

University of Northern Colorado

## Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

---

Undergraduate Honors Theses

Student Work

---

5-1-2024

### "Female Faithfulness Encouraged": Gendered Piety in Early American Print

Kadienne Sizemore

*University of Northern Colorado*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/honors>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#), [History of Gender Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Sizemore, Kadienne, "Female Faithfulness Encouraged": Gendered Piety in Early American Print" (2024). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. 92.

<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/honors/92>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact [Nicole.Webber@unco.edu](mailto:Nicole.Webber@unco.edu).

University of Northern Colorado  
Greeley, Colorado

“FEMALE FAITHFULNESS ENCOURAGED”: GENDERED PIETY IN EARLY  
AMERICAN PRINT

A Capstone  
Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment for Graduation with Honors Distinction and  
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Kadienne Sizemore

College of Humanities and Social Sciences

MAY 2024

“FEMALE FAITHFULNESS ENCOURAGED”: GENDERED PIETY IN  
EARLY AMERICAN PRINT

PREPARED BY:

---

KADIENNE SIZEMORE

APPROVED BY:

---

DR. TJ TOMLIN

HONORS CHAIR:

---

DR. CORINNE WIEBEN

HONORS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

---

LOREE CROW, M.A.

*RECEIVED BY THE UNIVERSITY CAPSTONE  
PROJECT COMMITTEE ON:*

*5/4/2024*

## **Abstract**

Following the American Revolution, membership in Baptist churches grew exponentially and the influence of the Baptist persuasion was significant. As one of the fastest growing Protestant denominations in early America, Baptists and their interests were often indicative of larger trends in religiosity. Conceptions of piety, including beliefs surrounding submission, faithfulness, and duty, were central to the structure of Baptist congregations and their proximate communities. This paper explores the role of gender in the discussion, presentation, and justification of Baptist notions of piety in their publications during the Early American Republic. To build on the work of historians exploring female autonomy in religious spaces, this paper will offer insights into the contrasting male perceptions of this dynamic. Through a rhetorical analysis of denominational print publications, I will identify the places where ideas of gender permeated the values of these communities as well as examine the tools used to form and disseminate gendered perceptions of piety. The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine and its equivalents in surrounding spheres will serve as my main primary source base, providing examples of published discourse that a large number of early American Baptists subscribed to. By analyzing the language used to set these standards, I will be able to highlight the congruence between Baptist values and male interests in 19th-century New England. The outcome of this was the deepening of ties between religiosity and gender structures in early America.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere and everlasting gratitude to my research mentor, Dr. TJ Tomlin, for his insights, patience, and guidance in this niche field of historical inquiry. I could not have undertaken this project without his support and the invaluable resources of the UNCo History Department. Additional thanks to Dr. Caitlin Monroe and Kelly Langley-Cook for being excellent advisors for any number of difficulties.

I am also indebted to the McNair Scholars Program at UNCo including Dr. Krista Kauffman and Dr. Jordan Garcia. Their continual support has been indispensable every step of the way. A special thanks also to Erin Van Gorkom for her help balancing the ins and outs of undergraduate research.

For their gracious support and for being stellar sounding-boards on issues of gender politics, a sincere thank you to Ethan Ahrend and Skylar Klocker. Their contributions to my success as both friends and colleagues are immeasurable.

Finally, a most heartfelt thanks to the 2023-2024 cohort of McNair Scholars for their help editing, brainstorming, organizing my thoughts, and for constantly lifting me up. They have been an integral part in the success of this project from start to finish.

## Table of Contents

FEAR AND FEMINIZATION .....	3
PRINT MEDIA AS A VESSEL FOR PIETY .....	12
Bibliography .....	24

In September 1808, the *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* published an editorial calling for dutiful evangelism amongst women. The article, entitled “Female Faithfulness Encouraged,” articulated, in no uncertain terms, the publication’s expectations for its women.<sup>1</sup> The female kin of male members of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society were encouraged to contribute to evangelism through pious conversation “without infringing in the least on the laws of propriety.”<sup>2</sup> The expectations listed in the following three pages demanded female modesty, faithful conversation, and amiable labors of love.<sup>3</sup> These expectations were explicit, but the tangible actions to achieve them were less clear: shepherd divine light, maintain a soft heart, and warm others with the love of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> The authors of the article used biographical and instructive writing to create a nuanced prescription for female behavior which instilled in them both a duty to their community and a meekness towards men.

The expectation for women to fully embody socially valuable traits was the cornerstone of patriarchy during the early nineteenth century. Individuals and systems of power constructed impossible standards of existence for women as a form of exploitation. Religious piety, as a standard, proliferated the landscape of early America. Piety as a value encompassed a larger set of moral, social, and religious notions including obedience and duty. Women’s embodiment of piety was a major point of contention for many religious groups, notably including Baptist communities. The growing influence of the Baptists in early America primed Baptist men with the power to construct and disseminate conceptions of piety that served their interests. These interests often

---

<sup>1</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1808), 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1808), 76.

<sup>3</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1808), 78.

<sup>4</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1808), 77.

intersected concerns about the loss of authority as a result of religiously empowered women. The widespread fear among Baptist men that women would become subversive rather than submissive manifested in men's construction of unattainable and oppressive standards of female piety.

Historians of gender and religion in early America have often centered the discourse around religious women's actions and reactions to religious oppression in order to shed light on their lived experiences within a patriarchal society. An examination of male motives will enhance the valuable and indispensable contributions of feminist lenses within religious studies conversations. The goal in the examination of male perspectives is to provide a basis for understanding how men's perceptions of their own social and religious status manifested in their conceptions of female piety. This paper will offer a two-part analysis of the discourse of Baptist men created to buttress evangelical male hegemony in the early 19th century. The first part uncovers the roots of men's fears and their justification for the subjugation of women. Part two introduces an in-depth analysis of the genres of print media that acted as vessels for these conceptions of gendered piety.

### **FEAR AND FEMINIZATION**

The subtleties in how femininity was infused into the very core of evangelical religious life created an antithesis to the power held by men. A major consideration in this dynamic is that Protestant churches in the 18th and 19th centuries underwent a feminization so significant that it threatened Protestant male hegemony.<sup>5</sup> Church

---

<sup>5</sup> Janet Moore Lindman, "Beyond the Meetinghouse: Women and Protestant Spirituality in Early America," in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).



membership was dominated by women, especially before the religious revivals of the early nineteenth century took hold.<sup>6</sup> Janet Lindman attributes this phenomenon to the relative power and autonomy that participation in religious communities gave women.<sup>7</sup> More women than men were active in church services, and they more frequently grappled with conflicts of religion; this was exacerbated by the fact that they were barred from involvement in other facets of early American life such as politics and commerce.<sup>8</sup> White women in early America were able to experience some level of self-determination in their religious lives as spirituality was considered to be a personal matter between oneself and God.<sup>9</sup> This sword boasted a dual blade: pious women were beneficial to overall morality, but they exposed the relative lack of morals of the men in their communities.

Feminization extended beyond physical spaces and church membership into the values and language of early American evangelicalism. Piety, which was often defined in terms of heart and soul, was regarded as being more innate in women.<sup>10</sup> The *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* described that “nature has endowed the fair sex with a higher degree of sensibility, than what is bestowed upon [men].”<sup>11</sup> Sensibility, in this respect, referred to the ability of women to use perception and empathy as a tool for evangelization. Martha Blauvelt describes this ideology as one that “insisted that

---

<sup>6</sup> Susan Hill Lindley, “*You have Stept out of your Place*” *A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 60.

<sup>7</sup> Lindman, “Beyond the Meetinghouse,” 144.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Kerber, “The Republican Mother and the Woman Citizen: Contradictions and Choices in Revolutionary America,” in *Women’s America: Refocusing the Past*, ed. Linda Kerber (Oxford University Press, 2011), 188.

<sup>9</sup> Lindman, “Beyond the Meetinghouse,” 143.

<sup>10</sup> Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 38.

<sup>11</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1808), 76.

religion was natural to women [and] implied that it was somehow unnatural in men.”<sup>12</sup> In the minds of many, this placed the responsibility of upholding morality on women. It also placed women in a unique position that held much of the religious burden and almost none of the authority or accreditation.<sup>13</sup>

Baptist men feared for their authority both within and outside of religious circles on the basis of a few assumptions about female behavior. The first of these was that their innate tendency towards virtue set women up to be the carriers of religion. As a mother, a pious woman would catechize her husband’s children.<sup>14</sup> As a wife, a pious woman would cultivate her husband's morality.<sup>15</sup> As a community member, a pious woman would engage in contagious religious conversation and “practice her duty towards her neighbors...”<sup>16</sup> The language that men used to describe these behaviors of virtuous women emphasized a nurturing disposition. A Baptist guidebook said of an overwhelmingly moral woman: “Her christian example, her maternal tenderness, her fervent prayers, her loving injunctions, had but one primary design, to inspire their tender hearts with the warmest love to Christ.”<sup>17</sup> The power that women exhibited from being this virtuous— albeit as a result of “maternal tenderness”— infringed on men’s sole authority in the domain of evangelical labor. If the tenet held that religious piety was

---

<sup>12</sup> Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Religion in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Bill J. Leonard, “Women in Baptist Life,” in *Baptists in America* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 204.

<sup>14</sup> Reverend T. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters; or Biographical Sketches of the Lives of Thirty Eminently Pious Females* (New Haven, CT: N. Whiting, 1822), 32.

<sup>15</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 87.

more readily accessible to women, then women were innately more Christian than men. This threatened the existing hierarchy that valued Christian maleness.

The direct foil to the concern about overly virtuous women was the even stronger concern over women prone to vice. Women who fit into this category contributed to a negative image of men's ability to enforce morality within their communities. Wariness about impiety emphasized the ways in which Baptist men took more interest in the male lives affected by women's behavior than the women's own wellbeing. Words of caution in the *American Baptist Magazine* instructed women to "beware a fretful peevish spirit, for it will be a constant hell to [them], and to everyone that is near [them]."<sup>18</sup> In a similar fashion, which placed responsibility for men's salvation upon women rather than the men themselves, one author concluded that "there is nothing more to be dreaded and avoided, - nothing more dangerous to our peace, to our comfort, to our character, to our welfare here and hereafter, than a criminal attachment to an abandoned and unprincipled woman."<sup>19</sup> While a principled woman could threaten men's authority by acting as a leader, an unprincipled one could threaten it by acting as a corruptive force that was difficult to control. Promoting and enforcing virtue were two primary roles of religious men; the risk of losing either was too great to sit idly by.

An increasing perception that the family was under assault by imperfect female piety caused concern among Baptist men. There was a distinct change in trends in family unit structures yielding from both overly pious and impious female behavior which resulted in "widespread concerns about gender norms and created a sense that institutions

---

<sup>18</sup> *American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 2 (March 1817), 52.

<sup>19</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 9 (March 1810), 273.

such as marriages, which supported traditional values, needed to be reinforced.”<sup>20</sup> The introduction of female autonomy through religious involvement necessitated that men manage “their dependents’ religious inclinations... to maintain authority within his household.”<sup>21</sup> There was thus an urgency for men, as heads-of-household, to fulfill their role as a “protector, to stand in the breach, and keep back invading judgements.”<sup>22</sup> Further emphasis on the role of protector, leader, and enforcer deepened men’s concerns about the state of their authority. Not only did they sense that it had become less stable, but they also sensed that it was increasingly important to maintain.

Both piety and vice opened pathways for women’s personal autonomy through a reduction of male authority over the terms of their salvation. Women who were less religiously proficient than men due to a lack of literacy or a tendency towards sin needed to rely more heavily upon their husbands. As a result, men often viewed a direct correlation between religiosity and familial hierarchy. Men worried that female religious empowerment would manifest in an inability for them to maintain their status at the top of this hierarchy. The results of such a situation ranged anywhere from sexual liberties and changes in occupation status to a further feminization of Protestantism.<sup>23</sup> The ideal of Christian wifehood built on fidelity, ownership, and submission stood to be destroyed with increased female autonomy.

The result of these conditions of women’s behavior was that men ended up seeming further from God than women. This distance from godliness had tangible

---

<sup>20</sup> Ingrid H. Tague, “Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century,” in *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001), 79.

<sup>21</sup> Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1997), 189.

<sup>22</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 1 (March 1808), 26.

<sup>23</sup> Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 181.

impacts. Without the ability to control various paths to eternal salvation, men had less to offer in positions of religious leadership. Women, however, had many influences on the salvation of their communities, the continuation of the Baptist persuasion, and the moral value of those around them.<sup>24</sup> Men's hegemonic power within religious communities was at risk of being subverted by women through one of two extremes: pious involvement in religious affairs or corruptive paths of vice. The *American Baptist Magazine* denoted this predicament before writing a direct call to action for Baptist wives. The article prompted: "always think on this, -- study your own temper in every thing, both towards God and man."<sup>25</sup> In placing the responsibility on women not to undermine God or mankind, this article is a prime example of the fear that the androcentric hierarchy was under siege.

In addition to their attempts to build and reinforce systems within congregations and family units, Baptists were more broadly involved in the business of religious promotion via print. The emergence of religious pluralism coincided with the rise of print culture in a way that allowed communities to advocate for their denomination through published discourse. Early New Englanders were largely Calvinists and, on paper, believed that their salvation was secured by grace alone as indicated by a definitive conversion experience. However, in terms of their conduct, historian David Nord claims that "uncertainty over the assurance of election and doubts about the validity of their own conversion experience encouraged the faithful (and the merely hopeful) to persist in piety."<sup>26</sup> This persistence of pious behavior is what drove many to seek biblical education through verbal and written discourse. New England Baptists were exceptionally prepared

---

<sup>24</sup> Lindley, "You have Stept out of your Place," 67.

<sup>25</sup> *American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 2 (March 1817), 50.

<sup>26</sup> Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 16.

for this reality and used scripture amply within their own discourse. Their frequent use of biblical allusions bolstered their promotion of the Baptist faith as well as gave their publications an added layer of ethos through the invocation of the Bible's authority. The dynamic that valued scriptural ethos provided a framework for men's justifications of female subjugation.

Discourses of piety were intended to serve a multitude of interests and thus required a delicate balance of lay and ecclesiastical appeals. The language of piety in print drew intentionally on scripture for the purpose of reinforcing socially acceptable roles and behaviors. One of the most prominent Biblical allusions in Baptist publications was to the Gospel of Matthew. One section from the Gospel of Matthew was particularly well employed in a gendered context:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.<sup>27</sup>

All Christians were meant to adhere to this sentiment, but it was most commonly used to describe women's efforts to evangelize, especially as mothers. The imagery of the candle and the language of warmth and light were common motifs in discussing female piety. In a description of the pious Lady Elizabeth Hastings, an author wrote that "throughout the whole course of her life her lamp burned brightly, and in age diffused its light... to promote the glory of God, and the welfare of mankind... for the benefit of her fellow creatures."<sup>28</sup> Not only did categorizations of this nature invoke the characteristic of warmth, they also highlighted the importance of selflessness through the creation and

---

<sup>27</sup> Mat. 5:14-16 (KJV).

<sup>28</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 44.

giving of life and light.<sup>29</sup> The expectation for women to display an intangible, abstract quality such as light or warmth to others provided women with a goal but no realistic or sustainable way to achieve it. “Warmth” and “light” became effectively synonymous with submission and selflessness. Thus, women could only strive to embody these intangibles through acts of selflessness which kept them docile and kept men in authority.

The location of Matthew 5:14 in the Bible prompts another consideration: female piety was achieved through docility. The passage is the culmination of the Sermon on the Mount, which was Jesus’ articulation of authentic Christian behaviors including meekness, peacemaking, mercy, and purity of heart. The Beatitudes, which were guidelines contained within the Sermon on the Mount, called upon the disadvantaged to engage in agreeable Christian behavior. Men’s frequent usage of the succeeding passage to describe female piety forged a connection between femininity and subjugation. The *American Baptist Magazine* cited 1 Peter 3:4, which drew from Jesus’ words from Matthew 5— they instructed wives to “be affectionate, kind, and lowly— ‘For a meek and quiet spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price.’”<sup>30</sup> This excerpt preceded an article which detailed the duties that new wives should expect to take on in their marriages. In this context, the themes of Matthew 5 were employed to instruct women on obedience in marriages and thus contributed to the confines of Baptist wifehood. Women may have been drawn to adhere to this type of prescription because “as saints, women were enabled once again to express their religious needs and desires in an acceptable idiom.”<sup>31</sup> A

---

<sup>29</sup> Keller and Ruether, *Women and Religion in America*, 3.

<sup>30</sup> *American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 2 (March 1817), 50.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Juster, “‘The Disorder of Women’: The Feminization of Sin, 1780–1830” in *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 179.

carefully curated paradox of humility as the sole means to achieve voice allowed men to ensure women's compliance without the risk that they would become empowered.

Scriptural references and the discourse surrounding them pervaded evangelical print culture to create a gendered language that at once diminished female autonomy and amplified male authority. To utilize themes of submission and selflessness in a way that would promote male dominance, the *American Baptist Magazine* advised its female readers to “be affectionate and submissive, remembering the testimony of God, ‘that the man is the head of the woman, as Christ is the head of the church.’”<sup>32</sup> This prescription outlined the desires of Baptist men to maintain dominance through proximity to divine authority. They sought to become closer to God by invoking their God-given dominance as it was articulated in scripture. The divinely appointed authority given to men appeared in a multitude of places, most notably cited from 1 Corinthians 11 and from Ephesians 5. The abundance of references throughout Baptist print media to Ephesians pointed to a reliance upon scripture as evidence of God-given authority. Scriptural discourse which pointed to men as a ruling class with an innate control over women, children, and animals served to uphold the systems that denied women any authority at all.

Discourses of piety included clever and nuanced argumentative strategies to maintain Christian male authority inside and outside of the religious sphere. Scriptural references provided them with validity as religious leaders. The press reinforced their sole oversight of print media. Genre differentiation opened multiple avenues for appealing to broad audiences. Varying levels of vagueness in demanding certain behaviors allowed them to evade detection for some of their more nefarious goals. All of

---

<sup>32</sup> *American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 2 (March 1817), 52.



these subtleties worked together seamlessly to construct an intricate network of androcentric prescriptions for women's lives. Men's narrow-sighted focus on preventing women from gaining authority failed to recognize unofficial avenues of power which covertly undermined patriarchy.

### **PRINT MEDIA AS A VESSEL FOR PIETY**

The proliferation of print media created a prime environment to develop patriarchal structures through the publication of gendered religious discourse. At the turn of the century, there was a steep increase in evangelical publications and an exigency of American citizens to consume print media as a form of sociopolitical engagement.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the civic duties that they engaged with through print media, American Protestants carried another prerogative for publishing: to spread the Word of God to laypeople.<sup>34</sup> A core argument, articulated by Candy Gunther Brown was that evangelicals used the world of print as a means to establish frameworks and promote common values in American Protestantism.<sup>35</sup> Denominational magazines published by missionary societies clearly exhibit this goal— in the case of New England Baptists, extensive collections were published by the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society and the American Baptist Missionary Union.<sup>36</sup> The central location and respectable status of these publications ensured readership across the mid-Atlantic and New England, which

---

<sup>33</sup> David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 14.

<sup>34</sup> Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 32.

<sup>35</sup> Candy Gunther Brown, *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* (Boston: Manning & Loring 1803-1816); *American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* (MA).

had become “perhaps the most literate place on earth.”<sup>37</sup> Brown further noted that regardless of denominational associations, the rise of print media allowed evangelicals to follow through on their duties of proselytization.<sup>38</sup> The texts, especially periodicals, were often used to correct perceived doctrinal errors, suggest ways to align oneself and one’s community with the Word, and unite American Protestants under common values.<sup>39</sup> The men involved in the creation and publication of print evangelism possessed unprecedented influence.

Evangelist publications shed light more on men’s understandings of gender dynamics and their own positions than on women’s actions, reactions, or feelings about them. The primary players in publication were men, especially those with religious educations and established ties to missionary societies. As the creators of religious discourse, the men involved in this process were uniquely situated to cultivate their own visions of religiosity. Within the magazines, many articles contained prescriptions for wives, daughters, and female churchgoers. In addition to articles written by men, magazines endorsed letters written by women that promoted conformity to Baptist standards. The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society justified their inclusion of a letter written by a woman with the explanation: “as a specimen of early and sincere piety, we think the sentiments worthy the perusal of our readers, especially of our young friends.”<sup>40</sup> Although such letters were targeted toward a female audience, they were either written or edited by men before publication. The resulting censorship was both a purposeful diminution of female voices and a result of systems that provided women with

---

<sup>37</sup> Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 1, no. 1 (September 1803), 22.

less access to literacy and platforms.<sup>41</sup> Such systems ensured that male voices dominated print culture.

Biblical biography was a particularly effective genre for gendered discourse within religious print culture. The author of a prominent guidebook for female piety wrote that “one of the peculiar excellencies of religious biography is, that while it preserves the memory of the just... it produces an anxious solicitude to copy after the example by pursuing the paths of virtue and usefulness in the world.”<sup>42</sup> Likewise, biographies of sinful women in the Bible could warn the dangers of corrupt behavior. This category of publication drew on the success of biography within the Bible itself for encouraging piety and discouraging vice.<sup>43</sup> The use of religious biography in everyday print pointed to a desire for the male authors of these publications to shepherd their authority as purveyors of His will.

Biblical biography was a unique category of evangelical print that called upon Baptist women’s desires to emulate women of the Bible as a tactic for promoting submissiveness and selflessness. The *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, for example, used a biographical account of Abigail and the lessons from 1 Samuel 25 to instruct women on how to account for their husband’s behavior.<sup>44</sup> The article began with a call for women to engage in faithful conversation in their daily lives as an avenue to increase overall morality. It specified that the duty should fall on women due to their

---

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 93.

<sup>42</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 115.

<sup>43</sup> Scott E. Casper, “Biography,” in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 462.

<sup>44</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1808), 76.

feminine sensibility as opposed to men, who displayed more viceful tendencies. The author utilized Abigail as a model for this dynamic in hopes that “the success of this pious and prudent effort may encourage others to similar labours of love, for the salvation of their friends.”<sup>45</sup> Abigail’s role was one of sweet submission that demonstrated humility and respect; she shouldered the burden of piety for herself, her husband, and David without reducing the authority of either man. The combination of scripture and biography as appeals in this article aimed to persuade women that they could be pious, as Abigail was. Unlike men who gained closeness to God, women who strove for this outcome were not promised any recognition or authority.

The inverse of pious examples were Biblical biographies that used corrupt examples to deter sinful behavior. Though somewhat less frequently, authors still utilized this approach to address a rise in subversive behaviors. Similarly to how Abigail’s behavior was depicted as a factor in the male lives around her, the behavior of sinful women was framed in terms of their impact on men.<sup>46</sup> An article published by the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society warned against adultery through a biographical telling of Herodias’ story to demonstrate the threat of female vice. The article depicted Herodias as a danger to her community and drew upon the established image of a vengeful, prideful, and disloyal woman who could not be controlled. The author of this article warned that many communities “peace, tranquility, comfort, characters, and fortunes, [had] been completely destroyed by illicit and licentious connections of this sort.”<sup>47</sup> The author related one woman’s viceful behavior with the downfall of such core

---

<sup>45</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3 (September 1808), 78.

<sup>46</sup> Juster, “‘The Disorder of Women’: The Feminization of Sin, 1780–1830,” 148.

<sup>47</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 9 (March 1810), 273.

aspects of community such as peace and fortune. Although the goal was to address unfaithfulness in men, the publication still charged women with the responsibility to prevent it. Positioning the story in this way invoked women's sense of duty to provide moral security to the men in their lives as well as promoted feelings of guilt for their potential to corrupt those men.

Both ends of the religious biography spectrum clearly outlined the fears and the interests of the men who published them. On one hand, Abigail held the power to think only of her own interests but instead chose to submit and to promote virtue among men. Her story represented the fear that a pious woman could determine the course of her kin's religious wellbeing. On the other hand, Herodias chose her own interests and allowed needless bloodshed and violence between men. Her pride and inappropriate conduct spoke to men's fears that a sinful woman could destroy their status.<sup>48</sup> The women, one pious and the other viceful, both threatened the livelihoods and moral standings of the men around them with their actions. By choosing these subjects for religious biography, the authors effectively minimized female authority through the demonstration of its danger.

Another type of biography detailed the lives of famous Christian women on the large scale or notable community members on the small scale. This type of lay-biography adhered to the same purpose as Biblical biographies but used more accessible points of reference. Obituaries were the most prolific example of this type of biographical media. The majority of obituaries described the lives and pious actions of their subjects to guide others in the sort of behaviors that would gain them recognition as good Christians. An

---

<sup>48</sup> Juster, "The Disorder of Women': The Feminization of Sin, 1780–1830," 170.

author from Massachusetts noted that, in writing religious biography, it was “both pleasing and profitable to exhibit the character, record the actions, and contemplate the worth of persons eminent for piety and virtue.”<sup>49</sup> The author noted that the “worth” of the person being biographies was of significance to him— this sentiment was common amongst religious biographers.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the social value of any one person’s story almost singularly determined whether they would be the subject of an obituary or other form of biographical literature. Socially valuable traits that made up the umbrella of piety were the real subjects of these biographies.

A significant compilation of biographical chapters, *The Heavenly Sisters*, detailed the lives and pious actions of thirty famous Protestant women. Although the subjects were mainly Anglican, the details provided by the author, Reverend Sharp, a notable Calvinist, proved useful to the American evangelical cause. The book had such a trans-national influence that it earned frequent advertisements in American Baptist publications. The book effectively addressed religious women through the lens of men’s primary concerns: female authority and female corruption. Some stories showcased the happiness and fulfillment of repentance to guide women away from vice. Others praised the already virtuous women for limiting their visible piety as not to gain recognition for their superior moral character. Both formulas for successful piety centered on obedience rather than ascendancy.

The first category of biographical trope was the story of the devoted servant. This category of woman avoided the follies of youth and remained faithful from birth to death. Lady Henrietta Hope’s biography described her as “naturally formed for eminence, for

---

<sup>49</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4, no. 2 (June 1814), 46.

<sup>50</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 88.

she possessed an excellent judgment, enriched by extensive information, and united to a heart formed for friendship and replete with sensibility.”<sup>51</sup> In cases where the woman actively practiced piety, the biography emphasized her contributions throughout her life much more than her conversion story or religious testimony. Women were praised especially if they hid their contributions in an effort to prove their selfless nature.<sup>52</sup> Lady Henrietta Hope was a known benefactor, but she only “permitted the public eye to discover but very few of her numerous, generous, and judicious exertions.”<sup>53</sup> It was critical for Rev. Sharp to note that the ideal pious woman would not seek recognition for her contributions. Recognition may have led to the acquisition of authority.

The story of the reformed female sinner occupied as much page-space as the devoted servant. The biography portrayed the subject— in this case, a Protestant woman— as having a troubled background whether from birth or by way of corrupt influence. A biographical chapter on Mary, Countess of Warwick highlighted that despite an excellent upbringing, she “understood nothing of the life and power of religion upon her heart.”<sup>54</sup> The portrayal of Mary’s troubled life took a turn for the better after she became an obedient wife and displayed a clear conversion. Mary’s woes “dispersed like mists before the sun, and were succeeded by the most cordial approbation of the things of God.”<sup>55</sup> When an author provided resolution through submission, the true power of this narrative became apparent. The author’s delicate use of warmth and light as the outcomes of piety spoke directly to the established requisite for female temperament.

---

<sup>51</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 75.

<sup>52</sup> Keller and Ruether, *Women and Religion in America*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 76.

<sup>54</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Rev. Sharp, *The Heavenly Sisters*, 20.

While *The Heavenly Sisters* modeled the macro part of a pervasive effort to encourage obedience, many local examples aided in the mission. Newspaper eulogies and autobiographical letters characterized biography on the local level and often invoked the familiarity of their subjects to reinforce the same ideas. As biography within the Bible and mass-produced biographical literature both addressed multiple female archetypes, so did local biographies. As a result of the shift in caliber, local biographies did not reach as far and aimed for quality and depth over quantity in terms of readership.<sup>56</sup> Occasionally, women's diary entries and oral histories made their way into newspaper publications, although often heavily edited by male authors. Inclusions of this sort were permissible under the assumption that without notability, the stories needed more details to hook a reader.<sup>57</sup> Using women's own words out of context further promoted submission through the implication that they conformed wholly and willingly.

Differences in the methods of biographical writing on a macro versus micro scale did not detract from the construction of similar images of pious and viceful women. A eulogy in the *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* commended Ann Hart, a pastor's wife, for her demeanor which was "unassuming, candid, entertaining, and instructive; innocently pleasant on proper occasions, but prudent and faithful in embracing suitable opportunities for introducing the important subjects of religion."<sup>58</sup> As in the story of Abigail and the biography of Mary of Warwick, this pastor's wife was

---

<sup>56</sup> Cayton, Mary Kupiec. "Harriet Newell's Story: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement," in *A History of the Book in America: Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, ed. Robert Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 412.

<sup>57</sup> Cayton, "Harriet Newell's Story: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement," in *A History of the Book in America*, 412.

<sup>58</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4, no. 2 (June 1814), 50.



portrayed as having masked her prudent faith with a meek demeanor. To use privileged local knowledge to support this narrative, the author of this particular article called upon the community's respect for Ann's husband. The author concluded that Ann's contribution to her community was her usefulness to her husband as he guided the congregation. The choice to biograph a pastor's wife and to feature her submission to a dominant male figure normalized subjugation.

The antithetical corrupt woman's story was also told, so long as it contained resolution. The components of the reformed sinner story included pain before God, a moment of conversion, a fulfilling life, and a final submission at death. The most useful piece of this archetype at the local level was the pain before God aspect, which was illustrated through personal testimonies, diary entries, and dramatization. Although the ultimate goal was to encourage piety for the reward of fulfillment and eternal salvation, the scared-straight tactic intensified the imperative to comply. A young lady wrote an autobiographical letter to the *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* which contained her confessions that she had "many seasons of sorrow and distress" and could see "so much evil in [her] heart, and so much vanity... apt to fall in with all manner of temptation."<sup>59</sup> The considerable time spent on the woman's poor behavior before conversion culminated in her confession to have been a burden to the company she kept and a corruptive force to her community. This display of misery resolved several pages later when the young lady found comfort in God through pious engagements with other Christians and with the Word.<sup>60</sup> Alternatively to the threat-to-marriage approach taken in other biographies of viceful women, this magazine article focused on the woman's threat

---

<sup>59</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 1, no. 1 (September 1803), 22.

<sup>60</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 1, no. 1 (September 1803), 25.

to her community. It appealed to female readers' sense of duty to their kin as well as to basic needs such as security and connection. By exhibiting the isolation that the antagonistic woman felt, the editors of the magazine discouraged the selfish disposition that she began her story with.

The vast genre of biography was easily accessible to both authors and audiences but not always direct in its goals. To address situations when the need for clearly articulated rules, regulations, and suggestions arose, authors utilized guidebooks. The guidebook genre encompassed a diverse set of prescriptive literature that included informative and instructional material. More commonly than biographies, instructional articles appeared in denominational periodicals as letters to the editor, advertisements, and editorials. Bias and gendered perspectives were more readily accessible in this genre of print as the content was not masked by clever editorial decisions.<sup>61</sup> Instead, the authors expressed direct views on female behavior and their opinions on how women might best align themselves with the Word.

With regard to the already pious woman, instructive editorials focused on correcting some of the smaller scale acts of insubordination that threatened male authority. For pious women, these instructions provided a plethora of miniscule details that required their attention and kept them placated. The second-ever issue of the *American Baptist Magazine* included a significant section on female dress. The author asserted that "the female part of the church must not have a curl in their hair, a feather or flower in their bonnets, nor a riband or lace to make any part of their dress, for all these things are... the effect of pride, and conformity to the world; and are inconsistent with the

---

<sup>61</sup> Brown, *The Word in the World*, 93.

directions given us in the scriptures.”<sup>62</sup> Five pages of detailed instructions on how to dress according to scripture followed that stressed modesty, propriety, and status. The author also explicitly noted that although there were guidelines for women’s dress, there were no such guides for men. Another periodical advertised that women could contribute via “spinning, knitting, and weaving societies... with a view to aid the great object of sending the gospel of salvation to the ends of the earth.”<sup>63</sup> Such trifling details effectively averted women’s attention from large-scale theological ponderings to minute social duties. Centered on marital duties, motherly responsibilities, and tasks for community involvement, this category of print put an overwhelming number of low-stakes responsibilities on women and furthered their exclusion from higher order issues. Men effectively barred women from involvement in political, philosophical, and ethical conversations.

To contrast the distracting, diminutive tasks prescribed to women who were already pious members of the community, articles targeted towards sinful women focused on profound responsibilities for their eternal salvation. One periodical included a letter to the editor which expressed a minister’s strife with viceful women. Using vivid imagery, he described a woman who sought the “unmeaning flattery of a vain and hollow-hearted world; running a giddy round of gayety, frivolity, and dissipation, and laying up in the future a cheerless and forsaken old age, and a miserable, remorseful eternity.”<sup>64</sup> A common technique utilized in instructive literature for sinners was the concentration on eternal damnation. The use of “miserable” and “remorseful” only deepened the weight of

---

<sup>62</sup> *American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 2 (March 1817), 53.

<sup>63</sup> *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4, no. 11 (September 1816), 375.

<sup>64</sup> *The Tennessee Baptist* 10, no. 27 (Tennessee: March 11, 1854), 3.

moral responsibilities, especially when contained within a letter on the importance of female religiosity. In a similar account of unconverted women, the author described that “thousands of our fellow-creatures are enveloped in heathenish darkness.”<sup>65</sup> Darkness, in this sense, was an incredibly potent tool for displaying the opposition of a sinful life to the light and warmth that women were socially required to pursue. The categorization of viceful women as being in darkness effectively isolated them from a community that valued light in its women.

In print, Baptist men overcame their fear of subversion by creating a narrative in which women held full responsibility for every poor outcome. Effectively, men had closer ties to piety and virtue while women had closer ties to humanity and sin. Although the common opinion was that women demonstrated greater morality, Baptist men nevertheless diminished that morality through the publication of unattainable standards of piety for women. If overly pious, they needed to be pious in smaller ways. If viceful, they needed to be pious in larger ways. The construction of this narrative was beneficial for forming a social and religious order in which women needed to commit much of their attention to the pursuit of an ideal level of piety. Through the creation of pathways by which women could only gain recognition for their virtue if they completely embodied piety, it became exponentially more difficult for women to improve their religious status. This both alleviated men from the tremendous responsibility of fostering community morals and demonstrated their ability to police those morals as executors of God’s will.

---

<sup>65</sup> *American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 11 (September 1818), 426.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

*American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 2. Boston: March 1817.

*American Baptist Magazine & Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 11. Boston: September 1818.

*Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 1, no. 1. Boston: Manning & Loring, September 1803.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h9h&AN=35182939&site=ehost-live>.

*Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 3. Boston: Manning & Loring, September 1808.  
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h9h&AN=35182939&site=ehost-live>.

*Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 2, no. 9. Boston: Manning & Loring, March 1810.  
<https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h9h&AN=35207478&site=ehost-live&ppid=divp21>

*Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4, no. 2. Boston: Manning & Loring, June 1814.  
<https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h9h&AN=35212577&site=ehost-live&ppid=divp1>

*Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*. Boston: Manning & Loring, September 1, 1816.  
<https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h9h&AN=35212634&site=ehost-live&ppid=divp36>

Sharp, Reverend T., *The Heavenly Sisters; or Biographical Sketches of the Lives of Thirty Eminently Pious Females*. New Haven, CT: N. Whiting, 1822.

*The Tennessee Baptist* 10, no. 27. Tennessee, March 11, 1854.  
<https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h9k&AN=66749563&site=ehost-live&ppid=divp3>

### Secondary Sources

Brekus, Catherine A. *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Brown, Candy Gunther. *The Word in the World: Evangelical Writing, Publishing, and Reading in America, 1789-1880*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

- Butler, Jon. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.
- Casper, Scott E. "Biography." In *A History of the Book in America: Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, edited by Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, 458–64. University of North Carolina Press, 2010. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807895689\\_gross.36](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807895689_gross.36).
- Cayton, Mary Kupiec. "Harriet Newell's Story: Women, the Evangelical Press, and the Foreign Mission Movement." In *A History of the Book in America: Volume 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*, edited by Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley, 408–16. University of North Carolina Press, 2010. [http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807895689\\_gross.36](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807895689_gross.36).
- Heyrman, Christine. *Southern Cross*. New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1997.
- Juster, Susan. "'The Disorder of Women': The Feminization of Sin, 1780–1830." In *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England*, 145–79. Cornell University Press, 1994. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctv5rdwc7.10>.
- Kerber, Linda. "The Republican Mother and the Woman Citizen: Contradictions and Choices in Revolutionary America." In *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, edited by Cornelia Dayton, Jane De Hart, and Linda Kerber, 147-153. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Leonard, Bill J. "Women in Baptist Life." In *Baptists in America*, 203–26. Columbia University Press, 2005. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/leon12702.13>.
- Lindley, Susan Hill. *"You have Stept out of your Place" A History of Women and Religion in America*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Lindman, Janet Moore. "Beyond the Meetinghouse: Women and Protestant Spirituality in Early America." In *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, edited by Catherine A. Brekus, 142–60. University of North Carolina Press, 2007. [https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807867990\\_brekus.8](https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807867990_brekus.8).
- Nord, David Paul. *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Skinner Keller, Rosemary and Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Women and Religion in America*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Tague, Ingrid H. "Love, Honor, and Obedience: Fashionable Women and the Discourse of Marriage in the Early Eighteenth Century." *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 76–106. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070770>.