in Dorothy’s England those same criminals would have been summarily executed. “There had not been above two or three hung [in Boston] during [the past fifteen years], which I think is a great credit to the citizens, who have almost finished their State Prison, for the confining of such for life which we in Old England, should hang without giving them time for reflection, to appease an Angry Judge” (164-64).

Neither did she confine her ministry to the prisoners, often evangelizing to the wardens and keepers, as well. For example, Dorothy not only accepted the hospitality of Boston’s under-keeper of the jail, Oliver Hartshorn, but also took the opportunity to remind both him and his wife of their earthly and spiritual responsibilities. “[I] felt rejoiced for an interval to excite him to his duty, by telling him the pleasure it gave me to see one so qualified for his station, move in this sphere, and I hoped if I should return here again, I should see him high Sheriff” (164). To his wife, Dorothy directed a charge to “go among the prisoners, and let her light shine by good counsel; for it might be, that they would remember it along [sic] time” (164). Dorothy entertained high hopes that “the sweetness of this woman . . . would be of service” to the prisoners (164). Thus, her prison ministry targeted not only inmates’ spiritual ease but also their bodily comfort.

Dorothy’s reformist and evangelizing efforts found particularly fertile ground at Walnut Street prison in Philadelphia. From 1784 to 1821, Walnut Street made up Philadelphia’s only penitentiary, housing both criminals and vagrants. In 1790, Walnut Street Jail became the first state prison in Pennsylvania, and with its sweeping reforms of
classification and separation of criminals and workshops providing useful trade instruction, set an example for the formation of prisons throughout the United States. More than any other prison of its day, Walnut Street eliminated the old abuses and idleness stemming from incarceration. The inmates labored at public work in an effort to make restitution and to learn trades. Inmates could even be seen in the state house (later Independence Hall) as they carried a frail Benjamin Franklin in a sedan chair to his appointments. New York framed its own prison system on the basis of the Walnut Street successes. However, the exploding population of Philadelphia overwhelmed the prison’s ability to accommodate numbers, and like its successors, became intolerably crowded. The large rooms, 18 feet square, which still housed most of the prisoners, by 1795 had between 30 and 40 occupants each.

In November 1805, convinced that she “was going among secret murderers, who had slain the just,” Dorothy made seven visits among the four-to-five hundred prisoners incarcerated at Walnut Street (204). She “walked from one end of the room to the other, preaching repentance to all in the name of Jesus and insisted, that an holy life, by faith in Him, was necessary for every man; proclaiming the door of mercy open for all, who would enter in” (212-13). Locked into the rooms overflowing with hardened criminals, Dorothy boldly proclaimed that she felt “divested of the fear of man” (213). Rather, she stressed, her dread stemmed from the prisoners’ trespass against the apocalyptic warning that “all manner of sin, and blasphemy, shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, shall not be forgiven unto man . . . [and] whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (212). Dorothy worried that some of the doomed souls in her audience existed
beyond her evangelical reach: “I arose and addressed them with fear and trembling, lest
any of them had sinned against the Holy Ghost: yet hoped they had not put it out of the
power of our Lord Jesus Christ to save them” (212). Her demonstrative trepidation at the
ultimate blasphemy must have communicated itself to even the most hard-bitten of
prisoners, for her reaction “made some of the oldest sinners, both tremble, weep, and look
pale” (213). Probably Dorothy’s bold proclamation of her earthly authority decreed by a
divine judge gave the men pause as much as her sermon did: “By the Power of God, I had
authority to declare unto them, that I did not fear a million of wicked sinners, such as
they were,” Dorothy declared, “and the Power was manifested in me” (213). The
response she engendered in the felons—and even in the Prison Keeper himself—led
Dorothy to rejoice that “the most callous may be reached while Mercy is offered unto
them” (213).

Two days later, Dorothy visited the women’s ward, where she remained behind
locked doors with the female felons for a grueling six hours, until “fatigued with praying,
exhorting, weeping, and fasting” (216). Again, she exhibited no fear for she “rejoiced to
be there alone to clear myself of the guilty, and comfort others whom I believed were
falsely accused and unjustly sent there by the wicked who violate the Law by swearing
falsely to injure the helpless” (215). In pity, she held and blessed a sickly, newborn baby
and its grief-stricken, adolescent mother who was sent there by her uncle—whom
Dorothy suspected to be the child’s father. “The babe opening its eyes in the Prison will
be marked with infamy,” Dorothy later wrote, “unless the mercy of God remove it to a
better world, which I much desire, if it be the adorable Will of my Heavenly Father”
(216). Equally moving to Dorothy was an elderly woman whose “locks were like silver
but dishonoured with shame,” for the felon’s great age reminded the itinerant of her own mother. “O the pity of my soul to this old woman!” Dorothy exclaimed, “I said in my heart, this might have been my mother! but God gave me a virtuous one, who preserved me from sin, with an example of Righteousness; and now while this woman is forlorn, and imprisoned; [my mother] is gone to Glory” (216). The old woman quaked in fear at Dorothy’s preaching, for she was “so deeply struck,” and Dorothy fretted that the wizened inmate “would faint away,” for her “sins made her lips quiver, and turn white, when the Word smote her conscience, and caused her body to shake with trembling” (216).

That Dorothy felt a deep and abiding concern for America’s imprisoned and spiritually lost cannot be in doubt; however, she sometimes exhibited a lack of insight of the twin catalysts of desperation and necessity which drove many of the incarcerated to criminal activity. She occasionally lapsed into the stilted rhetoric and wooden ideology of the established clergy whose exclusionism she so vehemently opposed. Sounding much like the canonicate that denounced her as an outsider, Dorothy sometimes issued blanket condemnations about placing earthly needs above spiritual ones, no matter what the impetus. In this parochial view, nothing—including hunger, cold, and desolation or a parent’s desperate bid to help a child or the shame and helplessness spawned by lack of education, skills, and resources—should encroach on submission to God’s law.

Nourishment and comfort of the body must be a secondary consideration to the nourishment of the soul:

Making a lie to deceive any thereby: or, when you are tempted to steal, whispers in your mind, Thou shalt not steal; no, if you are ready to perish
for want of bread; for, if you pray to God, He will send you all
necessaries, as he knoweth all your daily wants, and his eyes are on you,
watching all your ways, from the beginning of your life to the close of it.
If you are content with adversity, God will crown you with eternal riches
.

Perhaps Dorothy recognized the intractability of her teachings, for she anticipated
the denial and angry backlash of her commentary. She cautioned her readers not to let
their earthly needs blind them to the wisdom of her counsel: “Methinks the Holy Ghost is
seeking after your precious souls, my dear fellow creatures, by my pen this day,
therefore, despise not the instruction offered you in the name of the Lord” (3).

This dispassionateness and obduracy inspired others to rebuke Dorothy in return.
Even her supporters sometimes found fault with her incomprehension of the limited
wherewithal of the desperate. One admirer, despite his appreciation for Dorothy’s prison
ministry and the good works she accomplished, took Dorothy to task for this lack of
understanding. Convicted felon Phillip Williams, in his second year of a seven-year
sentence, heard Dorothy preach when she visited the prison in Georgetown where he was
incarcerated. Using religious and penal-reformist arguments, Williams reproved both
Dorothy and the prison system which bound him. Even while he praised Dorothy’s
altruism, he urged her to temper her tone of blame with empathy and modify her message
of censure with understanding.

Dated 6 April 1806, Williams began his letter by enunciating his appreciation for
Dorothy’s efforts, likening her to “the immortal and philanthropic [John] Howard”
(Address 23). Dorothy, wrote Williams, “made an impression on my mind which will
never be erased, so long as my intellectual faculties and corporeal existence are united
together” (23). The felon admired Dorothy’s fortitude, praising her for remaining
“undaunted, undismayed by loathsome dungeons, and the appearance of their wretched
inhabitants” and for her determination to “seek good in the midst of evil; and while the
voluptuary rolls in his couch of indolent ease, you display an unparalleled example of
feminine virtue and heroism, by an endeavour to snatch your fellow-beings from the very
verge of endless ruin” (23-24).

On the other hand, even while he lauded her motives, he beseeched her
indulgence and pardon “for pointing out some avenues in the human heart, which I think
you have never yet explored” (24). In Williams’ view, Dorothy could not fully meet the
needs of her imprisoned adherents because she could not apprehend clearly the character,
nature, or subtleties of criminality born of desperation, deprivation, and fear. Not only
had it brought them to their present bondage, but it also haunted them on a daily basis:
“You cannot realize to yourself of the feelings of a situation you have never experienced.
It is impossible, not only for you, but for all our species. The virgin cannot feel the
sympathies of the matron; the prince is ignorant of the feelings which inspire obedience
in the subject; so is the judge, and so are you Madam, of the sensations which fill the
breast of a convicted felon” (24).

Galvanizing Williams was his exception to Dorothy’s address before the young
black women of the Georgetown prison in April 1806. “You told the black women,”
Williams wrote to Dorothy, “that if they had been good girls, it was not likely they
would have been there”” (26). While Williams granted “it is not likely,” he also pointed
out “it is not impossible that they might have been there though as spotless as the Virgin
Mary” (26). He chastised Dorothy for succumbing to the regular practice of sweeping
denunciation by those who “judge from appearances” (25). “But are you always sure of
judging rightly? Is the judgment of any man, or woman, or set of men, or of Judges or
jurors infallible? If so, then you may indeed account all you see in prison as guilty
criminals; and on no other ground is this presumption justifiable” (25).

He also objected to what he saw as the crumbling rehabilitative philosophies on
which the penal system was originally designed, and the persistent failure to stem the tide
of corporal punishments sweeping into the criminal justice system. His insider position as
imprisoned felon accorded an alternate viewpoint to the classical theory of severity as a
punishment and deterrent to future crime. 760 He attacked the ineffectiveness of cruelty
mixed with incarceration and argued that, far from preventing crime, the inflexibility of
the penal system and its manifestation of viciousness corrupted the people within the
prison walls. Instead of the severe treatment meted out by prison officials who
increasingly looked to isolation and chains instead of education and skill-building, 761
Williams advocated cultivation of remorse through compassionate rehabilitation. Gentler
handling, he averred, would reshape new offenders and even habitual criminals into
productive citizens: “I am convinced there are few offenders in their first outset, but what
might be reclaimed by mild lenient measures; while harsh and severe punishments only
tend to corrupt and harden the heart. You and many others will perhaps say and think too,
that confinement in a Gaol or Penitentiary is a mild punishment; but experience has
taught me a different belief” (Letters 25). Williams characterized prisons as “no more
than nurseries of vice, and manure (if the expression is allowable) for the worst passions
in the human heart. They are only another name for long and continued tortures” (25-6).
Williams argued that incarceration failed because it was built on false assumptions; instead of incarceration being an opportunity for improvement and rehabilitation of criminals, penitentiaries fostered hardened criminal behavior. For every “good man” reformed by the penitentiaries, he asserted, “I am certain they turn out ten times as many bad ones” (26). Prisons, Williams asserted, served to corrupt principles while never inculcating them: “Truly, good morals will remain the same, through all vicissitudes and changes of adverse circumstances; and I believe the few who come out pure from a gaol, it [sic] like rich bullion; it contains much gold at going into the crucibles of man’s refining justice. I pray God that my heart may remain uncontaminated amidst the epidemic depravity of this prison!” (26). Williams sensed an egregious hypocrisy at an earthly judge and jury’s power to rob others of their liberty when these same judges often proved equally susceptible to the temptations, vices, and criminal activity which brought the prisoners to ruin:

I often think that arrogant man has the presumption to “be more just than his Maker.” Where is the legislator, the judge, or the juror, who has not a thousand times offended the law of his God?—still he goes unpunished! while his poor frail brother, for violating the least of man’s traditions, is cast into prison, and must there eat the bread and drink the water of affliction, until the utmost farthing is paid; even for a first offence. It is not for me to point out a remedy for these evils; though they are not remediless. Was not JESUS CHRIST himself convicted and executed as a felon? and the people scoffed him as such, both on his trial and way to execution. (26)
Williams disavowed any attempt at “preaching up my own innocence whatever right I may have to do so,” but rather emphasized his need to impress on the female missionary the necessity that “whenever prisoners are addressed, their feelings should be spared; at least by one of your benevolent and charitable nature” (27). The salient point, in Williams’ opinion, was that “the possibility of their being innocent, ought . . . to be always admitted” (27).

Most likely, Dorothy concurred with Williams’ estimations of the ineffectiveness of the prison system and the increasing emphasis on punishment rather than rehabilitation. The inclusion of the anti-capital punishment rhetoric published as part of her Butler tale substantiates violent opposition not only to the treatment of Rose herself, but also to the harsh penalties enacted for lesser crimes, most especially state-condoned murder.

A most compelling element to Williams’ letter, however, is his rebuke of Dorothy’s somewhat high-handed manner while visiting the prison and what it reveals about Dorothy’s readiness to examine her own human foibles. Despite her vehement opposition to criticism from male clergy and civic leaders who opposed her preaching on the grounds of gender, as well as her conflicted bitterness toward the Society of Friends for their dismissal of her based on “singularity,” she nevertheless seemed to embrace this censure from an imprisoned felon. One of the charges frequently levied against Dorothy was her inability to see human failure in herself, yet the fact that she published Williams’ letter exposes her ability to concede error as well as her acknowledgement of the right of others to highlight her faults. Publication of the letter demonstrates that her evangelical pugnaciousness rose, not a perception of infallibility, but rather from ecclesiastical,
sectarian, and public rejection of her divine mission and her right to preach the word of God as directed by Him.

The Mission to New York’s Native Tribes

When my bodily strength was exhausted, I returned to lay my bones quietly in the silent grave; but, to my astonishment, I received a new commission, with fresh vigour of bodily strength, to cross the wide ocean again, to call the Indians to repentance, and to testify to them, that they were of Jeroboam’s house, which were carried away by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, in the day when Hoshea was king of Israel. (Letters iv)

Despite the continued dire predictions of those who opposed her ministry without official endorsement from any religious denomination, Dorothy found to her gratification that her efforts among America’s native populations were generally welcomed, especially amongst the Indians themselves: “My little labour of love was acceptable to them, and God made me willing to impart unto them of his hidden riches that were concealed from the wise and prudent, who conceive my life madness, and my end to be without honour” (Letters iv).

Fresh into her second missionary journey, Dorothy became one of the few white women to not only mission to Native Americans but also to live and work amongst them. She spent six weeks instructing them about her God and His divine promises of deliverance; in return, she learned about their tribal traditions, strong kinship ties, and trading customs. Along the way, she garnered an acute awareness of their daily battles
against widespread privation, hunger, alcoholism, assimilation and acculturation difficulties, and prejudices perpetuated by and against them.

James Fenimore Cooper wrote in his introduction to the 1831 edition of *The Last of the Mohicans*, that it was “the seemingly inevitable fate of all these [native] people . . . [to] disappear before the advances, or it might be termed the inroads of civilisation, as the verdure of their native forests falls before the nipping frost.” This brand of fatalism coated the attitudes of more than Cooper. Dorothy, and many of her missionary counterparts, believed in the unavoidable destruction of Native American life. Their staunch belief in what they called “civilization programs”—education, agriculture, and moral reform—entailed the eclipse of the traditional Indian ways. “Accepting Christianity meant at least a partial rejection of much that was old and familiar,” observed Native American Studies historian James P. Ronda. While these missionaries may not have enunciated a demand for cultural suicide, their ultimate goal of conversion meant that the newly Christianized must “be a people set apart.”

Such characterization can be applied to the initial efforts of Dorothy. Despite the twin catalysts of compassion and evangelical fire, she nevertheless suffered from a provincialism and philistinism that clouded her true understanding of the natives populating central New York. In some ways, she satisfies the evolving historical image of the white missionary as “the self-seeking agent of western imperialism and aggression” and even the historical, and recently pejorative, image of self-less frontier culture hero who brought salvation and civilization to Indians lost in sin and barbarism. Like so many others, Dorothy began her journey amongst the Oneidas believing that the natives must cease traditional ways and accept Euro-American cultural values. In her arrogance,
she criticized the natives for uncleanness, intoxication, effusive living, and violence, believing them “almost strangers to economy and industry” (Bank 67).

The latter portion of her missionary work in Oneida County, New York, however, produced a transformation in her outlook. Her compassion becomes readily apparent as she witnessed first-hand the privation, hunger, and cultural stymie. By the end of her six weeks with them, she began to view Native Americans as a proud people struggling against the social, economic, and religious pressures of a conquering nation.

Ever one ready to crusade for the underdog, she joined the inter-cultural melee both in verbal and written form. In her published works and letter writing, she condemned the white traders and merchants who bartered with alcohol even while fleecing their indigenous neighbors of their money. She praised those natives who, like the Oneida chief Skanando, braved cultural censure for their religious assimilation. She chastised the white and the rich who reveled in their own national and financial superiority, blithely unconcerned for their starving native neighbors. And, as always, she pointedly addressed the subjugation of women, for females among New York’s indigenous tribes fared no better among their own patriarchy than did their white counterparts.

Immediately apparent to Dorothy upon her first arrival among the Oneida Indians was the limited resources of the tribe. In the early seventeenth century, when the Europeans first encountered the Oneida, the tribe held nearly six million acres of fecund land in what is now central New York State, a vast territory ranging from the borders of Canada to Pennsylvania. The dense forests, teaming lakes and rivers, and abundant game and resources provided the Oneidas with prosperous livelihoods. The Oneidas were part
of the Iroquoian-speaking Six Nations Confederacy, which included the Oneidas, Tuscaroraras, Mohawks, Senecas, Cayugas, and Onondagas. This Confederacy or League “is unique in native North America for its profound impact, longevity, and political success.” The Oneidas soon faced, however, rapid changes caused by disease, factionalism, the fur trade, the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the loss of a great deal of tribal land. Following the War of Independence, Oneida territory began to shrink as the new United States embarked on its manifest destiny. Between 1785 and 1842, the state of New York entered into more than thirty land treaties with the Oneida Indians, which ultimately resulted in dispossession and the Oneidas’ loss of

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original homeland. The Oneidas were defrauded of much of their vast estate, most notably as a consequence of the Treaty at Fort Herkimer (1785) and Treaty of Fort Schuyler (1788). The latter treaty resulted in the largest forfeiture of land, for the Oneida Nation believed it had leased—not sold—five million acres to the state of New York. As their spokesman Good Peter exclaimed at the time, “Instead of leasing our Country to you for a respectable rent, we find that we have ceded and granted it forever for the consideration of the inconsiderable sum of six hundred dollars per year.” Because the treaties “were never authorized by the federal government as required by the Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts of 1790 and 1793,” the Oneida consider them invalidated and continue land reclamation efforts in the U.S. Supreme Court.

The loss of tribal land, however, served as only one reason for the divisions within the Oneida Nation. Factionalism over relinquishing or maintaining ancient ways and the influence of missionaries played a part in compelling Oneida removal, and during the 1820s and 1830s, nearly seven hundred Oneida relocated to Wisconsin. Throughout the twentieth century, the Oneida of New York and Wisconsin have routinely resisted efforts by the United States to sell tribal lands, and have successfully operated gaming facilities, diversified business investments, and extensive social assistance programs. Today, the Oneidas are divided into three major communities: the Wisconsin Oneidas, the Oneidas of the Thames (Ontario), and the Oneidas of New York. However, as historian Jack Campisi observed, all Oneida communities have a “common estate” that unite them in outlook and identity.
Dorothy first moved among the Oneidas in July 1805, and her writings reflect how she rejoiced “much in my heart, that my eyes have seen this people,” for hers was a mission to evangelize and convert (Bank 59). Her initial stop was at the home of John Skenandoa, the eldest chief of the Wolf Clan at the time and the most famous historically. Skenandoa’s house, a small-framed, red-painted building, sat about one hundred yards from the main road, “in the margin of a valley through which a pleasant stream flows.” During the day, a large kettle of corn would be boiling over an open fire, providing fare that would be dipped out into a waiting basket at intervals throughout the day. The furniture and farming implements, while “coarse,” were “those of civilized persons.”

When Dorothy first met him, Chief Skenandoa—which she spelled Skanando—was aged ninety-five or ninety-six and “desiring to live to be one hundred” (59). Coatless, he wore a shirt “with his sleeves hanging loose,” sat with his hands together, and lifted his face “to Heaven, with a blessed smile” (59). Obviously having been apprised of the Native American custom of exchanging gifts upon first introduction, Dorothy managed to stockpile a small cache of funds to purchase presents for her potential converts. Perhaps his religious posture and temperance prompted Dorothy to give the noteworthy gift she did. To Skanando, she presented a “pair of red stone silver buttons, which was the only thing I had belonging to my honoured mother” (59). Dorothy’s offering, one laden with personal and cultural significance, indicated the esteem in which she held the wizened chief. Her high opinion rose to new heights when her friend, Calvin Young, testified that Skanando, a former tavern owner, “was never once intoxicated, and was looked unto with great respect, as king of those Six
Nations” (59). Young’s opinion is supported by the report of Jeremy Belknap and Jedidiah Morse who visited the tribe nine years before Dorothy’s arrival. In their 1796 report to their sponsors, the Scots Society for the Propagating Christian Knowledge, Belknap and Morse acknowledge Skanando as the “only man in the nation who never indulges himself in drinking to excess.”

Even while Dorothy approved of Skanando’s religious stance, the fierceness of his physical appearance disturbed her. Although shriveled in his old age, Skanando nevertheless once served the tribe as a powerful warrior, and his tenure as such could be clearly discerned in his form and bearing. His ears “were cut in the midst,” and his neck was “marked with powder;” signs of his bravery, the marks were meant “to distinguish him thereby” and had “made him shriek aloud” at their application (63).

Unfortunately, despite Skanando’s obvious bravery and former significance to the tribe, Belknap and Morse noted the diminished authority that Skenandoah maintained. As they noted to the Scots Society, Skanando “has every little influence in the nation, though one of the chiefs.” Although at one time a powerful chieftain of all the Oneidas, by the time of Dorothy’s arrival, Skanando enjoyed recognition only among the Christian party. Within five years, Skanando would be completely blind, frail, and infirm.

Dorothy also favored the chief’s wife, to whom she gave spoons, coffee, and a tin boiler. Pleased with the gift, the sixty-nine-year-old woman—who remains unnamed in Dorothy’s autobiography—returned the missionary’s generosity with seven ears of just-ripened corn. The number seven, evidently, represented good luck or a benediction, for the woman insisted on gathering seven ears for Dorothy: “Seven is a goodly number, must have seven,” the chief’s wife instructed the missionary (59).
Faced with such welcome from those she termed “heathen,” Dorothy initiated a village-wide tour, walking from hut to hut, greeting all, and testing the religious and cultural waters. That occasion became the first of many such forays over the following six weeks, and Dorothy found much to both esteem and disparage about her new flock. Internally divided, she respected the Oneidas and admired their resiliency and fortitude, while at the same time she was repulsed by their alien habits. For example, during her first venture through the village, Dorothy encountered a “handsome” Oneida, the wife to a Frenchman (59). Although Dorothy praised the woman for keeping her house “very neat” and bearing “some beautiful children,” she reproached the woman for being “very dirty for want of washing herself” (59). Dorothy promptly entered the woman’s home and proceeded to lecture her about the merits of cleanliness, insisting that the woman bathe.

Later, she was “much distressed” when she viewed six “drunken Indians” outside the inn where she stayed in the nearby town of Vernon. With their “yelling like wild beasts,” Dorothy believed “the devil sent them” to beleaguer her, but after indulging in excess, the men merely collapsed and “lay in the ditch” throughout the night, harassing none (59-60). To Dorothy’s mind “those miserable Indians” not only “leveled [themselves] with the beasts by their shameful conduct,” but they also lent fuel to the prejudicial fire of whites (60). The actions and attitudes of the natives proved, to someone born of a foreign culture, unfathomable as well as disconcerting. On another occasion, as she returned to her lodgings following a day spent ministering to the native women and children, Dorothy chanced upon “a number of Indians” stretched prone on the ground around a small fire, leisurely smoking their pipes (77). A lone woman isolated in a wooded copse with a group of languishing, yet visually intimidating males, Dorothy felt
unnerved by the unforeseen encounter. Tension can be detected in her frequent and deliberate reminders that, while their behavior seemed beyond comprehension to her, the native men composed an important part of God’s creation and, therefore, her divinely ordained mission:

I might, and should have been alarmed at this sight of miserable looking men, had not my mind recollected, that I felt love, and good will to all; neither would I injure a worm, could I pass by it without trampling thereon. The Lord was with me, though I had no other companion that day; for I thought I would try and go alone, which I did several other times, unnoticed here; and I feel thankful that I can say, some of bad dispositions said, “No Indian hurt you, need not fear them:” which I answered, “That I believe; for I love, and pray for them all.” (77)

With this conscious reminder to herself, Dorothy stopped and “looked up to Heaven, for a blessing to come upon them through an Outpouring of His Spirit” (77). Equaling her graciousness, the males called out “Sago, Sago,” which according to Cooper, is “the ordinary term of salutation used by the Indians of [the New York] region.”786 Dorothy “accepted [the greeting] as a salutation of their love” (77).

The moment alleviated some of the strain Dorothy experienced when among the male Oneidas, helping prepare the missionary for a later, even more terrifying encounter. The following day, after a demanding ride of twelve miles in the forest skirting the Oneida settlements and accompanied only by a young boy, Dorothy heard a “terrible howling” echoing through the dense woods (77). The unidentified shrieking sent fissures of fear through Dorothy, and her alarm multiplied when a “drunken Indian of the Pagan
party” materialized and advanced on her, “crying out like one almost scared to death” (77). Hampered by the language barrier, the Indian brave could only exclaim, “Lord! Lord! you madam, you madam” before falling silent, “quite ashamed of his conduct” (78). Belatedly, Dorothy recognized the man as one who had undergone a conversion experience just days earlier. During his religious transformation, the man had “made me believe that he felt very good when I was preaching among the Pagans,” and laid “his hands on his breast” as he told a horrific tale of brutality and superstition among the Oneidas. The grieving man, Dorothy recorded, bemoaned that he had no one to boil his pot; for his wife was killed by one of the wicked Indians, who pretended she was a witch; he told me “They came and took him a great distance; and then went into his log house and knocked her down with an axe: but being a strong woman, she got up again, and endeavoured to make her escape from those instruments of cruelty, who cut her throat from ear to ear, and then buried her, and laying earth several inches deep over her, made a fire on the earth to burn out the spirit of witchcraft that they said was in her. (78)

The man’s wife became the third victim of a group of superstitious vigilante natives led by a “wicked Indian who pretended to be wiser than his brethren” (78). The vicious murder of the man’s wife had occurred two years previous, and since then, he had been ostracized and targeted for maliciousness by the ringleader. Dorothy herself had noted the Oneida man’s changed circumstances within the tribe as well as the superstition that spawned violence among the natives:
I passed by his house, that was desolate: for he was hated by the rest of his brethren, and obliged to leave the place. A third woman was condemned to die for witchcraft, but being innocent, and willing to die, she desired that they would let her dress herself, that she might die decently, so they let her put on a white gown, which after she had done, she then said, “I am willing to die, but my blood will be upon you; for I die innocent!” This so affected some of the feeling Indians, that they let her depart in peace to her own home. (78)

Not insensitive to the man’s pain at having lost his wife so barbarously, as well as his inability to stay on a path of sobriety and religiosity after such a life-altering circumstance, Dorothy looked down on the Oneida man with pity. “I thought I would say something to him for yelling in this manner, throwing his arms about as he came along,” Dorothy later logged in her journal, “but my Merciful Jesus made me stand as one dumb, for the space of five minutes, and then we parted, which seemed to confound the Indian more than ten thousand words would have done” (78). Rather than launching into an exhortation about apostasy or pontificating on a white religion that the pagan Indian clearly did not embrace, Dorothy simply looked on him in silence. The stillness of the missionary seemed to jolt the Indian more than any stock phrases of religious sentiment could have done. The youth accompanying Dorothy marveled every bit as much as the drunken Oneida man, only the former’s wide-eyed surprise stemmed from the female missionary’s noticeable lack of fear rather than her eerie, preternatural silence. “There is not a woman in this neighbourhood, who durst have gone by that Indian,” the boy later exclaimed. Dorothy rejoined that she “fear[ed] the Lord, who has made the wildest beast
of the field, and therefore, I trust He will have compassion on me, and preserve me from every harm: but, His Will be done” (78-79).

The man’s pitiable history left an indelible impression on Dorothy’s heart, and in turn, led to an inspired sermon later that evening. In a large barn, “where many assembled together,” Dorothy labored to put life’s hardships into perspective for the spiritually hungry crowd: “I told my hearers they must pass through a death unto sin, if ever they walked in the paths of righteousness, or witnessed a table spread for them in the midst of their enemies, which by Faith, the Lord’s people partake of, eating His Body, and drinking His Blood mystically” (79). By day’s end, Dorothy keenly felt the physical and emotional strain of her role as spiritual guide and counselor:

I think, without God had aided me in my soul and body, it would have been impossible for me to support under what I felt for the people this day, as they were many of them in total darkness. Few are the number of Christians in this part; but may they be increased by the faithful labourers exercising their graces upon the Merits and Mercy of a Redeemer: for, He it is who restoreth from the fall, and maketh true Christians. (79)

In her bid to facilitate the making of true Christians, Dorothy felt herself drawn to the group of Oneidas whom white missionaries had labeled the “Pagan Party.” By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Oneida tribe had divided into two factions, the warriors and the sachems. During the War of Independence, the warriors, championed by the white missionary Samuel Kirkland, supported the colonial cause while the sachems declared neutrality. After the war, the warriors or Christian Party followed the converted Skanando. The sachems, called the Pagan Party, maintained the ancient
traditions and elected to relocate to Oriske. The Pagan Party, about one hundred fewer in
number than the Christian Party, either ignored Christian missionaries or “did what they
could to disrupt” their meetings. This endemic factionalism would later exacerbate the
tribe’s vulnerability to New York State’s avarice for tribal lands. According to
Campisi, the tribal divisions found articulation in religious arguments, each faction
seeking ideological justification for their opposition in religious dogma. “This process
made it easy for individuals and groups to maximize their political opportunities; it led to
a bewildering succession of shifts in alliances, group membership, and sectarian
allegiances,” Campisi observed. “And it made easy the separation of the Oneidas from
their land.” Indeed, the year Dorothy visited the Oneidas, the state negotiated a treaty
that divided the reservation between the two factions. Two years later, the state purchased
from the Christian Party a large tract of land for six hundred dollars. Within the decade,
New York State further capitalized on the factionalism by buying additional land tracts
from the parties.

Before Dorothy arrived, then, the divisiveness was firmly established, the factions
split by religious, district, and political lines. She felt no hesitation, however, in seeking
out the members of the Pagan Party, her “soul drawn out to pray for” them once she
learned that they “never worship God but once a year, believing only in the Great Spirit”
(61). Recruiting escorts among her newfound white friends, including her patron Calvin
Young and his daughter Peggy, Dorothy set out on July 28, 1805, to Oriske, or the “South
Settlement” (61). On arrival, she learned that a formidable, ancient chief named the
Blacksmith awaited her.
Hlauwistany,\textsuperscript{792} also known as Jacob Blacksmith, or simply The Blacksmith, was a chief warrior and head of the Pagan Party. According to Oneida Indian Nation Historian Tony Wonderley, the Blacksmith served as a major voice for the tribe, participating in a treaty with Pennsylvania founder William Penn and as an officer in the Revolutionary War, as well as a signatory on the Fort Stanwix Treaty and two separate tribal petitions to New York governors. Older even than the ancient Skanando at his death, he lived only five years more following Dorothy’s sojourn with the Oneidas.\textsuperscript{793}

Fearsome to Dorothy, the Blacksmith “was the strangest figure I ever beheld” (62). His “visage was so horrible,” and he “was a real Pagan within, as well as outwardly so,” Dorothy recorded (62). “To my eye, he appeared a complete savage: and I venture to say, the rememberance [\textit{sic}] of him in time, will never wear off” (63-64). Dorothy felt compelled to give a full description of the Blacksmith’s visual appearance in addition to her estimation of his soul’s distortion. Her depiction, while conjuring the stereotype of the Indian as “savage devil,” nevertheless rings authentic in that he presented the first truly alien figure to her Methodist-inspired conventional-mindedness:

His ears were slit, and hanging down, and his forehead, nose, cheeks, and chin, were painted red: he had a hairy cap on, with a red tail half a yard long, with a yellow striped ruffled dress, that came down to his feet, and the sleeves thereof to his fingers, bowed together with age, having on his breast a large ornament like a half moon of silver. (63)

With the visionary insight on which she so often relied, Dorothy felt “black darkness . . . covered his mind” for the Blacksmith “appeared as a beast of the earth” (62). To Dorothy, the Pagan Party leader must have satisfied every preconceived image
of the stereotypical “savage heathen.” Compounding her conventionalism and sparking a
gender-based alarm, the Blacksmith’s conduct toward the other whites accompanying
Dorothy bordered on frenzied. While clearly intended as an honor to Dorothy, the
Blacksmith stamped his feet “earnestly” in disapproval and dismissal of the other white
preachers, declaring they acted “‘friendly to us till they get our trees and lands, and then
they are no more our friends; but the Quakers are good people, and do not serve us so; I
love the Quakers’” (62). His admiration for the Quakers obviously extended to
Dorothy, for he grasped hold of her hands, refusing to relinquish them as he rejected the
other ministers, “whom he would not let come near him” (62). Dorothy confessed to the
turbulent feelings generated by the Blacksmith’s demonstrative approval and his “nipping
my hands almost together, until I was actually afraid of him” (62). Her fear
notwithstanding, Dorothy felt a blossoming admiration for the aged chieftain, his frank
welcome warming her to “the old Pagan Chief;” once he released her hands, the
Blacksmith “conducted himself respectfully” toward the female missionary (62).

Perhaps the Blacksmith’s acceptance of Dorothy derived from her daring in
venturing to the Southern Settlement despite the powerful combination of negative
rumors and her own personal “anxiety, which was great” (64). And Dorothy certainly had
heard rumors. Before her meeting with the chief, well-meaning friends had warned her of
his virulent dislike of most whites. The Blacksmith, she had heard, “thought the white
people devils” because the Oneida “were never infested with rats, or crows, till [the
whites] settled round them” (63). For an agricultural-based society like the Oneidas’,
which depended on domestic crops, wild berries and nuts, the presence of destructive rats
and crows must have represented evil portent indeed to the superstitious natives.
Dorothy’s bravery, then, as much as her association with Quakerism, may have endeared her to the formidable Blacksmith.

Additionally, the inclusiveness of Dorothy’s mission and message must have appealed to the Pagans. Dorothy’s writings insinuate that the Pagan Party felt distanced—in more ways than just the physical—from the majority of the tribe as missionaries rarely hazarded an undertaking there. She observed, “The Pagan Chief was glad to see me, because he thought it a true mark of friendship coming there” (62). Despite the Pagan Party’s refusal to participate in services at the Oneida chapel, “a good house built, for the purpose of gathering together every Sabbath,” and her own initial pessimism about the Blacksmith, Dorothy found the Oneidas of the Southern Settlement to be reverential to her and open-minded of the message she brought (62). The younger chiefs, aged women, and forty warriors accompanied the Blacksmith to her worship services, mimicking their chief’s tolerance and stoicism. “Blacksmith, the old Pagan Chief was highly pleased with my prayer, and sermon, and desired the favour of my ‘Coming again,’ when I bid him adieu” (63).

Dorothy’s religious service among the Pagan Party deserves examination, for in it one can detect a metaphor illustrating the Native American response to missionary-advanced Christianity. Surrounded by the warriors and women of the Pagan Party, and unquestionably discomposed by the foreign environment and culture, Dorothy resorted to kneeling prayer, just as she did in most moments of disquiet. Collapsing to her knees “in the place where they offer their yearly sacrifice,” she prayed to her white God. The ground where she worshipped was the site of the Pagan Party’s white dog ceremony, a newly resurrected practice which centered around the sacrifice of a pair of white dogs at
the Midwinter or New Year’s celebration. The accoutrement of pagan worship surrounding her little inhibited Dorothy:

A large pole was standing up, on which they fix a white dog, nigh the top, and then dance round it, imploring the Good Spirit to give them a plentiful crop of corn, from that which is just before put into the ground; rendering Him their thanks for His blessing upon the past crop the preceding summer. They have another white dog which they roast, and eat at the same time of their sacrifice, that are instead of lambs. (62)

In the clash of religions imaged here, the imminent eclipse of the Oneidas and their ancient way is revealed. Even surrounded by the physical elements of pagan religion, the white missionary persevered, chanting a new message of a singular God, alternate dogma, and different rites of worship. Dorothy was only one of a plethora of missionaries bent on converting the heathens, subjecting Native Americans to layer after generational layer of imperialistic religion. By degrees, the Bible and Christianity would overwhelm and subdue the elements of paganism and centuries-old religious practice. Similarly, the Native American becoming as extinct as their ancient cultures can be perceived. An early policy of near extermination from a new dominating culture, with a hardened allegiance to the principle of manifest destiny and fated to rule from sea to shining sea, would relegate the native to microscopic corners of the land and history. Both Native Americans and their religions would become “conquests” to an imperialistic power, virtually eradicated in the interest of the greater good.

Another example of the power struggle in Native American religiosity is discernable in Dorothy’s encounter with the natives at Brothertown on Aug. 16, 1805.
The Brothertown Indians were a mixture of Oneida and the Mohegan, Pequot, and Long Island Indians who migrated west to Brothertown in 1775, led by the native minister Samson Occom. Most of the Brothertown community would later move west with the Stockbridge Oneida in 1825 to settle in Wisconsin. Their descendants remain there today.

In 1805, Dorothy preached among the natives of Brothertown who practiced a hybrid Baptist doctrine, being “divided into two classes, one part believed in election, and the other in free salvation” (89). As a whole, however, they “had refused their minister” in shocked rejection of the prevailing religious tenet that women were subordinate in the affection of God:

. . . They said they would not worship such a cruel God as [the minister] served, as He only took care of a part of His creatures, and drew this comparison, by asking a question concerning their women: “Would not she be a cruel mother, who having two children, took the one and nursed it; and left the other to perish? So we will worship a God who takes care of all His children . . . .” (89-90)

Dorothy wholeheartedly approved their rationale, calling it “an excellent conclusion, and a sound argument” for she too questioned how Christians advanced such a theory. In her narrative, Dorothy used the example to illustrate to her predominantly white assemblage the confusion that white missionaries planted among the religiously untutored natives, as well as her assurance of “how far an Indian is capable of believing in the Living and True God, who is no Respecer of persons . . . .” (90).
And perhaps Dorothy had some inkling or premonitory vision of Native Americans’ demise as she preached that day to the Pagan Party, for her sermon demonstrates a remarkable insight into the Oneida situation. Equating the Pagan Party—indeed, the Oneidas as a whole—to the Israelite captives, denied of their birthright when Assyria conquered Israel, Dorothy proposed that the natives merely needed to shrug off the shackles of paganism and reclaim their former religious inheritance:

The text I spoke from was, “Alas, my brother!” which was opened to me, by the Revealing Light, so far, as to enable me to testify to them, that I believed they were of Jeroboam’s house, who were Israel’s seed, that were carried away captives by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, and so were come thither to keep their sacrifices, which were to typify Jesus the Son of God, who was offered up for them, and would call them back again into their own land, that should flow with milk and honey, and they should all be taught of God, who would be a Righteous King unto them, and join them to Judah, from whom they were separated for rebellion. I also signified, that their forefathers were carried away by Shalmaneser captives, because they worshipped two “Golden Calves.” (62-63)

Ironically, Dorothy’s interpreter that day reinforced the ill-fated collision of religions with his mistaken construal of the “golden calf” metaphor, which throughout the Bible symbolizes humankind’s apostasy and pagan worship. Chief Doctor Peter was the Pagan Party’s speaker and interpreter, “a religious man and of the Tuskerow nation, [who] spoke English well;” he translated “golden calves” into “yellow money” so that the native listeners “might understand the better” (63). Not only did Dorothy disapprove of the
paraphrase, but she also found fault with Doctor Peter’s technique, saying “there wanted animation in his delivery, which was a great disadvantage” (63).

Nevertheless, Dorothy, the Blacksmith, and the Pagan Party in general seemed pleased with the outcome of that day’s Christian services conducted in the midst of pagan worship grounds. Doctor Peter thanked Dorothy for her efforts on behalf of the Pagans and invited her to return the subsequent Sunday:

They were very attentive, and fully satisfied by Doctor Peter’s Energetic Speech, that indicated, “They were thankful that the Good Spirit had sent me over the Great Water to visit them; and they hoped the Great Spirit would take care of me; and conduct me safe back again to my own native place, requesting another visit from me next Sabbath morning if I would indulge them with my company.” (63)

After a week with the dual parties of the Oneida, Dorothy came to a greater understanding of the conflict raging between the warring factions and the religious schism that stymied any attempts at tribal unity. In particular, she marveled at the Indian view of Christianity, especially in the face of the bigotry which flourished alongside the white definition of religious faith:

What a strange view must the Indians have of the Christian religion: no wonder that they do refuse to practice it, and dare not place confidence in the fruitless professors; for it must be acknowledged, that they have made many of the Indians two fold more the children of the devil, by bringing strong drink unto them, and setting an example of wickedness before their eyes, which a Holy God will punish them severely for, as they were taught
to believe Jesus Christ has Died to take away sin: and can avail themselves of the privilege of reading the inspired writings of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Miracles of our Lord and Saviour, who crowned His Life with Mercy, Love, and Righteousness, and His followers must obey Him if they worship His Sceptre of holiness, that rules in the heart of every believer who submits to the Government of King Immanuel, the Prince of Peace. (70-71)

Part of the cancerous-like growth of Christianity among the Oneidas came from the Rev. Samuel Kirkland, a Presbyterian minister who “by fits and starts” gave shape to “an Indian Christianity that was at once Oneida and orthodox.” Despite his own questionable contribution to Oneida religion and culture, he nevertheless played a vital role in the furtherance of Dorothy’s own missionary work among the tribe.

Kirkland’s twenty-year history with the Oneida began late in January 1787. That evening, a holy man unknown to the natives stood before a group of Oneida and Stockbridge Indians gathered at Old Oneida for a day of fellowship and festival. Instead of bringing a message of a compassionate and all-embracing God, Kirkland spent the long, bitter-cold hours of the day and night “berating [them] for past wrongs and challenging [them] to live lives of purity and sobriety.” With a “tenacious character that could run to stubbornness on occasion,” Kirkland established a small but vocal congregation among the Oneida. The natives faithful to Kirkland perceived in him “a spiritual director, a guide in the midst of troubled times,” while others viewed him as a part of “the unscrupulous and the greedy who shouldered Oneidas out of the way.”
Kirkland’s political history with the Oneida, however, has been well documented and some credit him with indirectly contributing to Oneida survival and protecting tribal lands by enlisting their support of the patriots during the Revolutionary War. Convincing Skanando of the need to rally around the colonists, Kirkland became the catalyst for the Oneidas’ critical and ironic part in the victory over the royalists and the formation of the United States.\textsuperscript{805} During the war, the Oneidas proved invaluable as soldiers, raiders, spies, and messengers. They distinguished themselves as fighters during an ambush of General Herkimer’s militia near Oriskany Creek, New York, a clash which historian Barbara Graymont calls “one of the bloodies battles of the war.”\textsuperscript{806} They again rendered faithful and meritorious service at the Battle of Saratoga, the turning point of the Revolution, for it demonstrated that the colonials could withstand a substantial professional army and helped propel France (America’s most valuable ally) into the war. A white comrade at the battle later recalled the Oneidas as brave men who “fought Like Bull Dogs.”\textsuperscript{807} At Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78, they supplied George Washington’s starving army with hundreds of bushels of corn. Their alliance, however, strained relations with four other Iroquoian members of the Six Nation Confederacy who were sympathetic to the British.\textsuperscript{808} With the patriotic victory, the new U.S. Continental Congress acknowledged Oneida assistance by offering them in 1784 a guarantee of their original tribal lands.\textsuperscript{809} Yet, by contributing their formidable fighting skills to the war effort, they helped set into motion a mighty land-hungry machine that gobbled up Oneida tribal domain in a series of indeterminate treaties and disputed claims that remains unresolved today.

Kirkland’s successful bid to recruit the Oneidas to the patriot side can be mostly
attributed to the influence of Chief Skanando. Even before the outbreak of hostilities between colonists and loyalists, the competing factions of sachems and warriors had formed amongst the Oneidas. The warriors, “chafing under the restrictive leadership of the sachems,” sided with Kirkland, who gave them “an ideological foundation for their politics, a sense of legitimacy that further intensified the bickering.” The sachems objected to Kirkland’s “theological strictness, his rigid qualifications for baptism, and his activities in general.” Kirkland became the earthly instrument whereby Skanando achieved spiritual deliverance, and the aged chieftain’s conversion cemented a lifelong connection between the two men. Not only did Skanando side with Kirkland and his revolutionary cause, but he also lived out the remainder of his life as a dedicated supporter of the missionary. When he died, Skanando made a last request to be buried by the side of his spiritual mentor. In the cemetery of Hamilton Academy, built on original Oneida tribal grounds, the graves of Kirkland and Skanando lie side by side opposite the chapel.

By the time Dorothy journeyed to the Oneida tribal lands, Kirkland was a well-seasoned, 64-year-old preacher to the Indians. His esteem of Dorothy can be discerned in his compliance in setting up and advertising her meetings at Oneida Castle as well as in his willingness in admitting her as a secular and spiritual confidant. Not only did Kirkland approve of Dorothy but also his family. His daughter Sally Kirkland Amory, became a long-time endorser of Dorothy’s, and his daughter Eliza Kirkland Robinson not only helped arrange Dorothy’s services but also accompanied the female missionary on her travels from meeting to meeting.
Perhaps the aged Kirkland’s endorsement arose from an affinity with Dorothy born of their mutual trials in their furtherance of the kingdom of God. As Dorothy wrote, the two shared a deep gratitude to “the Lord our God [who] had been with us in ten thousand dangers, where death threatened us in the most poignant manner” (87). Certainly, Kirkland felt at ease enough with Dorothy to relate to her his near-death experience at the hands of the Oneida. Despite his ministry of forty years, twenty of which occurred after he had “adopted an Indian’s life, living among them for their benefit,” his early days with the tribe had not been easy ones. When he first moved among the Oneida, the leaders honored the missionary by assigning “the best man they had” to act as the missionary’s escort; yet, when the guide died only a few days after being attached to Kirkland, the superstitious natives attributed their member’s death to the white man. They were, Kirkland related to Dorothy, determined to have revenge, life, for life. I was commanded to fall asleep, and a fire was prepared; but while they were all round me, I kept singing hymns, trusting in God to deliver me, yet they often said to me, “Go to sleep, why do you sing?” At last one of the Chiefs was wrought on, and made an affecting speech, signifying, that, “This brother had fallen down a few steps short of their forefathers, and because he had fallen short a few paces, were they to kill a white brother for it” saying, “It will bring innocent blood upon our Nation if we kill him:” therefore, they hearkened unto this Chief, and I was marvellously [sic] delivered from the jaws of death. (87)
A second tale, related by Kirkland to Dorothy, confirmed the missionary’s exceptionally good fortune in escaping mortal harm amongst the natives:

Another wonderful escape I had through the goodness of God: I had taught a number of the young Indians to sing psalms, and they used to come and sing with me, and I prayed, so that many of them were become civilized, and did not like to go out among the warriors, which enraged the men of war much, so that they agreed to take my life from me, saying, “I wanted to teach them to milk, and hoe, and make women of them.” The night they fixed for putting me to death, I was fast asleep, and an old woman came and tried to awake [sic] me, knowing their intention, crying, “Up; up; up;” many times, and then left me; but being very sound, I did not regard what was said unto me, and therefore laid still, till she came and shook me by the shoulders, and said, “up; up; flee; flee for life;” giving me a blanket to hide me; I run [sic] among some thick bushes, and covered myself all over, laying down under them, which I had no sooner done, but I heard them march along, sounding through the woods, singing their warlike songs, and passed by me, to go to the hut where I came from, and sought me with great fury, threatening the aged woman that they would kill her unless she would tell where I was, but she said, I was not there, and then cried out pitiably, “What! kill an old granny! kill an old granny!” so they went away, and I remained hidden several days, until their rage was pacified against me. (87-88)
After listening to Kirkland’s frightening tales, Dorothy, true to her somewhat disputatious nature and special calling, did not hesitate to seize the opportunity to evangelize—even to one as seasoned as Kirkland. In Dorothy’s view, no moment proved unsuitable to nourish the flagging spiritual health of a member of her worldwide flock—no matter what his age, vocation, or rank. As the evangelical pair wended their way through the six miles of New York forest back to Oneida Castle, Dorothy praised, chastised, and counseled Kirkland. Thus, the largely untested female missionary became spiritual advisor to the veteran minister, a clergyman who had preached his first sermon before Dorothy was even born.

Her personal response to Kirkland mimicked the rhetorical strategies she frequently employed in her public addresses: a commiseration and alignment with the downtrodden commenced the address, followed by a rebuke of what Dorothy perceived as sinful behavior, and concluded with her propositions for reformation.

Dorothy began by remarking on how “pleased” she was “to hear the deliverance that God wrought out for my friend” during his early excursions among the native populations (88). Perhaps she too feared the ramifications of a vocation conducted in a culture so alien to her own. This well-placed anxiety, however, did not excuse his failure to invest complete and absolute trust in God’s protection for His messengers. Perhaps Dorothy expected Kirkland to share her comprehensive reliance on and conviction in the shield of God. After all, she had on many occasions utterly relied on secular and celestial veneration for a holy messenger. Dorothy scolded Kirkland: “[I] remarked, that if he had been more faithful, the Lord then would have blessed his labours more abundantly, which he with tears acknowledged he believed” (88). On the heels of her spiritual
chastisement came one concerning earthly matters—Dorothy’s perception of Kirkland’s flawed dealings with the natives. Conceivably, she witnessed in Kirkland the same unhealthy lust for tribal lands that others alleged he harbored. Whatever the catalyst for her impressions, Dorothy suspected something other than altruism motivated Kirkland:

“Let the time past suffice,” I cried, “but if thou hadst only taken thought for the Indians, God would have cared for thee and thy children; and I am fully sensible no one will ever profit the Indians, unless they can lay aside their own interest, and I am thankful that thou hast done the good thou hast: but I wish thou wouldest let the time past suffice, and what thy hand findest to do, do it with all thy might.” My aged brother, with tears said, he would take my advice: for what I had advanced was the truth, and I found great peace in declaring what I did . . . . (88-89)

In Kirkland, Dorothy witnessed a dangerous portent for herself, one that presaged the catastrophic evolution of a missionary who placed her needs before others’:

[I] hope that useful lesson, which the Lord my God taught me by His Spirit to give him, will be put in practice by myself, in every point of view, as touching my spiritual labour in His Vineyard; for, unless the heart is centred in Him, and weaned from all worldly attainments, or earthly possessions, it is not possible that He will honour us with spiritual riches, and qualify us to bring home many souls to Him, as instruments in His own Hands, to bring about that wonderful event, when the Outpouring of His Spirit causeth, “All to know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest.” (89)
Another missionary to the Native Americans to touch Dorothy’s life was Abraham Serjeant. When Dorothy first met him, Serjeant boasted a thirty-year career among the Stockbridge natives, and nineteen of those years had been served consecutively. The Stockbridge Indians originated from the tribe of Mahicans, or “The Place Where the Waters Are Never Still.” The Mahicans were early decimated by contact with Europeans: about 92 percent of their precontact population succumbed to European epidemics; disastrous military and trade encounters with the Dutch led to further reduced numbers; and the monopolization of the fur trade by the Dutch and Mohawk drove them from their native lands to Massachusetts in the seventeenth century. There, they became known as the Stockbridge. Eventually, English settlers drove them into Pennsylvania, and after the American Revolution many resettled with the Oneida in New York and later in Wisconsin.

According to Belknap and Morse in their report to the Scots Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge in 1796, the Stockbridge Indians “in general attend on the public instructions of Mr. Sergeant, and the religious conferences which he holds with them.” Like their brethren on the Oneida settlements, the Stockbridge men attended church far less frequently than the women. Of the approximately 300 Stockbridge, Serjeant’s church consisted of twenty-five women and five men; two of the latter had been disciplined for intoxication and, at the time of Belknap and Morse’s visitation, remained under suspension from Serjeant’s church. “We were present at one religious exercise, which was decently attended, and their singing was remarkably soft and harmonious. Many of these people, male and female, can read English, and some few can
write. They received, with great pleasure, some religious books, which we distributed among them.”

Serjeant lent full support to Dorothy’s mission among the Stockbridge, providing both locale and congregation for her services there the second week in August 1805. The Stockbridge lived more resplendently than their Oneida neighbors, sporting “better houses,” “a school for their children,” and a “church which is distinguished by a steeple, that you can see some distance off” (83). The latter was a “neat, clean, wood building with glass windows, and a handsome entrance, having a gallery all round, excepting where the minister sits” (83). Also attending were Serjeant’s three daughters, all “dressed as fashionable as any women in middle rank, although there were but few to see them, except the Indians, who all came with a blanket round them” (83). The Stockbridge congregation joined fully in Dorothy’s services, eliciting her admiration: “The Indians fantastically dressed, sung a psalm feelingly, which moved my passion of love, so that I wept all the time, tears of joy” (83). Serjeant and another interpreter, a Stockbridge chief named Captain Hendrick, facilitated Dorothy’s services by translating her prayers and sermon into the congregants’ native tongue. Grateful for the chief’s assistance, Dorothy gifted Captain Hendrick with “my pocket book [Bible] as I had not a crown to reward him with, for interpretation” (84). Her gift speaks of her esteem for Hendrick, since she valued the small Bible and had parted with it only once before, and then only in dire need.

Most notably, the Stockbridge women attending Dorothy’s services captured her attention for their humbleness, piety, and reverence. An eighty-year-old native woman—the “oldest squaw” in the village and appropriately named “Eve”—professed to be “Born
again,” having “been a Christian thirty years” (82). Despite her advanced age, Eve
“walked one day to hear me preach four miles, which my Master bid me ‘Reward her for
it double’” (82). The kind of faith that Dorothy witnessed among the natives encouraged
the missionary to continue her constant travels between the tribes, despite illness and
fatigue, feeling “it was a duty lay on me to visit some of the Indian women whom I felt
dear to me” (82). The women of the Muhheconnuk nation of Stockbridge Indians
demonstrated their appreciation in a written address to Dorothy, wanting to “shew their
affection and gratitude” for Dorothy having crossed “the Great Ocean, to call them to the
Fold of Jesus” (92). Written in their own language, and later translated into English by
Hendrick, the declaration illustrates both the deep spirituality of the native women and
Dorothy’s strong influence on them. The familiarity and intimacy of the salutation of
“Sister” reinforce their acceptance of Dorothy as a woman, minister, and fellow sufferer:

Sister, While we were sitting by the side of our fire-place here, we saw
you coming, and when you opened your mouth, we believed you were sent
by the Great and Good Spirit to visit us poor natives of this Island. We feel
thankful to Him that He has put such a love in your heart, that you were
willing to undertake such a long and tedious journey on purpose to deliver
His message to us. We thank the Great Good Spirit that He has protected
you on the way, and that you arrived here safely. Sister, In behalf of the
rest of our women, we now heartily thank you for your kindness, and for
the pains you have taken to visit us. We hope by the help of the Great
Good Spirit, we shall ever remember you, and the good words which you
delivered to us. (Bank 93)
In return for their words of high praise, Dorothy immortalized them by reprinting their letter in both The Bank of Faith and Works United and in her Letters Addressed to Dorothy Ripley. Her inclusion of the letter, composed by the women and, I believe, unaltered by Dorothy, gives voice to an otherwise silenced component of nineteenth-century women. Not until 1883 and Sarah Winnemucca’s Life Among the Piutes would a book written by a Native-American woman be published. This letter, predating Winnemucca’s work by eighty years, takes on important historical significance as an early example of Native American women’s writing.

Similar to the piety she found among the Stockbridge women, Dorothy witnessed a devoutness among the Oneida women that claimed her admiration. With the exception of Skanando, the females exclusively comprised her Oneida flock. When she eschewed escort or interpreter, seeking the more intimate connection to the Oneida that could only be formed during private moments and without the fanfare of white escorts, preachers, interpreters, and nearby residents in tow, it was the women who opened to her. Alone in the village with the Oneida, she walked “from one cottage to another,” personally inviting the natives to group worship and prayer, yet only the women responded to her call (66). “Feeling great sorrow of heart on their account,” Dorothy ministered to her tiny female flock, beseeching “the Benign Parent of us each, to open their blind eyes, that they might see Jesus, the Saviour of His people; and believe in Him, who is the light of the world” (66). The Oneida women did not disappoint her in their response.

They were very solemn, and sat as still as possible during the time of prayer, while the tears trickled down their cheeks. When I arose they each lifted their eyes to Heaven, and then looking earnestly at me, laid their
hands on their breasts or hearts, still melted in tenderness in my presence,
and gave me to understand that they knew something of the God whom I
approached. (66)

Dorothy saw in the moment the true markings of blessed union, for the women
congregants—native and white—communed with each other despite the barrier of
language and lack of interpreter. In that moment, the transcendency of spiritual
communion superseded the fundamentals of language. The Oneida women “gave me to
understand that they knew something of the God whom I approached, and felt what was
said, though it was not in their language, and they knew not mine” (66). Writing the next
day, Dorothy enthused, “I felt great refreshment in my spirit thereby, and a hope that He
who is merciful will meet those after their own way, and according to His unbounded
Love and Goodness, which is manifested in and through His Son Jesus” (66).

Similarly, the women of the tribes at Orisky and Brothertown comprised the
bulk of her congregation, far outnumbering the males. Much more so than the men, wrote
Dorothy, the women “have a greater knowledge of God before their eyes” (86). This
spirituality made the women “much better than the men,” for it gave them in-built
defenses against the hardships of Native American life in the early nineteenth century.
Most importantly, Dorothy observed, women’s spirituality “preserve[d] them from
intoxication, and other evils, that the men are liable to be overtaken with, when they are
deprived of their reason by strong drink” (86).

Perhaps Dorothy’s strong connection to the women of the tribes in New York
stemmed from her admiration of the industriousness they exhibited—a trait which
Dorothy herself highly valued. Their diligence also struck the female minister as a direct
contrast to that exhibited by the men. She praised the female natives, whose lives were characterized by great hardship, and she knew that the adversity and privation of her own life quest did not surpass theirs: “I am no ways calculated to live as the Indian squaws; yet believe the Lord can enable me to endure great hardships, if He sees meet to call me to work in that part of His vineyard, or soften my sorrows, and assuage my grief, by supplying me bountifully, as at this time by His extraordinary kindness, sending me help from a quarter that I might least expect,” Dorothy wrote. “I conclude the day with holy aspirations to the Giver of all my Mercies for His Spirit to whisper peace, and free salvation unto all this people, who appear in a forlorn condition” (67).

Their reverence in worship, dedication in domestic labors, and genuine friendship even beyond the boundaries of tribal kinship drew Dorothy’s respect. And in return, she elicited theirs. As Dorothy noted in her journal, “I was greatly led into sympathy with my Indian sisters, and their little helpless infants, whom with pleasure I could aid, was the Lord to give ability to a heart filled with generous sentiments to all His offspring” (77).

Although Native American history generally favors male over female, the Oneida Indian Nation—and Dorothy—placed great emphasis on the woman’s role. The Oneidas traditionally have been matriarchal, with women wielding significant clan power by selecting tribal leadership and possessing the authority to depose chiefs. The culture was also structured around matrilocal-extended families and matrilineal descent. Clan mothers held rights to property, family names, and titles. Upon marriage, the husband moved into the longhouse of the wife, and the residence and household functions came under the control of the eldest female of the family. Children were born into the clan of their mother.
The Oneida cultural emphasis on family can be seen in Dorothy’s encounter with Skanando on the first day of her mission. Upon Dorothy’s arrival, the Chief’s first act was to introduce the missionary to his extended family, all housed within the Skanando home: “[He] shewed me his wife, introduced his children, grand-children, and great-grand-children with joy and happiness” (59). When Dorothy enquired, “How many children, and grandchildren hast thou?” the aged chief “tried to number his posterity by counting his fingers many times over, and then laughed heartily, and cried out, “I cannot tell” (59). Dorothy frankly confessed to her surprise at such marked family unity, for “such, I presume, we do not expect, when we look at their condition, as the heathen” (59). Perhaps because of her own dispersed family, irreparably distanced by death and evangelistic fervor, Dorothy admired the importance that the Oneida placed on family: “My soul,” she testified, “was so highly gratified” (59).

Dorothy’s six weeks among the Oneidas revealed to the missionary the deprivation in which the natives lived. During her first days among the Oneida, Dorothy was not given sustenance despite the long days of ministering to the natives, riding horseback, walking through the village, and addressing all and any who would listen to her holy message. Each night she returned to Calvin Young’s home having gone without food all day. The reason behind the Oneida failure to extend refreshment to their spiritual advisor soon became evident to Dorothy: the Oneidas lived dangerously close to starvation.

The “Three Sisters” crops—corn, beans and squash—provided the basis of domesticated produce, although wild plant foods such as berries, nuts, and greens also comprised an important part of their diet. Although Dorothy does not describe her
meal, a sample of the Oneida fare can be found among the writings of Dutchman Harmen Meyndertsz van den Bogaert, a young barber-surgeon who visited the Oneidas in 1634. He enjoyed a repast of baked and boiled pumpkins, dried strawberries and blueberries, sunflower seeds, corn mush, beans and corn cooked in turkey fat, venison, dried and fresh salmon, turkey, rabbit cooked with chestnuts, and small loaves of cornbread baked with beans, bear fat, or bacon.827

After a full week among the Oneidas, the women shared their meal with Dorothy, and their modest allotment of cornbread loaves acquainted the missionary with the reality of their daily hunger. The “women brought me some Indian corn bread, with large beans stuck all over it, which I thought were raisins: but, found my mistake as soon as I took one” (77). The meal proved so alien to Dorothy that she could not bring herself to accept the offering, despite the hunger that gnawed at her: “it being very sad, and boiled, I chose to fast all day till night, rather than eat it” (77). Dorothy’s rejection of the food “suited one of my poor sisters very well: for, observing my uncommon delicacy, she looked at me, and made me understand that she was hungry, and could eat it fast enough: so I gave it her, and she wrapped it up as the richest dainty, with thankfulness” (77). The woman’s delight when given the small bounty humbled Dorothy, who vowed that the moment “was a lesson I mean ever to remember, while I sojourn below” (77).

Besides the obvious hunger, Dorothy also noted the impoverishment discernable in the Oneidas’ dress. Her close communion with the women afforded Dorothy ample opportunity to witness what she considered a pitiable lack of adequate attire among her own gender. “My heart was truly affected while praying with them, lamenting the disadvantage they laboured under for want of cultivation, both in spiritual and natural
things” (69). When Dorothy noted the Stockbridge women’s lack of clothing, she attempted some small part in alleviating it:

I was sorry that it was not in my power to clothe them with necessary things; for I had but four gowns and I gave them three of my little number, and from one dozen pieces of new linen, I left but one change: so the God of Heaven and earth, put it into the hearts of my rich Christian sisters to supply my returning wants, when I go among them; and above all, clothe my poor Red sisters with the Saint’s pure white linen, that I may meet them in the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. (82)

Again, among the Oneida, she shared her meager cache of clothing even though she could ill-afford to do so. She “took and divided” whatever “things as I could spare,” putting her trust “in the Lord for a future supply” (68). Dorothy gifted the women with “my linen shifts, which I spun in England” (68). The women appeared “well pleased” with Dorothy’s largesse, promising to “make gowns” of the linen, “as they do without under garments, and almost every necessary of apparel, we conceive that we want” (68). The Oneida women’s obvious pleasure in the endowment both gladdened and disheartened the female missionary: “Marks of their gratitude, in being thankful for the smallest favors, cheered my heart, and revived my spirits for a few moments,” Dorothy confessed, “but on comparing my line of inheritance with theirs, I was ready to sink into despair, and was overwhelmed in the midst of them” (69).

Dorothy’s sympathy toward the native women warred with her irritation at the prejudice displayed during encounters between white and native women. When she gifted
the Oneida women with the gowns, for example, the white women accompanying her whispered their disapproval in an aside to the missionary:

Some Christian professing sisters, who abound in garments and gold and silver, charged me thus, as I was coming along, “You must take care of your trunks and clothes; for the Indians are great thieves, they will steal what you have.” I answered, “I mean to save them the trouble of stealing my clothes, for I shall give them,” and so have taken the first opportunity to disperse abroad whatever I have, believing it my duty to try to gain their affection by shewing disinterestedness unto them, while I am here. (68)

In appreciation, the native women opened not only their homes but their hearts to Dorothy, exhibiting a conviviality and intimacy not readily expressed toward outsiders. As if in frank contradiction of the whites’ earlier words of caution, the Oneida women fully embraced Dorothy, seemingly instinctively reacting in kind to the impartiality exhibited by the white missionary. Astounded, Dorothy’s white companions exclaimed over the uncommon sociability and demonstrativeness expressed by the female Oneidas:

The women opened their boxes and shewed me all they had, which surprised some of the white people so much that they said, “We have seen more of the Indians since you came, than we have for years while we have lived in this neighbourhood: for they do not put confidence in us, as they do in you.” I answered, “I do not wonder they can trust me, as I have prayed for them many years; and have shed thousands of tears for their miserable situation.” (68)
Even from their most ardent supporters did racism buffet the natives and the whites who adopted their lifestyle. For instance, despite his voluntary, thirty-year acquaintance with the Stockbridge, Serjeant too demonstrated racial insensitivity. An illustration of such occurred as Dorothy preached among the Stockbridge on Aug. 12, 1805. During the service, Dorothy noticed a white woman among the native females attending. Originally from New Jersey, the woman had married a Stockbridge, and the couple produced two children. The previous winter, their third child had died in infancy, having “perished for want of clothes” (82). The baby’s demise from exposure elicited Dorothy’s sorrow and compassion: “Poor babe! its sorrows are at an end, and it is shining with the robe of Jesu’s Righteousness!” (82) The woman’s remaining children, however, remained pitiably bereft of clothing, running naked through the village and prompting the female missionary to chide the woman for her disregard of her children’s need. To Dorothy’s somewhat elitist way of thinking, the white woman “ought to be a pattern to the Indian women” in ways of deportment (82). “To induce her, I gave her a long morning gown, to make her helpless children each one, requesting Serjeant to let his daughter make them” (82). Serjeant, however, quickly voiced his qualms, dismissing Dorothy’s offering as “too good” for the woman (82). Dorothy scolded in kind: “It will last the better for being fine and good” (82). As if in reward for her kindness, Dorothy had the pleasure of seeing the white woman attend one of her religious services, the penitent having traveled a great distance to hear Dorothy preach: “I had an opportunity to preach Repentance and Faith in Jesus Christ, and was blessed in my own soul abundantly, for feeling the miseries of my fellow creatures in every direction, attending to the Spirit of God in me” (83).
More than likely, Dorothy’s own familiarity with the physical toll of hardship, as well as the emotional burdens of isolation, dispossession, and otherness, lent her a keener sensitivity to the Oneida women than their white counterpart could muster. She also lacked the generations-deep prejudice that coated the relations between the white and native races in post-revolutionary New York. As her mother country had lost more than twenty years previous the fight for the contested land of the United States, Dorothy harbored no intolerance or bigotry bred and cultivated by those warring cultures still tussling for New York acreage.

The decade before Dorothy’s arrival, the Oneidas numbered 628, less than half of their number at the end of the Revolutionary War. Dorothy estimated that “the number of Indians here-abouts are seven or eight hundred,” but as she made no pretensions toward sociology, her numbers understandably cannot be deemed definitive. Rather, Dorothy focused on causation, and in her zeal for touting an all-inclusive religion, she laid the blame for the diminished Oneida numbers squarely at the feet of “the wicked white people” (67). Specifically, she condemned whites for what she deemed the instigation and perpetuation of alcoholism among the Oneida, the fraudulent business dealings with the natives, and the gross exploitation of natives’ illiteracy and cultural unfamiliarity.

First, of particular concern to Dorothy were the susceptibility of Indians to alcoholism and the frequent exploitation of this vulnerability by whites during business dealings. “The white people,” she criticized, “introduce strong drink among them, to defraud and take advantage of their weakness and gross ignorance. Was not the Merciful God to provide a little food for them, as He does for the birds of the air, they must utterly
perish from off the face of the earth . . .” (67). Further, these unscrupulous whites, “who are of a bad principle, receive their clothes, and small necessaries for rum, or money to procure [the rum], which I think should be severely punished” (70). Although whites faced a fine if found guilty of selling rum to the natives, Dorothy scoffed, “it is so trifling, that it is not regarded by the wicked professors of Christianity” (70). As Belknap and Morse noted, the aftermath of the Revolutionary War witnessed an influx of white settlers around Oneida Castle, bringing both honest and dishonest whites into contact with the natives. While most whites were “in general, sober, peaceable, and well informed; and their plantations are continually enlarging and improving, by the hand of industry,“ mixed in among them were the “intemperate, knavish, and profane.” As the explorers lamented, “It is unhappy for the Indians, that they have more connexion with these [unsavory whites] than with the virtuous part of the community.”

On one notable occasion, Dorothy witnessed the profiteering and fraudulent trading between white merchants and natives, leading her to generally indict deceptive whites but more specifically to condemn the treachery of sham Christians. “One poor Indian came into one of those professing Christian’s house, with a brass candlestick, that was worth four shillings sterling, and begged two shilling loaves of bread for it,” Dorothy recalled, “but the inhuman woman only gave him one loaf, which I am ashamed at, and am sorry that she is the mother of children; knowing that this is not the way to secure bread here for them, neither lay up riches in Eternity, which will not wax old” (70). Dorothy felt the counterfeit Christian compounded her guilt when she promptly turned to Dorothy and indulged in a bit of gossiping, warning Dorothy that the owner of the home where the missionary lodged was a Deist. The woman deigned to offer her home to
Dorothy as a worthy alternative. Already riled by the woman’s earlier conduct toward the native, Dorothy tersely responded, “He acts like a Christian to me, being merciful” (70), and she abruptly quit the store.

This intimate view of the Oneidas’ situation proved the catalyst for Dorothy’s transformed opinion of the Native American. Whereas she began her journey among the Oneidas as the pejorative cultural hero or even that historically vilified agent of western imperialism, she gradually evolved into a compassionate and loving missionary and champion of the native. As she progressively butted against the racism and prejudice that colored the views of many of the whites, she became increasingly rankled by the divisiveness that prevented a harmonic coexistence between the natives and their neighbors. Accordingly, as her relationships among the natives became ever more loving, her receptivity to and from prejudicial whites degenerated into vexatious resentment.

Such a response can be seen in her exchange with interpreter Judge Dean. Her earlier sublime connection with the Oneida women notwithstanding, Dorothy valued a verbal link with the natives as well. To this end, she sought out James “Judge” Dean “to ask if he would interpret for me, as he knew the language, being among them much when a child” (69). Dean’s answer came not as a rejoinder to her question but as an admonition for Dorothy to refrain from investing an overabundance of merit to the natives: “Few know an Indian’s heart,” Dean cautioned the female missionary, “but I do; and I think they are not of the same species which we are” (70). Reigning in what could be a formidable, righteous temper, Dorothy “smiled with contempt at his opinion,” and instead assured Dean that “the Lord will visit them with a gracious outpouring of His Spirit; then shall it be evidenced their genius, or mental powers, are bright as ours; and
that their hearts are as susceptible of divine impressions” (70). Pushed beyond civility, Dorothy challenged Dean about his prejudice, charging cultural difference as the foundation of white disparagement rather than any true mental deficiency of the native: “For my part, I believe many of them are wrought upon by the Light, but their dwelling in the woods obscurely, have made them appear in the eyes of men, almost like the brute creation” (70). As usual, Dorothy felt no inhibitions about confronting male clergy with their shortcomings, and not surprisingly, Dean rejected her solicitation of his interpretation skills: “I was not sorry that Judge Dean gave me a refusal; for as soon as I saw him, it passed through my mind that he was not a suitable person to administer spiritual comfort” (71).

In her autobiography, Dorothy added further insult to Dean, alluding to fraudulency in his dealings with the Oneida. She cast doubt on Dean’s acquisition of Oneida tribal lands as repayment for what she considered questionable services. During the Revolutionary War, Dean served as a spy while posing as an Indian trader. In return, the Oneidas granted Dean a two-acre tract of land in 1786 that came to be known as Westmoreland, New York, situated in the western part of Oneida County. Dean actually settled on the property long before the sale of the land was ratified by his deed. “He was confident, doubtless,” in his war heroism and the Oneidas’ gift, wrote one historian, and so “accordingly set forth with [his family] for their new home.” The explorer DeWitt Clinton more freely impugned the methods of both Dean and Kirkland:

In passing the Oneida Reservation we saw some white settlers, and it is not a little surprising that they receive any encouragement from the Indians, considering how often they have been coaxed out of their lands
by their white brethren. I shall give a few prominent illustrations: 1. Peter Smith, a former clerk of Abraham Herring—he established a store in their country—called a son Skenando, after their Chief, and by wheedling the Legislature as well as the Indians, he has succeeded in acquiring an immense body of excellent land at a low price, and he is now very opulent.


In her account of the encounter with Dean and her determination of his unsuitability in religious matters, Dorothy wrote, “He might do to make treaties, and receive of their lands a reward, if they were disposed to trust him so far” (71). She further maligned Dean by writing that she did not regret the long, arduous trip that she and her companion Eve Young underwent in order to consult Dean, for their ample reward in the afterlife was as certain as his was uncertain:

Our riding eighteen miles, will not lose its reward of the Lord my God, who has heard the sentiments of this wise man, respecting his poor Indian brethren: and I have no doubt, when all Nations are at the Bar of the Eternal Judge, that he will see those stand with him there, although he thinks they are not of the same species with us. God grant that none of them may rise up to condemn him in the awful day of Judgment, when all shall receive according to the mercy they manifest in this world. (71)

With or without interpreter, and often unaccompanied, Dorothy preached to both Christians and pagans, white and native, indoor and alfresco, using whatever means she
had “to benefit those whom the Lord my god had caused me to sow in tears for, ever since I was a child” (64). Her venues included not only the purpose-built chapels, but also the humble locales of barns, school-houses, and the cleared patches in New York’s wilderness—any place where the spiritually needy could congregate to “hear a stranger” (64-65). Despite the heavy physical toll, Dorothy rotated her evangelistic missions between the Oneida village, the Pagans’ South Settlement, and the white village of Vernon. During this time, Dorothy preached “in a new large barn” belonging to her friend Calvin Young. More than three hundred people gathered amongst the hay, animal stalls, and farming utensils in the barn “which is the first I ever preached in” (65). Witnessing the intermingling of white and native within, Dorothy compared the two cultures—at once friendly and opposing—to the two Jewish kingdoms of the Old Testament, Judah and Israel. Clearly, Dorothy recognized a parallel in the situations of the warring Biblical kings who fought for Jewish supremacy and the opposing white and native cultures who fought for post-colonial America. Like Judah and Israel, the land of America would become the source of inter-cultural dispute, internal conflict, and military tussles.

The rigorous pace that Dorothy set to address all three audiences—Christian native, pagan native, and white—placed great strain on her as she traveled both by foot and horseback. Wearied yet exuberant at the receptivity of her followers, Dorothy felt her heart fill “with thankfulness that the Lord had furnished me with strength to go from one part to another this day, and at the close to enable me, in His Fear, to testify” that the “Lord my God . . . has prepared my way and given me an increase of Faith in Him for this people, whom my lot is cast among” (65). Her six-week stint at Oneida Castle, one of
the few to be undertaken by a white woman during the early Republican years, ushered in a compassionate element to Dorothy’s nature that seemed underdeveloped in the missionary in her beginning evangelistic efforts. Her work among the natives, who “had many times been shown me in a vision by the Lord,” was preordained so that she might “see a part of the workmanship of His Hand” (59). By living amongst them, witnessing their struggles to secure home, religion and culture, she underwent a certain awakening to the hardships endured by yet another element of the marginalized component of the new United States. Coupled with her work among the poor, imprisoned, diseased, and dying, the work with America’s natives stirred in Dorothy the compassion and non-judgmentalism that would eventually become the crown of her missionary endeavors. The untapped empathy and understanding that generally lay dormant within her during the first missionary journey burst forth in a dam of love, compassion, and generosity that characterized her work in later years. Without this early work among the underprivileged populations of the new, burgeoning Republic—which increasingly prized ingenuity, success, and self-motivation—her evangelistic potential could never have been realized. Thus, in her encounters with America’s disenfranchised populations, Dorothy not only opened up spiritual and compassionate avenues for her flock, but also for herself.
Ye pilgrims of Christ, join heart and your hand;
To bring to his breast, and heavenly land;
The weakest believer, who pants for His Grace;
And joyful receiver, who knows Jesus’s Face.

Poor sinners once more, I must you invite;
For heavenly ore, my pen doth now write;
Methinks as stars fixed, my crown doth shine bright;
With you I have mixed, and sorrow’d all night.

Those lines you may read, when I am in dust;
The soul is not dead, and never will rust;
As earth-worms whose canker, shall eat them as fire;
Whose souls doth now hanker, for Satan’s bad hire.

I here shall conclude fifty years of my life;
And as a prelude, shall give up all strife;
For Jesus is Heaven, on earth now begun;
His riches are leaven, as bright as the sun.

I speak what I think, and borrow of none;
With pen, and my ink, I blow David’s horn;
The Spirit’s my Teacher, and God is my Guide;
And Christ is my Preacher, and dwells by my side.

— “A Hymn from My Nativity” (Address 17-18)

Conclusion

Dorothy was the first female preacher to conduct religious services before the U.S. Congress, and perhaps the first woman to address Congress in any regard. On Jan. 12, 1806, she broke the gender barrier by preaching a “lengthy” yet “fervent, evangelical, camp-meeting style” service in the newly constructed Hall of Representatives. With the exception of Harriet Livermore, no other woman has been granted that honor.

The Ninth United States Congress was in session in Washington, D.C., from March 4, 1805 to March 3, 1807, during the first two years of the second presidential administration of Thomas Jefferson. Although both the House and Senate had adjourned
for the weekend, many of Congress’ members reconvened for a rousing Sunday morning service with Dorothy. Among those in the “crowded audience” of Washington’s social elite and national leaders that morning were Jefferson, Vice President Aaron Burr, and a host of other “Senators [and] Representatives” who, Dorothy later wrote, “gazed with admiration that I was not embarrassed when I took my subject from thy attracting Voice! the Voice of God!” (Bank 245).

Surprisingly, the United States Capitol regularly served as a church building, a practice that initiated even before Congress officially moved into the structure in 1800 and did not cease until long after the Civil War and Reconstruction. Senate approval of church services in the Capitol was given by Jefferson, then president of the Senate, who continued to attend services at the Capitol throughout his U.S. presidency. According to Margaret Bayard Smith’s epistolary-based Forty Years of Washington Society which reveals much about the early days of the nation’s capital, worship services were commonly held in the Hall of Representatives: “Preachers of every sect and denomination of christians were there admitted—Catholics, Unitarians, Quakers with every intervening diversity of sect. Even women were allowed to display their pulpit eloquence, in this national Hall” On that first occasion of a woman addressing Congress, a packed house would have been expected for the occasion’s novelty if not its spirituality. As Smith later lamented, “The admission of female preachers, has been justly reprobated: curiosity rather than piety attracted throngs on such occasions.”

Dorothy’s engagement at the Capitol arose through the efforts of her good friends and supporters, Washingtonians William and Eleanor Doughty. Two years earlier, the Doughtys and the Foxalls had supplied Dorothy with contacts, money, and meeting
houses to advance her ministry. Contrary to historical reports that Jefferson himself invited Dorothy to preach, these intermediaries approached Nathaniel Macon, speaker of the House, with her request to conduct services before Congress. When Dorothy arrived in Georgetown on Jan. 7, 1806, William Doughty delivered the news that “the Capitol was promised me on first-day” (240). The occasion to speak before the nation’s leaders, Dorothy reflected in her journal, represented “the most important work I have ever engaged with” (240). Even more, it fulfilled the promise she had based her life’s work on—the divine appointment issued six years earlier: “This admirable invitation was given to thy hand-maid, to deliver to Congress, when I was assured by Thy spirit, of having the Capitol, three thousand miles distance” (244-45).

Certainly, Dorothy realized the import of a female evangelist addressing Congress. Her earlier tussles with ministers bent on protecting the male prerogative to preach had taught her the value of hard-won concessions, and her realization of the enormity of the occasion can be discerned in her plea for divine guidance in her sermon: “The Lord direct my tongue, and open my mouth powerfully, that His Name (by a woman) may be extolled to the great astonishment of the hearers, who no doubt will be watching every word to criticise thereon” (240). Evidently, others shared Dorothy’s dubiousness regarding the religiosity of the Sunday morning worshippers who congregated in the Hall. Smith, too, noted in her letters the festival character of such a gathering: “I have called these Sunday assemblies in the capitol, a congregation, but the almost exclusive appropriation of that word to religious assemblies, prevents its being a descriptive term as applied in the present case, since the gay company who thronged the H. R. looked very little like a religious assembly.”
Armed with this knowledge, as well as the full evangelical power born of years preaching abroad to the indigent, enslaved, imprisoned, native, and dying masses, Dorothy “stood to proclaim among some of the first in this land” her holy-inspired message (244). She “reverenced” the assemblage “as the higher powers ordained of God, to govern the affairs of men,” but she also saw them as aimless souls “who refuse to eat the Bread of Life, and drink of the translucent Cup” of salvation (247).

Interestingly, Dorothy’s address to Congress invoked many of the themes that she stressed throughout her ministry to the diverse populations to whom she counseled, preached, and proselytized. As she thundered from the rostrum of the Speaker of the House, which she assumed as her pulpit, Dorothy’s sermon to Congress seemed to culminate a whirlwind, six-year ministry throughout post-revolutionary America. An examination of her rhetoric that day will highlight the unifying motifs of not only those first six years but also a lifelong ministerial dedication to the people of the new Republic.

The most prominent theme evident in both her address to Congress and the sermonic messages throughout her evangelical career was the unequivocal principle of the love, grace, and truth of God. Just as she stressed with unerring devotion to the masses, she affirmed to Washington’s elite that morning in the Hall of Representatives that life eternal could only be achieved through acknowledgment of and absolute relinquishment to the supremacy and will of God. To “those Rulers of the land, who had the direction and government of all the United States of America, at this period,” Dorothy proclaimed that any covenant between God and man was to be ratified with the blood and body of Christ. That morning, she delivered a divinely directed summons to a metaphorical holy communion: “May the Lord bless the people whom I have invited to
the sumptuous Table, spread with the Spotless Sacrifice, even the Body of our Lord Jesus, whose Blood is mingled with the Living Water, that proceedeth from the Throne of God” (245).

As always, she underscored the universality of Christianity. The holy summons to salvation and cleansing communion with the Spirit was extended to national leaders, the wealthy and influential, and the lowly populace alike:

Yea, may the President, Vice-President, with all the worldly-wise Legislators of each State, eat by faith of the Bread which came down from Heaven, and drink of the mingled wine. A glorious Table is spread for the simple, as well as for the learned, yea, let him that wanteth understanding, or a knowledge of the holy One, turn in hither, and verily a pleasant portion shall be presented to him . . . (245)

Dorothy also seemed routinely compelled to include a justification for female preaching. As usual, she combined the defense of her divine mandate to preach with an offensive that charged the congregants with their own spiritual deficiencies: “My Master Jesus told me by His Spirit, that many of the Rulers did not believe on Him; but denied [sic] His Power, Authority, and Glory: He therefore gave me that text to prove His Body, was the Bread of Life, and His Blood the drink of the righteous . . .” (246). Dorothy pointedly informed her listeners that God himself gave her the text. Rife with challenge, the statement not only boldly proclaimed her role as preacher by interpreting scriptural text but also that God himself invested her with the right to such responsibility. Few would be bold enough to refute such a claim. She reiterated her personal charge with an assurance to all that she did not take her role of holy-inspired mouthpiece lightly, but
rather had forsaken all to follow His dictates: I “testified, ‘A lonely path is mine, being a member of no society’” (247).

Also, in an exercise of vision that characterized much of her writing, Dorothy prophesied to the worshippers in the Hall that the “wisdom” which they so highly prized would fail them at a crucial point in the future: “I know that I am standing in the midst of some of the wisest men of this land,” she began, “but a few years back you could not comprehend one sentence: and in a few years more, the knowledge which you now possess, will ‘Vanish away’” (245). On one level, the reference may point to congregants’ spiritual disabilities since Dorothy saw them as “dead statues” who were not “born of water and the Spirit” (246). On a wider scale, one can read an ominous vision of uprising, a foreshadowed moment of providential history. Just as the war of revolution had so recently torn apart the colonists, so too would civil war rend the new nation in a few years more. Dorothy seemed to foresee that the worshippers’ “knowledge”—those radical ideals of democracy with kings dethroned and new constitutions ensuring autonomy—would fade as the demand for human equality, freedom, and rights culminated in a “second American Revolution.”

Also, prayer presents a key motif in Dorothy’s works. She concluded her evangelism that day with a plea for the “souls of all who were not born again” amongst the “professing Christians” gathered in the Hall (246): “Let descending rains flow plentifully upon the seed sown in the humble, contrite heart, prepared to be thy lowly habitation,” she prayed. “I return Thee thanks also, for awing the rich and gay; and request Thee to sanctify my weak endeavours, and crown the whole with Thy success, that glory may be given to thy Mighty Name . . .” (247). Prayer presented an opportunity
to praise and thank God for his mercies, as well as a fortuitous opening to commend, reprimand, lecture, or subdue those who bowed their heads with her.

Finally, unselfish concern for and devotion to the welfare of the oppressed characterized an overwhelming majority of her addresses, and her presence before Congress presented a unique occasion for her to draw legislative attention to the nation’s social ills. Dorothy informed lawmakers of her intention to immediately journey to Charleston, South Carolina, to preach among the enslaved and those robbed of the God-given right to worship. She “requested of such who feared the Lord, to remember me in their prayers, as I was going to the Southward, as far as Georgia” (247). Ironically, slaveholder Joseph Bryan was seated in the Ninth Congress as a representative from Georgia. His grandfather, Jonathan Bryan, not only became an intimate friend of John and Charles Wesley during their tour of Georgia prior to founding Methodism, but also had owned the slave Andrew Bryan, the Savannah preacher who would befriend and support Dorothy during her evangelical mission through the Southern states. Although Dorothy never mentioned Joseph Bryan in her writings, her evangelical work in both his native Savannah, Georgia, and ancestral homes near Beaufort, South Carolina, stirred political and social outrage and undoubtedly he heard of her religious shenanigans in meeting frequently with black congregations, even after sunset. To Dorothy’s credit, on that Sunday morning at the Capitol, Dorothy gave Representative Bryan fair warning of her revolutionary intent.

Despite the ground-breaking moment and the secular fulfillment of her trouble-fraught spiritual mission, Dorothy felt neither cowed nor nonplussed by the exalted company filling the hall that morning. Later, in written communion with God, she
reflected with gratitude “how tranquil didst thou keep my soul” (245) so that “I am not put to shame amidst those who are gainsayers” (244). In Dorothy’s view, “Thomas Jefferson the President, appeared no more terror to me, than if I were the Queen [sic] of the Nation, and he one of my subjects, ruled by my authority” (246). Perhaps her composure arose from the fact that this was not her first encounter with head of state: in 1803, she had confronted Jefferson in the relative privacy of his receiving rooms at the White House regarding his stance on slavery, and just six days preceding her appearance before Congress, she addressed the State of Maryland’s congressional house at the invitation of Speaker Tobias E. Stansbury.851 Or, mayhap, as Dorothy put it, her composure stemmed from holy inspiration: “It was Wisdom, that adorned my mind, and through the condescension of so noble a Mistress, I was empowered to speak to the honour of God, and not regard the appearance of any man, high or low: but hadst thou O God! not smiled with complacence on me, this day had been darkness, and my soul buried in a flood of tears” (246). Her story echoes the biblical accounts of Moses, David, and Jeremiah who were assured that God would guide them in what to speak.852 Reminiscent of these prophetic frontrunners, Dorothy felt the Spirit served as the author of all her utterances, speaking to and through her.

Dorothy’s success at the Capitol, however, did not always translate to success elsewhere. Like other female evangelists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, much of Dorothy’s energies centered on the communal and ecclesiastical struggle for the right to preach. The underpinning for the objection to women’s preaching was the scriptural foundation for the muted subjection of women. The Holy Scriptures demand a woman’s “silence” and proscribe any effort at teaching, preaching, or
otherwise employing the authority of a man.\textsuperscript{853} Both civic and church leadership frowned mightily on what they perceived as a woman’s usurpation of the man’s religious and societal role. For female preachers, the fight was not only for the souls of the spiritually lost, but also for their right to wage the evangelical battle.

In the diverse reactions to Dorothy in the nation’s media, one can detect the general cultural division over a woman’s right to preach. In Dorothy’s obituary, The Christian Advocate and Journal and Zion’s Herald lauded her efforts, unafraid to use the term “preach” to describe her evangelical labors: “[She] has preached to hundreds of thousands of nearly all classes under the sun, and to the great comfort of very many.”\textsuperscript{854} Unapologetic of its characterization, the newspaper also cited her as “perhaps the most extraordinary woman in the world. We need say no more than the truth of her . . . .”\textsuperscript{855} In contrast, other media denounced Dorothy for her obvious heresy, particularly denouncing her itinerant and prophetic impulses. A writer for The Pittsfield Sun questioned not only Dorothy’s motives but also remained dubious about the financial sponsorship of her travels: “And whom did [the travel money] come from? Perhaps from the poor and needy. We enter our solemn protest against such ‘extraordinary’ examples. Hannah Moore [sic] and Hannah Adams have benefited the world more by a single day’s labor by staying at home, than Dorothy Ripley by traveling her whole life.”\textsuperscript{856}

In the face of such vocal divisiveness, women such as Dorothy struggled to authenticate both their religious power and their entitlement to it. Dorothy joined a league of more than one hundred nineteenth-century female evangelists who sacrificed all to become spokeswomen of God. Their revolutionary vindication of women’s right to preach sprang from the conviction that God called men \textit{and} women to spread the news of
the kingdom of God. More importantly to Dorothy, divine directive rather than secular appointment dictated that she step out of the woman’s sphere assigned to post-revolutionary females. Dorothy never challenged sexual equality, just the entrenched social and religious conventions that denied her a place in the ministerial world. At the expense of communal and political standing, personal safety, patriotic identity, and feminine dreams of home, marriage, and motherhood, Dorothy forged a separate, ecclesiastical self as a chosen messenger of God. Like so many of her evangelizing sisters, though, Dorothy’s turning of the tide on a contested birthright of evangelical inheritance came at great personal cost.

Of practical importance throughout Dorothy’s ministry was the strong connection these evangelizing women maintained with each other, enabling them to preserve the position of power and authority they had secured. Dorothy found invaluable emotional and religious support in the form of “Mothers in Israel” and “Sisters in Christ,” who helped strip the most threatening aspects of a male-dominated, traditionalist religiosity. These women bolstered Dorothy as she preached in public revivals, visited the sick and dying, and ministered to the imprisoned and heathen. Women such as her dauntless friend Abigail Eames supplied the bulk of her emotional, financial, and practical aid by opening their homes to Dorothy for services, providing a roof over her head during missionary treks, and sustaining her psychologically when her mission was most at risk to melancholy, doubt, and weariness. Additionally, these women provided to Dorothy a working model on which to base her ministry. Prototypical female evangelists such as those in the vanguard at the onset of Methodism and the benevolent Quaker women who established a precedent for world-traveling female preachers aided her in the formation of
her own evangelical character. From preaching women such as Deborah Darby, Priscilla Gurney, and other Quaker women, she learned of not only the charisma that drew throngs of worshippers but also the value of employing the role of symbolic mother to her followers. This maternal insight served Dorothy well as she ministered to America’s enslaved and indigenous populations. It accorded her a more sensitive perception of the slave’s misery, the prisoner’s dejection, the afflicted’s pain, and the spiritually lost’s need.

Thus, what began as one woman’s religious reformist movement evolved into a culturally based one. As Dorothy encountered more and more of America’s spiritually poor, she detected a need for a secondary revolution—one of a moralistic, civic-minded variety. A prominent thrust to Dorothy’s spirituality, and in the message she disseminated to others, was social consciousness.

First and foremost, Dorothy targeted the moral and spiritual repugnancy involved in chattel slavery. Dorothy’s works utilized classic aspects of abolitionist polemical literature, including underscoring the brutality, degradation, familial disintegration, and sexual perversity born of the institution of slavery. And she consistently reiterated abolitionist dialectics that denounced slavery as incompatible with Christian ideals.

Dorothy particularly emphasized the brutality inherent in the institution of slavery. In her narratives, she spotlighted the brutal attacks on former slave Andrew Bryan, beaten, arrested, threatened, and vilified for his religious beliefs. She retold the story of two children kidnapped from their homeland and sold into slavery in exploitation of labour. She related to her predominantly white audience the degrading and painful result of slavery in her firsthand witness of slaves forced to wear placards around their
necks, announcing the price of humanity; of two aged black men whose fate hung in the balance because their infirmities rendered them undesirable to potential buyers; of a slave woman tricked into deportation “down river” and then denied sustenance along the journey; of a community of worshippers prohibited from congregating after sundown. In her retellings of specific slave experiences and her eyewitness accounts of brutality, Dorothy gave amplification to the otherwise muted voices denied a mode to articulate the oppressiveness of chattel slavery.

Dorothy further instructed her white audience on the inhumanity of slavery in the juxtaposition of freedom and forced inservitude and of Christian ideals and slaveholding. In the comparison and contrast of white and slave women’s lives, Dorothy illustrated how both races value the family, home, and sexual purity, even while slavery denied such attachments. She highlighted the dual nature of slavery in its harmful effects not only on the slave but also the slaveholder. In her encounters with white, slaveholding friends—the Snowdons, the Fullers, and the Younghusbands—Dorothy demonstrated how whites decayed under the putrefaction of slavery, destroying any innate morality and providing a foundation for future generations’ prejudice and racism.

Most importantly in Dorothy’s view, chattel slavery denied its victims the fundamentally human right to discover, share, worship, and live by God’s law. By preventing slaves the opportunity to learn to read, thereby making the Bible and its spiritual truths inaccessible to the enslaved, whites participated in a devilish conspiracy of spiritual disintegration. Dorothy believed that without the Bible as a daily guide and the unfettered opportunity to hear God’s message in worship services, slaves were bound spiritually as well as corporally.
The polemical character of Dorothy’s writing is equally pronounced in her description of evangelical efforts among the indigenous tribes of central New York. In her sketches of encounters with inebriated warriors, she presented a didactic message of prohibition that presaged the Temperance Movement twenty years in the future. In Dorothy’s view, excess was not a personal indiscretion but a stepping stone to domestic discord, tribal financial insecurity, and white racism. Widespread sobriety, Dorothy proposed, would help prevent natives’ susceptibility to corrupt trading practices of unscrupulous white merchants. She liberally took to task whites who demonstrated one mercantile standard for their fellow whites while setting an inferior benchmark for the neighboring tribes. Fair-mindedness and personal integrity, she argued, could not be swept away in the national interests of a Manifest Destiny.

Following the Revolutionary War, the new nation underwent cataclysmic social, political, and economic transformations that affected every segment of the new society. Concomitant with the urbanization ushered in after the war was endemic poverty, unemployment, and crime, and Dorothy’s impulse to Christian benevolence led her to those crippled by these sweeping changes. With unflagging dedication, she ministered to the nation’s economically and spiritually poor, those whose bodies and souls alike were afflicted. Through her descriptions of encounters within the confines of the nation’s almshouses and poorhouses, Dorothy revealed not only the gloomy and desolate character of public institutionalism but the desperation, melancholy, and hopelesness that branded its inhabitants.

Moral duty, she argued, comprised an elemental component of Christianity, and professors of Christian belief must be compelled to support their faith through good
works, the solution to the nation’s social ills. Benevolence to the inhabitants of America’s almshouses and poorhouses should be a national mandate, yet Dorothy found that the new nation’s poor-relief houses served as mere dumping grounds for the unwanted populations: the elderly, widows, abandoned women and children, the mentally ill, and the diseased and dying. She learned that, in a culture which valued ingenuity, adaptability, and acumen, these disenfranchised masses proved a liability, one that society increasingly resented as a financial drain on the national pocket.

In her prison ministry, Dorothy emphasized spiritual and moral transformation through the redemptive power of prayer, worship, and confession. She brought spiritual guidance and comfort to murderers, child molesters, thieves, vagrants, and prostitutes. Both inmate and warden presented potential converts, and she ministered to all alike.

Not only did Dorothy address the spiritual ills she discovered within America’s prison walls but also the situational shortcomings. Each time she entered a prison, Dorothy made a point to inquire into the workings of the system, institutional rehabilitative efforts, and inmates’ living conditions. Her works illuminate the heavy toll of overcrowding, harsh penalties, and a reductive focus on punishment rather than rehabilitation in America’s early prison system.

Dorothy particularly argued for safe provisions for those most vulnerable within the system: the elderly, women, and children. Shocked by the conditions that imprisoned women and children faced in the prison system, she argued for separate wards for males and females. She found that the women, housed in the same cells as men, were physically and sexually vulnerable, and co-habitation exposed children to moral degeneration and physical harm. Likewise, the elderly and dying, housed with the strong and violent, faced
peril and demoralization. In Rose Butler, the last person in New York State to be hanged for arson, Dorothy discovered the ultimate price that the disenfranchised often had to pay. As the convicted woman’s spiritual advisor, Dorothy recounted Rose’s last days and, in the retellings, readers can detect the racial tensions that overshadowed slavery’s end in the northern states.

However, even as she ministered to countless others, Dorothy always kept herself at the center of her narrative. The autobiography is, by definition, one of self absorption and fascination, and even while she investigated the varied, often undesirable aspects of the new American culture, her writings ultimately concern her own spiritual quest. Reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin’s classic *Autobiography* (1790) or Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* (1845), Dorothy’s collective works tell a coming-of-age story. She created the image of a divinely inspired spiritual hero, one forged by the fires of secular struggles, personal doubts, and denominational denial. Rather than seeing a victim, Dorothy envisioned herself as one blessed, for every trial meant succor from God, and every grief meant another jewel in her eternal crown. Dorothy envisioned Christianity not as a gilded cage but an open door, and she treated each trial as a step along her journey toward spiritual perfection. Clearly, her evangelical call led her into a transcendental existence adorned with personal and spiritual accomplishments, even if her public life remained marked with adversity. Dorothy’s early conviction of divine providence, faith, and chosenness presaged this later upheaval in her preaching career. The image of the baptismal, or an internal ritualistic cleansing seen in her youthful conversion, foreshadowed her later entrance to denominational freedom as an independent evangelist. This conversion of the spirit ushered in a new era of faith—in a blessed, evangelical
calling and in a fresh image of the self. In her journey from spiritual neophyte to mature evangelical force, Dorothy’s formation of an independent identity is epic in its courage, commitment, labor, and result.

The ultimate value of Dorothy’s works, then, lies in their revelations about the situation, aspirations, and accomplishments of a holy woman of God in post-revolutionary America. In all four of her major publications, Dorothy referred to her evangelical and social work as a “little labour of love,” a phrase that identifies the source of her energy for, perseverance during, and dedication to her holy mission. Whether through the lens of divine messenger, early reformist, or female revolutionary, Dorothy’s insights into the effects of the forces shaping the new country afford scholars an alternate view to early American life. A neglected and largely unknown writer, Dorothy Ripley and her “little labour of love” deserve further exploration for what they reveal about the beginnings of the country, which in turn will enrich our understanding of a national past.
Endnotes

1 Matthew 6:33
2 James Young’s spiritual transformation took place in the home of a Methodist woman. A primary means in which women acted as conduits of revivalism, women often opened their parlors to standing-room only crowds, conducting prayers, preaching sermons and eliciting conversions. The following day the woman again invited Young into her home, singing and praying with him. In a dramatic scene in which he threw himself to the floor, remaining there for several hours in a catatonic-like state, he felt a light “shine from the south part of heaven, and God, in mercy, lifted up the light of his countenance upon me, and I was translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear son.” Thus, the woman served as a channel to not only Young’s conversion, but also his eventual establishment as a Methodist itinerant preacher. See Jacob Young, Autobiography 23-42 and 42-47; qtd. in Wigger 53.
3 The moniker originated in England and was given to those who were described as “railing much at the ministry and refusing to show any reverence to magistrates.” See Larson 232.
4 See Hart and Stout (Directions 346) for detailed accounts of ecstatic “ranters” and their “deluded followers.” See also Boles (64-67), which describes in detail the “exercises” practiced by Barton Stone at the open-air meeting in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, which became the prototype for nineteenth-century revivalist camp meetings.
5 Franklin, “Information” 603
6 Noll 276; Miller 7
7 Brekus 123-24. See Chapter 1 of the dissertation for more detailed information on the competition among the various denominations for numerical supremacy in conversions.
9 Qtd. in Brekus 138. The same can be said about the seventeenth century, especially in New England, where the vast majority of communicants were women.
10 See Wigger (151-152) and Muir (“Petticoats” 119), who state that Methodist female exhorters were generally more “outspoken and assertive” than their Canadian counterparts.
11 Although attributable to a variety of causes, this defect is magnified by a lack of comprehensive church records, the gravitation of once-radical sects to the conservative center (hence their eclipse of female evangelists believed to be radicals) and the lack of licensing and ordination of women preachers. See Grammer 8.
12 Kerber 565-585. Although Kerber calls for a history of women which no longer stresses their “marginality,” clearly female evangelism and its individual participants have seldom been adequately acknowledged or dealt with as central themes of American religious history.
13 As stated earlier, our knowledge about individual female evangelists is in the process of change as feminist historians try to identify these forgotten women. In Strangers & Pilgrims, Brekus lists female preachers and exhorters in America (1740-1845), including names, denominations, and dates first mentioned in records. Also, the memoirs or diaries of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Julia Foote, Rebecca Jackson, and Sojourner Truth have recently been reprinted in modern editions. However, these efforts represent a small degree of scholarship, leaving a vast, untapped field.
14 Recent scholars such as Jon Butler and Brekus have challenged the encompassing term “Great Awakening” since the central facet, revivals, differed with wide-ranging characteristics: denominational, regional, length, and ferocity. As Brekus noted, “In reality, however, the revivals were as diverse as the denominations that led them, and they mirrored all of the contradictions of early-nineteenth-century American society: its commitment to democracy and its fear of social disorder, its celebration of individualism and its longing for community, its faith in the future and its nostalgia for the past” (123).
15 Brekus 119; Billington 372. Most women assumed leadership roles in the forms of Sunday school classes, scripture readings in their homes, and prayer meetings, such as that attended by James Young.
Dr. Johnson (1709-1784), the staunch High Churchman and quick-witted conversationalist, allegedly made this remark to his faithful Boswell in the summer of 1763, when women such as the Methodist Sarah Crosby and many Quaker women preachers were claiming for themselves greater opportunities for public exhortation and preaching. The oft-quoted statement can be found under the date of July 31, 1763, in George Birkbeck Hall’s *Boswell’s Life of Johnson* (463).

African-American women did not share in the “cult of domesticity” ideology. As Hart & Stout point out, slave women confounded all the basic tenets of “true womanhood” because they crossed the boundary between work and home without apparent contradiction. Jacqueline Jones in *Labor of Love: Labor of Sorrow* suggests, that in stark contrast to the “cult of domesticity” which confined white women to the home, black women who chose to remain at home and “play the lady” were denounced as “unnatural.”

Dorothea’s father, of whom more information is offered in Chapter 2 of the dissertation, was an itinerant preacher in Wesley’s service. Although never ordained, he is generally recognized by historians as the first Methodist preacher in Whitby, before Wesley established a more formal ministerial system. The Ripley patriarch joined the Whitby Methodists on Good Friday 1760, upon his arrival in Whitby; on that night, the Methodist class of twelve members met, and Ripley was requested to join them, and he did so with great reluctance (“Wesley Chapel” 169). Ripley went on to serve as overseer for the building of the first Methodist church in the town.

This does not include Quaker women, who left a substantial collection of written sources, including women’s correspondence, diaries, church business-meeting records, and published treatises, as well as literature written about these women. See Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775*.

The most strident voice among her detractors was that of Methodist preacher John Early who summarily dismissed her as “an English woman who passed for a preacher” (104/05). For a detailed account of Dorothy’s public skirmish with Early over a woman’s right to preach, see Chapter 1, “Dorothy & Female Evangelism.”

Madison (1768-1849) was wife of President James Madison. Although she left the Friends to marry Madison in 1794, she befriended Dorothy and other Quaker missionaries. In later years as official White House hostess for President Thomas Jefferson and for her husband, she was noted for her charm, tact, and grace, as well as her magnificence in entertaining. The story of Dorothy’s encounter with Dolley Madison can be found in Chapter 2, “Dorothy & A Legacy of Evangelism.”

Dearborn (1751-1829) served as an American general, congressman from Maine (1793-97), Secretary of War (1801-09), and minister to Portugal (1822-24). Under President Thomas Jefferson, Dearborn helped form the plan for removal of the Native Americans beyond the Mississippi River.

Asbury (1745-1816) was the preeminent Methodist bishop in America during the Revolutionary War and its aftermath. In the new republic, he promoted the growth of the circuit rider system that so well suited the frontier conditions. At the Methodist Conference in Baltimore in April 1803, Asbury interviewed Dorothy and conferred on her an unspoken seal of approval. Asbury’s endorsement, coupled with that of Bishop Richard Whatcoat, helped open Methodist doors to Dorothy. For an account of Dorothy’s encounter with Asbury, see Chapter 2.

Sands (1745-1818) was a Quaker preacher born on Long Island, New York, but whose missionary work brought him international acclaim. Initially a merchant, he entered the Society of Friends and married a Quaker. His ministry began in 1772, spanning the United States, Canada, and Europe. He proved an invaluable resource, confidante, and supporter to Dorothy. For more on her friendship with Sands, see Chapter 2.

In addition to Dorothy Ripley, other female evangelists, such as Harriet Livermore, likened themselves to “strangers in a strange land.” See Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*. 
For more on violence directed toward Dorothy, see Chapters 1 and 4. For details on the mob violence toward Wilkinson and Elaw, see Brekus 81 and 272, respectively. Also, Susan Juster offers a fascinating examination of the public reception of Wilkinson and the hostility toward her as exhibited by learned men. She, too, covers the Philadelphia attack on Wilkinson’s lodgings. See Juster, Doomsayers 219-239. A dated but still informative biography of Wilkinson is Herbert A. Wisbey, Jr., Pioneer Prophetess: Jemima Wilkinson, the Publick Universal Friend (1964).

See Brekus 203

Brekus 6, 7. Sojourner Truth, born in slavery as Isabella Van Wagenen in New York, became a traveling preacher after she “left everything behind” to become one of the most celebrated feminists and abolitionists of her time. See Brekus 252-53.

Clarissa Danforth, the most popular female preacher in the late 1810s, married a well-to-do merchant from Connecticut. Ann Rexford wed a successful lawyer. Both women retired from the pulpit following their marriages, except for a brief reappearance by Danforth. See Brekus 252.

Bourne (1772-1852) was the English founder of the sect of Primitive Methodism. In 1799, he joined the Wesleyan Methodists and became a preacher, but he fell into disfavor when he began conducting outdoor revival services in violation of the prohibitions by the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. Together with William Clowes, Bourne established Primitive Methodism and, in his lifetime, attracted an estimated 110,000 members to the sect.

Dow (1777-1834) was an American evangelist who, more than any other of his evangelical contemporaries, popularized the outdoor revival. Although he had a lifelong connection to the Methodist Church, Dow spent most of his life as an independent, itinerant preacher, traveling throughout post-Revolutionary America on horseback. With the help of Dorothy, Dow introduced camp meetings to England through the Primitive Methodists. Their work together is discussed in Chapter 2.


Gurney (1757-1828) was a Quaker itinerant preacher who traveled throughout England from 1763 to 1824. She hailed from influential Quaker stock: her paternal grandfather was Joseph Gurney, the eminent minister; her cousin was Elizabeth Gurney Fry, the celebrated prison reformist; and her brother was John Joseph Gurney, a leading figure in the anti-slavery cause. For detail on Gurney’s strong influence on Dorothy’s burgeoning missionary career, see Chapter 2.

Both groups supported women in a ministerial role, so they offered financial and practical aid to traveling female, as well as male, ministers.

The black ministers writing to Dorothy were Absalom Jones, a deacon and priest in the Episcopal Church (7-8), and Richard Allen, bishop in the A.M.E. Church (8-9). Two other letters are from Native American women, including one from the “Mulhecononuh nation of Indians” (13-15) and another from Catherine Quachemut (Neyuh Dinnaukomuh) of the New Stockbridge Indians (15-17). Two additional letters—and the only ones of the aforementioned which are not included in Dorothy’s other published works—are from imprisoned felons, one named Philip Williams (23-27) and the other identified only as “D.L.” (29-32).

Of course, I follow an impressive line of feminist scholars who have objected to the canon’s reductionist tendencies as it concerns literary women. Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert, Adrienne Rich, Elaine Showalter and many others have condemned the misrepresentation or distortion of women and the omission of women from acknowledged histories and anthologies. Their efforts have proven instrumental in altering the academy’s perception and approach to women’s writing in general. However, I doubt any of these feminist scholars would argue that the battle has been won.

Dexter 61
48 Some exceptions should be noted, of course. For example, certain medieval women such as Hildegard of Bingen hold important, even prominent, places in religious histories. Also well known and documented are the activities of many English Quaker preachers such as Margaret Fell Fox.

49 Wigger 27

50 Wigger 29

51 Such was the case among the Methodists. See Wigger 29-38 for greater detail.

52 The Methodist Conference of 1803, convened in Manchester, England, deemed opposition and sufficiency of male preachers to be reason enough to prohibit women’s preaching. Only upon an extraordinary call was a woman to be permitted to preach, and then she might do so only before congregants of her own sex. For more details, see Chapter 2.

53 Juster, Disorderly Women, 130. In her Southern Cross, Heyrman also asserts women’s exclusion from Baptist leadership; see 167-8. In Juster, see 122-45.


55 Fiorenza, a professor of Divinity, has pioneered work in biblical interpretation and feminist theology. Her teaching and research focus on questions of biblical and theological epistemology, hermeneutics, rhetoric, and the politics of interpretation, as well as on issues of theological education, radical equality, and democracy. She is co-founder and editor of the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion and co-editor of Concilium. She was elected the first woman president of the Society of Biblical Literature. She has published 11 books, including In Memory of Her (1983) (translated into 12 languages), Discipleship of Equals, and Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation.

56 Perhaps the foremost known North American feminist theologian, Phyllis Tribble is a professor at Wake Forest University’s School of Divinity. Her work, Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies, focuses on the portrayal of women in the Old Testament and implies that feminist imagery has historically been overlooked. In 1984, she published her monumental Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives, coining a new term, “texts of terror,” that feminist theologians and scholars readily embraced. She also published God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality.

57 Naomi Goldenberg is currently Professor of Religious Studies, at the University of Ottawa. She is very active in the American Academy of Religion. For four years, she was a member of the steering committee of the section on Social Sciences and Religion. Naomi’s expertise is in the areas of psychoanalysis, feminism, and religion. Her major books include: Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions (1979); The End of God (1982); and Resurrecting the Body: Feminism, Religion and Psychoanalysis.

58 A theologian and professor of applied theology at Garrett-Evangelical theological seminary, Evanston, Ruether has written extensively on women and theological issues. Her books analyze the effects of male bias in official church theology and seek to affirm the feminine dimension of religion and the importance of women's experience. Her book Sexism and God-Talk was published in 1983.

59 Wigger 153

60 Taken from Lee, Life 36; qtd. in Wigger 153. Jarena Lee’s sole contribution to literary history is her spiritual autobiography, first published as The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee (1836) and later revised and expanded as Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee (1849). Lee detailed in her writings her arguments for a woman’s right to preach, and her claims form an early example of feminist theology. Her urgings were eventually heeded by Richard Allen, and she was granted permission first to preach on the itinerancy circuit for the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church. Later, she could officially hold prayer meetings in her home. Both constitute huge concessions given to a nineteenth-century woman of any race.

61 Italics are mine. All references to Extraordinary Conversion are taken from the first edition unless otherwise noted.

62 For further reading, see the efforts of Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the Woman’s Bible (1898), one of the first attempts by women to assess the Judeo-Christian legacy and its impact on women through history.

63 Taken from Lee, Life 36; qtd. in Wigger 153.

64 Unless otherwise noted, all references from Bank are taken from the second edition.
See Chapter 2 for more details on how prototypical Methodist women preachers inspired Dorothy as a child.

This estimate is supplied by Dorothy herself (Bank 181).

1 Tim. 2: 11-15, NIV

Castelli 222

As well as being the most fruitful source of specific references to women’s vital role in the early church, Romans 16 is probably the most contentious. For a stimulating discussion of women’s role in first-century Christian church establishment, see Elizabeth A. Castelli, “Paul on Women and Gender,” in Women & Christian Origins, edited by Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo. Particularly interesting in Castelli’s work is the discussion of the title conferred on Phoebe in Paul’s letter. Castelli notes that Phoebe is called *diakonos* of the churches in Cenchreae and the *prostatis* of many and of Paul himself. While translators routinely use “minister” in English when the Greek term refers to men, they consistently use the diminutive of the same title for Phoebe, referring to her as “deaconess.” Yet, Castelli questions why Phoebe would be carrying a letter of recommendation by Paul—a letter that would have been carried by a missionary as an introduction to those communities Phoebe traveled to—if she could not claim the distinction of minister.

Howell was a Baptist exhorter. Brekus notes that the first mention of Howell in historical records was in 1808. See Brekus 344

Qtd. in Lovegrove 103

Qtd. in Juster, Disorderly Women 130

Dexter 62

Dexter 62-63

For more detail on Dorothy’s involvement with Holcombe, Clay and Georgia slave law, see Chapter 3, “Dorothy & America’s Slaves and Free Blacks.”

Samuel Kirkland served the Oneidas for more than forty years as their spiritual guide and minister. He and his daughter Eliza proved kind and staunch supporters of Dorothy.

John was the only disciple present at the crucifixion; the other ten, under threat of suffering the same fate as Jesus, had fled.

Despite Mary’s clear mandate from the risen Lord to tell the good news, her announcement to the male disciples was met with doubt, suspicion, and dismissal. The men experienced difficulty in lending credence or authority to a message presented by a woman and were swayed only with the power of their own experience. Interestingly, they spent their lives trying to get others to do what they could not do themselves: accept the message of the risen Savior on the strength of another’s spiritual encounter.

In Luke 8:2, Mary Magdalene is mentioned as one of the women who “ministered to Him [Jesus] of their substance,” meaning they supported Jesus with money and supplies. Mary and other women later accompanied Jesus on his last journey to Jerusalem (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 23:55) and witnessed the Crucifixion. Mary remained there until the body was taken down and laid in a tomb. In the early dawn of the first day of the week Mary Magdalene and two other women came to the sepulcher with sweet spices to anoint the body (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Gospel of Peter 12). They found the sepulcher empty but saw the “vision of angels” (Matthew 28:5).

As the first witness to the empty tomb, Mary Magdalene went to tell Peter and John, (John 20:1-2), earning her the epithet “Apostle to the Apostles.” According to the New Testament, she was the first witness of the Resurrection appearances of Jesus, though at first she did not recognize him. Mary When he said her name, she was recalled to consciousness, and cried, “Rabboni.” She wanted to cling to him, but he forbade her. John 20:17 testified, “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’”

This is the last entry in the canonical Gospels regarding Mary of Magdala, who now returned to Jerusalem. She is probably included in the group of women who joined the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:14).

Matthew 16: 9-11

For more on Native American women’s embrasure of Dorothy’s egalitarianism, see Chapter 4, “Dorothy & America’s Disenfranchised Populations.”
Early (1785-1873) was born in Bedford County, Virginia, and joined the Methodist conference of his state in the great revival of 1801-02. He became an itinerant preacher about 1807, quickly attracting attention for his fervor and eloquence and establishing himself as a stalwart revival minister. He successively filled the offices of secretary of the conference, presiding elder, and delegate to the quadrennial general conference. Early took an active part in the agitation that resulted, in 1844, in the division of his denomination into the Methodist Church north and south. He filled the elected position of book agent in the latter, and he played an instrumental role in founding Randolph-Macon College in Virginia. Bishop Early, though a vigorous writer, published only a few sermons, addresses, and occasional pamphlets, some of them relating to the disruption controversy. He died in Lynchburg on Nov. 5, 1873.

Early 104/05. While the pagination of Early’s diary provides sequential numeration, the typewritten copy held at the repository at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers dual numbers.

“The Domestic Slave Trade: Victims of the Trade”

“The Domestic Slave Trade: The Slave Traders”


The transportation of slaves by chaining them together in a line and then herding them to the destination. Slave narratives and abolitionist writings of the day described coffles that marched across whole states for weeks at a time. Conditions rivaled those of the slave ships, with slaves given minimal water and food, no protective shelter, and uninterrupted hours of arduous walking along uncertain terrain. The coffle was a horrific scene of domination and cruelty, as observed by John Rankin, who “illumined the ‘very dangerous evil’ of slavery in a description of the coffle, detailing the obscene theatricality of the slave trade: ‘Unfeeling wretches purchased a considerable drove of slaves—how many of them were separated from husbands and wives, I will not pretend to say—and having chained a number of them together, hoisted over the flag of American liberty, and with the music of two violins marched the woe-worn, heart-broken, and sobbing creatures through the town.’” Qtd. in Hartman 1. For an image of a slave coffle, see <http://afroamhistory.about.com/od/slavery/ig/Slavery-Photographs-and-Images/Slave-Coffle.htm>

Runaway slave Charles Ball, in his memoirs, accorded readers an alternate view of the negro speculator. Part of a “coffle” being force-marched to South Carolina and Georgia from Ball’s native Maryland, Ball immediately detected the deference accorded his master once the coffle entered the Middle South region: “In the State of Maryland, my master had been called a negro buyer, or Georgia trader, sometimes a negro driver; but here, I found that he was elevated to the rank of merchant, and a merchant of the first order too; for it was very clear that in the opinion of the landlord, no branch of trade was more honorable than the traffic in us poor slaves.” Ball 53

Norfolk residents contributed nearly fifty dollars and passage to Charleston toward Dorothy’s mission to the southern states. They also provided shelter, board, transportation around the city, and venues for her sermons.

Though sixty-nine years of age, he was elected bishop in 1854 and served for nineteen years. He received the degree of D.D.

Letter dated Nov. 7, 1853. In that same year, at the age of twenty-six, Sara Hicks of New Hartford, New York, married Benjamin Franklin Williams, a North Carolina planter-physician. Her letters to her parents, excerpted in Nancy F. Cott’s Root of Bitterness, 171, recount her first impressions after the couple moved to Greene County, one of the richest agricultural regions of North Carolina. They settled temporarily at Ben’s widowed mother’s home, Clifton Grove, a working plantation with thirty-seven slaves. As wife and mother, Sarah Hicks Williams lived the rest of her life in the South. See Williams’ letters in Cott, Root, 167-173.

168. Sara Hicks Williams’ letter to her parents dated Oct. 10, 1853. Excerpted in Cott, Root, 167-168

Heyrman 167. Most of Methodism’s early female exhorters circulated through New England, including women such as Fanny Butterfield Newell, Nancy Caldwell, Catharine Van Wyck, and Hannah Herrington. For details on these women and their activities in New England, see Wigger 153-72.
The exception to this was among the dwindling and increasingly despised Quakers. Female Friends often spoke at mixed religious gatherings, evangelized as missionaries, and maintained separate women’s meetings to enforce discipline. However, their numbers and prestige had sharply decreased in the South because of their abolitionist church policies.

See Chapter 3 for more information on Dorothy’s activities in the slaveholding states. For more on Dorothy’s activities in the prisons and among the sick, see Chapter 4.

To be fair, marriage presented a special challenge for some male preachers, as well, most especially itinerants. Most of the first-generation Methodist preachers, for example, viewed celibacy as a necessary criterion for itinerancy. Marriage usually necessitated locating, putting down roots, and establishing familial responsibilities. “Preachers who married and located usually continued as local preachers, though as such they forfeited membership in their conference, becoming something of a second-class citizen,” observed John Wigger (65).

For more detail on the Methodist crackdown on female exhorting and preaching, see Chapter 2, “Dorothy & A Legacy of Evangelism.”

Thomas Scattergood (1754-1814) was a Quaker preacher born in Burlington, New Jersey. His great-grandfather, of the same name, was of the company of Quakers that went to Burlington in 1676. His father, Joseph, at first a mariner, became a lawyer, and died when Thomas was six years old, leaving him to the care of his mother, who, after giving him a good English education, apprenticed him to a trade. He became a tanner, in which business he continued throughout his life. He was an active member in the Society of Friends, was for many years a noted elder of the sect, and in the work of the ministry traveled extensively in this country and in Great Britain. His Memoirs were printed in the Friends’ Library, in 1844, and afterward published in a separate volume (London, 1845).

During the revolutionary era, women contributed to the war in ways similar to the men. Women such as the legendary “Molly Pitcher” of the Battle of Monmouth and Deborah Sampson Gannett, a young woman subsequently glorified for disguising herself as a man in order to enlist in the Revolutionary army are the most famous examples of women who took up arms in defense of their country. Still other women contributed to the war effort through such organizations as the Daughters of Liberty and the Ladies Association, which abstained from tea drinking, boycotted loyalist shops, made homespun clothing, and raised money in support of the Revolutionary cause. By the 1780-90s, however, women felt a cultural shift in the evolving image of what Linda Kerber has called “republican motherhood.” When the exigencies of warfare gave way to politics of state, society increasingly viewed women as indispensable and active promoters of patriotism in the men of their families—husbands, sons, and social companions. Women came to be idealized as the source not only of domestic morality but also of civic virtue itself. As Kerber has emphasized, in the newly republican United States, motherhood offered an acceptable outlet for female talent and patriotism despite women's exclusion from politics. For an expanded view of this subject, see Kerber’s Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America (1980). Also see, among others, Mary Beth Norton’s Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800 (1980); Cott, Nancy F. The Bonds of Womanhood: “Women’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835 (1977); Sara M. Evans’s Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America (1997); and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812 (1990).
“Mothers in Israel” was a term accorded to devout, supportive female workers in the faith.

Brekus 204

Qtd. in Brekus 204. Brekus notes that, in the early nineteenth century, the word “handsome” was used to describe both sexes.

Brekus 204.

For the story of Dorothy’s tussle with the Quakers over her authenticity, see Chapter 2.

Brekus 204. Brekus clarifies Pell’s situation by adding that her conversion prompted Pell to vow never to so cheapen herself that way again. In her words, “Hell clutched her, but hadn’t energy enough to hold her.”

Brekus 204

1 Tim. 2: 9-10, NIV

A. White 19

Brekus 228

Vignettes taken from Brekus 229

Leviticus 12:1-5

Jael’s place among the most devious of the Bible’s women is one of contention. The poetic account of her murder of Sisera, in Judges 4, is complimentary to Jael. She is praised for her loyalty and bravery in the slaughter of an enemy to the Israelites. While not contradictory to the rules of engagement in her time, Jael’s actions seem barbarous to modern sentiment and contrary to modern ideas of right and the obligations of hospitality. Sisera was a general in the army of the Canaanite King Jabin, who had tyrannized Israel for more than twenty years. When Sisera fled the battlefield after the Israelites wrested control, Jael came forth to offer him her hospitality. Jael’s husband had been a friend of King Jabin, and Sisera believed himself to be safe in the couple’s tent. Yet, when Sisera fell asleep, Jael drove a tentpin into his temples. The outcome was exactly as Deborah had prophesied: “For the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (Judg. 4:9).

Brekus 151

Krueger 49-50

Qtd. in Juster and Macfarlane 34

Brekus 151

Krueger 50

132

Martha Routh (1743-1817) was a Quaker minister whom Elbert Russell, in his comprehensive Friends history, The History of Quakerism (1942), identified as one of the most prominent of the traveling American ministers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (234-35). Although Routh predominantly addressed other Friends, her ministry included some non-Quaker audiences as well.

Brekus 151

151

James 1: 2-4, NIV

statistics from Wigger 33

M.H. was the Quaker woman Mrs. M. Hirst, who, along with her husband, I. Hirst, cared for Dorothy. “S.S.” was her daughter; however, this daughter was not the same who cared for Dorothy earlier in the day. Dorothy identified that daughter as “A. Hirst.” More than likely, this was her daughter-in-law, for Dorothy reported that “A. Hirst” and her husband “I Hirst” provided her with food and a bed.

Olivers 130

Statistics from “Quick Brown Fox Triangle.”

394-95

The offering of two mites by an unnamed widow (Mark 12: 41-44; Luke 21:1-4) occurred during the last Passover week of Jesus’ life on earth. She entered the Court of the Women in the Temple at Jerusalem and cast into the chest there her two mites, hardly enough to buy a loaf of bread. The cash value of her gift compared to the gifts of the wealthy was hardly enough to notice, but the devotion behind it touched Jesus. Luke tells that in praising her generosity, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put in more than all the other. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on” (21: 3-4 NIV).

Bryant 122-23
from the title page of Bank, 2nd ed.

Unice Painter of Stafford, Virginia  See EC 106-08

Adams 1

A third road passed through Virginia southwestward to the Holston River.

Most likely, Dorothy’s geography is confused here. She named “Rhoway,” as the town where she caught the stage to Philadelphia. In her journal entry for that day, she cited “New York” as the starting point of her journey. However, “Rhoway, New York” is most likely Rahway, New Jersey, approximately 15 miles southwest of Manhattan. Through Rahway coursed the King’s Highway, or the Country Road, which was one of the principal routes from New York to Philadelphia. Today, it is called St. George’s Avenue. See “A Brief History of Rahway.”

Qtd. in Adams 14

Adams 5

E.B. Smith 9

12-13. Unfortunately, Mittelberger’s tale of horror did not end with the scene inside the ship. Upon arrival in America, the non-paying passengers faced equal terror in the sale and barter of human flesh and years of inservitude: “When the ships have landed at Philadelphia after their long voyage, no one is permitted to leave them except those who pay for their passage or can give good security; the others, who cannot pay, must remain on board the ships till they are purchased, and are released from the ships by their purchasers. The sick always fare the worst, for the healthy are naturally preferred and purchased first; and so the sick and wretched must often remain on board in front of the city for 2 or 3 weeks, and frequently die, whereas many a one, if he could pay his debt and were permitted to leave the ship immediately, might recover and remain alive . . . .” See Mittelberger for a detailed account of Mittelberger’s journey and arrival in Philadelphia in 1750.

“Dorothy Ripley” Obituary, 16 Jan. 1832

“Dorothy Ripley” Obituary, page 3, column 3. However, the veracity of the Herald’s estimation is weakened by its misinformation in regard to Dorothy’s place of death. It cited “William Owen” as the owner (and nephew by marriage) of the home where Dorothy expired. She actually died at the Mecklenburg County home of her niece, Peggy Green, and her husband, William Green.

Payton (1726-1794) was the daughter of a traveling minister, niece to a female Quaker preacher, and a minister herself at age twenty-two. She wrote, “early in the morning of life, I knew the Lord to be a God nigh at hand” (qtd. in Larson 71). Similarly, Bevan (1682-1705) was educated by Quaker parents and traveled in the ministry with her father. Ashbridge (1713-1755) was religiously groomed by her Anglican mother and, perhaps because of her tumultuous life fraught with domestic violence and inservitude, was attracted to Quakerism after visiting Quaker relatives. For detail about these women and their missions, see Larson 305-315.

Larson 71
Matthew 13: 20-21: “The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the
word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or
persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away” (NIV).

In the nineteenth century, people of African origin were usually referred to as “Ethiopian” or “guinea-
 negro.” Dorothy consistently used “Ethiopian” in reference to anyone with dark skin. See Irving Lewis

Jonah 1: 1-3: “The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and
preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.” But Jonah ran away from the Lord and
headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the
fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord” (NIV).

The medical term for this eighteenth century slang is undetermined, but Dorothy’s sister could possibly
have been the victim of borreliosis, a general term encompassing a number of diseases with similar
manifestations and caused by ticks. Today, borreliosis is commonly known as Lyme disease. One strain of
borreliosis is specific to Europe.

Dickinson 50
H.P. Kendall 5
Dickinson 53
Dickinson 53

A new Wesleyan Chapel stood high above at the head of a flight of steps. John Wesley opened the new
chapel in 1788, before it was quite finished.

In addition to Dorothy’s Extraordinary Conversion, other contemporary works describe the horrific
landslide. Details can be found in Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, XXI: 170-71, V: 95; and
Young’s History of Whitby.

Job 1: 20-21: “At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in
worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the
Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (NIV).

Lockjaw, medically called tetanus, is a bacterial disease that affects the nervous system. As a result of
widespread immunization, first introduced in 1927, tetanus is now a rare disease. Tetanus is contracted
through a wound which becomes contaminated, usually a result of coming into contact with animal manure.
A common first sign of tetanus is muscular stiffness in the jaw, followed by stiffness of the neck, difficulty
in swallowing, rigidity of abdominal muscles, spasms, sweating and fever. Complications associated with
tetanus include spasm of the vocal cords and/or spasms of the respiratory muscles, causing interference
with breathing.

See Psalm 31:3: “Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me”
(NIV).

John 3: 3-8 (NIV).

Robert Barclay (1648-1690) wrote “Apology for the True Christian Divinity,” commonly known as
Barclay’s Apology. Written in 1676, the first edition being in Latin and followed two years later by an
English edition, this work has long been considered a literary cornerstone for the Society of Friends, giving
a thoughtful and unemotional account of the ideas and practices of the Quakers of his time.

See also Bauman 21-25, 124-27.

Brekus 198
R. Jones 35

John Griffith and Job Scott traveled extensively in the ministry and often sat in silence through meeting
after meeting, explaining their being “shut up” by the need of famishing congregations who had grown too
fond of words. Griffith came to feel that his mission was twofold—to reform the Society along the lines of
the discipline and to teach Friends the value of silence. The silent meeting in the literal sense became the
norm of worship. To “appear in” vocal prayer or testimony frequently laid one open to the suspicion of
acting “in the will of the creature.” Only a powerful conviction of duty laid on one could justify vocal
service; and it was customary to apologize for breaking the silence. Dr. John Rutty, an Irish physician,
recorded in his A Spiritual Diary (1776) the fact that for twenty-two consecutive meetings in Dublin,
Ireland, during the year 1770 the silence was broken but once. Job Scott, traveling in New Jersey and
Pennsylvania in 1785, attended fifteen meetings in twenty days and dared not “to open his mouth in one of them” (E. Russell 237-38). These cases were regarded as exceptional, however. See E. Russell 237-38.

In one of his tongue-in-cheek stories, Benjamin Franklin praised the Quaker meeting as the only place where he could get a proper rest during his early days in Philadelphia: “[I] was led into the great meeting-house of the Quakers, near the market. I sat down among them, and after looking round a while and hearing nothing said, being very drowsy through labor and want of rest the preceding night, I fell fast asleep and continued so till the meeting broke up, when some one was kind enough to rouse me. This, therefore, was the first house I was in, or slept in, in Philadelphia” (“Autobiography” 25-26).

203 Bauman 21-25, 124-27

204 In Paris in 1801, for example, Fanny Burney encountered this slim-line look when she made the fashion mistake of wearing three petticoats. Fashionable young women had begun wearing a single petticoat and the more brazen had forsaken stays and shifts. Middle-aged women resisted such flamboyance, seeing this semi-nudity as characteristic of the morally bereft. See The Historical Maritime Society’s website at <http://www.hms.org.uk/nelsonsnavyworkingw.html>

205 The term “mob cap” earned a respectable usage among the working class by Dorothy’s twenties, having previously implied immorality. By the 1790s, it was used to describe a lady’s morning cap, an ordinary linen garment worn by women for centuries but expanded to accommodate greater amounts of hair and padding. Since most women could only afford one cap, the mobcap enjoyed continual use, both indoors and without, breaking the custom of women never wearing it outdoors without an overhat. For more information, see The Historical Maritime Society’s website, especially “Sluts & Slatterns, Women’s Working Dress, 1795-1805,” at <http://www.hms.org.uk/nelsonsnavyworkingw.html>

206 By 1800, the more fashionable women, especially those living closer to London, had discarded the cap or kercif in favor of the trendy sunbonnet.

207 Bed-gowns were jackets to the hip and of a shorter length than the similar Indian gown of the seventeenth century which had become outdoor wear. Usually, tapes fastened down the front of the jacket since buttons required too much time for a homemade garment.

208 In 1814, George Walker noted the costume of Yorkshire’s working women. See The Historical Maritime Society’s website.

209 The absence of ornamentation such as decorative buttons or jacket lapels rendered Quakers easily recognizable. On the other hand, because of the widely expansive geographical presence of Friends, their clothing differed according to accessibility. For example, the quality of fabric varied greatly. In general, however, Quaker garb for women included a simple dress of natural color, a serviceable apron, and the ubiquitous plain gauze cap. To some observers, the plainness rendered their dress unremarkable. As one early eighteenth-century traveler put it, “There is the drab bonnet, and the drab gown, and the frill, and neckerchief and apron to correspond; all very good, and, in a certain acceptation, very handsome; but there are no feathers, no flounces, no gaudy colours, and no finery, either genteel or shabby” (Matheson and Reed 77). To still others, the simplicity of Quaker dress was a pleasing sight to the eyes. To Charles Lamb, “the very garments of a Quaker seem incapable of receiving soil; and cleanliness in them to be something more than the absence of its contrary. Every Quakeress is a lily; and when they come up in bands to their Whitsun conferences, whitening the easterly streets of the metropolis, they show like troops of the Shining Ones” (qtd. in Mattingly 37). However, the salient point in any discussion about Quaker dress is that it appeared readily identifiable. And, at the turn of the eighteenth century, their clothing engendered a general image of modesty and religious sincerity. For more information on Quaker dress, see Joan Kendall’s “The Development of a Distinctive Form of Quaker Dress,” Costume 1985: 58-74; also see Murray-Rust, Chapter 4.


211 Dorothy wrote that her father’s benevolence and religious zeal were well noted in the town. His “family were favoured beyond thousands, for they saw his zeal, wisdom, and universal benevolence from year to year,” and he welcomed many traveling strangers to stay at the Ripley home “if they served his God” (EC 9).

212 Dickinson 47. Wesley made this statement on June 13th, 1786, his ninth visit to Whitby, during which he passed an eulogium upon his recently deceased itinerant, William Ripley. The original reference comes from Zechariah 3:2, “Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?” (KJV). However, Wesley’s mother, Susanna, also used this phrase to refer to her son when he was a child and saved from the 1709 burning of his family’s home. The phrase evolved into a moniker unique to John Wesley.
George Sanders held an influential position in the town of Whitby, as well as among the Friends. The minutes show George Sanders handling the money often for the Whitby Preparative Monthly Meeting, his name appearing frequently as the financial representative in the Whitby Preparative Meeting Book from 1778 to 1815. See YQHP

Pickering Monthly Meeting Minutes, 7 mo. 1799
Pickering Women’s Monthly Meeting Minutes, 19 of 11th mo. 1799
Pickering Women’s Monthly Meeting Minutes, 11th of 3 mo. 1800 reads, “The friends appointed to join the men Friends in paying a visit to Dorothy Ripley report they attended thereto.”

“Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 22: 34
See Larson 99-100.

See Murray-Rust, Chapter 4.

“Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 23: 79

The Lynchburg Virginian, Jan. 16, 1832

Joint of 1 mo. 1804
Joint of 3 mo. 1804
Joint of 3 month, 20th, 1804

Whitby Preparative Monthly Meeting Minutes, 20, 3 mo. 1804

Dorothy’s letter actually reads “thy honoured father” as the author of the letter; yet, Jane’s father-in-law, Jonathan Sanders is more likely the one identified here. Jane’s father-in-law maintained a prominent position in the monthly meeting which would have conferred the certificate on Dorothy. See Bank 172.

According to Whitby historian and lecturer, Robert T. Gaskin, Mary Linskill was one in whom “beauty, wisdom, riches, honour, virtue, and piety all met together.” He added that in twenty years, Mary “had known an equal number of persons received into membership amongst the Friends, but none, she said, had been ornaments to their profession.” See “Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 22: 33-51.

“Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 23: 78. One of Dorothy’s few enduring friends, David Sands corresponded with Dorothy during her life and offered support and aid throughout her ministry.

“Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 23: 78

Taft 205

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Rhode Island, like Philadelphia, had evolved into a Quaker stronghold. In 1772, the Yearly Meeting there had thirteen Monthly Meetings and forty-seven Particular or individual congregations. The attendance at the Yearly Meeting was occasionally said to rival that of Philadelphia in numbers. Rhode Island Friends continued to be politically active throughout the eighteenth century, fostering several Quaker governors and numerous Quakers in the Assembly.

Thomas and Sarah Robinson of Newport, Rhode Island, were great entertainers of visiting ministers. When visiting in 1793, Rebecca Jones wrote that their “daughter Mary is like to become ‘a crown’ to John Morton. They have passed one meeting [to gain approval for marriage] (qtd. in “Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 22: 47). The Robinsons later moved from Newport to Vermont.

In an eighteenth-century Quaker meeting, ministers routinely sat at the front of the meetinghouse facing the other worshippers. In this “minister’s gallery,” women and men occupied separate sides of a raised dais. See Larson 5.

Although she answered with seeming effortlessness, Dorothy’s writing reveals her pain at this man’s unfounded charges. Since J. Terrell was an elder of the Caroline County, VA, meeting and his wife the recorder, their good opinion would have smoothed the way for Dorothy’s efforts there. Evidently, there was a sharp division in the Terrell family respecting the legitimacy of Dorothy (see “Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 22: 49). Members of the Terrell family became Friends before 1730, so they were well established in the Quaker community. See Weeks 101 and frequent references in James Bell’s Our Quaker Friends—Virginia (1905).

Larson 83

Spelled in Dorothy’s works as “Fauquir,” the correct spelling is Fauquier. During the Revolutionary war, Warrenton, Virginia, was known as Fauquier Courthouse. Located near the foothills of Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains, the name Warrenton was adopted in 1810 and became chartered in 1816. The name
originally came from Joseph Warren, a heroic General in the U.S. Army who died at Bunker Hill in 1775. Many know Joseph Warren as the General who sent Paul Revere on his famous ride.

James Carey (1751-1834) was a Quaker merchant and banker deeply interested in the plight of slaves. He married into the powerful Ellicott family, founders of Ellicott City, Maryland. See “Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 22: 48-49.

Dorothy’s fears had precedence, for the Quakers strictly monitored members’ activities. For example, in 1776, when George Whitefield made his last visit to the United States, Quaker minister Jemima Wilkinson attended the New Light Baptist meetings in Cumberland; her actions caused her to be dismissed from the Quaker society to which she had belonged all her life. After a severe illness later that year, Wilkinson asserted that she had had a vision both of her death and of God's determination to return her to the earthly world so she might preach His word. Thereafter, she refused to identify herself as Jemima Wilkinson, preferring “The Publick Universal Friend” or simply “the Friend” (Harris 214).

See Murray-Rust, Chapter 4.

The woman was Mary Awmack and, despite his wife’s less than welcoming greeting, her husband Joseph Awmack provided Dorothy with the means to proceed to Whitby.

Dorothy later identified the widow as Emma Cobb. See EC 106.

When Jesus sent out his twelve disciples to preach to the “lost sheep of Israel,” he gave them instructions about their conduct while traveling: “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matt. 10: 11-16, NIV).

Rebecca Jones (1739-1817) of Philadelphia was a Quaker minister often mentioned in writings of her time. The Quaker historian, Rufus M. Jones, considered Jones among the most significant preachers of her day, a woman well educated and endowed with decided gifts. For more information, see William J. Allinson’s Memorials of Rebecca Jones (1849) and Elizabeth Anthony Dexter’s Career Women of America, 1776-1840 (1950): 56.

Qtd. in “Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 23: 16.

J.R. de J. Jackson mistakenly wrote, “[Dorothy] left for America in 1802 as a Quaker missionary to serve African and Indian congregations” (271-72). John Bryant also erroneously described Dorothy as “an itinerant Quaker from England” (123).

Absalom Jones (1746-1818) was the first African American priest in the Episcopal Church. Richard Allen (1760-1831) was founder and first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. See more about Jones and Allen in Chapter 3, “Dorothy & America’s Slaves and Free Blacks.”

Friend E. Ripley (no relation) provided Dorothy with dry shoes and stockings after Dorothy had spent the day traveling through deep snow (EC 37). Others provided her with a horse, coach travel, lodgings at inns, and food stores.

Sands (1745-1818) was a minister from Cornwall, New York, who came among Friends by conviction and whose ministry spanned years in America and England.

Priscilla Hannah Gurney (1757-1828) made a lasting impression on Dorothy first at meeting in London then at Houndsditch when the former “arose clothed with power and divine authority” (EC 40). Clearly, Dorothy aspired to emulate Gurney. In addition, Gurney is credited with deeply impressing her young cousin Elizabeth Gurney Fry, who would evolve into a frontierwoman for prison reform. In her journals, Fry writes of her elderly cousin: “She was exactly the person to attract the young; she possessed singular beauty, and elegance of manner. She was of the old school; her costume partook of this, and her long retention of the black hood gave much character to her appearance. She had early renounced the world and its fascinations; left Bath, where her mother and sister Christiana Gurney resided; became eventually a minister among Friends; and found a congenial retreat for many years at Colebrook Dale” (“Elizabeth Fry,” Chapter IV).

Dorothy would naturally have planned London as her point of departure. Because it was a bustling seaport and hub of trading, London served as the springboard for Quaker transatlantic travel in the eighteenth century. As the seat of imperial government, it also served as the headquarters for the transatlantic Quaker organization, including the London Yearly Meeting, the most influential annual
meeting in the Society of Friends in the eighteenth century, and the Morning Meeting, the meeting of ministers and elders. Larson 102

“Dorothy Ripley: Unaccredited Missionary” 22: 47. According to Larson, many eighteenth-century Quaker men like Waring were active in long-distance commercial ventures that served a dual purpose of providing support to traveling ministers (102). “Men such as John Hunt, a Quaker merchant in London, and Israel Pemberton Jr., a Philadelphia Quaker merchant, formed a transatlantic network of Friends linked by business and religious beliefs that provided support to the eighteenth-century Quaker itinerant ministry” (102).

At the end of the eighteenth century, Bristol was a town of about 100,000 inhabitants (Fayle 64). The year Dorothy sailed, 76 ships left Bristol harbor for North America. In return, 54 ships brought their exotic cargoes into Bristol’s bustling harbor (67).

According to Larson, numerous Quaker-owned ships commanded by Quaker ship captains carried traveling preachers across the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. Increased sailings between the colonies and the British Isles assured itinerant ministers greater opportunities for transatlantic travel. Between 1675 and 1740, the overall number of transatlantic voyages had doubled, and because Quaker settlement at major ports increased in proportion, itinerant ministerial travel was assured (Larson 103).

At the time of Dorothy’s travel, a guinea was valued at 21 shillings, or 1 pound and 1 shilling. A coin originally made of gold from the Guinea coast of Africa, the guinea came into existence in 1663, under Charles II; when first issued they were worth one pound, or twenty shillings. The value of the guinea had fluctuated over the years from 20 to 30 Shillings. A Royal Proclamation of December 1717 fixed the value of the Guinea at 21 Shillings. In the Great Recoinage of 1816, the guinea was replaced as the major unit of currency by the pound. Although the last guinea was minted in 1813, the guinea as a monetary unit continued until the Decimalization Act in 1971. Auction houses, in particular, used to denominate all their bidding in guineas. By contrast, there were 20 shillings (also referred to as “Bob” in slang) to a Pound. After decimalization, the shilling was revalued at 5 Pence and the coin continued to circulate. In 1990, the shilling was withdrawn from circulation and formally replaced by the smaller 5 Pence coin, still in circulation today. Shilling derives from a Saxon word; however, the “s” with which it was abbreviated comes from solidus, a Roman coin. See “The British Money” at http://www.dicamillocompanion.com/British_Money.html. In 1801, one guinea would have bought a fine beaver hat or 12 French lessons; a half-guinea would have bought a bottle of Dr. Prossilley’s water for the pox (half a guinea was a common professional fee) or a ticket in the pit or box at Theatre Royal, Covent Garden; five guineas would have purchased a silver watch; and roughly half the price of Dorothy’s passage would have bought a night out, including supper, a bath and a fashionable courtesan. A shilling would have bought 1 lb of perfumed soap, the postage of a one page letter from London to New York, or 1 lb of Parmesan cheese. See “The First Foot Guards” at <http://footguards.tripod.com/08HISTORY/08_costofliving.html>.

This was not the first time that the Bristol Monthly Meeting funded transatlantic passage for an itinerant minister. In 1700, Ann Dillworth, an American Friend returning to her Pennsylvania home after missionary work in England, required eleven pounds to secure passage, and the Bristol meeting disbursed the money. For Ann Dillworth’s ship passage, see Larson 101 and Bristol Men’s Meeting Minutes, 6th of 3rd mo. 1700 and 1st of 5th mo. 1700.

This statement is derived from letters written to and from Dorothy, as well as her accounts of their scattered encounters in both America and New England throughout their evangelical careers.

Deborah Darby (1754-1810) was the daughter of John Barnard, and married Samuel Darby of Upperthorpe in 1776. She first appeared in ministry in 1779 and steadily advanced in insight and power until she became one of the most effective “Publishers of Truth” in the Society. Historian Rufus M. Jones says of her, “In the hand of God she became an important instrument in the preparation for service and ministry of two of the leading Friends of the nineteenth century—Stephen Grellet and Elizabeth Fry” (356).

Deborah, one of the most heroic, talented women of the Bible, served the Israelites in a variety of ways: prophetess, judge, poetess, singer, and political leader. She was also a wife and mother. The life of Deborah is recorded in Judges 4-5. Chapter 4 contains the prose narrative, and chapter 5 presents the story in poetic form.

Dickinson 45-46

Dickinson 46
This quote comes from Church’s *More about Early Methodist People*, 207. A leader in Wesleyan and Methodist scholarship and histories, Leslie Church paid tribute to Dorothy in both *More* and his earlier seminal history, *The Early Methodist People*.

Henry Foxall (1748-1830) was one of several eighteenth-century Methodists from the West Bromwich, Staffordshire, area who migrated to America when English migration to the New World was at its height. The Foxall family were keen Methodists and frequently attended the weekly meetings held at the Asbury cottage in Great Barr. After migration, Henry Foxall settled in Georgetown on the outskirts of Washington D.C., having brought with him the technology which laid the foundations for the US arms industry. Henry built up a flourishing business and opened his own foundry, producing some of the guns used by the Americans during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 against the British. Apparently his designs were quite advanced and were still in use to fire the opening salvos of the American Civil War from Fort Sumter in 1861. Henry endowed the Foundry Methodist Church in Washington, now a major centre of Methodist activity, numbering among its regular congregation, Sen. Hilary Clinton. There was regular contact between the Methodist communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Shortly after serving a two-year term as Mayor of Georgetown, Henry made a nostalgic visit home in 1823 when aged 65. Following a sudden and short illness, he died and now lies buried in All Saints churchyard, West Bromwich.

Bishop Francis Asbury (1745-1816) was born near Birmingham, England, of Methodist parents. Asbury became a local preacher at 18 and was ordained at 22. In 1771, he volunteered to go to America, and when the American War of Independence broke out five years later, he was the only Methodist minister to remain in America. In 1784, John Wesley named Asbury and Coke co-superintendents of work in America, marking the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the USA. For the next 32 years, Asbury led all Methodists in America. Like Wesley, Asbury preached in all sorts of places: courthouses, public houses, tobacco houses, fields, public squares, wherever a crowd assembled to hear him. For the remainder of his life he rode an average of 6000 miles each year, preaching virtually every day and conducting meetings and conferences. Under his direction the church grew from 1,200 to 214,000 members and 700 ordained preachers.

Bishop Richard Whatcoat (1736 -1806) served as the third American Methodist bishop. Whatcoat was reared in the Church of England, becoming a Methodist at age 22. He preached as a devoted lay Methodist for nine years, becoming a minister in 1769 and quickly earning a strong reputation as a problem-solver. John Wesley and Thomas Coke ordained him Elder in 1784, and then Wesley sent Whatcoat and Coke to the U.S. as missionaries. Whatcoat became influential among Methodists in America, known for his effectiveness as a preacher. Contemporaries attributed his strength chiefly to his devotion. In 1800, he was elected bishop, joining Coke and Asbury as leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church. After several years of infirmity, he died in Dover, Delaware.

Religious tradition has it that Judas pilfered from the disciples’ money bag for his own use. John 12: 4-6 (NLT) records, “But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples—the one who would betray Him—said, “That perfume was worth a small fortune. It should have been sold and the money given to the poor.” Not that he cared for the poor—he was a thief who was in charge of the disciples’ funds, and he often took some for his own use.” Quite likely, Jesus knew what Judas was doing (see John 2: 24, 25 and John 6: 64), but he chose not to do or say anything about it.

Although traditionally difficult to date, the beginnings of Methodism are traditionally accepted in line with the three “rises” of the movement distinguished by Wesley. Three meetings—Oxford in 1729, Savannah in 1736, and London in 1738—coalesced into the formation of a society with about forty or fifty members. Women figured prominently among these founders and set the pace by initiating weekly meetings for prayer and confession. See Chilcote, *John Wesley* 45-49.
As Chilcote noted, “If pushed to its logical extreme, the principle expressed in this statement could be used to sanction even the preaching of women.” (106)

Wesley, “Plain Account.”

Grace Murray (1715-1803) was raised in a devoutly Anglican environment but in 1740, she began attending evangelical preaching and was converted by John Wesley. Appointed one of the first class leaders in Newcastle, Murray traveled through several of the northern counties to meet and regulate the female societies. She later journeyed to Ireland to perform the same function there. Wesley, according to historical records, called her his “right hand” (Chilcote, John Wesley 75). Murray’s husband strenuously objected to her connection with Methodism and threatened to have her commitment on grounds of insanity. After her husband’s death at sea in 1742, she was appointed housekeeper at the Orphan House in Newcastle. Her position brought her into close contact with Wesley, and in 1748, he proposed marriage. However, she married John Bennet in 1749. Bennet established himself as an independent minister in Cheshire, and Grace assisted in his ministry. The couple had five sons, one of whom became a congregational minister in London. See Chilcote, John Wesley 75 and Simon Ross Valentine, John Bennet and the Origins of Methodism and the Evangelical Revival in England (1997).

Isabella Wilson (d. 1807) secured leadership roles by meeting classes, holding prayer meetings, visiting the sick, engaging in epistolary correspondence, and participating in spiritual conversation. See Chilcote, John Wesley 93, 108; Chilcote, “John and Charles Wesley on ‘God in Christ Reconciling:’ The Call to Reconciliation”: 16-17; and John Pipe, “Memoir of Miss Isabella Wilson,” Wesleyan Methodist Magazine (1808): 465.

Anne Cutler, known as “Praying Nanny,” (1759-1794) was 26 before first experiencing the forgiveness of sins, but she proved instrumental in reviving Methodism in Dewsbury and traveled extensively throughout northern England on evangelistic missions. See Chilcote, John Wesley 259-60, 94-95. See also William Bramwell, A Short Account of the Life and Death of Anne Cutler (1796) and B. Smith, The History of Methodism in Macclesfield (1875).

Sarah Crosby (1729-1804) first heard Wesley preach when she was 21 and, although inclined toward Calvinism, joined the Methodists that same year. In 1757, she moved to London and was appointed a class leader at the Foundery Society. In 1761, she moved to Derby and became one of the first female preachers in Methodism. She liberally “preached” to large audiences, maintained an epistolary communication with Wesley, and later traveled with Wesley and Elizabeth Hurrell, who sparked controversy herself when she preached at the Methodist Chapel in Sunderland on Oct. 22, 1775. A considerable canon by and about Crosby exists. See Chilcote, John Wesley 151-55, 255-259, 118-31.

For a fuller examination of Dorothy’s compassionate ministry to Butler during the condemned woman’s final days, see Chapter 4, “Dorothy & America’s Disenfranchised Populations.”

Today, adult membership—full, preparatory, or affiliate (the latter arranged for people away from their home church who wish to affiliate where they live)—continues to be based upon confession of faith or by letter of transfer from other evangelical churches.
institution prayer meetings, rose to class leader, and exhorted before small assemblies. See Chilcote, John Wesley 103.

Chapter 1 records Dorothy’s stance on women’s right to preach.

Mary Bosanquet Fletcher (1739-1815) experienced “evangelical conversion” at 23 and began a lifetime career of evangelical and missionary work: established of an orphanage and school, fought for women’s right to preach by epistolary confrontation with John Wesley, preached throughout the north of England, and became the first Methodist woman preacher to utilize an explicit reference to a sermon text. Along with her famous husband, John Fletcher, she served the church in Madeley, Shropshire, as “co-pastor.”

Chilcote, John Wesley 122-23. Some historians disagree with Chilcote’s estimation that the first excerpt (from a letter he wrote to Sarah Crosby) marks the beginning of Wesley’s acceptance of women preachers. Chilcote asserts that “The more stringent aspect of Wesley’s churchmanship made it impossible for him at this point to admit to the use of the term ‘preacher’ in such cases, but the close association of reading portions of his notes on the New Testament and speaking a few words to a large assembly is highly suggestive of preaching in a more technical sense” (Chilcote, John Wesley 122). Historian Earl Kent Brown, in “Standing in the Shadow: Women in Early Methodism,” cautions the modern reader about misinterpreting Wesley’s comment to mean that she may preach if she doesn’t call it “preaching.” Brown writes, “Actually he is telling her it is all right to ‘witness’ to God’s work in her heart. ‘Preaching’ in the technical sense he would have her avoid” (Brown 27).

In a bold move, Eliza Bennis, founder of Methodism in Waterford, realigned the circuit of itinerant preacher Richard Bourke, sending him to Clonmel to preach there. Critics may have charged her with a flagrant usurpation of male authority, but Wesley fully approved her modification of the preaching circuit and continued to seek her opinion. See Chilcote, John Wesley 132-33.

Letter from Wesley to Miss Dale, dated November 17, 1769, London; qtd. in Chilcote, John Wesley 133.

All quotes taken from Bosanquet’s letter to Wesley; qtd. in Chilcote, John Wesley Appendix D: 299-304.

Anne Gilbert began her preaching efforts in 1771 in her native Cornwall after first establishing herself as an integral part of the Methodist community in her hometown. After being called upon to address a meeting of young people, she branched out to exhortation and calls for repentance. In response to her preaching, Wesley is reported to have tersely said, “Sister, do all the good you can” (qtd. in Chilcote, John Wesley 145).

Newman, a bookseller who was converted in 1771 after hearing Wesley preach, proved instrumental in the conversion of family members and friends, including her future husband and one of Wesley’s itinerants, Jonathan Coussins. See Chilcote, John Wesley 148-50, 275-76.

Having lived in Harrogate during the writing of this dissertation, I can attest to the weight Bosanquet’s name still carries in that town. Devoted Methodists there continue to hold her name in high esteem.

See Chilcote, John Wesley 150-53

Taft, Holy Women 2: 75.

Crosby’s presence in Whitby is revealed as a result of her letter to her friend, Mrs. Cayley, written from Whitby. See Chilcote, John Wesley 154.

Qtd. in Chilcote, John Wesley 154-55.

Dow’s efforts to convert the spiritually bereft of the early nationalist period are well-recorded. See “the Primitive Methodist Connexion” section of this chapter for a detailed look at Dow. Johny Edwards (no relation to the famed Jonathan Edwards of the eighteenth century) earned double monikers as an enlightened man of God and a deranged quack.

17. Mountford’s convincing argument about how culture, tradition, and ideology inhabit rhetorical space and shape speakers’ performances offers a compelling alternative as to why Dorothy, like so many other female preachers, abandoned the pulpit.

Stokes (1750-1823) joined the Methodist Society at the New Room. An intimate of Wesley’s, Mary disregarded heavy discouragement from Wesley about her decision to join the Quakers and served in the
capacity of evangelical preacher for that denomination for approximately fifty years. She was interred in the Friends’ Cemetery near Bunhill Fields. See Taft, Holy Women, 2: 149-77; Jones, The Later Period of Quakerism, 1: 63-64, 198-99, 210-11, 237-42, 274-78; and Chilcote, John Wesley 162-163, 280-81.

Chilcote, John Wesley 162. Mary was an “intimate friend of John Wesley, who did everything in his power to keep her from joining the Quakers” (162).

One such defector was John Helton, a popular Methodist preacher, whose conversion to Quakerism led to his published reply to Wesley’s Letter to a Quaker. In the pamphlet, Helton points out how a matured Wesley had altered his view on critical Methodist issues, including women’s preaching. See Helton, Reasons for Quitting the Methodist Society; Being a Defence of Barclay’s Apology (1778).

Qt’d. in Chilcote, John Wesley 236. The question of female preaching within the Wesleyan Methodist Church did not receive official consideration again until the twentieth century when general cultural attitudes changed. The 1803 regulation remained in effect until its revision in 1910 when Methodist leadership deleted the proviso of women’s preaching exclusively to their own sex. This remained the official stance of the institution until the Methodist Union in 1932. In 1910, the Wesleyans officially lifted the ban on women preaching to mixed congregations and in 1918 officially granted them the same rights and conditions as male local preachers. The move towards gender equality within the Church gathered pace after the union of the major denominations in 1932 to form the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The Women’s Fellowship was established in 1944 as part of the Home Mission department to consider problems vital to women. The Fellowship has been particularly active in social issues. The first women to be accepted into the full ministry of the Church were ordained at the Bristol Conference in 1974. Another major landmark in achieving equality was reached in 1993 when Kathleen Richardson, who had already achieved the distinction of being the first female District Chairperson, was elected the first woman President of the Conference, thereby becoming the head of the Church during her year in office.

Chilcote, John Wesley 236.

Taft 1: v

Still others found sanction for their preaching activities among the offshoots of Methodism, such as the later Primitive Methodists, with whom Dorothy would subsequently associate.

Qt’d. in Krueger 75.

All quotes taken from Bosanquet’s letter to Wesley; qt’d. in Chilcote, John Wesley, Appendix D: 299-304.

Thomas 312. See also Harold Blodgett’s Samson Occom (1935).

Italics are mine.

Krueger 21

Krueger 1

Krueger 21

Krueger 24

Romans 10: 8-10 (RSV)

Romans 12: 3-13 (RSV)

1 Cor. 12: 4-11

Krueger 24

Achtemeier 989-90

Krueger 8

Methodist minutes, London Conference, 1780; qt’d. in Muir, “The Bark Schoolhouse” 29.

Church, Early 231

Schweiger 14

Schweiger 15

These camp-meetings were not confined to the Methodists; Presbyterians and Baptists also participated as well as other smaller sects. Because of the plethora of accompanying emotional exercises, while some denominations saw an increase in church membership others experienced irreparable schisms.

Some early sources offer the most colorful descriptions of camp-meeting occurrences. Among the most interesting and authentic are William Speer, The Great Revival of 1800; Catherine C. Cleveland, The Great Revival in the West, 1797-1805; J. R. Rogers, The Cane Ridge Meeting House; William W. Sweet, Circuit Rider Days in Indiana; and Richard McNemar, The Kentucky Revival.

Qt’d. in Driver and Janson 108.

Driver and Janson 107-08
While the pagination of Early’s diary provides sequential numeration, the typewritten copy held at the repository at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill offers dual numbers. Early did not fully name Dorothy’s companion, and Dorothy made no reference to the event in her works.

For a detailed account of Allen’s refusal to Dorothy, see Chapter 4, “Dorothy & America’s Slaves & Free Blacks.”

According to Brekus, these dissenting groups began to “trade their tradition of female evangelism for greater power and respectability” (271). As these new denominations became increasingly successful, they distanced themselves from the revival “enthusiasm” that marked their early histories and from the radicalism of female preaching. Although the change occurred gradually and not all congregations deserted female preachers, the transformation proved dramatic for some women used to approbation in the pulpit. For example, Rachel Thompson, a capable Methodist preacher for nine years, was excommunicated from her church in August 1830 on the grounds of insubordination—she had refused to stop preaching (Brekus 270). For more details on the withdrawal of denominational support of female evangelists, see Chapter 1.

Descriptions and quotations are excerpted from a letter written by Brother Henry Sharman about the first camp-meeting in Lincolnshire near Grantham. Qtd. in Clowes 134-35.

Mary Shelley completed her writing in May 1817, and Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus was first published on Jan. 1, 1818, by the small London publishing house of Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor & Jones. Critical reception of the book was mostly unfavourable, compounded by confused speculation as to the identity of the author. Despite the reviews, Frankenstein achieved an almost immediate popular success, putting Mary on the literary map. The novel was an important work for the acceptance of women as credible contributors to literature.

From The Lincoln, Rutland and Stamford Mercury, 25 Sept. 1818; qtd. in Ambler 33. Although it still stands along the street in Bingham, the Primitive Methodist chapel converted to a Salvation Army Hall before, ironically, becoming a betting office and, finally, a pub. Today, the former chapel is called The Horse and Plough, a public house that still sports a plaque on the outer wall identifying its origins as Dorothy knew it.

Qtd. from a speech delivered on October 29, 1927 to the Mississippi D.A.R. during an unveiling of the first historical marker in Prentis County. The speaker at the event was Frank R. King of Tusculumbia, Alabama, president of the Tennessee Valley Historical Association. The subject of his address was the Natchez Trace. See King.
Clowes 136. As a rule, the crowds displayed only minor bouts of hostility toward the missionaries. However, exceptions such as Clowes’ incident exist. In Newark, the citizens sprayed a lay preacher named Lockwood with the town fire-engine hose until he could but gurgle, “You can’t quench the fire within!” In Bottesford, the church bells and a brass band pumped up the volume to drown out the preacher’s voice. In Shelford, another aristocratic preserve, the outraged denizens demolished the mud cottages of two of their fellow parish dwellers because they had opened their homes up to the preachers to conduct their services. For more details, see H.B. Kendall.

H.B. Kendall, n.p.; Walford 29-30. Wedgwood’s arrest seemed to have elevated him in the annals of Primitive Methodism which, writes Walford, “owes much to [his] apostolic labours . . . . Few have excelled him in winning souls to Christ; a divine influence accompanying the word delivered by this extraordinary messenger of gospel-truth, has often produced the most powerful effects in the minds of those who have sat under his ministry; and his name, to hundreds, is this day like ointment poured forth” (Walford 38n).

Dow’s “Reflections” went through at least 11 editions, the latest of which was published in Liverpool by W. Forshaw in 1818. It was also included in Dow’s comprehensive work, All the Polemical Works of Lorenzo, Complete: Containing His Chain of Five Links, Two Hooks, and a Swivel; Reflections on Matrimony; Hints on the Fulfilment of Prophecy; Analects on the Rights of Man; Dialogue Between the Curious and Singular . . . (1814).
dress and style of preaching attracted great attention, while his shrewdness and quick discernment of character gave him no considerable influence on the multitudes that attended his ministry. He had been a public preacher for more than 30 years. He was a Methodist, in principle, though not in connection with the society” (“Lorenzo Dow”).

For more on Dorothy’s chilling flight from Savannah under cover of night—and the Holcombes’ desertion of her—see Chapter 3.

For greater detail on the “stranger” mentality of the itinerant, see Chapter 1.

Another story about the canny preacher has been told almost as often as the “raising-the-devil” yarn. Usually called “Lorenzo Dow Catches a Thief,” the legend has been widely collected from oral tradition and has been printed and reprinted in newspapers and books, sometimes with varying details, but always with the same basic narrative line. One version goes this way: While passing through some dense woods one day, on his way to a scheduled revival meeting, Lorenzo Dow came on two men cutting wood. Mounting a large stump, he announced, “Crazy Dow will preach from this stump six months from today, at two o’clock P. M.” Six months later, as a huge crowd awaited him at the appointed spot, Dow encountered a man in great distress on the way to the scene of his sermon. After inquiring what the matter was, the
preacher learned that the unhappy man was a poor woodsman whose axe, his only means of making a living, had been stolen. Dow promised the wretched fellow that if he would attend the services scheduled to start shortly, he would locate the axe for him. Before Lorenzo continued on, he leaned down, picked up a stone and put it in his pocket.

In the midst of his powerful sermon, the fiery minister suddenly interrupted his flow of words, reached in his pocket and pulled out the rock. Brothers and sisters, he rasped, “There is a man in this audience who has had his precious axe stolen. There is also one among you who stole it. I am going to rear back and throw this rock, here, right at the thief's head.” So saying, he pretended to throw the stone with all his might. When only one man in the crowd ducked his head down, Dow went over to the fellow and said, “You have the man's axe.” And so he had. The thief returned the axe to its owner and never again robbed anyone.

Story qtd. from Philips.

In the course of writing the dissertation, I was unable to locate the burial site of Dorothy.

Brigadier General Tobias E. Stansbury (1756-1849 served vital roles in both the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. He repeatedly served in the Maryland Legislature and as Speaker of its House of Delegates. He died at his home in Baltimore County, Maryland, on Oct. 25, 1849.

John Woolman (b. 1720) died at York, England, October 7, 1772, of small-pox. Dorothy was ten years old at Woolman's death. Both Whitby and York are part of County Yorkshire, the former at the northeastern end and the latter at the southwestern tip.


For more on Dorothy's assault on the American drive for wealth at the expense of the indigent and indigenous groups in the new Republic, see Chapter 4, “Dorothy & America’s Disenfranchised Populations.”

The phrase “hewers of wood and drawers of water” traditionally has referred to the lowest social class in the Israelite community. The designation originated from the curse of Joshua on a deceptive neighboring tribe in the Promised Land: “Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and said, ‘Why did you deceive us by saying, “We live a long way from you,” while actually you live near us? You are now under a curse: You will never cease to serve as woodcutters and water carriers for the house of my God’” (Joshua 9: 22-23, NIV). See also Deuteronomy 29: 9-11: “You are all now standing before the Lord, your God—your chiefs and judges, your elders and officials, and all of the men of Israel, together with your wives and children and the aliens who live in your camp, down to those who hew wood and draw water for you—that you may enter into the covenant of the Lord, your God, which he concluded with you today under this sanction of a curse” (NIV).

In addition to the slaves he inherited, Washington also bought some fifty slaves prior to the Revolution, although he apparently purchased none afterward. See Barton. See also George Washington, The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799, edited by John C. Fitzpatrick (1925), Vol. I: 117, 278, 383.

Historical criticism has long recognized Jefferson’s ambiguity on the slave issue. Although a slaveholder of more than 300 slaves, he also advocated the abolition of slavery. For example, his initial draft of the Declaration of Independence included language that described the slave trade as the perverse plot of an evil English monarch designed to pollute guiltless colonists. In his Notes on the State of Virginia, the only book he ever published, he sketched out a plan in which all slaves born after 1800 would eventually become free. In 1784, he proposed a bill in the federal Congress prohibiting slavery in the western territories—it failed by a single vote.
Although Franklin was a slaveholder, his later life was characterized by abolitionist efforts. He endorsed the 1790 petition from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to Congress urging the legislative body to abolish the slave trade and slavery altogether.


Greve. “Slaves worked not only as laborers but also as operators and managers of the quarry and lumber mill that provided the main construction materials. In the early 1860s, one slave, Philip Reid, ran the foundry and managed the slaves who cast the 19-foot, 7-ton bronze monument atop the Capital’s dome, which celebrates America’s freedom. Benjamin Banneker, a free black man from Baltimore County, Maryland, did much of the government’s surveying in 1791 and 1792 around the 18 swampy farms that make up what is now downtown Washington. Author and historian Ed Hotaling said slave labor was not what President Washington had in mind when planning for the capital’s construction in 1791. The government and its contractors initially sought white craftsmen and laborers from Baltimore, Norfolk, Virginia, and elsewhere. The prevalence of slave labor in the capital area suppressed prevailing wages, however, and made recruiting difficult. About half the slaves in the United States lived in Virginia and Maryland at that time, and farmers often rented them out in the off-season. Thomas Jefferson, whom Washington named a commissioner in the city’s construction, favored slave labor because it was cheaper, Hotaling said. Jefferson’s three-member commission authorized renting up to 100 slaves a year to work on the capital’s first two big construction projects. Greve also states that “the total number of slaves who worked on the Capital and the White House is unknown. . . . Records include about 400 payments to slave masters from 1795 to 1801, but the figures are lump sums that may include multiple workers.”

By no means were American presidents and Southerners the only leaders to be tainted by connections to slavery. According to historian Douglas Harper, “a list of the leading slave merchants is almost identical with a list of New England’s prominent families: the Fanueils, Royalls, and Cabots of Massachusetts; the Wantons, Browns, and Champlins of Rhode Island; the Whipples of New Hampshire; the Eastons of Connecticut; Willing & Morris of Philadelphia. To this day, it’s difficult to find an old North institution of any antiquity that isn’t tainted by slavery. Ezra Stiles imported slaves while president of Yale. Six slave merchants served as mayor of Philadelphia. Even a liberal bastion like Brown University has the shameful blot on its escutcheon. It is named for the Brown brothers, Nicholas, John, Joseph, and Moses, manufacturers and traders who shipped salt, lumber, meat—and slaves. And like many business families of the time, the Browns had indirect connections to slavery via rum distilling. John Brown, who paid half the cost of the college’s first library, became the first Rhode Islander prosecuted under the federal Slave Trade Act of 1794 and had to forfeit his slave ship. Historical evidence also indicates that slaves were used at the family’s candle factory in Providence, its ironworks in Scituate, and to build Brown’s University Hall” (Harper).


Variant spellings for “Ann” are used. Some historical records state her name as “Anne”.

This finally became law through the efforts of Jefferson’s friend and fellow statesman, James Madison.

For greater detail on Dorothy’s sermon before Congress, see the dissertation’s conclusion.

Jefferson served two terms as President, March 4, 1801-March 3, 1809.
Hutson and Pelikan 95

See “Brief Biography of Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826).” By the time Jefferson inherited about twenty slaves from his father in 1764, Virginians had been working their plantations primarily with black slave labor for more than sixty years. In 1774, Jefferson inherited 135 more slaves from his father-in-law, John Wayles, who had been directly involved in the importation of enslaved Africans into Virginia. This practice was not prohibited until 1778, by an act drafted by Jefferson himself. By 1796, Jefferson owned about 170 slaves—fifty living on his land in Bedford County and 120 in Albemarle County. The seventy adult slaves on the Monticello plantation were the foundation of Jefferson’s labor system, performing the farming and household tasks, driving the wagons, constructing the buildings, and making items of wood and iron necessary for plantation and house.

Jefferson wrote from Monticello on May 20, 1826 to Heaton, (d. 1837), a Whig state representative from Butler County, Ohio.

Jefferson, who called the institution of slavery an “abominable crime,” was all his life a slaveholder. Successful in outlawing the international slave trade to Virginia, he was disappointed by the failure of his early efforts to end or restrict slavery, and came to believe that a practicable solution to the problem could not be found in his lifetime. He continued, however, to advocate privately his own emancipation plan, which included a provision for resettling slaves outside the United States. As Jefferson stated in 1814, “My opinion has ever been that, until more can be done for them, we should endeavor, with those whom fortune has thrown on our hands, to feed and clothe them well, protect them from all ill usage, require such reasonable labor only as is performed voluntarily by freemen, & be led by no repugnancies” (494). From Jefferson’s earliest years, he regarded slavery as a moral wrong and an outrage to humanity, and like many of his contemporaries in Virginia, he held paternalistic views of his human chattel, feeling responsible for their welfare while doubting their ability to succeed in a free white world. As he described in a letter to Dr. Edward Bancroft, Jefferson had strong scruples against selling slaves, while freeing “persons whose habits have been formed in slavery,” he said, “is like abandoning children” (482). Yet, economic difficulties forced him to sell almost one hundred slaves during his lifetime, and his death left the remainder unprotected. He freed or bequeathed freedom to only seven slaves, all skilled artisans who could be expected to prosper as free men. Because Jefferson died deeply in debt, most of the other members of the Monticello African-American community were sold at auction and dispersed among different owners in Albemarle and surrounding counties.

Jefferson was among eight other Presidents of Welsh descent. It is widely suggested that the family of his father, Peter, were originally from Snowdonia. See “Presidential Connection” and Coolidge.

Sally Hemings (1773-1835) was a slave at Monticello who had at least six children. She lived in Paris with Jefferson and two of his daughters from 1787 to 1789, and reportedly became pregnant with Jefferson’s child while they lived there. Sally’s duties included being a nursemaid-companion to Jefferson’s daughter Maria (c. 1784-1787), lady’s maid to daughters Martha and Maria (1787-1797), and chambermaid and seamstress (1790s-1827). There are no known images of Sally and only four known descriptions of her appearance or demeanor. She left no known written accounts, and it is not known if she was literate. In the few scattered references to Sally in Jefferson’s records and correspondence, there is nothing to distinguish her from other members of her family. Whether this indicates Jefferson’s insensitivity to Sally as a slave or as mother to his children—or, indeed, neither—is debatable. Jefferson was at Monticello at the likely conception times of Sally Hemings’ six known children. There are no records suggesting that she was elsewhere at these times, or records of any births at times that would exclude Jefferson paternity.

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A private letter of 1805 has been interpreted by some individuals as a denial of the story.

They also stated that Jefferson’s nephews Peter and Samuel Carr were “the fathers of the light-skinned Monticello slaves some thought to be Jefferson’s children because of their resemblance to him.” See “Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings”
That a Jefferson-Hemings relationship could be neither refuted nor substantiated was challenged in 1998 by the results of DNA tests conducted by Dr. Eugene Foster and a team of geneticists. The study—which tested Y-chromosomal DNA samples from male-line descendants of Field Jefferson (Thomas Jefferson’s uncle), John Carr (grandfather of Jefferson’s Carr nephews), Eston Hemings, and Thomas C. Woodson—indicated a genetic link between the Jefferson and Hemings descendants. The results of the study established that an individual carrying the male Jefferson Y chromosome fathered Eston Hemings (born 1808), the last known child born to Sally Hemings. There were approximately 25 adult male Jeffersons who carried this chromosome living in Virginia at that time, and a few of them are known to have visited Monticello. The study’s authors, however, said “the simplest and most probable” conclusion was that Thomas Jefferson had fathered Eston Hemings.

The DNA study found no link between the descendants of Field Jefferson and Thomas C. Woodson (1790-1879), whose family members have long held that he was the first son of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings. Madison Hemings, Sally’s second-youngest son, said in 1873 that his mother had been pregnant with Jefferson’s child (who, he said, lived “but a short time”) when she returned from France in 1789. But there is no indication in Jefferson’s records of a child born to Hemings before 1795, and there are no known documents to support that Thomas Woodson was Hemings’ first child.

Since then, a committee commissioned by the Thomas Jefferson Heritage Society, after reviewing essentially the same material, reached different conclusions, namely that Sally Hemings was only a minor figure in Thomas Jefferson’s life and that it is very unlikely he fathered any of her children. This committee also suggested in its report, issued in April 2001, that Jefferson’s younger brother Randolph (1755-1815) was more likely the father of at least some of Sally’s children.

Thomas Jefferson freed all of Sally’s children: Beverly and Harriet were allowed to leave Monticello in 1822; Madison and Eston were released in Jefferson’s 1826 will. Jefferson gave freedom to no other nuclear slave family. Jefferson did not free Sally Hemings. She was permitted to leave Monticello by his daughter Martha Jefferson Randolph not long after Jefferson’s death in 1826, and went to live with her sons Madison and Eston in Charlottesville. Sally Hemings’ children were light-skinned, and three of them (daughter Harriet and sons Beverly and Eston) lived as members of white society as adults. Because Virginia law required a freed slave to leave the state within one year, Jefferson asked the Virginia assembly to grant the freed slaves permission to remain in the state “where their families and connections are.”

Madison Hemings stated in 1873 that he and his siblings Beverly, Harriet, and Eston were Thomas Jefferson’s children. See “Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings.”

Elizabeth Hemings and her children lived at John Wayles’ plantation during his lifetime, but there are no documentary records relating to Wayles’ possible paternity of any Hemings children. See “Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings.”

Martha Wayles Jefferson (1748-1782).

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Schachner 962

However, Jefferson subscribed to the French rule that married women must forswear dancing (Schachner 962).

Jefferson, Jefferson: Political Writings 544

Schachner 92

Drinker (1735-1807), a Philadelphia Quaker, began keeping a daily diary in 1758, when she was twenty-three years old. Drinker remained in the city during the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793, recording news
from her merchant husband, Henry (referred to as “H.D.” or “H.S.D”) and other visitors, as well as her own observations on the effects of the epidemic. Drinker continued to chronicle life in Philadelphia until her death in 1807.

479 Dorothy recorded her Washington stay with Ann Mifflin, the Quaker abolitionist and minister. Evidently, Ann also went by the name of “Nancy.”

480 William Canby

481 Crane 1515-16

482 The 1800 Census showed that South Carolina had 146,151 slaves; in contrast, Georgia had 59,699. See “1800 Census” and “Georgia. Resident Population.”

483 Perhaps Dorothy overestimated Dolley Madison’s benevolence to the Africans. Despite Dorothy’s witness of Dolley’s soft spot for her black nurse, other historians have recorded Dolley’s less-than-maternalistic attitude toward slaves. As Nicholas Gordon writes in his history of former Illinois Gov. Edward Coles, “Certainly after Madison's death she did not follow her father’s example [of liberating slaves], putting ruthlessly on the block to the highest bidder the slaves that Madison had once intended to free.” See Gordon.

484 D.G. White 16-18

485 Qtd. in “The Domestic Slave Trade: The Victims of the Trade.”

486 “The Domestic Slave Trade: The Victims of the Trade.”

487 “The Domestic Slave Trade: The Victims of the Trade.”

488 Historians long ago discovered that the date of 1808 as the end of U.S. slave importation is erroneous. Slaves continued to be smuggled in even fifty years after the law took effect. Although national legislators made slave importation a crime, they made no provision for its enforcement. As historian Douglas Harper noted, what is traditionally recognized as the final shipment of African slaves into the United States occurred in 1858: “In a notorious case, the famous schooner-yacht Wanderer, pride of the New York Yacht Club, put in to Port Jefferson Harbor in April 1858 to be fitted out for the slave trade. Everyone looked the other way—which suggests this kind of thing was not unusual—except the surveyor of the port, who reported his suspicions to the federal officials. The ship was seized and towed to New York, but her captain talked (and possibly bought) his way out and was allowed to sail for Charleston, South Carolina. Fitting out was completed there, the Wanderer was cleared by Customs, and she sailed to Africa where she took aboard some 600 blacks. On Nov. 28, 1858, she reached Jekyll Island, Georgia, where she illegally unloaded the 465 survivors of what is generally called the last shipment of slaves to arrive in the United States.” See Harper.

489 Dorothy became the first woman to speak before the U.S. Congress. From the Speaker’s Chair, Dorothy addressed Jefferson, Vice President George Clinton and “a crowded audience” on Jan. 12, 1806. For more detail, see the dissertation’s conclusion.

490 Benezet 41

491 “The Middle Passage has been defined in several ways. Some authors refer to these routes as the ‘triangle trade’ or ‘circuit trade,’ ‘three cornered,’ ‘round about,’ and ‘transatlantic trade’ routes. The typical voyage for slaves taken by the British went south down the coast of Africa into the area adjacent to the Gulf of Guinea. These English slavers brought cargoes of rum, brandy, glass, cloths, beads, guns, and other appealing goods from Europe. They bargained with African traders for their tribal captives. Some slavers entered the shores and kidnapped the unsuspecting natives and took them aboard their slave ships or kept them in waiting areas near the shore called ‘barracoons’ or slave barracks. When the desired number of African slaves was met for shipping, the voyage of middle passage continued from Africa on the slave ships going across the Atlantic Ocean with a destination in one of several ports in the West Indies and Caribbean. In the West Indies and Caribbean, some slaves were off-loaded and sold to work at the sugar plantations, also called the ‘Sugar Islands.’ The raw molasses was taken aboard the ships; then they sailed up the coast northbound for Newport or Bristol, Rhode Island’s distilleries, to make rum from the molasses. Other stops along the Atlantic coast where slaves were exchanged for goods or cash were Charleston and Boston. The goods produced by cheap slave labor were loaded aboard the now empty slave ships along with sugar, tobacco, or cotton for the trip back to England. The rum from the rum distillers went directly back to Africa for more slaves, bartering on this, the Triangular Trade Routes. By 1768, the English slave trade had a figure of 53,000 slaves a year being shipped to the North American continent. Other slave traders included the French at 23,000, the Dutch at 11,000, and the Portuguese at 8,700 slaves being
transported yearly from Africa. Estimates of up to 10 million slaves took the Middle Passage Voyage to reach the Americas.” Qtd. from “The African American”

492 All information regarding the Lydia came from Dorothy’s journal, dated Feb. 20, 1806. See Bank 279.

493 Harper, “Northern Profits from Slavery.”

494 Cottman 50. Cottman tells the emotionally explosive tale of the Henrietta Marie and how teams of divers, black and white, investigated the ship where it sank off the coast of Key West.

495 Several variables dictated the time it took for slave ships to cross the Atlantic from Africa. Weather conditions and the design and condition of the ship often adversely affected crossing. In 1796, for example, a violent storm prevented a Liverpool slave ship from reaching its destination for more than six months. This resulted in 128 of the Africans on board dying of starvation as food supplies dwindled. Only forty Africans survived the voyage. A lengthy crossing time exacerbated the agony of the journey the enslaved Africans, many of whom had been on board for weeks or even months before the voyage began. In the early days of the transatlantic slave trade, Africans were locked up in forts or “castles” on land and only boarded the slave ships once the ship was ready to set sail. However, slavers increasingly found it advantageous to load Africans directly onto the ships where escape was minimized.

496 This detail about Charleston statutes came from Dorothy herself. See Bank 279.

497 See “CPI Conversion Factors.”

498 Dorothy refers to the biblical account that the Jews paid thirty pieces of silver to Judas Iscariot in exchange for his aid in the arrest of Jesus: “Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over” (Matthew 26: 14-16, NIV).

499 For an illuminating story of one of the “castles,” called Cape Coast Castle, see William St. Clair’s The Grand Slave Emporium: Cape Coast Castle and the British Slave Trade (2006). St. Clair illuminates the African side of the slave trade “triangle,” which has remained a murky area for historians. In reality, Cape Coast was a far cry from a castle, but was, rather, a warehouse-dungeon. From its “doors of no return,” captured men, women and children born in Africa were detained until deportation to plantations in the Caribbean, Americas and elsewhere.

500 After eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve donned leaves in an attempt to “hide” from God: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3: 7-8, NIV).

501 At least 618,000 Americans died in the Civil War, and some experts estimate the toll at as much as 700,000. However, the number most often quoted is 620,000. In any case, these casualties exceed the nation’s loss in all other wars, from the Revolution through Vietnam. The Union armies had about 1,557,000 men. Their losses, by the best estimates, were: battle deaths, 110,070; disease, etc., 49,458; total 23 percent. The Confederate army, known less accurately because of missing records, was composed of about 1,100,000 men. Its estimated losses were: battle deaths, 94,000; disease, etc., 164,00; total 24 percent. The leading authority on casualties of the war, Thomas L. Livermore, admitting the handicap of poor records in some cases, studied 48 of the war’s battles and concluded: of every 1,000 Confederates in battle, 112 were wounded. Of every 1,000 Confederates, 150 were hit. Mortality was greater among Confederate wounded because of inferior medical service. Statistics from Mintz.

502 John Hoff operated a print shop at 118 Broad Street, Charleston. He is recorded as printer on various ecclesiastical works and publications as diverse as botany dictionaries and medical treatises. See for example, Richard Furman’s Conversion Essential to Salvation (1816). This sermon was preached before the Religious Tract Society of Charleston in the First Presbyterian Church at its first anniversary meeting on June 10, 1816. He also printed the Protestant Episcopal Church’s convention proceedings as Journal of the Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the State of South-Carolina; Held in St. Michael’s Church, Charleston, From February 16th, to Februray [sic] 19th, 1819, Both Days Inclusive (1819). He also printed Joseph Brevard’s three-volume An Alphabetical Digest of the Public Statute Law of South-Carolina (1814). Among the medical works he published are John L.E.W. Shecut’s Flora Carolinaensis, or, A Historical, Medical, and Economical Display of the Vegetable Kingdom: According to the Linnaean or Sexual System of Botany: Being a Collection or Compilation of
the Various Plants Hitherto Discovered and Made Known by the Several Authors on Botany, &c. (1806); and ATreatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases, by Regimen and Simple Medicines (1807).

503 The Savannah River is formed by the confluence of the Tugaloo and Seneca rivers. It flows southeast to serve as the boundary between Georgia and South Carolina and empties into the Atlantic Ocean at Savannah after a course of 314 miles.

504 Bryan died in 1812, having obtained a house of his own, property in Savannah and in the country, and the freedom of his wife—though his “only daughter and child, who is married to a free man” remained in slavery along with her seven children since, according to law, children inherited the condition of their enslaved mothers. Bryan is buried in Laurel Grove Cemetery South in Savannah.

505 Bryan was born enslaved near Charleston, but was moved to a plantation near Savannah with his master, Jonathon Bryan. The fictional Uncle Tom starts out in Kentucky, then moves farther south to New Orleans, and eventually meets his death on the Legree plantation in Louisiana.

506 Josiah Henson (1789-1883) was born a slave in Charles County, Maryland. Before reaching the age of eighteen, he was sold three times. By 1830, Henson had saved up $350 to purchase his freedom. After giving his master the money, he was told that the price had increased to $1,000. Cheated of his money and believing he might again be sold, Henson decided to escape with his wife and four children. After reaching Canada, Henson formed a settlement where he taught other fugitive slaves how to be successful farmers. He became an active Methodist preacher, an abolitionist tour speaker, and part-time conductor on the Underground Railroad along routes between Tennessee and Ontario. He was the first black person to be featured on a Canadian stamp. Matthew Henson, the arctic explorer who accompanied Admiral Robert E. Peary on his expedition to the North Pole in 1909, was Josiah Henson’s great-grand nephew. Josiah Henson’s autobiography, The Life of Josiah Henson (1849) was read by Stowe and was part of the inspiration for her novel. His cabin remains standing amidst a residential development in Montgomery County, Maryland, and was recently acquired by the Montgomery Planning Board. Plans are under way to open the cabin to the public.

507 Stowe, Key.

508 A very small number of free blacks owned slaves. Although most free blacks purchased relatives whom they later manumitted, a few free blacks also owned slave holding plantations in Louisiana, Virginia, and South Carolina. Two recent works of fiction have this subject at their heart. See Edward P. Jones’ The Known World (2003) and Jacqueline Sheehan’s Truth (2003).

509 Qtd. in Barton. As early as 1692, Virginia passed laws that placed a heavy economic toll on any slaveholder who freed his or her slaves, thus discouraging owners from releasing slaves from bondage. That law declared: “[N]o Negro or mulatto slave shall be set free, unless the emancipator pays for his transportation out of the country within six months” (qtd. in Barton). Subsequent laws further restriction manumission of slaves, specifically that a slave could not be freed unless the slave owner guaranteed a security bond for the education, livelihood, and support of the freed slave in order to ensure that the former slave would not become a burden to the community or society. Not only did such laws place heavy economic burden on any slave owner inclined to free his or her slaves, but they also levied stiff penalties against any slaveholder trying to circumvent the law when manumitting slaves (Barton).

510 Qtd. in Barton.

511 Qtd. in Barton.

512 This statistic was provided by Dorothy, Bank 287

513 Noel served as mayor from July 9, 1804, to Sept. 13, 1807.

514 The Exodus story can be found in Exodus 1-14.

515 In 1790, just before the explosion in cotton production, some 29,264 slaves resided in the state. In 1793, the Georgia Assembly passed a law prohibiting the importation of slaves. The law did not go into effect until 1798, when the state constitution also went into effect, but the measure was widely ignored by planters, who urgently sought to increase their enslaved workforce. By 1800, the slave population in Georgia had more than doubled, to 59,699; by 1810, the number of slaves had grown to 105,218. See “Slavery in Antebellum Georgia.”

516 Census reports show that, in 1800, the state’s population was 162,686; by 1810, that number had grown to 252,433. See “Georgia: Resident Population and Apportionment of the U.S. House of Representatives.”

517 The story of the Clay family is one of wealth, religion, torn loyalties, and destruction by war. The Clay family was composed of eminent ministers, successful lawyers and judges, and ardent Southern sympathizers. Their hugely successful rice plantation, “Richmond” located about fifteen miles south of...
Savannah, served as the family seat and later the automobile-industry pioneer Henry Ford of Dearborn, MI, built his winter residence on the site of the former Clay plantation. The Clays were torn by the Civil War, some of them ardent secessionists while others disapproved of the division of the Union.

Joseph “Judge” Clay (1764-1811) was born and raised in Savannah. He graduated from Princeton in 1784 with the highest honor in his class. Returning to Savannah, he studied law and, after admission to the bar, soon became an eminent lawyer. In 1796, he was appointed U.S. District Judge for Georgia, holding that office until he resigned in 1801. In 1803, he made a profession of religion, uniting with the Baptist church in Savannah. In 1804, he was ordained to the ministry as assistant pastor of Dr. Henry Holcombe, and in 1807, was invited to the pastorate of the First Baptist Church in Boston. His health beginning to decline, he resigned his charge in 1809, and died soon afterward. He was a member of the Georgia convention of 1798 and influential in framing Georgia’s State Constitution.

His father, also named Joseph Clay served as a member of the revolutionary committee of 1774-75, a colonel in the army, and paymaster-general of the Southern department. He was a member of the Continental Congress from 1778 till 1780, when he resigned, and afterward served as county judge.

His son, Thomas Savage Clay (1801-1849), was a successful rice planter on the Ogeechee River. The latter Clay graduated from Harvard and later helped organize the Bryan Neck Presbyterian Church near his plantation in Bryan County. His wife, Matilda Willis McAllister Clay, was a daughter of a neighboring planter, George Washington McAllister (1781-1850), and Mary Bowman McAllister. Her brother, Joseph Longworth McAllister (1820-1864), had Fort McAllister built on his lands at the mouth of the Ogeechee River and served as Lt. Colonel of the Hardwick Rifles, later part of the 7th Regiment of Georgia Cavalry. McAllister was killed in action against troops commanded by Gen. George A. Custer at Trevilian’s Station, Virginia, on June 11, 1864.

Clay’s grandson, Thomas Carolin Clay, was the second son of Thomas Savage Clay and Matilda Willis McAllister Clay. He was educated by private tutors at “Richmond” plantation and studied at Yale College as a freshman. When Georgia seceded from the Union on Jan. 9, 1861, T.C. Clay left for Savannah, never to return to Yale to complete his studies. He enlisted as a private in Capt. Winn’s Company, 1st Battalion, Georgia Cavalry on June 30, 1862, known as the Liberty Independent Troop. On Dec. 20, 1862, he was detailed to the Signal Corps, and on Jan. 20, 1863, he was transferred to Company G, 5th Regiment, Georgia Cavalry. He was paroled with the Signal Corps at Albany, Georgia on May 6, 1865.

Near the height of the war in coastal Georgia on Nov. 1, 1864, T.C. Clay married Caroline Matilda Law (1842-1909). She was the daughter of Judge William Law (1793-1874), an ardent Secessionist, and his second wife, Alethea Jones Stark Law (1810-1872). Ft. McAllister fell in December 1864, and “Richmond” was burned, forcing the family to flee to south Georgia. After the war, T.C. Clay and his family lived in Savannah until 1878. Thereafter, he planted rice at “Richmond” until 1887, when he returned to Savannah to live for the rest of his life.


In Wheatley’s poem, the narrator declares: “Twas mercy brought me from my Pagan land/Taught my benighted soul to understand/That there’s a God, that there’s a Saviour too:/Once I redemption neither sought nor knew. . .” (815).

Thomas and Elizabeth Fuller of Beaufort, SC, were staunch supporters of Dorothy, even though she failed to convince them of the necessity of freeing their slaves.

Other points of friction were church teachings and practices. In 1844, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church split into two conferences because of tensions over slavery and the power of bishops in the denomination. The two General Conferences, the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) and Methodist Episcopal church (South) remained separate until a merger in 1939 created the Methodist Church. The latter became the present United Methodist Church as a result of additional mergers.
However, the Freewill Baptists, while renouncing their practice of footwashing (one of their most controversial rituals), they stood firm in their stance denouncing swearing, drinking excessively and owning slaves.

See Furman. As evidence, Furman cited the Old Testament practice of enslavement: “The Israelites were directed to purchase their bond-men and bond-maids of the Heathen nations; except they were of the Canaanites, for these were to be destroyed. And it is declared, that the persons purchased were to be their ‘bond-men forever;’ and an ‘inheritance for them and their children.’ They were not to go out free in the year of jubilee, as the Hebrews, who had been purchased, were: the line being clearly drawn between them.[See Leviticus XXV. 44, 45, 46, &c.] In example, they are presented to our view as existing in the families of the Hebrews as servants, or slaves, born in the house, or bought with money: so that the children born of slaves are here considered slaves as well as their parents. And to this well known state of things, as to its reason and order, as well as to special privileges, St. Paul appears to refer, when he says, ‘But I was free born.’” Furman further bolsters his argument with the examples of the Romans and Greeks who, after converting to Christianity in the first-century, were not required to relinquish their slaves.

In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI wrote in Supremo Apostolatus that he admonished and adjured “in the Lord all believers in Christ, of whatsoever condition, that no one hereafter may dare unjustly to molest Indians,Negroes, or other men of this sort; . . . or to reduce them to slavery . . . .” The operative word is unjustly. The Pope did not condemn slavery if the slaves had been captured justly. Roman Catholic Bishops in the Southern U.S. determined that this prohibition did not apply to slavery in the U.S. To their credit, various other popes did order or otherwise influence the emancipation of slaves that they considered to be unjustly enslaved. Qtd. in “Christianity and Slavery.”

The Cushites were Africans with clear negroid features. Cush is the land upstream from the fourth cataract of the Nile River in what today is Sudan. This is the area of the great bend in the river as it flows southwest before resuming its northerly flow. The Greeks called the black people south of Egypt “Ethiopians,” but most of these were Cushites. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, translates “Cushite” as Ethiopian.

Specifically, Douglass read Daniel O’Connor’s “Speech in the Irish House of Commons, in Favour of the Bill for Emancipating the Roman Catholics, 1795.” In O’Connor’s work, Douglass found a parallel to the slave’s condition: “What I got from [O’Connor] was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights” (Douglass 61).

Zilpha Elaw (1790-1845) was born outside of Philadelphia to a free black family. She joined the Methodist Episcopal Church at an early age. Later in life, she became a preacher and evangelist, traveling throughout the northeastern and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States and later in England. Recounting her great journey during a time when women of color were rarely heeded, her memoirs, Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, an American Female of Colour (1846), were published shortly after her death.
551 “Slave Codes”
552 “Kidnapping in Pennsylvania”
553 Another terrifying example occurred in Massachusetts when free blacks were kidnapped and transported to the island of Martinique. In 1788, the Massachusetts legislature declared the slave trade illegal and provided monetary damages to victims of kidnappings.
554 See “Africans in America.”
555 Taylor
556 The Fullers were a powerful family in Beaufort, South Carolina. Their home, called “The Tabby Manse” (circa 1786), is located at 1211 Bay Street, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places in South Carolina. The Tabby Manse still gives the impression of a Palladian villa magically transported to the banks of Beaufort River. See “Thomas Fuller House.”
557 Fuller was born in Beaufort in 1804, and died in Baltimore in 1876. He received a degree from Harvard in 1824.
558 Francis Wayland (1796-1865) served as pastor (1821–26) of the First Baptist Church in Boston, where he earned renown for the power of his preaching. After a brief professorship at Union College, he served as president of Brown University from 1827 to 1855. He founded a free library at Wayland, Massachusetts, which inspired legislation empowering towns to support public libraries through taxation. After retiring, he focused his energies on benevolent works, notably prison reform. Among his many books are Elements of Moral Science (1835); Elements of Political Economy (1837); and Elements of Intellectual Philosophy (1854).
559 Fuller used political, historical, and biblical arguments in his defense of slavery—the same defenses that the vociferous anti-slavery debaters used. In counter-attacks, Fuller delineated the abuses of the institution and the institution itself. To Wayland’s thesis that slavery was sinful, Fuller parried with “what God sanctioned in the Old Testament, and permitted in the New, cannot be sin” (qtd. in Chesebrough 30). As evidence, he stressed the plethora of examples and teachings recorded in the Old Testament sanctioning slavery as a way of life ordained by God. “The New Testament is not silent as to slavery; it recognizes the relation, and commands slaves to obey their masters” (30). Paralleling the Gospel teachings with the political circumstances of his age, Fuller posited, “Jesus and his apostles found slavery existing as a part of the social organization. Should they appear now, they would find the same institution here. They did not declare it to be a sin, but by precept and example permitted it to continue . . .” (30).
560 Eventually, the name evolved into Kukymuth and the road became known as Kukymuth Road. Today, it remains a thoroughfare through Henrico County. See “Names & Places in Henrico County.”
561 “Isaac,” Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser
562 “Isaac,” Virginia Chronicle
563 In the advertisement, two of the three named black men were labeled runaways. The other man, who had in his possession signed papers proclaiming his freedom, was detained along with the runaways. The three names signed to the man’s papers were published in the article as well, presumably in an attempt to determine the legitimacy of the paperwork.
564 “Isaac,” Norfolk Herald
566 “Proceedings of a Court of Oyer and Terminer”
567 Nathaniel “Nat” Turner (1800-1831) was an American slave whose failed slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia, was the most remarkable instance of black resistance to enslavement in the antebellum Southern United States. In 1831, Turner led the slave rebellion in Southampton, killing at least fifty-seven whites. On Nov. 5, 1831, Turner was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. He was hanged on November 11 in Jerusalem, Virginia; his body was then skinned, beheaded and quartered, and various body parts were kept by whites as souvenirs.
568 John Brown (1800-1859) became the first white abolitionist to advocate and practice guerrilla warfare as a means to the abolition of slavery. Although black anti-slavery leaders were well aware of him from the late 1840s, Brown first gained mainstream attention when he led a company of volunteers during the
Bleeding Kansas crisis, in which he fought pro-slavery Southerners, directed the Pottawatomie Massacre on the night of May 24, 1856, and freed eleven slaves from slaveholders in neighboring Missouri. Brown’s most famous deed was the raid on the federal armory at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, in 1859. Brown’s subsequent capture by federal forces, his trial for treason to the state of Virginia, and his execution by hanging comprised an important element of the origins of the American Civil War, which followed sixteen months later. Historians continue to debate his role and actions prior to the Civil War, as an abolitionist, and what tactics he chose.

Denmark Vesey (originally Telemaque, 1767?-1822) was a black slave and, later, a freeman, alleged to have planned what would have been the largest slave rebellion in U.S. history. His insurrection, which was to take place on Bastille Day, July 14, 1822, became known by about nine thousand slaves and free people of color throughout Charleston. The plan called for Vesey and his group of slaves and free blacks to take over the city of Charleston and, by some accounts, to inflict atrocities and killings on the local white population. Vesey and his followers had planned on fleeing to Haiti after the rebellion to escape retaliation. The plot was leaked by two slaves opposed to Vesey’s plan, and 131 people were charged with conspiracy by Charleston authorities. In total, 67 men were convicted and 35 hanged, including Vesey.

A tavern owner, Thomas Prosser was a young man who had “fallen heir some time ago, to a plantation within six miles” of Richmond, and “had behaved with great barbarity to his slaves.” See letter from J. T. Callender to Thomas Jefferson, from Richmond jail, dated Sept. 13, 1800, in “Papers of Jefferson,” Library of Congress; and letter from William Mosby to Governor James Monroe, from Henrico County, dated Nov. 10, 1800, in Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia: 26 (qtd. in Aptheker 219n.).

Apteker 219-220

However, as one contemporary noted, the plot was “kept with incredible Secrecy for several months,” and the next notice of apprehensions of revolt appeared in a letter of August 9 from J. Grammer of Petersburg to Augustine Davis of Richmond (220). This letter was given to Dr. James McClurg, who informed the military authorities and the Governor (220-21).

Charles Quersey and Alexander Beddenhurst, respectively.

The rebels amassed weapons and began hammering swords out of scythes and molding bullets. Slaves constructed crude swords and bayonets as well as about 500 bullets through the spring. Each Sunday, Gabriel entered Richmond, impressing the city’s features upon his mind and paying particular attention to the location of arms and ammunition.

Aptheker 218.

Callender apparently wrote to Jefferson on Sept. 19, 1800 from the Richmond jail, then overcrowded with the slave followers of Gabriel. Callender wrote to Jefferson that “it has come out that the fire in Richmond within these two years, was the work of negroes” (Aptheker 218). A serious fire in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in April 1799 earlier had been determined to be the work of arsonists. It was the last in a string of fires sweeping from Augusta, Charleston, Savannah, Newark, Elizabeth, New Jersey, Baltimore, and New York City. The general consensus was that slaves were the culprits.

Aptheker 221

Mosby Sheppard’s slaves, Tom and Pharoah, told him of the plot (Aptheker 221).

Monroe, seeing that speed was necessary and secrecy impossible, acted quickly and openly. He appointed three aides for himself, asked for and received the use of the federal armory at Manchester, posted cannon at the capital, called into service well over six hundred and fifty men, and gave notice of the plot to every militia commander in the State (qtd. in Aptheker 221).

However, as the slave “Ben” did not have enough contact with slaves from outlying areas, white authorities made a deal with lead co-conspirator Ben Woolfolk to supply the damning evidence. Other slaves provided further testimony.
The reward offered for Gabriel Prosser converts to about $4,225 today. See conversion rubric at “CPI Conversion Factors.”

Gabriel swam to the schooner Mary on the James River, seeking refuge. The white captain, a former overseer who later had a change of heart about slavery, offered sanctuary to Gabriel. However, when the ship docked in Norfolk, a slave named Billy who worked on the ship alerted white authorities to Gabriel’s whereabouts, probably in hopes of obtaining the $300 reward offered for Gabriel’s capture. Both Gabriel and his white would-be rescuer were arrested. If Billy had indeed coveted the reward, he must have been severely disappointed in the $50 he received, an amount far below what he required to purchase his freedom.

Although Richmond served as the venue for most of the trials, blacks captured in other counties were tried in those locations. Many of them shared the same fates as the Richmond slaves. However, in at least two counties, the results differed: in Hanover County, two slaves successfully escaped to freedom; in Norfolk County, despite heavy pressure from magistrates to slaves and working-class whites alike, no witnesses would come forward with evidence and the slaves were returned to their masters. In Petersburg, although authorities arrested four free blacks, they too were released because of lack of witnesses. Although several slaves offered condemning evidence, the testimony of slaves against free people was inadmissible in Virginia courts.


Aptheker 226. According to Aptheker, “these Negroes, who were conscious revolutionists, behaved nobly.” A resident of Richmond declared, in a letter of September 20, 1800, “Of those who have been executed, no one has betrayed his cause. They have uniformly met death with fortitude.” An eyewitness of the rebels’ conduct while in custody, John Randolph, six days later, stated, “The accused have exhibited a spirit, which, if it becomes general, must deluge the Southern country in blood. They manifested a sense of their rights, and contempt of danger, and a thirst for revenge which portend the most unhappy consequences” (qtd. in Aptheker 223).

For more background on the famous Prosser estate, see “Brookfield Plantation.”

July 1803

Massachusetts was one of a handful of colonies to punish what later was called “miscegenation” (Harper “Slavery in the North”).

The trope of the tragic mulatto, however, became a central one in sentimental fiction of the nineteenth century. The phrase “tragic mulatto” has a problematic history and status in literary studies, its genesis dating back to Sterling Brown’s The Negro in American Fiction (1937), in which a “single drop of midnight in her veins” renders the mixed-race figure as doomed to “go down to a tragic end” (144). For a riveting exploration of the trope, see Eva Allegra Raimon’s The “Tragic Mulatta” Revisited: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Antislavery Fiction (2004). Also, Judith Berzon’s groundbreaking study Neither White Nor Black: The Mulatto Character in American Fiction (1978) portrays the literary device as “an outcast, a wanderer, one alone” and the “fictional symbol of marginality” (100). Also see William Wells Brown’s Clotel, or The President’s Daughter (1853), a semi-fictional biographical novel which furnishes much detail about the kind of abuse the Jacobs discussed.

To increase their labor force at a minimal cost, plantation owners encouraged slaves to produce children. Child-bearing started around the age of thirteen, and by twenty, female slaves would be expected to have four or five children. To encourage child-bearing, some population owners promised women slaves their freedom after they had produced fifteen children. White owners looking to sell their female slaves often advertised young women as “good breeding stock.” One slave trader from Virginia boasted that his successful breeding policies enabled him to sell 6,000 slave children a year (qtd. in “Slave Breeding”).
Charles Ball was married and living in Maryland when he was sold to a master in South Carolina. His memoirs recorded white masters' sale of women as breeding stock: “About sunrise we took up our march on the road to Columbia, as we were told. Hitherto our master had not offered to sell any of us, and had even refused to stop to talk to any one on the subject of our sale, although he had several times been addressed on this point, before we reached Lancaster; but soon after we departed from this village, we were overtaken on the road by a man on horseback, who accosted our driver by asking him if his niggers were for sale. The latter replied, that he believed he would not sell any yet, as he was on his way to Georgia, and cotton being now much in demand, he expected to obtain high prices for us from persons who were going to settle in the new purchase. He, however, contrary to his custom, ordered us to stop, and told the stranger he might look at us, and that he would find us as fine a lot of hands as were ever imported into the country - that we were all prime property, and he had no doubt would command his own prices in Georgia. The stranger, who was a thin, weather-beaten, sunburned figure, then said, he wanted a couple of breeding wenches, and would give as much for them as they would bring in Georgia - that he had lately heard from Augusta, and that niggers were not higher there than in Columbia, and, as he had been in Columbia the week before, he knew what niggers were worth. He then walked along our line, as we stood chained together, and looked at the whole of us - then turning to the women; asked the prices of the two pregnant ones. Our master replied, that these were two of the best breeding-wenches in all Maryland - that one was twenty-two, and the other only nineteen - that the first was already the mother of seven children, and the other of four - that he had himself seen the children at the time he bought their mothers - and that such wenches would be cheap at a thousand dollars each; but as they were not able to keep up with the gang, he would take twelve hundred dollars for the two. The purchaser said this was too much, but that he would give nine hundred dollars for the pair. This price was promptly refused; but our master, after some consideration, said he was willing to sell a bargain in these wenches, and would take eleven hundred dollars for them, which was objected to on the other side; and many faults and failings were pointed out in the merchandise. After much bargaining, and many gross jests on the part of the stranger, he offered a thousand dollars for the two, and said he would give no more. He then mounted his horse, and moved off; but after he had gone about one hundred yards, he was called back; and our master said, if he would go with him to the next blacksmith's shop on the road to Columbia, and pay for taking the irons off the rest of us, he might have the two women” (Ball 36-38).

Hawley 98. Emphasis is Hawley’s. The Rev. Hawley supported the American Anti-Slavery Society’s publication of a volume of facts and testimonies about American slavery. He stipulated that such publications provided the only means of record for non-slaveholding populations: “one may reside at the south for years, and not witness extreme cruelties; a northern man, and one who is not a slaveholder, would be the last to have an opportunity of witnessing the infliction of cruel punishments” (95).

This seemed to be the attitude Dorothy encountered among the different races she engaged in her evangelical and humanitarian missions in the new Republic. She found that males—white, black, and native American—subjected their women to inferior status in the public, and oftentimes, private arena. See Chapter 1, “Dorothy & Female Evangelism,” for a more detailed view of male attitudes toward women during the post-revolutionary era.

Statistics qtd. in “Africans in America.”

Jones (1746-1818) was born a house slave in Delaware. He taught himself to read out of the New Testament and other books. At the age of sixteen, he was sold to a storeowner in Philadelphia, and soon began attending a night school for blacks, operated by Quakers. In 1766, he married another slave, and purchased her freedom with his earnings, buying his own freedom in 1784. After that, at St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church, Jones served as lay minister for its black membership. Known as “the black Bishop of the Episcopal Church,” Jones’ powerful orations, denouncement of slavery, and warnings to oppressors swelled the ranks of St. Thomas’ membership to more than 500 in its first year. See Kaplan and Kaplan, especially 99-101.

Allen (1760-1831) was born in 1760 the slave of Benjamin Chew, a Quaker lawyer who became Chief Justice of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1774. Chew sold Allen and his parents to a Delaware plantation owner who allowed his slaves to attend Methodist services in Dover. Through these services,
Allen became a Christian and began holding his own Methodist services in his quarters on the plantation using traveling Methodist preachers as weekly speakers. In 1783, he bought his freedom and began a career as an itinerant preacher, eventually settling in Philadelphia in 1786. Allen was born and died in Philadelphia. He is buried in Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. See Kaplan and Kaplan, especially 97-99.

Allen described the incident in his memoirs: “A number of us usually attended St. George’s Church in Fourth street; and when the coloured people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall, and on Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door, and told us to go in the gallery. He told us to go, and we would see where to sit. We expected to take the seats over the ones we formerly occupied below, not knowing any better. We took those seats. Meeting had begun, and they were nearly done singing, and just as we got to the seats, the elder said, ‘let us pray.’ We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H— M—, having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off of his knees, and saying, ‘You must get up—you must not kneel here.’ Mr. Jones replied, ‘wait until prayer is over.’ Mr. H— M— said ‘no, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and I force you away.’ Mr. Jones said, ‘wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more.’ With that he beckoned to one of the other trustees, Mr. L— S— to come to his assistance. He came, and went to William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church. This raised a great excitement and inquiry among the citizens, in so much that I believe they were ashamed of their conduct.” Allen, Life 13.

In 1787, black Christians organized the Free African Society, the first organized Afro-American society, and Jones and Allen teamed up as its leaders. Members of the Society paid monthly dues for the benefit of those in need. The Society established contact with similar black groups in other cities.

The Free African Society built its church on Fifth Street, one block from the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall). There, they built a two-story brick building capable of seating more than 500 worshippers. The church was dedicated on July 17, 1794. The African Church applied for membership in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, and in October 1794, it was admitted as St. Thomas African Episcopal Church. Jones was ordained as deacon in 1795 and as priest on Sept. 21, 1802, shortly before Dorothy stepped into the pulpit of St. Thomas’ for the first time. See “Origins.”

In 1816, Bethel held a convention for African American Methodists to air grievances with the parent Methodist denomination. The convention established the first General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, ordaining Richard Allen as the first Bishop of the new denomination. “Thus the AME Church, the first independent black denomination, was born” (“Origins”).

Because both churches began in 1794, some debate continues today over which of the two was founded first. “This debate, which became especially acute around the centennial of the two churches, has led to a belief that the two churches were competitive rivals at their founding, but this [is] misleading, as Richard Allen and Absalom Jones worked together to found their congregations” (“Origins.”)

Originally known as African Zoar, the church was dedicated on August 4, 1796, by Bishop Francis Asbury. Today it is regarded as the first recognized African-American congregation in the Methodist denomination.

“Origins.” As the congregations of St. Thomas and Bethel began to swell, the yellow fever plague struck Philadelphia 1793, causing more than 20,000 wealthy Philadelphians to flee, as well as state and national government officials. Particularly hard hit were Philadelphia’s urban poor and working class immigrants, who often could not afford to see a physician. With a dramatic shortage of doctors and medical assistants, the city’s needy turned for help to the long-ignored African American community for help. Jones and Allen stepped forward as two of the most effective leaders involved in organizing aid for the needy poor. Delighted with the opportunity to demonstrate to white Philadelphians what African American Christians could accomplish, he enlisted black aid. “Mistakenly believing that blacks were immune to yellow fever, Rush recruited scores of black Christians to help in the treatment of the sick and the burying of the dead. At the peak of the epidemic more than twenty Philadelphians died each day, many of them African Americans.” See “Origins.”

Dorothy attended the Northern District’s Monthly Meeting on April 24, 1803, followed by the Southern District’s meeting two days later. On April 29, she attended the Philadelphia monthly meeting. Also, she
lodged with various Quakers in the city. Therefore, much of her personal connections and evangelistic work revolved around the Friends rather than her true calling—conversion of the Ethiopians. See EC 131-33.

More than likely, at least one of the intermediaries was James Pemberton. For more detail on Pemberton’s connection to the African churches of Philadelphia, see Chapter 2, “Dorothy & A Legacy of Evangelism.”

See Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion of Dorothy’s struggles to preach among these denominations.

Hardening antifeminist sentiment following Wesley’s death resulted in the Methodist Conference of 1803, convened in Manchester, imposing a prohibition on women’s preaching. For greater detail, see Chapter 2.

James Pemberton (1723-1809) was a successful merchant, prominent in public life and affairs of Quaker meetings. He served as the clerk of the “Meeting for Sufferings” and helped to found the Pennsylvania Hospital. Pemberton was also a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society where he succeeded Franklin as president in 1790. Exiled to Virginia with his brother Israel Pemberton for his pacifist principles, James was one of many Quakers who withdrew from the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1756 as conscientious objector to the Revolutionary War. His wife was Phoebe (whose name is spelled in some records as Phebe).

Although Zoar was mentioned as a separate church in the records of the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church as early as 1811, it was administered by St. George’s, which supplied its pastors. Zoar established two mutual aid societies, the Beneficial Philanthropic Sons of Zoar and the Female Beneficial Philanthropic Society of Zoar in 1826. During this period, a number of members left Zoar to join Richard Allen in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1832, a “plan of separation” from St. George's was adopted to take effect in three years. In 1835, the “Covenant of Assumption” made possible the assignment of Zoar’s first African-American pastor, Rev. Perry Tilghman, who served until 1844. Zoar was chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on June 14, 1837. See “Zoar United Methodist Church Records, 1841-1984.”

The Journal of Negro History was founded in 1916 as a quarterly research journal. It was published by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History founded in 1915 by Carter G. Woodson and Jesse E. Moorland. In 2002, the Journal of Negro History became The Journal of African American History.

Only a few months after Dorothy left Philadelphia, Meriwether Lewis also left the city to join George Rogers Clark in Indiana before arriving late in the year at the staging area near St. Louis. After making final preparations, they set off on May 14, 1804, for the west, ascending the Mississippi to the mouth of the Missouri, and then westward. From North Dakota to nearly the coast, Lewis and Clark passed through lands that no Europeans had ever seen. On Nov. 18, 1805, they reached their goal of the Pacific.

For a list of names penned to the 1783 petition to the U.S. Congress on Oct. 4, 1783, see “Quaker Petition to Congress.”
Discipline (1817); Gloucester was the first black ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church. Samson Peters [spelled Sampson by Payne], was an A.M.E. preacher who organized the oldest African-American church in Princeton, New Jersey.

Edwards, no relation to the eighteenth-century minister, was a Welsh-born scale-beam maker who took up the evangelical cross alongside Dorothy in 1810. Besides evangelizing together, they also suffered the indignity of arrest after marching down the streets trumpeting salvation.

The Leverett Street almshouse was closed in 1825.

The widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17: 7-24 passed a test of self-denial when she gave the prophet Elijah water and bread instead of saving it for herself and her son. A terrible drought covered the land as Elijah fled Queen Jezebel’s wrath. Elijah took refuge in the widow’s home, requesting that she feed him from her meager store. She acquiesced and, using the last of the meal in the barrel, baked a loaf which she permitted Elijah to eat from first. In return for her obedience to the prophet’s directive, she was to know the fulfillment of the prophet’s promise uttered in the name of God: neither the barrel of meal nor the cruse of oil would be exhausted before the drought came to an end.

Dorothy’s second passage comes from 2 Kings 4: 1-7. In this story, the wife of one of Elisha’s murdered prophets frantically beseeched his aid when her husband’s creditors meant to confiscate her sons and sell them into slavery as repayment. Elisha instructed her to take her tiny amount of oil and begin filling all the jars in her house, pouring without ceasing. Her faithful following of Elisha’s directive resulted in a miraculous overflow of oil which filled several jars with the precious commodity, which she then sold to pay her creditors.

In Wesley’s text, see particularly the introductory 1-4 and I: 5 of “On Visiting the Sick.”

In its early years, the Park enjoyed little to no competition in New York City. Nevertheless, it rarely made a profit for its owner, William Dunlap, prompting him to sell it in 1805 after declaring bankruptcy. Following a few more failed managers, John Jacob Astor and John Beekman bought the theatre, which they kept until its demolition in 1848. See Allston T. Brown, A History of the New York Stage: From the First Performance in 1732 to 1901 (1903); Mary C. Henderson, The City and the Theatre (2004); and Alois M. Nagler, A Source Book in Theatrical History (1952).
No where is the powerful imagery of an angered God more frightening than in Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741). In it, the nightmarish images build to terrifying effect as Edwards warned that “the God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked” (97). Similarly, threats of doom characterized some of George Whitefield’s sermons. In Sermon 35, “The Conversion of Zaccheus,” Whitefield depicted hell as a tangible damnation within the body of a sinner: “For if you do not feel yourselves lost without Christ, you are of all men most miserable: your souls are dead; you are not only an image of hell, but in some degree hell itself: you carry hell about with you, and you know it not” (Whitefield).

According to Stansell, the number of women employed in each occupation were: boardinghouse keepers, 79; mantua makers and milliners, 51; teachers, 32; seamstresses, 31; nurses, 25; tailors and tailoresses, 22; grocers, 18; midwives, 11; tavern and coffeehouse keepers, 7; fruiters, 5; and other occupations with women, 10. See Stansell 225.

According to Mary Beth Norton, during this period, the code of premarital female chastity was not yet a phenomenon among the middle or lower classes. See Liberty’s Daughters, 51-56. Similarly, Stansell found that an acceptance of premarital sex characterized relationships among the working class up through the Civil War. Thus, Sands’ forthright sexual relationship with Weeks did not violate traditional norms.

The well in which Sand’s body was found can still be seen in an alley on Spring Street near Greene Street (Dunshee 205). The home of Sands was located on the southwest corner of Greenwich and Franklin Streets.

Moreover, while northerners no longer supported a slave system, their overall prejudices toward newly liberated blacks and soon-to-be-freed slaves did not significantly alter. In fact, with the influx of a large free black population in the North, racial tensions heightened. According to historian Marylynn Salmon, “Although northern whites saw daily evidence that free blacks were capable and hardworking, they readily accepted southern judgments on the inferiority of African Americans” (165) By embracing southern arguments of the inherent dishonesty, foolishness, and intellectual inferiority of blacks, northern whites “solved a moral dilemma” and relieved themselves of the “obligation to help them build better lives for themselves as free people” (165).

For example, historian Stuart Banner calls Rose “a New York City slave” (34). By contrast, others fail to be definitive enough, simply labeling her a domestic or servant, such as Ann Fabian who described Rose...
as “a nineteen-year girl” who “worked as a servant” (58). Such simplistic descriptors do not encapsulate the political void in which a slave-cum-indentured servant existed. For others, the confusion appears even more magnified. For example, Goldberg referred to Rose as an “Irish domestic” who burned her mistress’s house down “in the hopes that her mistress’s enraged response would be to send her back to Ireland” (Goldberg 190). Hence, the most appropriate descriptor for Rose would be that used by Stansell of “a servant-girl” (86). The term, despite the pejorative overtones attached to “girl,” does indeed capture who Rose was. Only nineteen, Rose was still a “girl,” a naïve one spellbound by the allure of a fun and frivolous lifestyle far removed from the drudgery of her normal routine and easily swept into the dangerous world of urban crime by those much more experienced than she.

These assertions are made by Medford and Brown. However, historian Thomas D. Beal maintains that historians’ tendency to cast Rose as a life-long criminal with a long history of petty thievery and rebelliousness stems from the “authenticated” account of her final statements. Only days after her Rose’s execution, the printing house of Broderick and Ritter published “An Authentic Statement of the Case and Conduct of Rose Butler” (1819). It promised readers that the statement derived from notes taken by the Rev. John Stanford, the part-time chaplain for the Bridewell, Almshouse, Newgate, and other city and state institutions. Stanford attended Rose at her execution. However, Beal asserts that the publishers “altered parts of the story they printed” (Beal). Rather than an unadulterated story derived from Stanford’s private memorandum book, which lent the story credibility, the publishers took great license in their modifications. “Going far beyond an occasional punctuation change or editing, the publishers added entire passages. These passages are key because since 1819 historians have used them each to misinterpret Butler’s life and crime” (Beal). Beal further contends that “Broderick and Ritter told Butler’s story for a unique audience, and although they promised an ‘authentic account,’ they gave readers something very different” (Beal).

Dorothy’s account of the final days of the condemned Rose begins her published work, An Account of Rose Butler (1819), but the bulk of the book treats the subject of capital punishment, a divisive issue both then and now. Dorothy claims to be reprinting published editorials from a writer identified only by the pen name of “Benevolus.” These commentaries orchestrated a coherent argument in favor of the abolishment of capital punishment. Not surprisingly, Dorothy too favored an end to the death penalty, especially after her prison ministry and encounters with Rose. Neither the editorials nor Dorothy’s stance are covered in this dissertation although both deserve greater investigation.
Dorothy identified the minister only as “Strong.”

Nathan Strong (1748-1816) graduated from Yale College in 1769 and was ordained pastor of the First Congregational Church, Hartford, in 1773, where he remained until his death. He received the degree of D.D. from Princeton University and was editor of the Hartford Selection (1799), which wielded considerable influence upon American hymnody.

By 1787, with the cemeteries of New York full after annual bouts of yellow fever, the city leaders purchased the 90-lot tract of the current Square where more than 20,000 rest today. In 1890, workmen digging the foundation for the arch came upon headstones with German inscriptions dating to 1803. The former potter’s field makes up two-thirds of the present park. Around the turn of the century, the potter’s field evolved into a favored site for duels as well as public hangings. Duels continued in the potter’s field until April 1828, when state law prohibited the practice. One of the more famous duels there occurred between William Coleman, editor of The New York Evening Post, and Captain Thompson, harbormaster of the port of New York. These practices continued up until the cemetery’s closing on May 1, 1825. See “History of Washington State Park.”

Public opposition to any dissection of bodies resulted in outbursts of violence in both Europe and America. In England, Robert Knox, an eminent British anatomist, was excoriated by the public because a body he purchased for dissection was one of the victims murdered by the serial killers and resurrectionists William Hare and William Burke; the murderers were brought to trial and convicted in 1828. The case led to Great Britain’s 1832 passage of the Anatomy Act, which permitted legal acquisition by medical schools of unclaimed bodies. In the U.S., dissection of the human body has been practiced since the middle of the eighteenth century despite frequent riots and acts of violence against anatomy lecturers and medical students, who reputedly robbed graves to find bodies for study. In 1788, the “Doctors’ Mob,” composed of outraged citizens of New York City excited by reports of bodysnatching, ransacked the rooms of anatomy students and professors at Columbia College Medical School in search of bodies (Stern 40). The public was angered because medical students dug up bodies “not only of strangers and blacks . . . but the corpses of some respectable persons” (181). The militia had to be mobilized to prevent threatened lynchings of doctors imprisoned in jail for safekeeping, and three members of the crowd were killed (181). The following year, body snatching was prohibited by law, and not until 1854 were anatomy students able to legally accept unclaimed bodies from public institutions. Similar public outrage occurred in Baltimore and throughout the United States. In 1844, the equipment of a college in St. Louis was destroyed (Stern 181). See J.B. Bailey, ed., The Diary of a Resurrectionist (1896) and T. Gallagher, The Doctors’ Story (1967).

The writer mistakenly identifies Butler as a “slave” who “burned down her mistress’s house” (McDonough).

Prior to the New Penal Code of March 1796, sixteen crimes were punishable by death in New York, including murder, rape, robbery, treason, burglary, stealing from a church, forgery, and counterfeiting. All other felonies, if committed a second time, were also capital. The new penal law established a schedule of crimes and punishments with only treason and murder retained as capital offenses. Other crimes formerly punishable by death now resulted in life imprisonment, with hard labor or solitary confinement as judicial options. Other felonies, on the first offense, resulted in imprisonment up to 14 years, with hard labor or solitary confinement at the judge’s discretion. The second offense meant an increased penalty to life imprisonment. Petty larceny earned a year’s imprisonment on the first offense, upping to three years for a second offense. Prisoners with a year or less sentence served their time in county jails while prisoners with longer sentences went to the state prison. See “New York’s First Prison, Newgate.”

Designed for less than 450 prisoners, Newgate was doomed from the beginning in its efforts to keep pace with the exploding population of New York City in the early 1800s. Already filled by the time of Dorothy’s arrival, Newgate became further flooded in the wake of the crime wave which followed the return of soldiers to New York City after the War of 1812. Then, the number of convictions increased by
more than two-thirds, from 295 in 1815 to 436 in 1816. Without an alternate prison, only two undesirable remedies remained: cramming the inmates into Newgate or granting pardons. An 1817 law allowed inspectors to shorten inmates’ terms by one-quarter if they exhibited good behavior while incarcerated. But this proved woefully inadequate. By 1821, Newgate had nearly doubled its capacity, at 817 residents. Without the governor’s use of clemency, an estimated 2,000 would have needed incarceration. Pardon rather than sentence completion accounted for nine-tenths of all releases. Mass releases twice a year disrupted prison industries and created disciplinary problems. Inmates expected to serve no more than half their terms, and “were outraged if held past that date. Every pardon season saw 40 to 50 unreformed felons suddenly loosed upon the citizenry” ("New York’s First Prison, Newgate").

739 Qtd. in "New York’s First Prison, Newgate."

740 Rev. John Stanford (1754-1834) was ordained in England in 1781 at age 27. He came to the U.S. five years later and worked as a pastor in Virginia and later at First Baptist Church of Providence, Rhode Island, which traces its origins to the congregation begun by Roger Williams, thus making it the first Baptist church in America. In 1789, Stanford helped build the Fair (later Fulton) St. Baptist church in Manhattan, serving as pastor until 1801 when fire destroyed it. Until his 1812 appointment as Newgate’s first official chaplain, he journeyed throughout the eastern seaboard as an itinerant preacher. Stanford’s became the leading voice advocating separation of children from hardened criminals and education for the incarcerated young. He also helped establish the New York House of Refuge, the first juvenile reformatory in the U.S. He died in New York City at age 80.  

741 Luke 23: 42

742 The principal keeper earned $875 per year plus lodging and board for his family in private compartments at the prison. His deputy keeper earned less than half of what his supervisor made, and the eleven under-keepers made only $250 although “diet, lodging, and washing” were included. A resident clerk also served the prison at $500 a year. Using the model of Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Jail, Newgate’s administrative design placed the welfare of prisoners in the hands of seven unpaid gentleman “inspectors” appointed by the governor. One of the inspectors functioned as the agent, or chief business officer, at a salary of $1,500 plus lodging. Eddy served as Newgate’s first agent. See “New York’s First Prison, Newgate.”

743 Qtd. in Lewis

744 Lewis

745 Lewis

746 Lewis

747 Qtd. in “New York’s First Prison, Newgate.”

748 At their discretion, inspectors could reimburse the inmate upon release for earnings exceeding the cost of his incarceration. According to Eddy, inspectors could “take into consideration the character of the person before his conviction, his behavior during confinement, [and] the general disposition he has manifested. If, on the whole, it appears probable that he may make a bad use of the money, they give him one or two dollars only” (qtd. in “New York’s First Prison, Newgate”).

749 This stipulation excluded prisoners who had learned the trade before their conviction.  

750 “New York’s First Prison, Newgate.”

751 Matthew 25: 41

752 It was torn down in 1838 and much of its granite used in 1840 to construct the Tombs Prison on Centre and Leonard Streets.  

753 Torrey 289. Torrey cites census numbers for his population totals. In 1805, the number of New York residents was 75,703. Just before the close of Bridewell, more than 185,000 lived in the city.

754 Born in Marburg, Germany, around 1748, Philip Jacob Arcularius immigrated to New York prior to the Revolution and shared a baking business with his brothers. “According to family legend, Arcularius volunteered to supply the city’s soldiers with bread during the Revolutionary War” (Hofer). By the 1790s, he left the baker’s trade, became a tanner, and prospered as a master artisan. He married Elizabeth Grim in 1775, and the couple had eleven children, including Christina, the eldest, born in 1777. He served in the state General Assembly five times between 1798 and 1805; as assistant alderman for New York’s Fifth Ward from 1796 to 1800; and superintendent of the almshouse from 1805 to 1806. Christiana’s sampler “Tree of Knowledge” has become celebrated among decorative arts scholars as “one of the most ambitious examples of New York’s Biblical sampler style,” and was featured in the New-York Historical Society’s exhibition “Home Sewn: Three Centuries of Stitching History” (Hofer.)
John Howard (1726-1790) has been called the Father of Prison Reform for his philanthropic efforts to improve the environments and care of prisoners during the eighteenth century. As high sheriff of Bedfordshire, England, in 1773, he assumed responsibility for the county jail and was shocked by the conditions he witnessed there and in other prisons throughout England. Making prison reform his lifelong work, his efforts led to two parliamentary acts in 1774: one abolished fees paid by prisoners for food, bedding and other facilities; the second enforced improvements in the system, leading to better prisoner health. He conducted seven major journeys throughout Europe, visiting prisons and working for improvements. While examining military hospitals in Russia, he contracted typhus and died there Jan. 20, 1790. Sixteen year later, the Howard League for Penal Reform was founded in his honor.

Deterrence theory was formulated by eighteenth-century social philosophers Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham and supported by Americans such as Thomas Jefferson. In this view, authorities subjected prisoners to harsh conditions in the hope of convincing them to avoid future criminal behavior and to exemplify for others the rewards for avoiding such behavior. The deterrence model emphasized that the fear of harsh punishment would win over whatever pleasure the illegal activity might bring. At its most basic, three elements form the theory: certainty, the certainty of being apprehended by police and/or the certainty of receiving some penalty upon processing by the court system; severity, the austerity of the penalties associated with criminal acts, with the idea that as punishments increase in severity, the individuals will be less likely to commit acts that could lead to such punishment; and celerity, the swiftness with which criminal sanctions are imposed, emphasizing that punishment which follows closely behind the commission of a crime creates a causal link in the perpetrator’s mind. For an examination of these three components of punishment, see Edmund S. Howe and Thomas C. Loftus, “Integration of Certainty, Severity, and Celerity Information in Judged Deterrence Value: Further Evidence and Methodological Equivalence,” in Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 26:3, pp: 226–242; F. Zimring and G. Hawkins, Deterrence (1973); Jesenia Pizarro and M.K. Vanja Stenius, “Supermax Prisons: Their Rise, Current Practices, and Effects on Inmates,” The Prison Journal, (June, 2003, Vol. 84, no. 2: 248–264); and Tracey L. Meares, “Social Organization and Drug Law Enforcement,” American Criminal Law Review, Vol. 35, 1998. For a thorough and interesting comparison of the various justifications of criminal punishment see Graeme Newman, The Punishment Response (1978). Also see an excellent collection of articles edited by R. Gerber and P. McAnany, Contemporary Punishment (1972).

While Quakers initially coined the phrase “penitentiary” with the goal of penance as the motivator behind incarceration, by the time of Dorothy’s visitations, the compassionate model of the Friends generally had been set aside in favor of the “deterrence” model.

Bragdon 31. This powerful League of the Iroquois, which became so crucial in the contest for the continent that was waged between the French and the English in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, joined together for mutual defense and trade. The Iroquois tribes were, from east to west, the Mohawk, known as “Keepers of the Eastern Door;” the Oneida, “Second to Join the League;” the Onondaga, “Those Who Watch Over the Central Fire;” the Cayuga, “Younger Brothers of the League;” and the Seneca, the “Keepers of the Western Door” (P. Franklin 61). The League effectively controlled territories from Albany, New York, as far as Lake Erie, and south to central Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The three main rivers running through the territory, the Susquehanna, Delaware, and Ohio, enabled access to western and southern hunting territories, and via Lake Ontario, to the north, League members could travel along the St. Lawrence to the northeast (Bragdon 31).

Campisi and Hauptman 45

Campisi and Hauptman 45; Bragdon 141
The Wisconsin Oneidas fared little better. Tribal lands were reduced to an area of 65,000 acres by a 1838 Treaty. The boundaries designated by that treaty established what today is officially recognized as the original Oneida Reservation. Oneida land holdings dwindled over the remainder of the nineteenth century with the Dawes Act, or General Allotment Act, of 1887, which provided for the division of tribal lands to be held under a trust patent and subject to a restraint against alienation for twenty-five years. Through various activities by land speculators, Bureau of Indian Affairs officials, and some tribal members, all but only a few hundred acres were lost by 1929. See “Proud and Progressive”

Land reclamation has been a major focus of the Oneidas for more than twenty years. The tribe’s first big break came in 1985 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that all Oneida, collectively, were entitled to a 250,000-acre land claim in Central New York. On the heels of this victory was another when the courts tossed out a seven-year lawsuit levied by two adjoining counties and the city of Green Bay challenging the jurisdiction of the Oneida Nation and its boundaries. The action empowered the Oneidas to retain all land rights. However, the Oneidas have not yet received any land as compensation (Campisi and Hauptman 45). Finally, with the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988, the Indian Tribes in Wisconsin gained an exclusive means of generating revenue. With these revenues, the Oneidas have reacquired much of their reservation land. Nearly twenty-five percent of the original reservation has been reclaimed. Today, Oneida land holdings are 16,689 acres in both Brown and Outagamie counties. “Long-term goals of the Oneida include the purchase and recovery of all original reservation lands” (“Proud and Progressive”).

From 1821 and 1822, at a sum of $5,000, the Oneidas of Wisconsin acquired joint use of five million acres of land with the Menominees and Winnebagos. This area included lands along both sides of the Fox River within the state of Wisconsin. The Oneidas relocated to the west “in hopes of re-establishing itself as a self-sufficient, sovereign entity with a self-determined economy” (“Proud and Progressive”).

Skenandooh (c. 1706-1816) was adopted into the Oneida Nation instead of being a natural-born Oneida. The accounts of his birth and adoption vary. In the 1870s, one descendant claimed that Skenandooh came from Conestoga, Pennsylvania, a town along the Susquehanna River, which was populated by Susquehannocks and other Native Americans. More commonly, historians note his birthplace as being in the Great Lakes region. In 1845, one Oneida recorded, “Scanado was adopted by the nation when quite young; came from the west; does not know what tribe, but showed himself smart and rose to the chieftaincy by his bravery and conduct” (qtd. in “Oskanondonha”). A man who knew Skenandooh claimed that his mother was a Huron captive adopted (with her infant son) into the Oneida Nation (“Oskanondonha”).

The spelling of Skenandoa’s name ranges widely in historical accounts, including “Skenandoah,” “Skanandoa,” “Skenandoa” and “Skenandough.” By contrast, his name is spelled “Oskanondohon” on the Oneida Indian Nation of New York website at <http://www.oneida-nation.net/oskan3.html>. Pomroy Jones, a local historian, wrote in 1851 of the chief, spelling his name “Scandanoa” (qtd. in “Oskanondohon”). Among the translations given for this name are Aged Hemlock, Ghost Faced, and Running Deer. His real name, pronounced “(H)-ska-non-don-ha,” means “the Deer” (“Oskanondohon”). He took the Christian name John when baptized, probably in the 1760s. See “Oskananondonha” on the Oneida Indian Nation website for greater detail.

Calvin Young and his wife, Eve, proved staunch supporters of Dorothy during her time among the Oneida. Not only did they house the missionary, but they also arranged religious meetings, locales, and audiences. They provided transportation and introductions among the Oneida. Both Eve Young, and the Youngs’ daughter, Peggy, accompanied Dorothy during her many excursions between the Oneida settlements and throughout the New York countryside.
clothing. His pride revolting at his self-degradation, he resolved never again to place himself under the power of ‘fire water,’ a resolution which it is believed he kept to the end of his life” (qtd. in “Oskanondonha”).

Belknap and Morse 17

With the arrival of missionaries and the introduction of Christianity, the tribe had divided into two “parties”: the Christian and the Pagan (later known as the Orchard Party). See Clinton.

The age of the chief’s wife is derived from notes taken by DeWitt Clinton in 1810 during his sojourn among the Oneidas. In 1810, the chief’s wife was seventy-four, and Skanando was 101. Clinton also described Mrs. Skanando as marked by a large goiter at the base of her neck (Clinton).

The Oneidas recognized two kinds of chiefs: sachems and chief warriors. Nine Oneida sachems possessed chiefly titles, hereditary offices distributed among the three Oneida clans which traced membership through the matriarchal line. The senior women of the tribe nominated the men. The sachems served as leaders in diplomacy, trade, and other peace-time activities. By contrast, chief warriors were elected based on merit and ability, not on inheritance or family membership. Called “Pinetree Chiefs” today, these men generally were elderly since they had to earn widespread respect based on accomplishment. Although the men of the clan nominated the chief warriors, the tribal members had to be in agreement (“Oskanondonha”).

Ronda 28

See Campisi 60

Campisi 60

These last purchases, one each from the Christian and Pagan Parties, occurred during separate treaties in 1809. See Campisi 60.

There are many spelling variants of The Blacksmith’s Oneida name, including Hlawistany, Rawistony, Alawistonis, Aghwistonnis, Raghwistonnis, and Aughweehstanis (Wonderley).

The information on the Blacksmith comes from years of compiled tribal history by Wonderley. The first substantiated mention of the Blacksmith in historical records is from the 1784 Fort Stanwix Treaty. However, Wonderley speculates that the Blacksmith was the officer commissioned by Congress in 1779 as Lt. John Otaawigton.

The Oneidas’ high-esteem of the Quakers has been well-noted. In his travel writing, DeWitt Clinton credited the Quakers as the only missionaries working amongst the Oneidas to be successful in their efforts: “Abraham Hatfield and his wife (Quakers), have resided here sometime; having been sent by that Society principally with a view to teach the savages agriculture; for which they receive $200 a-year. Hatfield was sick; his wife appeared to be a kind, good woman; well qualified for the duties allotted to her. They are amply provided with oxen and the instruments of agriculture, to administer to the wants and instruction of the Indians. The Oneida’s [sic] are much attached to the Quakers. They teach morals—not dogmas—agriculture, and the arts of civilized life. Those of England have divided £8,000 among the Friends of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York, in order to ameliorate the condition of the Indians. The means adopted by the Quakers are the only competent ones that can be adopted. They indicate a knowledge of human nature; and if the Indians are ever rescued effectually from the evils of savage life, it will be through their instrumentality” (Clinton).

Ronda 27

The Rev. Samson Occom (1723-1792) was the first Native American to publish documents in English. A member of the Mohegan nation near New London, Connecticut, he was born to Joshua Tomacham and Sarah and believed to be a direct descendant of the famous Mohegan chief, Uncas. In 1768, Occom wrote A Short Narrative of My Life (1982), and A Choice Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1774). He shot to fame in 1771 with his moving execution sermon, A Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul (1774).

Bragdon 115

2 Kings 17:1. Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, fell to Assyria in 721 B.C., and Israelite captives throughout the kingdom were taken into exile.

Kirkland (1741-1808) was born in Norwich, Connecticut and died in Clinton, New York. He began his missionary work as a protégé of Rev. Eleazar Wheelock, but Kirkland soon went his own way. Serving as missionary to both the Seneca and the Oneida, and playing an instrumental part in the Revolutionary War, he later founded the Hamilton-Oneida Academy, later Hamilton College (1793). With an eye toward
schooling native children, Kirkland nevertheless was quickly disabused of the idea by the caucasian sponsors who established Hamilton-Oneida as an all-white school. The town of Kirkland, New York, is named after him. For more detail on Kirkland’s ministerial involvement with the Oneida, see Ronda 23-30.

In 1788, in recognition of his services, the Indians and the State of New York granted him 4,000 acres of land, a portion of which he set aside for the Hamilton-Oneida Academy (New York State Writers’ Program 466).

The Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784 provided that the Oneidas “shall be secure in the possession of the lands on which they are settled” (Heisey and Hanes). This guarantee is reiterated in the 1789 Treaty of Fort Harmar. However, until 1790, state and local governments forced tribal land cessions on the Oneidas, reducing the Oneida territory from the more than six million original acres to about 300,000. The Continental Congress’s 1784 guarantee, together with the U.S. Congress’s 1790 Indian Trade and Non-Intercourse Act, which forbade purchases of Indian land without prior federal consent, comprises the legal basis for Oneida’s argument of fraudulent land purchases by New York State.

Kirkland’s welcoming acceptance of Dorothy seems baffling, considering his general disdain for the Quakers. In January 1800, Kirkland stood by as a small band of Philadelphia-based Quakers closed their three-and-a-half-year mission to the Oneidas. Later, reflecting on the scene, he wrote, “A true history of the Quaker enterprize [sic] among the Oneidas, would really be entertaining as well as a little ludicrous. It would present a picture of ignorance, pride, superstition & bigotry curiously blended” (Tiro 353). One could speculate he viewed the Quakers as a competitor for the Oneidas’ attention. Or perhaps the staunchly patriotic Kirkland disdained the Quakers for their pacifist attitude that prevented them from participating in the Revolution. More likely, the great liturgical gulf between Kirkland’s severe Presbyterianism and the Quakers’ doctrine of Inner Light became the catalytic difference that propelled his disparagements. One cold winter morning, as he prepared for the sacrament of Holy Communion, Kirkland discovered his loaf of bread was frozen. When he sought a replacement from the Quakers, they refused on the grounds that “it is to enable thee to perform a ceremony in a manner different from what we believe essential” (353). To Kirkland, the refusal exemplified what he considered the “bigotry, self confidence, & preciseness for which the Quakers are distinguished” (353). Certainly, the moment illustrated the longstanding Quaker–Presbyterian antagonism that continued into the early Republican years.

Eliza Kirkland, “an amiable young woman,” took Dorothy in a chaise to an unnamed Quaker’s house about four miles from the Kirkland home (Bank 89). Dorothy’s services were held in the Quaker’s barn (89). See also Bank 166-67, 172.

Because of the novel The Last of the Mohicans, the Mohegans and Mahicans are often confused by whites. Although related to the Mohegan and Delaware tribes, the Mahicans lived as a separate Algonquian-speaking tribe that initially occupied the upper Hudson River.

In 1934, the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mahican Indians returned to their native Massachusetts. During the 1990s, the Mahicans endeavored to protect graves endangered by development, and the tribe joined others along the upper Great Lakes to oppose a copper mine on the Wolf River. See Bragdon 132.
Belknap and Morse 16. The population statistic provided here was noted by Belknap and Morse in 1795 (23).

Belknap and Morse 16

On “behalf of the rest” of New Stockbridge native women, the letter is signed by five women of the New Stockbridge Indian tribe: Lydia Suhquauwkhuh, or Hendrick; Catharine Quauquwchon; Elizabeth Maukhtoaquauwusquch, or Jersey; Catharine Quinney; and Eve Knohtcaunmeu. It is dated 19 Aug. 1805.


Sarah Winnemucca (1844-1891) was born a Northern Piute and labored as a lecturer and activist, school organizer, and author. She spoke five languages and served the U.S. Army as an interpreter and scout during the Bannock War of 1878. In 1880, she pleaded the Indians’ cause in Washington before President Rutherford B. Hayes and U.S. Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz. Her book, Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims, is an autobiographical account of her people during their first forty years of contact with explorers and settlers and is the first copyrighted publication of a Native American woman. See Patricia Stewart’s “Sarah Winnemucca,” in Nevada Historical Society Quarterly XIV: 4 (1971); and Sally Zanjani’s Sarah Winnemucca (2001).

Among the natives and whites in Brothertown, Dorothy held her first open-air meeting, a pivotal moment in her ministry, for it was the embryonic start of a revival-style, out-of-doors preaching that would come to characterize her international ministry. For details, see Chapter 1, “Dorothy & Female Evangelism.”

Oneidas are divided among three “clans” that form the tribe: the bear, turtle and wolf. The bear “taught us gentleness and strength. It takes more strength not to raise your hand to strike someone than it does to strike them” (“Clans”). The turtle “taught us patience, never to give up. [It’s] seen as strength and solidarity, old and wise, and well respected” (“Clans”). The wolf “taught us to use our ears and be watchful” and indicates a “strong sense of family” (“Clans”).

The “Three Sisters” has deep spiritual meaning for the Oneida. Known as the “sustainers of life,” the Iroquois consider corn, beans, and squash to be special gifts from the Creator. The well-being of each crop is believed to be protected by one of the Three Sister Spirits. Many an Indian legend has been woven around the ‘Three Sisters”—sisters who would never be apart from one another—sisters who should be planted together, eaten together and celebrated together” (“Three Sisters Cookbook”).

Starna 15

Starna 17. Estimates of the Oneida Nation population for 1792 vary. Samuel Kirkland, the white missionary to the Oneidas, put the total at 630 while Thomas Pickering estimated 626 for the same year. In 1794, DeWitt Clinton approximated the number of Oneidas to be 1,088, with 628 of that number in the U.S. and the remainder in Canada. In 1774, William Tryon estimated the Oneidas to be 1,500 strong.

Belknap and Morse 21

James “Judge” Dean (b. 1748) became missionary and interpreter to the Oneidas from an early age. Little is known of his early years except that he was born in Groton, Connecticut. At age twelve, he was sent to reside at Oquango, on the Susquehanna River, with a missionary to the Oneidas, named Moseley. Dean soon mastered the Oneida language, was adopted by a female native, and joined the tribe. He was a member of the first graduating class of Dartmouth, just prior to the Revolutionary War.

“...confirmed by the State on the 6th of February, 1787, according to an act passed May 5, 1786” (Wager 604). Wager 604. For details on Dean’s usage and development of the Oneida lands bequeathed to him, as well as the development of the town of Westmoreland, New York, see Wager 603-613.

Clinton. The western part of the town of Westmoreland, New York, was included in the original Oneida Reservation, from which tracts were granted to Dean, Wemple, and others (Wager 604). Evidently, some doubted Kirkland’s methods among the natives, as well, for just as Dean had done, Kirkland prospered greatly from his association with the Oneidas. In 1788, in recognition of his services in aid of the colonists during the Revolutionary War, the Indians and the State of New York granted Kirkland 4,000 acres of land, a portion of which he set aside for an institution for the education of white and Indian boys (New York State Writer’s Program 466).
At the death of Solomon, the last king of the united Israel, civil war broke out as the king’s sons and generals fought for the throne. Although Rehoboam had his father’s blessing to be the new king, Jeroboam possessed more military might and influence. In the end, Rehoboam claimed the southern half of the country, calling it “Judah,” and Jeroboam took the northern half, retaining the name “Israel.” Each claimed to be God’s chosen king. The northern kingdom of Israel was comprised of twelve tribes of the original tribes of Jacob. Two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, formed the southern kingdom of Judah. After just over 200 years, the kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria around 722 B.C. The southern kingdom of Judah lasted more than 300 years before being conquered by Babylon around 586 B.C. (R. Russell).

Barton

837 Brekus 18. Livermore (1788-1868) preached before Congress four times, always to large crowds. For more on Livermore, see Catherine A. Brekus, Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845 (1998); Harriet Livermore, A Narration of Religious Experience (1826); and Samuel T. Livermore, Harriet Livermore, the “Pilgrim Stranger” (1884).

838 In the 9th Congress, there were 34 members of the Senate and 142 members of the House. The Senate adjourned on Friday, January 10 and the House on Saturday, January 11 until the following Monday morning (“Proceedings,” Senate 47-48; “Proceedings,” House 339; Supplementary Journal 1120-23).

839 On Dec. 4, 1800, Congress approved the use of the Capitol as a church building: “The speaker informed the House that the Chaplains had proposed, if agreeable to the House, to hold Divine service every Sunday in their Chamber” (“Proceedings,” House, 6th Congress 797).

840 “Mr. Jefferson during his whole administration, was a most regular attendant,” wrote Margaret Bayard Smith. “The seat he chose the first sabbath, and the adjoining one, which his private secretary occupied, were ever afterwards by the courtesy of the congregation, left for him and his secretary” (13).

841 M.B. Smith 15

842 15

843 See EC 121 and Bank 232 and 240.

844 Nathaniel Macon (1757-1837) served as Speaker of the House for the 8th and 9th sessions of Congress. Macon, a representative from North Carolina, was a Baptist who was “a constant and close reader of the Bible,” (qtd. in Hutson 86).

845 Erroneous historical reports that Jefferson personally issued the invitation to Dorothy may stem from an early article in the Wesley Historical Society journal. In it, the author described how Dorothy first discussed slavery with Jefferson in the White House (1801) and then later sought his “permission” to preach in the Capitol (1806) (“William Ripley” 32). Since then, the association has continued. For example, Brekus writes, “Thomas Jefferson allowed Dorothy Ripley to preach in the Hall of Representatives in 1806” (350).

846 I borrow this term from Charles and Mary Beard, who used it to illustrate their interpretation of the American Civil War (Beard and Beard 2: 53). They characterized the war as the aggression of Northern capitalists in an effort to gain economic supremacy over Southern plantation owners.

847 Joseph Bryan (1773-1812) was born in Savannah and educated by private tutors before attending Oxford University. During the Revolutionary War, he traveled in France before returning home to engage in agricultural pursuits on Wilmington Island, Georgia. He was elected as a Republican to the 8th and 9th Congresses, serving from 1803 until his resignation in 1806. The remainder of his life was devoted to planting, and he died on his estate, “Nonchalance,” on Wilmington Island, near Savannah. Joseph was son to Josiah Bryan (1746-1775) and grandson to Jonathan Bryan (1708-1788). For an interesting account of how the Bryans became part of Georgia’s plantation elite and the rise of evangelical Christianity in the South, see Allan Gallay’s The Formation of a Planter Elite: Jonathan Bryan and the Southern Colonial Frontier (1989).

848 According to Georgia historian Isabella Remshot Redding, the early Bryans settled at least three plantations in South Carolina: Walnut Hill, Good Hope, and Cypress (20). Redding attested that these plantations were “probably not unlike [George] Washington’s home at Mount Vernon” (20).

849 Tobias E. Stansbury (d. Oct. 25, 1849) was Speaker of the House of Maryland five times, including 1806 when he gave Dorothy permission to preach to the House on January 6. Stansbury was a presidential elector for the State of Maryland in 1804, 1808, and 1812, and a brigadier general during the War of 1812.
The Bible records that God spoke to Moses: “Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Exodus 4:12); David wrote, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; His word was on my tongue” (2 Samuel 23:2); and Jeremiah testified that the Lord told him, “I have put My words in your mouth” (Jeremiah 1:9).

1 Timothy 2: 11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35

Feb. 10, 1832: 95, c. 4-5

Feb. 10, 1832: 95, c. 4

Feb. 2, 1832. Hannah Moore (1745-1833) was an English evangelical philanthropist, religious writer, and educator of the poor. In her younger years, she befriended Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole, and in her later years, was connected to William Wilberforce and the Evangelicals of the Clapham sect. See Moore’s Village Politics (1793), Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799), and Coelebs in Search of a Wife (1808). Hannah Adams (1755-1831) was a historian and pioneer in the field of comparative religion, becoming the first historian of religions to attempt to represent sects and denominations from the perspective of the adherents, utilizing the terminology particular to those faiths. Her work A View of Religions (1791) won her nationwide acclaim. Further information on Adams can be gleaned from her autobiography, A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams, Written by Herself. With Additional Notices by a Friend (1832).

The American Temperance Society was formed in 1826. For additional information on temperance and prohibition, see Ruth Bordin’s Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900 (1981); also see Sarah W. Tracy and Caroline Jean Acker’s Altering American Consciousness: The History of Alcohol and Drug Use in the United States, 1800-2000 (2004).

Among other places, Dorothy uses this phrase in EC v; Letters iv; Address 4; and Bank 44.
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