PREACHING WITHOUT A PULPIT:
WOMEN’S RHETORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO
SCIENTIFIC CHRISTIANITY IN AMERICA, 1880-1915

A Dissertation in

English

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2011
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ABSTRACT

“Preaching without a Pulpit” considers the widespread public debate surrounding metaphysical healing in the late nineteenth-century and outlines the rhetorical theories and practices of important female metaphysical healers, particularly Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins. Because their theories assume the harmony of science and religion, Eddy and Hopkins engage both the Christian and liberal rhetorical traditions. I argue in this dissertation that metaphysical theologies such as those of Eddy and Hopkins are a powerful example of the conciliatory project of liberal Christianity during the period, challenging the assumption that the rhetorical practices exhibited in the liberal and Christian traditions are inherently contradictory. Their liberal characteristics provide metaphysical rhetorics with aims distinct from evangelical rhetorics and traditional pulpit oratory. Therefore, their relative absence in rhetorical history does more than marginalize a series of prolific “gurus”: it substantially stymies our theoretical understanding of the possibilities and limits of religious discourse.

My analysis of the rhetoric of metaphysical healing draws from published and archival material from the period between 1880 and 1910 and approaches these texts from a historiographical and feminist perspective. The Introduction argues for increased attention to the tradition of liberal religious discourse; Chapter One (“Exploring the Intersections of Rhetoric, Gender, and Liberal Religion”) subsequently suggests that the metaphysical healing movement participated in the broader conciliatory project of liberal religion, as it sought a means of making scientific and religious modes of understanding compatible. It also introduces the three major themes that I will use to characterize metaphysical healing as a liberal religious discourse: social progress vs. individual enlightenment; reason vs. passionate
belief; and professional authority vs. individual expression. Chapter Two (“Neither Christian nor scientific: Character, Common Sense, and the Liberal Backlash Against Metaphysical Healing”) offers a detailed analysis of the popular debate over metaphysical healing, addressing each of the three themes introduced in Chapter One. I show that women held the same contested relationship to religious liberalism that they held to liberalism more generally: they risked being dismissed as speaking subjects, precisely because their arguments relied heavily on liberal assumptions about reason and objectivity.

Chapters Three (“The Liberty of the Daughters of God: Mary Baker Eddy and a Rhetoric for Woman’s Hour”) and Four (“I AM the radiant Logos in Mind: Emma Curtis Hopkins, Spirituality, and the Divine Dialectic”) address the major figures of this study. Chapter 3 claims that Mary Baker Eddy melded Christian and liberal values to develop what she understood as a truly progressive Christianity. In integrating these two discourses, she redefined progressive, liberal standards in feminine terms and thus undermined the standard arguments against women’s public speaking and active participation in public religious life. However, Eddy remained invested in nineteenth-century visions of feminine spirituality, ironically reifying the very stereotypes that stymied female preaching. Chapter 4 argues that Emma Curtis Hopkins advanced a dialectical vision of religious discourse that is in many respects more radical than Eddy’s. Hopkins encouraged dialogue as a means of religious instruction, emphasizing the democratic and mutually uplifting relationship between teacher and student. However, the sense of empowerment Hopkins provided her followers rarely extended beyond the personal and private. The work of these two figures suggests that a liberal religious discourse held implications for nineteenth-century women that were contradictory, shifting, and undeniably complicated.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations..................................................................................................................vi  
List of Figures..............................................................................................................................vii  
Acknowledgments.........................................................................................................................viii  

INTRODUCTION. Situating Scientific Christianity in Rhetorical Scholarship.........................1  

CHAPTER 1. Exploring the Intersections of Rhetoric, Gender, and Liberal Religion...........20  

CHAPTER 2. “Neither Christian nor scientific”: Character, Common Sense, and the Liberal  
Backlash Against Metaphysical Healing......................................................................................60  

CHAPTER 3. Liberty of the Daughters of God: Mary Baker Eddy and a Rhetoric for  
Woman’s Hour.............................................................................................................................120  

CHAPTER 4. “I AM the radiant Logos in Mind”: Emma Curtis Hopkins, Spirituality, and  
the Divine Dialectic.......................................................................................................................194  

CONCLUSION..............................................................................................................................232  

NOTES..............................................................................................................................................242  

WORKS CITED...............................................................................................................................266
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used for manuscript collections:

MBEL Archives of the First Church of Christ, Scientist. Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity, Boston, MA

The following abbreviations have been used for books by the major authors:


CL Class Lessons of 1888 by Emma Curtis Hopkins.

FCC First Church of Christ, Scientist and Miscellany by Mary Baker Eddy.

HM High Mysticism: Studies in the Wisdom of the Sages of the Ages by Emma Curtis Hopkins.

MW Miscellaneous Writings by Mary Baker Eddy.

NY No and Yes by Mary Baker Eddy.

PP Pulpit and Press by Mary Baker Eddy.

R Résumé: Practice Book for the Twelve Lessons in High Mysticism by Emma Curtis Hopkins.

RDS Rudimental Divine Science by Mary Baker Eddy.

RI Retrospection and Introspection by Mary Baker Eddy.

SCMP Scientific Christian Mental Practice by Emma Curtis Hopkins.

SH Science and Health with a Key to the Scriptures by Mary Baker Eddy.

ST Self-Treatments including “The Radiant I AM” by Emma Curtis Hopkins.

UG Unity of Good by Mary Baker Eddy.
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>“When His Own System Failed to Work,” <em>Life</em>, 1894</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>The Mother Church and Extension, Boston, 1908</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>“Seeking and Finding,” Portrait of Eddy at the time of her discovery of Christian Science</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Mary Baker Eddy at Pleasant View, 1903</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My foray in the world of nineteenth-century metaphysical healing began during the first year of my graduate program, and the subsequent six years have been a series of snags, hiccups, and those moments of intellectual epiphany that make the scholarly process worthwhile. I could not have overcome these challenges without significant financial, intellectual, and emotional support.

The Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity provided me with a generous research fellowship, which allowed me to spend part of the summer of 2009 at the Christian Science archives in Boston, Massachusetts. Sherry Darling and her staff demonstrated a knowledge of and excitement for the library’s materials that was truly inspiring. The Center for Democratic Deliberation at the Pennsylvania State University, through its fellowship program, granted me invaluable time and space to write in the early stages of this project. The investment of these organizations in promoting new research in Christian Science and civic discourse respectively was essential to the successful completion of this project.

I also must thank the many colleagues who read drafts of this dissertation in its many stages. The members of my reading groups – Kevin Browne, Mike Hogan, Jessica Sheffield, Michelle Smith, Matt Weiss, and Rebecca Wilson-Lundin – reminded me consistently why scholarly work is a process best completed collaboratively. Anne Rose and Robin Schulze offered thoughtful and challenging comments that will be superb intellectual fodder for this project’s future progress into a book. I also want to thank Cheryl Glenn for her faith in my work and for “picking nits” – and Jack Selzer for his professional advice and for pushing me
when I needed it. As my advisors, both demonstrated infinite patience throughout the writing process, even when it was not warranted.

My final thanks I save for my family, especially my parents, Bill and Sandra Scalise, for giving me all the books I could read and for always believing (even when I didn’t).
Introduction

Situating Metaphysical Religion in Rhetorical Scholarship

In her 1916 book, *Let’s Be Healthy in Mind and Body*, Susanna Cocroft, a popular beauty and health expert, conjectured on the foundation of good health:

The progressive physician has always recognized and used mental suggestion as a material agency in building up the body vitality.

Only a few centuries ago we persecuted the body to develop the spirit, then the pendulum swung to the other extreme, ignoring the relationship between body and spirit. Today we take the middle ground and realize the interdependence of body, mind, and spirit.

We formerly said, I have a soul; we now say, I am a soul and I have a body. (18)

Cocroft closely connected the spiritual, mental, and physical, suggesting that they were “inseparable in their relation to heal and happiness” (17). Poor health, she warned her readers, was the consequence of insufficient “faith in self” that “dishonor[ed] … [the] Creator” (24). Her text, therefore, outlined strategies for developing the spiritual attitude that would lead to physical health and the physical “habits” that would reflect spiritual wellbeing.

It is unlikely that New Age adherents seventy-three years later knew of Susanna Cocroft’s manual of health and wellbeing. Nevertheless, they received strikingly similar advice when they read *Going Within*, actress Shirley MacLaine’s contribution to the self-help genre:

Despite the dominance of traditional methods of medicine, there is an ever-increasing interest in exploring the roots of consciousness as a guide to
a solution for physical suffering. And the roots of consciousness speak directly through the seven chakras of which the physical body is an expression.

To me, what is most attractive about this holistic approach is that it recognizes and honors the balancing of man’s energies by means which acknowledge that we are more than simply physical beings. (497)

Relying on the Hindu concept of the chakras, MacLaine presented to her readers a holistic vision of health that echoed that of Cocroft. She coined the term “body language” to describe the material manifestation of mental and spiritual states on the body, assuring her audience that the body would “express, in physical terms, the internal attitudes of the consciousness it housed” (496). For MacLaine, as for Cocroft, salvation from physical suffering lay in a correct understanding of the laws governing spiritual and physical health.

The work of Cocroft and MacLaine represents a coherent metaphysical tradition that stretches beyond the seventy-three years separating them, a tradition that has been traced variously by historians Charles Braden, Stillson Judah, Catherine Albanese, Marie Griffith, Catherine Tumber, and Beryl Satter. However, while this work has offered strategies for incorporating these women into the scholarly narrative of American religious history, it has not been translated into substantive descriptions of their place in the history of religious rhetoric. One of the few scholars to address metaphysical rhetorics, James Crocker-Lakness argues that New Age communication is “distinctive, diverging in several important ways from conventional theories” (150). Based on his examination of “channeled” texts, Crocker-Lakness suggests that these works present a “distinctive ethics of communication” that challenges the “male-dominated view of communication as influence” (151; 140). New Age rhetors, in other words, enact a view of communication that assumes discourse between
spiritual equals. This rhetorical approach is closely connected to their goal of spiritual unity (reflecting perfect communication between the individual and God), as opposed to the traditional aims of conversion or salvation from sin. Given the distinct aims of metaphysical rhetoric, this gap in rhetorical history does more than marginalize a series of prolific “gurus” (although this point is worth noting): it substantially stymies our theoretical understanding of the possibilities and limits of religious discourse.

Scholars of rhetoric have failed to follow Crocker-Lackness’s lead for two primary reasons, both of which reflect the limits of current work. First, histories of women’s religious rhetoric have been limited by their subject selection. Gillian Gill suggests that metaphysical healer and Christian Science founder, Mary Baker Eddy, has been ignored by feminist scholars because “she does not fit the established pattern of female achievement” (xviii). Such an argument could be extended to many female metaphysicians of the nineteenth century, most of whom supported only indirectly those movements most popular in scholarship on the period: abolition, temperance, and suffrage. Catherine Tumber, for example, addresses the New Age movement only to critique it as a detriment to civic life and political activity.

This bias is exacerbated in rhetorical scholarship by the interest in evangelical defenses of female preaching, including those of Margaret Fell, Phoebe Palmer, and Francis Willard. In her Republic of Mind and Spirit, Catherine Albanese contends that metaphysics represents an important influence on the development of American religiosity, one that must be placed in tension with denominational-establishment and evangelical narratives. In other words, metaphysicians do not fit neatly in histories of America’s mainstream churches or in stories of the revival activities of the “born again” (6). I would extend Albanese’s argument to suggest that the rhetoric of metaphysicians, if it is to be understood, must be distinguished
from the standard genres of the mainstream church and the evangelical revival, including sermons, defenses, exhortations, and conversion narratives. In short, rhetoricians have ignored the work of Eddy, Cocroft, and MacLaine not because it lacks rhetorical sophistication but because it cannot be neatly placed beside that of Fell, Palmer, Willard, and other female evangelicals.

The second reason metaphysical rhetoric has been ignored is less obvious and likely even more important to a discussion of religious discourse in the contemporary public sphere: an over-emphasis on fundamentalist rhetoric at the expense of liberal religious discourse.\(^1\) Much recent scholarship on religious discourse has been an offshoot of the more general interest in democratic deliberation and focused primarily on the civic activities of conservative evangelicals in the United States.\(^2\) While introducing a 2009 *Journal of Communication and Religion* special issue on the subject, Thomas Lessl noted that work in religious communication and democratic deliberation has intersected primarily due to “mounting suspicion directed at the public behavior of religionists” (195). In other words, scholars of rhetoric have grown increasingly wary of faith-based groups that emphasize political activism as well as missionary work; some have further suggested that religious discourse represents a significant challenge to American liberal democracy and its ideal of open, rational dialogue. Sharon Crowley’s *Toward a Civil Discourse*, which considers the divide between religionists and liberals, received sufficient scholarly acclaim to warrant both the Rhetoric Society of America Book Award and the Conference on College Composition and Communication Outstanding Book Award in 2008. But despite its currency and cachet, such work holds little explanatory power for metaphysical texts that are, I would argue, intrinsically liberal.
The emphasis on the Religious Right and democratic deliberation has reinforced a dichotomy between religion and liberalism – and thus a dichotomy between the spiritual and rational-scientific that metaphysical texts like that of Cocroft and MacLaine explicitly deny. It has become almost standard for scholars of rhetoric to oppose religious and liberal discourses, including science, based on the premise that their epistemological (and rhetorical) foundations are contradictory. According to this model, scientists and political liberals, as descendants of the Enlightenment, assume that knowledge is expanded by open, rational, and often agonistic debate about truth-claims. By contrast, religious believers generally emphasize the importance of faith, emotion, doctrine, or tradition in coming to know the truth. For example, Crowley suggests that religionists and liberals fail to achieve common ground for discourse because liberals cannot account for the importance of emotion and faith in a religious worldview. She explains, “[D]eeply held beliefs are so tightly bound up with the very bodies of [religious] believers that liberals’ relatively bloodless and cerebral approach to argument is simply not persuasive to people who do not accept liberalism or whose commitment to liberalism is less important to them than other sorts of convictions” (4). In other words, liberalism so closely associates the quest for truth with rationality and objectivity that it cannot account for worldviews that suggest other paths to conviction. Thus a stalemate has arisen between believers and non-believers, the reflection of oppositional worldviews and rhetorical practices. Rhetorical scholars such as Crowley have presented their work as an intervention, developing theoretical structures that would allow citizens to speak across this great divide.³

It should be noted that this juxtaposition of liberal and religious discourses in rhetorical scholarship is reasonable if fundamentalist Christianity, invested in a literal interpretation of the Bible, is adopted as a standard. Indeed, liberalism and fundamentalist
Christianity have historically grown in opposition to each other. Historian of religion George Marsden, in his seminal Fundamentali

sm and American Culture, defines early fundamentalism in the opening decades of the twentieth century as “a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought” (4). For Marsden, ant

modernism involves a rejection of scientific development, democratic government, and human progress – a rejection of precisely those values promoted by liberalism and the broader “Enlightenment project.” In other words, fundamentalists position themselves in opposition to mainstream American society and its sins precisely by their rejection of liberal democratic government, science, and other modern ideals. These religious believers and proponents of liberal democracy or science often see each other as antagonists in a struggle for the wellbeing of the nation, as Crowley suggests.4

However, metaphysical works like that of Cocroft and MacLaine challenge any easy analogy between Christianity and fundamentalism or direct opposition between religion and Enlightenment liberalism. As these works reflect, religion, science, and political liberalism share a deep historical relationship that has shifted, and is still shifting, with changing social conditions. Nineteenth-century America, before the rise of Christian fundamentalism in the opening decades of the twentieth century, provided fertile ground for a variety of religious communities whose rhetoric reflects a more complicated relationship to modern, Enlightenment values than direct opposition. I would argue that metaphysical writings offer some of the most novel and complex efforts to work through the tensions between a liberal and Christian worldview. A focus on fundamentalist rhetoric to the exclusion of these texts limits the models available to explicate religious discourse, both contemporary and historical. My project addresses this lack by delineating historical examples of metaphysical rhetoric.
Through my analysis, I hope to construct a model of liberal religious discourse that can serve as a practical and theoretical alternative to fundamentalist discourses. The nineteenth-century metaphysical texts I consider in this project represent only a snapshot of liberal religious discourse, as opposed to an exhaustive narrative; they are meant primarily as a firm foundation for addressing rhetorics in a liberal religious tradition of which American metaphysics is only a part.

I have chosen to address historical rather than contemporary metaphysical texts for two primary reasons. First, a historical perspective challenges the easy conflation of fundamentalism with Christianity in general – and the assumption that fundamentalism is the dominant and univocal religious tradition in American public life. In fact, religious fundamentalism arose as a dominant discourse in American Christianity only after the First World War. Voices like that of Charles Finney, Horace Bushnell, and Henry Ward Beecher – all liberal Christians – dominated the discourse of American Christianity before this period. According to Gary Dorrien, this theological liberalism, which reached its ascendency in Victorian America, was part of a “mediating theology tradition” that aimed “to create a third [theological space] between a regnant orthodoxy and an ascending ‘infidelism’” (xiv). Liberals conceived religion to be a civilizing force, fully modernist in their faith in human progress and willingness to reconsider theology in the light of modern knowledge. Heavily influenced by Common Sense philosophy, liberal religion in the early nineteenth century even took on an evidentiary temper. Many Christians sought empirical proof of supernatural phenomenon, and they validated and objectified their religious experience with the same Enlightenment belief in “natural reason” that had given birth to modern science (Porterfield, Protestant, Chpt. 2).
Second, a historical perspective reveals that nineteenth-century American Christians often believed their faith-based practices to be an extension of (or the true expression of) social and political democratic ideals – not in opposition to them. Nineteenth-century liberal religion actually reinforced and extended a quite radical democratic impulse in American Christianity that extended back to the Revolution. According to historian Nathan Hatch, Christians of the Early Republic drew heavily upon the new “rhetoric of liberty” that political liberalism had provided (6). Hatch identifies three democratic tendencies in American Christianity: a denial that the clergy is a separate order of men, a willingness to take individuals’ religious experience at face-value, and a confidence in the ability of believers to overthrow authoritarian structures and create change (9-11). The gradual rise to respectability of these early movements, such as the Methodist and Baptist churches, tempered the radical spirit of early American Christianity, but these tendencies remained at the heart of later liberal religion. Fundamentalism, then, is a relatively recent reaction to a liberal religious tradition that is deeply embedded in American culture, an older tradition in which perceptions of faith, liberal democracy, and science are intimately entangled rather than radically separated.

I have chosen to focus on the late nineteenth century because it produced a plethora of metaphysical theory and practice. Nineteenth-century Americans, perhaps more vigorously than Christians during any other period, actively sought and sometimes believed they had found a resolution between their faith and modern, liberal values. In this project, I specifically outline the rhetorical theories of female metaphysical healers – theories that assume the harmony of science and religion and reflect the influence of both the Christian and liberal rhetorical traditions. These metaphysical theologies are a powerful example of the conciliatory project of liberal Christianity during the period. Moreover, they directly
challenge the assumption that the rhetorical practices exhibited in the liberal and Christian traditions are inherently contradictory. My ultimate goal is not to rehabilitate or defend liberal religion or deny the powerful presence of fundamentalist discursive practices currently. Instead, I hope to challenge the easy dichotomy between liberalism and religion by suggesting that they are not, and have not always been, as intrinsically opposed in the minds of Americans as recent rhetorical scholarship implies.

**Mapping the Project**

My discussion of the writing by and about female metaphysical healers is driven by two interrelated purposes. First, this project provides a sustained analysis of the rhetorical theory of two important female religious leaders, specifically addressing issues of gender. Second, it offers a framework that can be used to examine the rhetoric of other liberal Christians and to develop more effective models for religious discourse in the contemporary public sphere. While Christians have practiced many forms of metaphysical healing, those under consideration in the following chapters adopt an explicitly “scientific” identity as well as a Christian one. I argue in the following chapters that metaphysical healing practices were a deliberate effort on the part of liberal Protestants in the late nineteenth century to develop a Christian theology that was philosophically and emotionally compatible with modern scientific knowledge. In making this claim, I assume that liberalism and science are interrelated modern discourses, linked as part of the “Enlightenment project.” I further suggest that the subjects of this study modified liberal rhetorical practices for a predominately religious purpose. My project as a whole will be guided by four central questions: What are the primary characteristics of late nineteenth-century liberal religious discourse (or the rhetorical ideals of liberal Protestants) as reflected in the debate over
metaphysical healing? How did the female rhetorical theorists addressed in this study reconcile liberal principles with their ultimately Christian purpose? What impact did gender have on the theories of religious discourse developed by these women? How does a liberal stance affect these theorists’ understanding of their sacred and civic obligations?

Metaphysical healing proves a particularly rich topic for rhetorical and historical work in nineteenth-century American religion because the practice necessitated an engagement with liberal and scientific discourses. My analysis in the following chapters suggests that metaphysical healing raised similar concerns for late nineteenth-century Christians as the theory of evolution. In other words, the practice forced Christians to define the relationship between religious belief and scientific knowledge. The idea of a “Christian science” held substantial appeal for many Christians of the period, while raising troubling questions regarding the relationship between science and religion for others.

Doctors and hypnotists during the period, assuming a scientific ethos, frequently argued that the mind’s influence over the body could be explained rationally and systematically. For many Americans, these arguments conformed with (or potentially conformed with) the long tradition of healing in Christianity; for others, they denied the necessity of faith and a personal God. In any case, the explicit attention to “scientific” cures fundamentally distinguished late nineteenth-century concepts of divine healing from earlier forms. While a significant number of Protestants during the period did practice divine healing without claims to scientific authority, these faith-based healing practices rarely generated the attention or aroused the animosity of “scientific” theologies.

I have chosen to highlight the rhetoric of Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins in the final chapters of this project because they generated enormous interest during the period, wrote and spoke extensively, and, most importantly, emphasized the
“scientific” nature of their metaphysical theologies. Eddy founded the Christian Science denomination and outlined its principles in her textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, she developed her healing theology around the “scientific” premise that, because God is All, sickness and sin cannot exist. Hopkins, a renegade student of Eddy’s, was arguably the most influential teacher in the diverse New Thought movement; she built her theology of self-empowerment around the premise that God was active within each individual. Despite their significant theological and rhetorical differences, both women proclaimed that cures were the result of spiritual science as opposed to faith alone. This emphasis makes Eddy’s and Hopkins’ theology fundamentally liberal, a stance with substantial implications for their vision of religious discourse. They share a fundamental belief that religion and science should be mutually enriching – and a liberal theological and rhetorical legacy. In short, the metaphysical healers addressed in this study are significant because they participate in a liberal rhetorical tradition in Christianity that extends through the work of Susanna Cocroft and Shirley MacLaine.

It is important to emphasize that I approach metaphysical healing as an alternative religious movement, one which occurred largely outside the confines of mainstream churches and challenged established theological doctrine. I do not mean to suggest that Christian Science, New Thought, and the broader metaphysical healing movement bore no relationship to mainstream nineteenth-century churches or to orthodox Protestant doctrine. However, Eddy lacked an extensive theological education and argued that only the Bible was necessary to achieve spiritual understanding; Hopkins read extensively in world religions but refused to confine the practices she taught within institutional structures. As the following chapters will reflect, these rhetors rarely addressed the opinions of professional theologians but instead engaged with popular ideas and cultural attitudes regarding gender, healthcare,
and faith. Similarly, the well-known theologians of the nineteenth century largely ignored metaphysical healing practices, despite the substantial attention the topic received in the popular press. Rather than theologians, newspaper editors, doctors, students, and other interested lay Christians filled the popular periodicals of the day with discussions about the efficacy of “Christian science” and healing by non-medical means. Therefore, these articles provide the historical and rhetorical context for my discussion of metaphysical healing, as opposed to the work of well-known liberal theologians.

At the theoretical level, my focus on “scientific” metaphysical discourses will allow me to contribute to an ongoing discussion in rhetoric regarding the characteristics of healthy and ethically responsible dialogue between proponents of conflicting belief systems (specifically liberalism and religion). A wide array of rhetorical scholarship shares with the work of Crowley and MacLaine a central question: what types of discourse can open a space for discussion between two seemingly incompatible worldviews? As early as 1969, Edward P.J. Corbett criticized political activists on college campuses for practicing a “close-fisted” rhetoric that stymied public discourse. Corbett expressed deep concern that believers in a political or religious ideology often refuse to communicate with those who disagree and encouraged a form of “open-handed” civic discourse that aims to reach consensus through rational exchange. Scholars since Corbett have challenged his assumption that liberal rationality and tolerance is the foundation for a healthy public discourse (Marback). However, the current interest in democratic deliberation has inspired new theoretical structures for assessing “open” and “closed” discourses (Anderson and Prelli; Welsh; Childers) and new interventions to promote productive exchange across cultural or ideological difference (Ratcliffe; Ivie; Hicks; Logan). In short, scholars of rhetoric have
sought a healthy form of public dialogue that resolves conflict while acknowledging difference.

Perhaps no discourse has received greater attention in this context than that of faith-based groups, which is often presented as the foil to a liberal and rationalistic worldview. In *The Rhetoric of RHETORIC*, Wayne Booth introduces a theoretical approach for opening conversation among competing discourses, which he calls listening-rhetoric or rhetorology. In the final chapter of the book, Booth chooses religion and science as a representative conflict that can be mitigated through the practice of rhetorology. “As in most controversies,” Booth explains, “those who attack either religion or science usually make their case without showing any serious evidence that they have listened to their opponents: religion is superstition, utterly fake; science is the cruel enemy of human values” (153). In the remaining pages, Booth outlines seven warrants that religionists and scientists share that can be used as the foundation for more effective conversation between the two groups. The subjects of this study share with Booth a desire to reveal commonalities between scientific discourses ostensibly driven by “reason” and religious discourses driven by passionate belief. However, the work of these writers offers a Christian perspective on the subject that Booth cannot account for and does not address as an extent rhetorical tradition. Therefore, my focus on the rhetoric of metaphysical healing will allow me to address models of “open” discourse already present (but rarely acknowledged) in the Christian rhetorical tradition.

At the historical level, my emphasis on the work of Eddy and Hopkins will allow me to contribute to the wide array of work in nineteenth-century women’s rhetorics. Feminist scholars have long noted that religious events and practices provided women with their earliest opportunities to speak in public. Jane Donawerth explains that most early defenses of women’s public speaking specifically addressed preaching, as this practice was “extended
by sentimental culture intro the broader area of morality” (xxx). Like Margaret Fell, Phoebe Palmer, and Frances Willard, the female rhetors in this study developed arguments justifying their authority to speak on spiritual and moral issues. However, they drew upon the liberal tradition in ways that these other rhetors did not, making the justifications they provide for women’s religious rhetoric quite different than earlier models. For example, early Methodist women commonly insisted that they had an “extraordinary call” from God to speak (Bizzell 380). By contrast, female metaphysical healers often claimed that their arguments reflected a universal moral standard comprehensible by rational means. Heretofore, scholarship on women’s religious discourse has emphasized the older revivalist and evangelical traditions (Bizzell; Brekus; Brereton; Collins; Hardesy, *Your Daughters*). The work of Eddy and Hopkins is important foremost because it offers an alternative to this evangelical tradition, a liberal perspective that thrived in the late nineteenth-century. However, my focus on female metaphysical healers can also provide new avenues for considering women’s engagement with the liberal public sphere, as very little work has addressed the coupling of religious and liberal arguments in women’s rhetoric.5

My analysis of the rhetoric of metaphysical healing draws from published and archival material, primarily from the period between 1880 and 1910, when the movement peaked. Fortunately, my primary figures, Eddy and Hopkins, published extensively, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of their rhetorical strategies, based on such works as *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Eddy) and *High Mysticism* (Hopkins). Both Eddy and Hopkins centered their ministries around the written rather than spoken Word, each producing thousands of published pages. Moreover, Christian Scientists and New Thought leaders began successful periodicals that published the work of believers and other leaders in the movement, including but in no way limited to the *Christian Science Journal* and *Christian
Science (a primary outlet for Hopkins). Given this powerful public presence and the popularity of metaphysical healing, mainstream periodicals (Outlook, Arena, Popular Science, McClure’s, North American Review, Collier’s, Nation, Atlantic Monthly) also published hundreds of articles offering thoughts and observations on this “fad,” sometimes respectful and other times quite harsh. Taken together, these sources paint a portrait of both the broader assumptions of liberal Christians regarding religious discourse and the rhetoric of two important liberal theologians.

My primary theoretical and scholarly perspective in my reading of this primary material will be historiographical, heavily influenced by feminist work in both rhetoric and religious studies. In part, my research continues the process of recovering and recuperating marginalized texts. Literary scholar Cary Nelson describes this process as three-fold: the retention of texts “popular” in their contemporary contexts, the retention of texts considered without intellectual or cultural merit, and the recovery of unrecognized theories or theorists, a process that often involves the extrapolation of texts not explicitly “theoretical” (51). In the context of women’s religious rhetoric, this work has included the recovery of writing by early female preachers and orators, such as Salome Lincoln and Jarena Lee (Davis, Andrews). In a similar vein, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg have included in their anthology of rhetorical theory, The Rhetorical Tradition, such rhetors as Margaret Fell, Phoebe Palmer, and Francis Willard. As these women offer complicated arguments about who is allowed to speak and in what contexts, Bizzell and Herzberg can justify their inclusion in such an anthology and challenge scholarly definitions of what qualifies as rhetorical “theory” and an appropriate “theorist.” Historians have complimented this work in rhetoric by providing extensive histories of female preaching in America (Brekus and Hardesty, Your Daughters) and explicating the relationship between Christianity and the
women’s rights movement of the nineteenth century (Braude and Hardesty, *Women Called*). Nevertheless, Eddy and Hopkins (as well as their female followers) remain barely visible in the history of American religious rhetoric, despite their substantial fame and popularity in their own time. This project therefore aims to extend recovery work in religious rhetorical history through an extensive analysis of these women’s writings, painting them into the established “tradition.”

The absence of Eddy and Hopkins in rhetorical studies can in part be explained by narrow definitions of “rhetoric” that account for only a limited range of symbolic practices. Confronted by the absence of women in standard histories, feminist scholars of both religion and rhetoric have long asked how women’s religious experience is gendered, as well as how their religion constructs their gendered experience. The most extensive body of work addressing this question, particularly given the traditional concerns of rhetoric, is sustained analyses of the gendered construction of religious discourse (Mountford; Bizzell; Collins) and religious practice more generally (McDannell). However, the social conditions of nineteenth-century America dramatically limited women’s opportunity to participate in such traditional, public forms of speech as preaching. As rhetorician Nan Johnson describes, educators in the nineteenth-century emphasized letter writing and other “domestic” forms of writing for proper women, buffered by traditional Christian ideology. These same assumptions, the ideology of separate spheres, guided the material practices of women’s religious life during this period. Rather than preaching, most women instructed their children in Biblical interpretation (and sometimes translation), the singing of hymns, and the arrangement of religious artifacts (McDannell) – activities that are symbolic, expressive, attentive to context and purpose, and thus rhetorical. Nevertheless, these practices, neither public nor explicitly persuasive, are generally ignored in standard rhetorical
histories. Eddy and Hopkins, although they were able to gain a public voice, fail to conform to typical definitions of the religious rhetor – not only because their theologies are not “respectable” but also because they were primarily writers rather than preachers. Moreover, Eddy in particular reinforced many standard conceptions of femininity (Butler and Schoepflin), limiting the rhetorical practices of her followers even if she did not limit her own public voice. I therefore want to broaden rhetorical practice and theory to include and address forms of religious expression other than preaching. Such an approach will allow scholars to consider more fully both the conditions in which these religious leaders wrote – and the sacred practices that shaped the lives and religious identities of their “average” female followers.

Chapter One (“Exploring the Intersections of Rhetoric, Gender, and Liberal Religion”) provides the necessary historical background on metaphysical healing and situates the work of Eddy and Hopkins in scholarship on women’s religious rhetoric. It also introduces the three major themes that I will use to characterize metaphysical healing as a liberal religious discourse: social progress vs. individual enlightenment; reason vs. passionate belief; and professional authority vs. individual expression. Chapter Two (““Neither Christian nor scientific’: Character, Common Sense, and the Liberal Backlash Against Metaphysical Healing”) continues this discussion by providing a detailed analysis of the debate over metaphysical healing, addressing each of the three themes introducing in Chapter One. Throughout this discussion, I attend specifically to issues of gender and the resources and constraints that a liberal religious discourse provided for women rhetors. I ultimately argue that women held the same contested relationship to religious liberalism that they held to liberalism more generally: they risked being dismissed as speaking subjects,
precisely because their arguments relied heavily on liberal assumptions about reason and objectivity.

Chapters Three (“The Liberty of the Daughters of God: Mary Baker Eddy and a Rhetoric for Woman’s Hour”) and Four (“I AM the radiant Logos in Mind: Emma Curtis Hopkins, Spirituality, and the Divine Dialectic”) address the major figures of this study – Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins respectively. Like Chapter Two, both analyses are developed by addressing the three major themes of the project (social progress vs. individual enlightenment; reason vs. passionate belief; and professional authority vs. individual expression). While I argue that both Eddy and Hopkins should be considered important rhetors in the liberal and Christian traditions, the rhetorical theories they develop have dramatically different implications. In melding Christian and liberal discourses, Eddy redefined progressive, liberal standards in feminine terms. In doing so, she undermined the standard arguments against women’s public speaking but ironically reified feminine stereotypes. Hopkins advanced a dialectical vision of religious discourse that is in many respects more radical than Eddy’s; she encouraged dialogue as a means of religious instruction, emphasizing the democratic and mutually uplifting relationship between teacher and student. However, the sense of empowerment Hopkins provided her followers rarely extended beyond the personal and private. The work of these two figures suggests that a liberal religious discourse held implications for nineteenth-century women that were contradictory, shifting, and complicated.

In concluding this introduction, I want to state that my central goal is to address the rhetoric of liberal Christians (to the greatest extent possible) in the terms that were their own. Scholarship in rhetoric too often addresses religion, intentionally or unintentionally, as an external force on the liberal public sphere, particularly when its primary aim is to address
civic deliberation. In other words, it adopts the tradition of secular liberal discourse as a starting point and considers the impact of religious discourse on it. While scholarship in this vein can undoubtedly be useful, it almost necessarily constructs religious belief as a problem to be solved and ignores the unique traditions of religious rhetoric. Thomas Lessl observes, “Many of those in the broader field who wish to critique the communication behavior of religionists in the public sphere are like ethnographers who have ventured onto some remote Pacific island without being able to speak the language of the tribe they wish to study” (196). I do not speak as an insider in any of the religious movements that I am addressing. Nevertheless, I adopt the voices of believers as my starting point and hope to critique without judgment. My primary goal, then, is not to proclaim the theologies addressed in this study as good or bad, open or closed – but offer them their rightful place in the Christian rhetorical tradition.
Chapter 1

Exploring the Intersections of Rhetoric, Gender, and Liberal Religion

In October 1887, the *New York Times* published a short article addressing the new religion of Christian Science, a phenomenon that had already spread from Boston (the home of its founder, Mary Baker Eddy) to most major American cities. Interestingly, the article primarily reflected on the public’s fascination with the theology, as opposed to informing readers about it. The writer wryly observes, “In a fashionable afternoon call the chances are three to one that ‘Christian Science’ will come up for discussion as surely as two or more ladies are gathered together, and once entertained the topic usually absorbs the remainder of the day” (“Perhaps They Are Right” 17). Although ambivalent about the issue, the article testifies to a public debate on the subject of metaphysical healing during the period that was both ubiquitous and vigorous. As this project will demonstrate, the topic raised critical questions for Americans of the period about the place of religion and science in public life, the nature of faith and health, and the legitimacy of alternative religious and medical practices: Is scientific progress compatible with the spiritual progress of the nation? Should religious practice be driven by faith and emotion – or by reason? Should people’s physical and spiritual wellbeing be guided by professional authorities or trusted to the individual?

In one sense, these questions reflect the relevance of metaphysical healing to the most pressing theological issues of the day. The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and the scientific process that is arguably its most lasting legacy) has at its core a steadfast belief in progress. As a political entity, America undoubtedly represented for its nineteenth-century citizens these liberal ideals of reason, tolerance, and the pursuit of a more perfect world. Yet the founding myths of the nation imbued its secular values with a
Christian spirit – constructing the narrative of a land chosen by God to shed its democratic light on the peoples of the world. Following the Civil War, the Darwinian ideas that had spread throughout Europe found their way to American shores, posing a fundamental challenge to orthodox Christian beliefs. Certainly, many Americans adamantly rejected evolution as contrary to the Scriptures, yet many others believed that scientific advancement could not be so neatly rejected. These Christians often sought to unify, or at least reconcile, spiritual and scientific progress – to develop a coherent theology that could bring Christian beliefs to bear on liberal values (and vice versa). The proponents of metaphysical healing and other religious health reform movements participated in this broader conversation; they provided multifarious answers to the questions modern science raised for Christianity and outlined the terms under which they thought liberal values should shape American spiritual life.

Metaphysical healing, then, attracted the interest of the general public because of its implications for large, often troubling, theological questions. But the movement (or more accurately, movements) held particular significance for women, as the wry aside about gatherings of “ladies” by the Times editor suggests. Christianity already had by the late nineteenth-century a long tradition of female writers and speakers, from Margery Kemp and Julian of Norwich, though early Protestant apologists such as Margaret Fell and Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, to American reformers such as Phoebe Palmer and Frances Willard. Moreover, the ubiquitous figure of the “Angel of the House” in the nineteenth century only solidified the woman’s role as the spiritual guardian of both her family and American society more generally. Metaphysical healing coupled this spiritual role with women’s traditional role as physical caregivers, and in doing so, it provided women with a means of seeing their work in a broader social context. As this project will demonstrate, these practices placed a
substantial number of women in highly visible public roles. The wide variety of these roles, along with their affirmation of female spirituality, challenged the image of the preacher and other orthodox Christian authorities, and it reinforced the social influence of the gender more generally.

However, the implications of metaphysical healing for late nineteenth-century women were not all positive or empowering. Many of the female religious rhetors of early Protestantism justified their speech and entry into the public sphere by arguing for their exceptionality. In other words, these women suggested that they were compelled by God to speak and that a failure to do so would be sinful. Others situated themselves in the revivalist tradition, offering emotive narratives of their conversion and exhortations on the saving grace of God. By contrast, the liberal tradition privileged reason above all other faculties as the driving force of human progress. In touting reason as the ideal in religion as well as science, liberal Christians undermined these standard justifications for women’s spiritual discourse. Such attitudes left women religious rhetors in the late nineteenth-century with a difficult choice: adopt a strategy that is devalued by the general public and reaffirms stereotypes regarding women’s emotionality and secondary status; or adopt one that reinforces masculine values and undermines those very arguments that had given a voice to many women in the past. Women religious health reformers responded to these conflicting visions of the female religious figure with a variety of theological arguments and rhetorical strategies; while their answers rarely fell neatly into one side of this dichotomy or the other, they had to address at some level the unrelenting authority of Enlightenment values, a rational ideal from which women had often been excluded.

Its significance to questions both of theology and gender make metaphysical healing a ripe area of study for scholars of religious history, nineteenth-century American life, and
women’s rhetorics. Moreover, the writings of the women who led these movements vary substantially from that of more frequently studied Protestant women rhetors, such as Phoebe Palmer, Francis Willard, or the early Methodist preachers. While they are not entirely disconnected from these traditions, Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins do not reproduce the genres typical in women’s spiritual writing (such as conversion narratives) – or the standard arguments for women’s preaching that appeared in many defenses (such as the existence of women preachers in biblical history). At a certain level, these women assumed their right to speak, preach, and guide their many followers, and they unabashedly inserted themselves into theological conversations and positions of religious authority that would have been unthinkable even a generation before. Nevertheless, no scholar of rhetoric has yet attempted to write these women and their movement(s) into the history of women’s religious discourse – or taken seriously their sophisticated and novel theories of religious rhetoric. This project is an attempt to do both and, in doing so, to broaden our understanding of religious discourse and women’s rhetorics in the late nineteenth century.

Ultimately, I aim to introduce Eddy and Hopkins as important female theorists of religious rhetoric, contextualizing their work within the broader cultural struggle to unite liberal and Christian epistemologies. In presenting these two women as rhetorical theorists, I am suggesting that they offered important visions of what a liberal religious discourse ought to be – visions that both drew upon and challenged the models of liberal religious discourse provided by men. This chapter begins this work by placing theories of metaphysical healing in the context of historical work on liberal religion and women’s religious rhetoric. The opening section introduces three major themes crucial to understanding the social, religious, and rhetorical impact of metaphysical healing in the late nineteenth century: social reform vs. individual enlightenment; reason vs. passionate belief;
and professional authority vs. individual expression. I will use these three themes throughout this study to help characterize the varieties of liberal religious rhetoric under consideration. After a section defining the types of metaphysical healing available to nineteenth-century Americans, the final two parts place these practices within broader historical narratives: first, the debate in liberal Protestantism regarding the relationship between religion and science; and second, the struggle of women rhetors to gain authority as speakers and subjects within the mainstream Protestant church.

**Introducing the Major Themes**

Edward Eggleston, a popular novelist, historian, and Methodist minister, penned perhaps the most sustained and compelling fictional examination of religious health reform to appear in the press, a short novel titled, “The Faith Doctor.” Serialized in *Century Illustrated Magazine* in 1891, the novella provides a telling look at the terms under which nineteenth-century Americans considered metaphysical healing and the criteria by which they judged it. A fascinating but quite orthodox discussion of the issue, Eggleston’s story can serve as a point of entry into the three major themes that will be developed throughout the project: social progress vs. individual enlightenment; reason vs. passionate belief; and professional authority vs. individual expression. For Eggleston as well as his contemporaries, these themes are entangled with questions of gender and the authority of women to speak on religious matters. The story suggests the power metaphysical practices had to gain women access to public life – and reinforce the assumptions that had denied them that access in the first place. Eggleston ultimately rejects faith healing – but his liberal views on religion make this rejection more complex than simply reinforcing standard dichotomies of masculine and
feminine discourse. Therefore, after providing a brief summary of the story, this section introduces each of these themes and their relevance to women’s religious discourse.

Although superficially a love story, Eggleston’s *The Faith Doctor* serves primarily as a commentary on female spirituality. At the heart of the story are three female characters, each of whom practices different types of Christian reform. The protagonist, Phillida Callender, is the daughter of a deceased Presbyterian missionary, devoted to her aging mother and free-spirited sister and to missionary work in the slums of the city; she practices largely traditional charity work, at least until her temporary excursion into the murky waters of faith healing. By contrast, her friend, Mrs. Frankland, rarely works with the needy and instead preaches the Gospel to large groups of women, composed primarily of what she refers to as the “weary rich.” Finally, during her time as a faith healer, Phillida meets Eleanor Arabella Bowyer, a Christian Scientist who runs a healing business in the neighborhood where Phillida works.¹ These three contrasting examples of female spirituality allow Eggleston to comment on the appropriateness of each form – and, more specifically, the appropriateness of each woman’s engagement with the public sphere. Not surprisingly, Eggleston’s ultimate conclusion is closely connected to the form of religious discourse each woman employs.

The primary plotline of the novella chronicles the (mis)adventures of Phillida and her cosmopolitan, would-be lover, Charles Millard. Charley, although born in a small New York town to a family of moderate means, is an up-and-coming bank manager who has gained access to some of New York’s exclusive social circles. Despite their differences, Charley and Phillida are immediately attracted to each other, Charley drawn to Phillida’s devotion and kindness and Phillida to Charley’s intelligence and grace. The odd couple seems at first to make the relationship work and becomes engaged. However, Phillida unknowingly forces
the couple’s conflicting values to a head when she begins to practice metaphysical healing among the poor, an almost accidental consequence of her deep faith. Phillida quickly becomes lumped in public opinion with those “cranks” and “imposters” who sell their services as faith healers, although she accepts no money for her cures. Infuriated upon overhearing his fiancée insulted by colleagues, Charley reprimands Phillida for failing to consider his feelings and reputation. Phillida subsequently decides she must sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of the sick and breaks off the engagement. Eventually, the couple is reconciled – of course, after Phillida moderates her misguided religious beliefs.

A reading of the character of Phillida dramatizes the first primary theme I will consider: social progress vs. individual enlightenment. The central question at issue can be phrased another way: Should earthly progress or personal conversion be the primary goal of religious discourse? Scholars of religious history have long emphasized the importance liberal evangelicals placed on building the Kingdom of God on earth, a mission that invested American Protestantism with a pragmatic spirit. As Ferenc Morton Szasz explains, “Liberal Christians envisioned the merging of Christianity of the world and hoped that the spirit of Christ would permeate all aspect of the secular order” (44). This view did not necessitate active social reform (although it sometimes did), but it did demand that religious belief have visible consequences in the lives of believers. Some Christians believed progress towards the Kingdom would be manifested in social justice, while others believed this state would come to pass through individuals’ greater understanding of God’s order. Eggleston does not demonstrate any substantial commitment to social justice, but he shares the fundamental assumption of religious liberals that a religious belief should be judged by its relevance in the lives of men and women and in modern society more generally.
Of the women in the novella, Phillida best exemplifies the quest for a religion for living. The faithful woman almost desperately seeks a Christian lifestyle that will make God a palpable presence. Explaining her belief in faith cures to a friend, Phillida admits, “[T]here are the cures by faith related in the Bible. I am afraid that if I give up modern cures [by such means] I must lose my faith in miracles” (Aug. 618). Miracles like healing are, for Phillida, not simply a demonstration of God’s omnipotence but his immanence in earthly life. As her first act as a healer, the woman befriends a German immigrant girl, Wilhelmina, who has been an invalid for many years. Praying with the girl, Phillida tells her that “faith as a grain of mustard seed” will make all things possible (Jun 247). Importantly, Mina’s purity or faith is not in question; Phillida does not ask her repent of her sins but to understand that God’s goodness is manifest. Pulled from the brink of despair by Phillida’s faith, the little girl gains the strength to walk again over the course of several weeks. This success confirms Phillida’s belief that God is present in the world and provokes her refusal to stop practicing the faith cure; it is both the purest reflection of her deep spirituality and her greatest downfall.

Significantly, Eggleston does not dismiss the idea of a “living religion” but is in fact quite sympathetic to it (and to Phillida). Over the course of the story, Phillida learns what Eggleston already understands: a Christian need not depend on miracles to recognize the impact of faith in human life. Phillip, Phillida’s friend and cousin, addresses her concern over miracles, “The belief in Bible miracles is a poetic and religious belief, and it does not involve any practical question of action today” (Aug. 618). Phillip warns Phillida of the dangers of judging present-day concerns by the criteria of the ancient past. In fact, Phillida’s most powerful demonstrations of the impact of faith have little to do with her healing work, as she inspires two selfless act of kindness from the men of the story. Charley anonymously donates a wheelchair to Mina after meeting her, and Philip helps Charley and Phillida
reconcile, although he is in love with her as well. Phillida exercises the moral influence so often attributed to women in the nineteenth-century, tangibly and irrevocably altering the conduct of these previously worldly men. Phillida’s goodness and faith have made God present in the lives of the people around her, although in terms she did not expect. Her actions – and subsequently the actions of the two men – are the true manifestations of God in the world. Eggleston suggests, in other words, that a living religion is demonstrated not through miracles like cures but in the conduct and character of the faithful.

The second key tension that I return to throughout this study, reason vs. passionate belief, is closely connected to the first. The question was pivotal to both theologians and lay Christians: does rational analysis or the subjective, lived experience of religion provide the pathway to divine truth? Liberal Christians expected their faith to inform and improve their lives demonstrably, frequently embracing science and modern knowledge in the belief that it could lead to this type of progress. However, liberal Protestants were first and foremost Christians, with a Christian framework for interpreting the world, and they repeatedly sought methods of reconciling their faith and a “rational” and “progressive” approach to life. Like their ostensibly secular counterparts, they believed that the order that governed the world was absolute and knowable. But as a reflection of God’s work in the world, this order was fundamentally moral – and irrevocably intertwined the physical and the spiritual. As a result, liberal Christians often emphasized a “common sense” faith that could be tested by human experience. Such a stance emphasized the importance of reason in guiding moral action on earth, while affirming that Christian faith was necessary to grant these actions purpose. From this perspective, reason did not reveal spiritual truth but confirm what the soul recognized as righteous behavior.
Miss Bowyer, of the female characters in the story, best represents the struggle of late nineteenth-century Americans to reconcile reason and faith. The woman, partly hypocritical and partly deluded, explains to a bewildered Phillida that the goal of Christian Science is to revive ancient faith healing “but in a more scientific spirit, in the spirit of our age” (Jul. 406). The “Christian Scientist” ranks good works rather low on her list of Christian priorities but nevertheless argues that her theology is scientific and thus modern. When Miss Bowyer suggests to Phillida that “God works through forces in nature, according to law,” her response is telling: “That is just as true of the action of medicine. … I don’t like this affecting to put God in while you leave him out of your mixture” (Jul. 407). To Phillida, the Scientist’s “glib” explanations of the denomination’s principles sound rehearsed, and her willingness to profit from the poor and sick is offensive and unchristian (Jul. 407). Phillida is able to recognize the action of God in the world and in medicine; Miss Bowyer attempts to turn religion in to science and thus produces nothing but pseudo-rationality. As Eggleston paints her, Miss Bowyer represents a devotion to the sort of theological abstractions that never require genuine Christian sacrifice.

Despite Eggleston’s warning that Christianity should not be reduced to a science, “common sense” nevertheless holds an important place in his ideal Protestantism. Charley’s uncle, Mr. Martin, falls under the spell of Miss Bowyer, even refusing to call a medical doctor when his son falls ill. The uncultured laborer excitedly explains Miss Bowyer’s Christian Science theology to his nephew, “Sin and misery are at the bottom of sickness, and all are going to be done away with by spirit power…. People are getting more and more susceptible to magnetic and psy – psycho-what-you-may-call-it influences. This is bringing out new diseases that the old doctors are only able to look at with dumb amazement” (Jun. 251). Charley, graced with better sense than his uncle, inquires as to Miss Bowyer’s
“‘proofs.’” Increasingly amused by his uncle’s explanations, the young man teases, “But if you work your argument backwards it will prove that as evil exists there isn’t any good God.” However, Charley’s amusement turns to horror when the Martins’ son catches diphtheria and, deprived of medical attention, hovers near death. The boy eventually recovers after Charley and Phillida unite to drive Miss Bowyer from the house and call a medical doctor. The frightening incident teaches Mr. Martin and Phillida a valuable lesson: a religious theory that cannot withstand the test of common sense and rational proof is likely subjective, faulty, and dangerous. Despite the God’s omnipotence and the power of faith, reason is necessary to appropriately direct the expression of this faith on earth.

The final theme of central importance to both Eggleston’s novella and my own project is professional authority vs. individual experience. It is important to note that this dichotomy contrasts personal religious experience with professional authority rather than simply church authority: professionals (including some church leaders) claim authority by virtue of their education and rational understanding of a “profession,” rather than by virtue of ordination or tradition. Although ministers and preachers serve a central and respected role in the church, the Protestant tradition since the Reformation has encouraged a deep suspicion of church authorities and presumably arbitrary doctrines. Liberalism, which stressed the individual’s faculties as the foundation of knowledge, reinforced this iconoclastic spirit. Historian of religion Gary Dorrien emphasizes that a key characteristic of liberal religion during the period was “the idea of a genuine Christianity not based on external authority” and a corresponding “commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience” (xxiii). This liberal attitude unquestionably dispersed religious authority from the church – and it justified alternative religious practices and forms of discourse other than preaching, many of which were spearheaded by women. However, liberal discourse, secular
or sacred, lauds logic as the test of “objectivity” and the relative truth of a claim. This assumption, best exemplified by the educated professional, proved a significant challenge to women associated with emotionality and subjectivity, regardless of the topic’s faith-based nature.

Eggleston’s discussion of individual and professional authority centers on the character of Mrs. Frankland. A popular and engaging preacher, Mrs. Frankland is a woman with social ambition, Quaker ancestry (although Episcopalian by marriage), and an “oratorical temperament” (May 47). Enlivened by “the fame of such women as Mrs. Livermore, Miss Willard, and Mrs. Bottome,” Mrs. Frankland pursues her desire to undertake “public duties” and begins leading a Bible class (May 47). Women flock to hear the orator’s impassioned sermons, further driving her ambition and justifying her flamboyant approach to religious practice. Eggleston describes Mrs. Frankland as an “artist in drapery” whose imagination “delighted in the grandiose.” As an “artist,” Mrs. Frankland’s “exegesis was second-hand and commonplace,” but she knew “upon the familiar chords of traditional and superficial interpretation of Bible how to play many emotional variations, and her hearers, who were all women, were caught up in a state of religious exaltation” (May 47). Neither the listeners nor the rhetor can judge the content of the theology beyond its consistency with social convention, so they are left to evaluate it based on its emotional and aesthetic appeal. It is important to note that both speaker and audience are exclusively women, untrained in theology and rhetoric, and thus easily seduced by sweet-sounding language.

In Eggleston’s narrative, Mrs. Frankland serves as the most powerful evidence for the validity of a religion based in commonsense and a moral pragmatism. Mrs. Frankland’s oratory leads even the righteous Phillida astray, for faith alone is not sufficient to guide
moral conduct. The dangerous mixture of Mrs. Frankland’s gaudy language and her own
naiveté push Phillida to the brink of religious obsession – and to her estrangement from
Charley. By nature and inclination, Phillida “dwel[t] in a region of high ideals” and “hate[d]
the practical necessities that oblige high ideals to humble themselves before they can be
incarnated into facts” (May 54). Guided by religious enthusiasm rather than good sense,
Phillida fails to see Mrs. Frankland’s preaching as simply “rhetoric,” language couched in a
pleasing garb (May 48). By contrast, Beswick, the medical professional in the novella,
assesses the function and worth of metaphysical healing in objective terms. He explains
calmly to Phillida, “‘We use faith-cure and mind-cure in certain diseases of the nerves.
Nothing could have been better for… [Mina] than for you to make her believe she could
walk. I should have tried that dodge myself, but in a different way, if I had been called”
(Aug. 614). Like most doctors of his day, Dr. Beswick holds a moderate view that
acknowledges psychosomatic ailments, recognizes the limitations of tonics and elixirs, and
refuses to judge either his patients or questions of health outside of the context of everyday
experience. He represents a view of cures that is objective and open-minded, one bolstered
by his professional ethos.

Eggleston ultimately advocates a reasonable pragmatism that obligates faith to have a
discernable impact on human life – a perspective warranted by the holistic view of moral
order typical of moderate liberal Christians. It is not accidental that the men of the story –
Philip, Charley, and Beswik – serve as contrasts to the extremism of the female characters.
If the women of the story divest faith of reason or science of faith, the men in the story
adopt a “real-world” view of the question of faith cure. The men in the story, despite their
flaws, simply know better than to succumb to the irrational assumptions that gird
metaphysical healing. Undoubtedly, Eggleston chose to play out the story’s conflict through
his female characters because he (like most Progressive-Era Americans) believed women to be the driving force behind the movement’s popularity. If the reader is to take one “moral” from Eggleston’s story, it is the importance of “common sense” in religious life – a common sense that the women characters in the story desperately lack. Ultimately, the narrative reveals the complicated intersections of gender, science, and religion in the nineteenth century – and the central place of language in working through these various cultural threads. This project, then, attempts to outline these intersections and their powerful (if largely ignored) impact on women’s religious discourse during the period.

**Liberal Expressions of the Debate between Religion and Science**

Eggleston participated in a much broader cultural conversation when he published his narrative, a debate through which nineteenth-century Americans attempted to define the boundaries between religion and science and negotiate between the powerful discourses of Christianity and liberalism. As a philosophical tradition, liberalism was born in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during the period commonly referred to as the Enlightenment, and it was unquestionably the most powerful intellectual influence on America’s founding fathers.² Historian Henry May poses two central premises of an Enlightenment worldview: first, people of the present age possess a fuller understanding of the world than those of the past; and second, this progress is achieved through the exercise of the universal rational faculty of mankind (162). Given its investment in reason, liberalism (as well as its offspring, modern science) has often been viewed as incompatible with religion, both in the nineteenth century and today. Indeed, a liberal worldview devalues appeals to tradition, religious authority, or faith, on which certain types of religious discourse depend (Crowley, *Toward 15*).³ As a consequence, recent scholarship in rhetoric, such as
Crowley’s, has portrayed a contemporary public climate torn between the competing discourse of Christian fundamentalism and secular liberalism (Toward).

By contrast, religious historians, such as May and Hatch, have long since recognized the unique intersection of Enlightenment liberalism and Protestant Christianity in America during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. May identifies a “great revolutionary alliance” between “Enlightenment, radical Protestantism, and democracy” during the Jeffersonian Era, a heritage that remained visible (if diluted) in nineteenth century American religion (168). Although Protestantism had lost much of its radical force by late in the century, many Americans retained the Enlightenment’s modernist spirit and remained devoted to a genuinely liberal Protestantism. In an effort to articulate the influence of liberal principles on religious discourse, this project centers on three assumptions shared by secular and sacred liberals: a belief in progress in human life and knowledge, reason as the foundation for that progress, and the sanctity of individual authority. This section briefly outlines the implications of these assumptions for the debate between religion and science, laying the foundation for my discussion of metaphysical healing in the following chapter.

Liberalism manifested itself in particular ways when asked to subsist beside the equally powerful values of Christianity, as it was in nineteenth-century America. In the introduction to his excellent history of liberal religion in America, Dorrien argues that the defining characteristic of the theological tradition is its search for a “third way” between the unyielding orthodoxy of traditional Christianity and the dangerous heathenism of materialism (xiv). Providing a lengthy but useful definition of the theology, Dorrien explains:

Liberal Christian theology is a tradition that derives from the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Protestant attempt to reconceptualize the
meaning of traditional Christian teaching in the light of modern knowledge and modern ethical values. It is not revolutionary but reformist in spirit and substance. Fundamentally it is the idea of a genuine Christianity not based on external authority. Liberal theology seeks to reinterpret the symbols of traditional Christianity in a way that creates a progressive religious alternative to atheistic rationalism and to theologies based on external authority.

Specifically, liberal theology is defined by its openness to the verdicts of modern intellectual inquiry, especially the natural and social sciences; its commitment to the authority of individual reason and experience; its conception of Christianity as an ethical way of life; its favoring moral concepts of atonement; and its commitment to make Christianity credible and socially relevant to modern people. (xxiii)

At the heart of Dorrien’s description of liberal Christianity is not simply its inherent progressivism – but its explicit understanding of itself as a progressive and “civilizing” form of religion (xiv). Liberal Christians embraced rather than feared the relentless march of progress, although they defined “progress” in highly moralistic, Victorian terms. While blind obedience to religious authority would stymie scientific and political progress, a godless materialism would lead to the moral degeneration of the race. Therefore, liberals inferred, the appropriate strategy was to develop a form of Protestantism that would be compatible with the rapid and undeniable scientific advancements that were reshaping the world.

As Dorrien’s definition reflects, the liberal spirit in religion was expressed in two interrelated attitudes – a faith in progress and an understanding that “modern” religion should reflect the spirit of the age. The progressive stance of liberal Christianity was rooted in particular theological doctrine, adapted to the historical context of late nineteenth-century
America. At the core of liberal Christianity and its attitude toward modernity are post-millennial beliefs. Millennial thought (including both pre-millennialism and post-millennialism) addresses the Apocalypse as described in the New Testament; the different versions of millennialism derive specifically from varying interpretations of Revelation 20:1-7, which prophesizes that Christ will return to judge the earth and reign for a thousand years. Post-millennialists, including liberal Christians, believe that Christ will return after human effort has brought about a thousand years of peace, and they consequently view the moral and spiritual progress of American society as the manifestation of God’s work. Through Protestantism, human beings will gradually come into a fuller understanding of God’s law – both spiritual and natural (which is understood as God’s law as reflected in the physical world). As a result of these assumptions, postmillennialists possess a strong sense of agency over the earthly world – and a duty to improve it.

Given its simultaneous investment in both Christianity and modernity, liberal religion in America coupled the old Protestant image of the “City of God” and the urban ethos of the late nineteenth-century. Many Americans between the Civil War and World War I viewed the nation as a beacon of hope, justice, and righteousness (although this stance became more difficult as the triumph of the first conflict faded into the despair of the second). In *The Divided Mind of Protestant America, 1880-1930*, Ferenc Morton Szasz describes a central affirmation of liberal religion to be God’s presence in the affairs of men (68). This theological tenet implies that human progress is a coming into being of God’s will – that scientific observations are evidence of his presence and secular advancements a validation of society’s righteous path. Describing this attitude, Szasz emphasizes the desire of progressives to bring the Kingdom of God into being on earth, but he also suggests that the unifying aspect of liberals’ various understandings of this kingdom was specifically the
improvement of social conditions (44). The coming into being of this Kingdom would be visible in the development of human society, the result of the struggle to make the world a more civilized and Christian place.⁵

As it manifested in the late nineteenth-century, the great debate between science and religion was an expression of this larger cultural desire for a progressive Christianity. Some Americans, appealing to their audience’s faith in modernity, argued that such an advanced institutionalized religion was impossible or at least improbable; they adopted the familiar approach of contrasting a progressive scientism with a reactionary religiosity. For example, John William Draper, a professor at the University of New York, published a lengthy treatise on the topic in 1874 that he titled History of the Conflict between Religion and Science. Modern science represents in Draper’s text the ideal liberal discourse, seeking to discover the absolute laws of the universe. Identifying the dichotomy between law-governed and faith-based discourses, Draper begins, “[F]aith is in its nature unchangeable, stationary; Science is in its nature progressive; and eventually a divergence between them, impossible to conceal, must take place” (vii). Draper proceeds to outline four historical conflicts since the birth of Christianity between religion and science. The fifth, current controversy he describe as “a controversy respecting the government of the world, whether it be by incessant divine intervention, or by the operation of primordial and unchangeable law” (xv). A human being can only obey one master, Draper suggests – blind faith or the laws of reason. And although he claims to present a “clear and impartial statement of the view and acts of the two contending parties,” Draper leaves no question as to which master he prefers and presents a rather bleak outlook for any resolution (ix). Draper’s thesis, that the historical record demonstrates institutionalized religion’s strident opposition to science, became highly influential in the closing decades of the nineteenth-century.⁶
However, Draper’s views were hardly universal, only one of an array of living hypotheses regarding the relationship between religion and science open to nineteenth-century Americans. Many believers outside of Draper’s university circle painted a more optimistic picture of a nation that could be both Christian and scientific. Indeed, much influential Protestant theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries encouraged Christians in their hope that humankind could advance their understanding of the spiritual world. Common Sense Realism or the Scottish Philosophy, which “tried to give solid metaphysical content to common-sense acceptances,” flourished on both sides of the Atlantic during the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century (Ahlstrom 355). These theologies (like secular philosophies of the period) privileged the universal human faculty of “common sense” and suggested a correspondence between empirical reality and that perceived by the human mind; they confirmed the spiritual authority of the “everyday” Christian and the compatibility of faith and reason. In antebellum America, these assumptions about “common-sense” manifested themselves in the vigorous search for empirical verification of Biblical revelation through metaphysical events, a quest that suited the evangelical temper of the Second Great Awakening (Porterfield, “Protestant Experience,” Cpt. 2). These supernatural occurrences validated individual religious experience for evangelicals, while easing tensions between metaphysical beliefs and the scientific temper of the age. Because of its investment in the common-sense of experience, historian Sydney Ahlstrom described these theologies as “precisely the kind of apologetic philosophy that Christians in the Age of Reason needed” (356). These “common-sense” approaches to religious life comforted Christians, assuring them that the spiritual world was compatible with the physical world and thus could be understood.
Although the interest in supernatural experiences had diminished by the late nineteenth-century, both the desire for and many of the assumptions supporting a scientific religion remained constant. Foremost, liberal Christians of the late nineteenth century often blended the “natural” and “spiritual” together in their understanding of the order that governed the world. From a Christian perspective, God had enacted both the physical and natural laws apparent to science and the moral order of spiritual life. “Common-sense” was thus in a manner both rational and moral. Religious historian William Hutchinson emphasizes that liberal religion of different varieties was “less an effort to adjust religion to culture than an attempted renunciation of the long-standing and singular commitment in Western thought to what seemed an artificial distinction between the two” (9). In other words, he argues, liberal theology did not acknowledge a distinction “between sacred and secular, between a starting point in revelation and a starting point in reason or in science” (8). Liberal Christians in this mold rejected Draper’s thesis because they refused to acknowledge the dichotomy upon which it rested, the so-called conflict between Biblical and scientific epistemologies.  

The work adopting this perspective that was likely the best known to late nineteenth-century Americans was Henry Drummond’s 1890 text, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. Drummond’s primary purpose is to debunk the myth that science and religion should be separated because one obeys the laws of the seen while the other the laws of the unseen; he explains, “The position we have been led to take up is not that the Spiritual Laws are analogous to the Natural Laws, but that they are the same Laws... – Laws which at one end... may be dealing with Matter, at the other end with Spirit” (11). Like all good liberals, Drummond abandons a theology based on “Authority rather than Law,” but he does not abandon theology altogether (21). Instead, he hopes to increase faith by demonstrating that
the Spiritual World is not arbitrary or “a castle in the air, of an architecture unknown to earth or heaven, but a fair ordered realm furnished with many familiar things and ruled by well-remembered laws” (26). Only a fuller understanding of these laws can satisfy the “scientific demand of the age” and keep faith alive for modern Christians (23). If theology has not yet achieved this scientific standard, Drummond soothes his readers, it is only because “in the order of evolution [it] should be the last to fall into rank” (17). Religion, if given the necessary time to progress, would prove itself scientific.

In affirming the existence of immutable spiritual laws, Drummond did not reject the necessity of faith. A Christian identity implies that one accepts certain central premises: the existence of an omnipresent Creator, the divinity of Christ, and the possibility of salvation through faith. Instead, the primary significance of Drummond’s work is his assumption that all human beings possess the natural faculty to understand these laws. Rather than undoing the fundamental tenets of Protestant thought, liberal beliefs internalized the process of achieving spiritual understanding and thus redefined spiritual authority. Religious historian Leigh Eric Schmidt closely links religious liberalism to the emphasis on personal “spirituality” in nineteenth-century America. According to Schmidt, liberal Protestants understood the foundation of religious life to be not doctrine or tradition but the “individualized search to imbue this life with spiritual meaning” (13). Liberalism, from this perspective, “was always as much a religious vision of emancipated souls as a political theory of individual rights and civil liberties or an economic calculus of the beneficence of free markets” (11). As this description suggests, the liberal emphasis on “common-sense” proved highly compatible with the Protestant affirmation of individual spiritual experience. Most significantly, Protestant theology dovetailed with secular liberalism in challenging external authority, including that of the mainstream Church.
Because they believed that the individual mind was the epistemological foundation for religious truth, liberal Protestants were deeply suspicious of orthodox doctrine and the men ordained to perpetuate it. Catholicism in particular aroused the ire of American Protestants for its continuing affirmation of the authority of the church fathers (as it had since the Reformation). The development of the parochial school network during the Progressive Era was especially troubling to non-Catholics, who deemed the practice contrary to the principles of religious freedom and the separation of church and state (Handy 232). The labeling of parochial education as “un-American” (despite the protests of Catholic leadership) is particularly telling. The main function of a liberal education system was to develop the rational faculties of children and, in so doing, create an informed citizenry. From the perspective of liberal Protestants, to place a religious authority above common-sense or reason was to impede social progress. Yet these liberals never argued that education did not have an obligation to develop the moral character of students. In fact, education through much of the nineteenth-century adopted an explicitly moralistic tone, linking a classical curriculum with orthodox piety (Marsden 14). Liberals instead protested primarily against what they saw as “blind” obedience to human authority, which they believed to be as detrimental to spiritual life as it was to secular life.

Attacking the archaic religion of a less enlightened time, many liberals championed a new faith that would be guided as much by the nation’s universities as by its churches. Andrew D. White, co-founder and first president of Cornell University, followed Draper’s lead by publishing in 1896 his mammoth *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*. White explicitly identifies his interest in the topic with the struggles he and Ezra Cornell faced in founding the university, which he attributes to the charter’s non-sectarian stance and focus on scientific education. Revising Draper’s thesis, White names the struggle
not as one between “Science and Religion” but between “Science and Dogmatic Theology” (ix). This distinction between “Religion” and “Dogmatic Theology” is central to White’s understanding of the conflict he is describing, for it allows him to differentiate a faith plausible in the modern, scientific world from one based on “biblical texts and ancient modes of thought” (xii). White argues that “ideas and beliefs regarding the Supreme Power in the universe are progressive,” so he attacks not all religious beliefs but those he sees as reactionary (393). Praising the contributions of comparative religion and literature, mythology and folklore, and anthropology to religious thought, White concludes:

If … modern science in general has acted powerfully to dissolve away the theories and dogmas of the older theological interpretation, it has also been active in a reconstruction and recrystallization of truth… In the light thus obtained the sacred text has been transformed: … out of the old welter of hopelessly conflicting statements in religion and morals has come … the idea of a sacred literature which mirrors the most striking evolution of morals and religion in the history of our race … exhibiting to us the most complete religious development to which humanity has attained…. (394-395)

From White’s perspective, religion and science would prove not only highly compatible but mutually beneficial, if the “old conception of our Bible as a collection of oracles” could be washed away (395). Like all liberals, he believed strongly in the authority of reason over that of “blind” faith, prophecy, or church authority.

It should be emphasized that a stance such as White’s denounces “arbitrary” authority based on tradition or doctrine while still allowing for a “professional” authority grounded in reason and understanding. Neither White nor Draper describe an intrinsic incompatibility between all forms of religion and science but instead suggest a fierce struggle
by religious leaders to stymie the advancement of scientific knowledge. In other words, they both suggest that the hostility between these two perspectives is political – a consequence of the desire for power. White implies a political conflict by beginning with the story of Cornell’s founding and the demands he and his co-founder faced to choose a sect. Draper is even more explicit in his suggestion that the “antagonism … between Religion and Science is the continuation of a struggle that commenced when Christianity began to attain political power” (vi). Like White, Draper only suggests an incompatibility between science and certain forms of religion, such as Catholicism, which “claim to be the sole interpreter of Nature and revelation, the supreme arbiter of knowledge” (362). By contrast, Protestantism and science could coexist in harmony if only it would faithfully uphold its cardinal principle, “the right of private interpretation of the Scriptures” (363). Draper’s raging anti-Catholicism and liberal devotion to reason go hand in hand, primarily because so many nineteenth-century Christians interpreted Catholicism as “blind” obedience to earthly authority. This argument, however, does not necessarily imply the abolition of the clergy in favor of a spiritual free-for-all (although some radical Christians did promote just that). Instead, these liberal assumptions more often authorized the authority of a professional minister whose reasoned teachings could be affirmed through individual Biblical study. This negotiation between individual and professional authority will be a constant theme throughout this project.

A major argument of this study will be that metaphysical healers participated in this cultural conversation regarding the relationship between science and religion. As this section suggests, the questions that drove this conversation were epistemological: Were science and Christianity intrinsically antithetical worldviews? Or could Americans develop a “scientific” Christianity? While some liberals did argue that the two worldviews were incompatible, liberal Protestantism left open a space for some in which natural and spiritual law could be
theoretically unified as part of a single, knowable system. Indeed, theories of metaphysical healing were perhaps the most widely read and debated attempts to answer these questions and resolve the tension between liberalism and Christianity. The following section reviews the major branches of metaphysical healing, in order to refine this claim and define and distinguish these different responses to the “great debate.”

**Defining the Branches of Metaphysical Healing**

Eggleston’s novella further testifies to the exigency of metaphysical healing for Americans of the late nineteenth century, even as its representations of these practices are often unfair and misleading. Eggleston associates metaphysical healing practices with emotionality and a belief in miracles, representing them as feminine (and consequently deleterious), but in doing so, he elides perhaps the most important cultural function the movement and the underlying reason for the public interest it generated. The issue of metaphysical healing, like the theory of evolution, forced believers to consider whether religious truth was compatible with, analogous to, or in opposition to scientific study. In contrast to evolutionary theory, however, metaphysical theologies offered many Christians a means of reconciling their religious principles with their modern faith in rationality and progress. Theories of metaphysical healing influenced by liberal Protestantism denied any distinction between natural and spiritual law, suggesting that religious truth could be explained through systematic means. So while many Christians understood the theory of evolution to be antagonistic to Biblical teachings, they often saw metaphysical theologies as the expression of a truly “scientific” Christianity. The intense public debate over metaphysical healing must be placed within the context of this broader effort to unify the Christian and liberal
worldviews, if the full significance of Eggleston’s gendered depictions of the practice is to be made clear.

The metaphysical healing movement is an important nineteenth-century expression of a much longer tradition in American religion; it is a rearticulation of persistent theological commonplaces to meet the needs of a particular historical moment: in this case, to resolve the tension between liberalism and Christianity. In her sweeping history of metaphysical religion, Catherine Albanese places within the metaphysical tradition those manifestations of religiosity that “[privilege] the mind in forms that include reason but move beyond it to intuition, clairvoyance, and its relatives such as ‘revelation’ and ‘higher guidance’” (Republic of Mind and Spirit 6). Albanese emphasizes that proponents of metaphysical religions generally resisted institutional structures and orthodox religious authority and thus organized in communities that were more “fluid and egalitarian” (8). Therefore, she defines metaphysical religion not as a set of communal liturgical practices or doctrines but as a shared spiritual “mentality” characterized by four “themes” or beliefs: Foremost, metaphysicians are preoccupied with “consciousness” or the powers of the mind broadly conceived. Second, they advance various theories of correspondence between the “macrocosm” (the spiritual world or Mind) and the “microcosm” (the material or human world). Third, they emphasize “movement and energy” as a means of explaining the relationship between these two worlds. And finally, they describe salvation in earthy or pragmatic terms, as a process of healing (not necessarily but often physical healing) through which the separation between the spiritual and material world is overcome (13-15).

Not surprisingly, Albanese’s four characteristics of metaphysical religion overlap in important ways with the three themes I am using in this project to address liberal theology. Liberal and metaphysical theologies share a suspicion of orthodox religious authority and an
investment in the pragmatic effects of faith in the world, which makes them tangibly if not inherently sympathetic. But more importantly, metaphysical theories of correspondence provide philosophical justification for the harmony of reason and faith. Liberal Protestants during the period, seeking a viable vision of progressive religion, often found it in metaphysical theories that unified the spiritual and material in a coherent system.

Specifically, these theories of correspondence confirmed two important assumptions of nineteenth-century religious liberalism: first, human beings could achieve an improved understanding of the order governing the spiritual world; and second, reason confirms faith rather than existing in opposition to it. In short, the theologies of metaphysical healing I discuss in this project are a manifestation of the overlap between liberal and metaphysical religiosities, although these two types of religion should not be universally conflated. I have chosen to address metaphysical healing (as opposed to another form of liberal religion) because of its prevalence in the late nineteenth-century, the heavily gendered constructions of the practice in popular culture, and its usefulness in explicating the fundamental concerns of liberal Protestantism.

The public debate over the issue of metaphysical healing frequently conflated the array of such practices available to nineteenth-century Americans, collapsing all of them under the rubric of “Christian Science.” Titus Munson Coan opened his 1888 piece in The Chautauquan with a question: “What is the thing, essentially, that we call mind-cure, will-cure, Christian Science, – for all these forms of creed and practice are substantially one” (607)? However, Coan’s accusation was largely a straw-man argument, as he implied that the various metaphysical healing movements were so fatuous that they could be conflated without concern. In actuality, proponents of mind-cure, faith healing, and Christian Science differed widely in their assumptions and in their assessment of the relationship between
religion and science. Americans formed a variety of opinions regarding the efficacy of metaphysical healing precisely because of these distinctions; they often accepted one philosophy of “mind over matter” while rejecting another as irrational, degenerative, or even deceptive. For the purposes of this project, it is important to both distinguish between the various metaphysical philosophies and recognize the significance of the broader cultural push for a “scientific Christianity.”

I use the term *metaphysical healing* to define healing practices that explain their effects in terms that are not physical or biological, as the nineteenth-century subjects of this project did. In an 1899 article in a medical journal, M.L. Holbrook defined the term as “healing not by material things, by air, water, food, medicine … but non-material ones, or by producing mental states which favor health.” As Holbrook’s definition reflects, the term metaphysical healing did not necessarily carry a religious connotation for nineteenth-century Americans. Holbrook describes the metaphysical merely as “a realm that is not physical, although it may be related to it[,] and that embraces mind.” Americans of the period did frequently associate the metaphysical with the divine and explain cures in terms that were specifically Christian. However, such an association was not intrinsic to many metaphysical theories of healing. For example, physicians (like Holbrook) often divested the metaphysical of divine or spiritual connotations in an effort to justify its use in their practices.

The popularity of metaphysical healing in the late nineteenth-century reflected an emerging trend in both religion and medicine regarding the construction of suffering. Nineteenth-century religion and medicine provided new (and less positive) interpretations of suffering that reinforced each other and encouraged exploration into alternative cures more generally. Americans increasingly rejected the assumption behind “heroic” medicine that suffering was a necessary part of healing, as well as challenging the theological assumption
that physical suffering was a means to grace.\textsuperscript{10} These ideas provided Americans with a new sense of agency and inspired them to explore a variety of avenues for treating their physical ailments, avenues not limited by any deference to the medical profession.\textsuperscript{11} Even many doctors, particularly eclectics, spoke positively of the ensuing pluralism in health care, as it reflected a sense of hope that had been rare in the treatment of disease. Observing in 1892, C.R. Hammerton lauded the new “liberalism of the age” in medicine and suggested that it would lead to more effective practices (163). The numerous alternative cures available to nineteenth-century Americans, including metaphysical healing, represented their increasing optimism that suffering was not an integral or inevitable part of human experience.

Theories of metaphysical healing in the nineteenth-century can be most easily and usefully divided into two camps: those reliant on religious explanations, which can be called \textit{divine healing}; and those reliant on medical or scientific explanations, which can be called \textit{mental therapeutics}.\textsuperscript{12} Faith healing is the type of divine healing most familiar to Americans and most frequently practiced by Christians today. Proponents of \textit{faith cure} are continuationists who believe that the ability to heal is a gift bestowed on certain members of the church by the Holy Spirit. They assume that miracles such as healing are not limited to the early church but are still a valid expression of faith in the world today. As H.M. Dexter explained to the readers of \textit{The Chautauquan} in 1890, faith cure “holds that … miraculous powers of healing … are a normal and perpetual part of the furnishing of the same [Christian church today]; so that in all times and in every place … ‘the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick’” (715).\textsuperscript{13} Proponents of faith healing believe that Christ’s atonement promises both physical and spiritual redemption; they further teach that physical redemption requires spiritual redemption and a high degree of personal holiness. Pentecostals are the most significant example of a community with a continuationist belief in faith healing today,
although they did not share a coherent religious identity until the opening decades of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{14}

Americans, both in the nineteenth century and today, often confuse Christian Science with faith cure and assume that Christian Scientists practice faith healing. However, the theological assumptions of Christian Science are fundamentally different from that of faith cure. Although nineteenth-century Christians sometimes used the term “Christian science” to describe their ideal religion, I will use \textit{Christian Science} to identify the denomination founded by Mary Baker Eddy, the Church of Christ, Scientist. W.B. Carman described the central theological principles of this emerging religion in 1887: “The Christian Scientist claims to understand the truth and the relations between God and man; and to apply the truth remedially by concentrating thought upon the fact that the sickness, and the body of the patient[,]… are creatures of a false belief; that the sufferer is really only spirit, which cannot be sick” (332). As Carman’s description reflects, members of this denomination do not believe that healing is a divine gift but a spiritual law. From this perspective, any enlightened Christian could utilize the divine Principle of Christian Science to heal themselves or others.\textsuperscript{15} An array of smaller communities developed in the late nineteenth century that understood healing as a function of divine law, including some founded by Eddy’s renegade students. These groups are generally classified together as the \textit{New Thought movement}, although they never formed a discrete denomination and exhibit a wide range of theological beliefs.\textsuperscript{16} Collectively, these theologies represent the broader, informal movement for a \textit{scientific Christianity}, the focus of this study.

While the various manifestations of divine healing garnered the most attention in the nineteenth century, not all metaphysical healers explicitly adopted a Christian stance. The pluralism of the profession and new popular constructions of wellbeing encouraged
substantial exploration into mind-cure by physicians. Nineteenth-century Americans occasionally used the term mind-cure as I use metaphysical healing, to identify the range of non-material therapeutics. However, the term more accurately and appropriately identifies a treatment that doctors and patients perceived as scientific rather than spiritual. A form of mental therapeutics, mind-cure shares the investment of Christian Science in definitive laws of health but differs significantly in interpretation. Hammerton explains mind-cure to his nineteenth-century audience: “Most of us have laughed at the mind cure craze … but there are important natural laws at the bottom of it” (162). Hammerton emphasizes the assumption of mind-curists that the principles of healing could be explained and controlled without divine intervention or faith. It is also important to note that mind-cure (like mesmerism) raised serious questions regarding human agency for nineteenth-century Americans. Most understood this practice to reflect, as Dexter explained it, “the direct influence of a strong will over a weaker one” (715). (These concerns about agency often extended to divine healing, if the “stronger will” was perceived in actually to be a religious figure as opposed to God.) Even if they were not willing to support scientific explanations of mind-cure, many physicians acknowledged its usefulness and advocated the practice for patients whose problems were presumably not physical, such as hysterics.

It is important to note that the manifestations of metaphysical healing highlighted here are only a minute sample of the diverse healing practices available in the Christian tradition. Religious historian Amanda Porterfield has described Christianity as a “religion of healing” and identified the practice as a reoccurring meme throughout the religion’s history (3). Indeed, nineteenth-century Christians themselves often represented their healing practices as a legacy inherited from the early church. Nevertheless, the metaphysical healing movement bares the marks of its nineteenth century followers and reflects their particular
interests and concerns regarding the relationship of Christianity and science. This project specifically addresses “scientific Christianity” (as opposed to faith healing or mental therapeutics) because these theologies vividly reflect the desire of nineteenth-century Americans to develop a religion that was both devout and progressive. As this project will demonstrate, this particular snapshot in the history of American religion reveals the primacy of liberal theology, its significance for religious discourse, and the possibilities and challenges of a liberal religious discourse for female rhetors. The following section turns to a discussion of women’s religious discourse, arguing that the historical narrative has been dominated by evangelical models of discourse at the expense of the liberal religious models provided by female metaphysicians.

**Gendering Religious Discourse**

Both nineteenth-century Americans and contemporary scholars have noted that women dominated the metaphysical healing movement in the nineteenth century. During this period, articles such as the *New York Times* piece that opened this chapter noted with amusement or distain the number of women involved in these practices. Historian Paul Eli Ivey confirms the observations of believers by suggesting that approximately seventy percent of Christian Scientists during the Progressive Era were women (30). While historians have begun addressing the movement with a focus on gender (Curtis; Satter), scholars of rhetoric have largely ignored it as a forum for women’s religious discourse. Gill suggests that this neglect may be in part due to the reluctance of feminist scholars to address conservative or religious women, as these figures often do not share their active political stance on gender issues (xviii). However, the array of scholarship on women’s religious rhetoric suggests that this gap is at least partly due to an overemphasis on evangelical and revivalist rhetoric at the
expense of other traditions. While the remaining chapters are an effort to move beyond this limited focus, this section first addresses the impact of evangelicalism on women’s religious rhetoric in the nineteenth century.

Scholars in both rhetoric and religious studies have highlighted the power of evangelical femininity to justify public roles for women. Evangelical rhetorics challenged the authority of the traditional male preacher by stressing the equality of all Christians and privileging individual experience and personal spirituality. Consequently, these discourses deemphasized the significance of formal biblical scholarship and theological education, opportunities reserved almost exclusively for white men. Revivalists instead assumed that personal experience and “common sense” was all that was necessary to interpret Scripture accurately (Hardesty, *Your Daughters* 61). The fiery revival preachers of the nineteenth century spoke not to convince their listeners through formal exegesis but to elicit the fear and trembling that would bring them closer to God. Revivalist crowds relished in oration that could touch the hearts of sinners, and they identified most closely with figures who could articulate the difficult spiritual journey to salvation. For role models, evangelicals chronicled the exploits of spiritual prodigies, young preachers who could incite mass conversions with their untutored words (Heyrman 78). For believers, such expressions of piety could only have come from God himself and reflected the spiritual character of the speaker. Both women and men of lower social stations seized on this image of the revivalist preacher to lend credibility to their religious rhetoric. By 1850, more than one hundred women, most itinerants, had preached to the burgeoning evangelical congregations of the United States (Brekus).

Further scholarship on gender and nineteenth-century religion has highlighted the formation of a Protestant ethos that was distinctly feminine, an image of the ideal Christian
that was particularly powerful for Americans in the middle of the century. In her seminal work on nineteenth-century American culture, historian Ann Douglas outlined the “feminization” of American religion during the period and its corresponding emphasis on morality and personal piety. As Douglas points out, older, conservative methods of worship centered on the figure of the preacher and highlighted his moral character, rigorous education, and ability to guide his congregation through reasoned oratory. By contrast, distinctively evangelical traits (such as humility, self-abasement, emotionality, and physical intimacy) were emphasized in sentimental culture and corresponded to traditional, womanly virtues. Even male evangelical clergymen frequently seized on this sentimental ethos to affirm their spiritual authority, often forging close relationships with the women in their congregations to gain support in the community (Heyrman 170). In short, because they closely linked femininity with morality and piety, revivalists envisioned the ideal Christian as inherently “womanly.”

The contradictory implications for women of a sentimental Christian ethos have remained a consistent theme in scholarship on both nineteenth-century religion and rhetoric. The sentimental bent of revivalist culture reinforced the nineteenth-century archetype of the pious “Angel,” but it also encouraged certain forms of public participation by women. Female rhetors frequently adopted the language of Christian piety to assert their moral superiority and consequently argued that their presence in public life was essential. Historian Virginia Brereton emphasizes that female evangelicals understood the revivalist work of conversion as a “moral and civic as well as spiritual necessity” (5). In many cases, women drew on evangelical assumptions to justify their right to speak not only on spiritual subjects but also on other moral or social issues. Nancy Hardesty has argued that the feminist movement in the nineteenth century was deeply influenced by evangelical revivalism
Women Called). She emphasizes that the Methodist Holiness movement united individual and social perfection and that its members often viewed women’s rights as a sign of the approaching Millennium (42). Similarly, rhetoricians have highlighted the ways in which women adopted a Christian ethos to justify their reform activity (Bacon; Mattingly, Well-Tempered Women). For example, Patricia Bizzell argues that reformer Francis Willard developed an effective rhetorical ethos by “evoking the gender ideology… [of] the ‘Cult of True Womanhood,’ which enjoined upon women piety, purity, submission to male authority, and motherly domesticity” (378). Bizzell traces Willard’s strategy specifically to the platform oratory of early Methodist women preachers, illustrating the intimate connection between a Christian ethos and public roles for women.

Yet this work also suggests that a distinctively feminine ethos was not universally beneficial to the growth of women’s religious discourse. Even relatively tolerant evangelical communities, such as the Methodists, described female religious orators as exceptional and largely limited their rhetoric to forms other than traditional preaching. John Wesley, who founded the Methodist movement in the mid-eighteenth century, recognized that women comprised a significant portion of his following and that they could fill an important role in expanding the fledgling faith. Consequently, early Methodist women (such as Mary Bosanquet Fletcher, Hester Rogers, and Sarah Crosby) mentored individuals in spiritual matters, led classes, gave public testimony, exhorted, or occasionally preached scripture (Collins 338). However, Wesley simultaneously affirmed the Pauline injunction against female preaching and limited this activity to a small number of women with an “extraordinary call” from God (Bizzell 380). This argument persisted throughout the revivals of the nineteenth century, limiting the public roles of evangelical women. According to Susan Hill Lindley, even apparently “spontaneous” revival meetings were carefully
structured, with the primary preaching and leadership roles reserved for men. Such “exceptional” female preaching, Lindley cautions, “[was] not the same thing as equal and formal religious leadership for women” (61).

Moreover, both historians and rhetoricians have noted that nineteenth-century Americans easily assimilated notions of “feminine” spirituality with the prevailing ideology of separate spheres. According to this doctrine, men utilized their greater intellectual powers in the public realm, while women served as the spiritual guardians of the home. As domestic religious figures, women were expected to provide informal instruction and nurture the souls of their family members – to be the “saviors of their sons and husbands” when they strayed from the path of righteousness (McDannell 129). These views largely limited women’s rhetorical practices, both secular and religious, to those that would cultivate feminine virtues. As Nan Johnson explains, educators in the nineteenth century emphasized letter writing and other “domestic” genres for proper women, justifying their decision with Christian ideology. Similarly, manuals and periodicals instructed women in appropriate forms of religious rhetoric, such as private prayer, translations of the New Testament, hymn singing, and the artistic arrangement of religious artifacts (McDannell 134). Vicki Tolar Collins argues that Hester Rogers served as a female exemplar for the (now firmly established) Methodist church precisely because she did not practice the masculine art of preaching. Rogers’ widely circulated spiritual journal instead “portray[ed] a deep private piety that Methodist leaders endorsed as a model for women” (350). In other words, Methodists leaders after Wesley’s death promoted a nonthreatening form of feminine spiritual discourse that allowed them to stress Rogers’ “virtue as wife, mother, and teacher” (351). Sentimental culture therefore constricted women’s religious discourse to certain forms and content, even as it served to authorize women as speakers on spiritual subjects.
Because such emphasis has been placed on an evangelical tradition with ambivalent consequences for women, the scholarly narrative of female religious discourse is often one of degeneration. Indeed, the broader trends in evangelical leadership were beginning to stymie the opportunities of female preachers by the late nineteenth century. Although Methodists and Baptists represented only a small portion of the American population at the start of the nineteenth-century, their enormous revivals and mass conversions made them the two largest Protestant denominations in the country by 1850 (Hudson 97). The new respectability of their evangelical faith elicited increasing, rather than decreasing, hostility to female preaching from church leaders and members. As Laura Vance suggests, this “religious maturation and change may affect the allotment of authority on the basis of gender” (2). In other words, as they become less marginalized, religious sects become more willing to compromise with the views of larger society, including views on gender. Sadly but not surprisingly, assimilation into American culture required evangelical leaders to restrict women’s preaching and deny its significant influence. As Catherine Brekus suggests, clergymen “traded their tradition of female evangelicalism for greater power and respectability” and “began to deny that they had every allowed women into the pulpit” (271). As their evangelical denominations gained respectability, women thus faced even greater pressure to conform to the sentimental image of the good Christian woman and significantly less opportunity to leverage this image into a public voice.

This narrative of degeneration has been reinforced by current work on traditional preaching in the late nineteenth century. Scholarship suggests that Victorian preachers in America began to stress rhetorical practices and theories that reinforced the public, masculine nature of the art. Roxanne Mountford describes a shift in American preaching during the nineteenth-century, which placed a greater emphasis on the character of the
preacher himself (41). As Mountford explains, Americans modeled this ministerial character after idyllic “leader-heroes … the ideal man of the late Victorian period” (42). In large part, this cultural desire for white, male heroes in the clergy grew in response to anxieties over effeminate, evangelical preachers. Deprived of their traditional status markers, their education and unique spiritual insight, evangelical ministers struggled for a means of building ethos in the pulpit. Protestant preachers consequently adopted new strategies for gaining authority and credibility as religious leaders. Mountford suggests that the masculine body of the preacher became an important marker of his character. By contrast, Russel Hirst emphasizes the growing importance of clerical professionalism in the late nineteenth-century. According to this model, the minister gained spiritual and rhetorical authority by means of his personal power, social status, wealth, and individual activity (Hirst 83).

Undoubtedly, these shifts in clerical character reinforced each other – and distinguished the “real” preacher from the women speaking informally at revivals and camp meetings. By the end of the century, the representative type for the Protestant preacher had shifted from the feminine evangelical to the “manly man,” educated, authoritative, and protective.

My purpose in this project is largely to move beyond the degenerative evangelical narrative of women’s religious discourse in America. The spiritual discourse of women was stymied in the late nineteenth century in many respects, particularly if this discourse is restricted to preaching. But the portrait I am painting of female religious rhetoric in the late nineteenth-century is in many respects more optimistic. Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins produced thousands of pages, making them two of the most prolific religious rhetors of the period. Their fame and productivity suggests two important trends regarding women’s spiritual rhetoric: only certain forms of religious discourse by women were declining; and preaching held at best a tenuous position above the alternative, written forms
of spiritual rhetoric that were more accessible to women. In short, I am suggesting that Eddy and Hopkins have been largely ignored in the field of rhetoric because they do not fit the scholarly portrait of either the preacher or the evangelical. The following chapters therefore emphasize an alternative, liberal tradition that flourished in the late nineteenth century, in an effort to offer new and more useful models to address the religious rhetoric of women like Eddy and Hopkins.

**Conclusion**

As the following chapters will demonstrate, the liberal perspective of late nineteenth-century religion did not so much change how Protestants understood their relationship with God as it determined how they presented that faith to others. Addressing the relationship between religion and rhetoric, Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted argue that “religion must be conceived of not as a revelation of an unalterable, fully known truth but rather as an idea mediated by discourse and the human attempt to evaluate and improve our religious commitments through discourse” (“Introduction to Part I” 11). I would suggest that the nineteenth-century Christians addressed in the following chapters largely share Jost and Olmsted’s vision of the mediated nature of religious discourse. For metaphysical healers and many of their critics, secular and religious periodicals offered a space to work through difficult theological questions. While these believers never questioned the authority of the Bible or the importance of faith in reaching religious truth, they did carefully evaluate the nature of religious discourse, with a clear sense that their debates on spiritual subjects represented not God’s word but God’s word as manifested in the world of men and women. In other word, the pragmatic stance of liberal religion allowed Christians to evaluate religious discourse not as “true” or “false” but as more or less effective in producing a more Christian
world. This self-conscious stance makes the religious liberals of this project novel theorists and practitioners of religious discourse – and fruitful subjects for developing our understanding of the resources and constraints placed on women’s religious rhetoric.

The final three chapters of this project nuance the themes that have been introduced here by considering them in the context of a specific rhetorical situation: the debate over the validity metaphysical healing as a form of “scientific” Christianity, a debate that raged in all of the major periodicals of the late nineteenth century. This debate demonstrates, perhaps better than any other, the advantages and limitations of a liberal religious discourse for women. The following chapter outlines the specific terms in which this debate was gendered and the significance of this gendering on the rhetorical standards expected for public discourse on religion. The final two chapters turn to the central female figures of scientific Christianity, Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins. I present these two women as rhetorical theorists rather than orators, as both spent considerable time outlining what they saw as the ideal spiritual language. I hope this discussion will both expand our sense of the tradition of women’s religious rhetoric – and offer new, liberal models of religious discourse in the public sphere.
Chapter 2

“Neither Christian nor scientific”:

Character, Common Sense, and the Liberal Backlash Against Metaphysical Healing

Periodicals of the late nineteenth century were awash with articles and stories discussing the merits of health-related religions. Satirists and cultural commentators turned their pens on the “fad” of religious healing with vigor, a testament to the popularity and omnipresence of these spiritual practices. In Ellis Meredith’s short 1899 piece, “Miss Melissa’s Miracle,” a family of young women, alone and struggling financially, turn to “Science.” Melissa, one of these sisters, believes that she has powers, and she takes it upon herself to cure a neighbor crippled by sciatica through “absent treatment.” After waiting and patiently praying for the man, Mr. Morris, for months, Melissa finally finds her faith rewarded on seeing the man walk by without so much as a limp. The overjoyed sisters confess their part in the cure to Mr. Morris, who, touched, never divulges that he has just gotten a wooden leg. After the truth is finally revealed, Mr. Morris proposes to Melissa; grateful and even inspired by her thoughtfulness for a stranger, he claims she can cure him of “heart disease” too (47-48). Melissa, while lacking good sense, possesses the sincerity and faith to win herself a good man.

An 1894 short story by John Bonner, “She Had a Familiar Spirit,” shares remarkably similar motifs to that penned by Meredith. In this tale, Cynthia, “a romantic … with mystical tendencies,” believes she has a calling to heal through prayer, even as the town doctor attempts to educate her regarding the nature of disease (467). After a young child under her care dies of scarlet fever, Cynthia is placed on trial, but she is ultimately acquitted in an emotional courtroom scene. The judge declares her to be a “noble […] … self-denying
[girl], devoted to the noble work of doing good” (473). Overcome, Cynthia takes ill of brain fever, but when she returns from her recuperative trip, the kind and knowing town doctor proposes. “I will leave medicine to my husband,” Cynthia concludes. It is telling that Cynthia, like Melissa, is brought to her senses by a well-educated man, one not stripped of reason by his overwhelming desire to do good and care for others.

It is not accidental that the tales of Melissa and Cynthia revolve around remarkably consistent characters and reach nearly identical resolutions. In fact, the figure of the noble, faithful, but misguided woman working with the sick was a consistent stereotype of the faith-curist and metaphysical healer during the Progressive Era. Both women share the qualities of the beneficent Angel of the nineteenth-century – faith, modesty, and altruism. Unlike quacks who promise miraculous cures for a fee, the motives of the selfless Melissa and Cynthia are never in question. Instead, their magnanimity overwhelms their common sense, leading in one case to embarrassment and in the other to disaster. Even more telling than the (somewhat) tragic flaws of the protagonists are the attributes of the men who save them. Mr. Morris and the doctor exude both the common sense necessary to avoid the mistakes of their fiancées – and the character to recognize a good woman. The two narratives, in deliberating on the issue of metaphysical healing, intimately link issues of faith, health, and gender. As the stories reflect, healing practices raised important questions for nineteenth-century Americans about women’s spirituality and their function in forging a well society. In other words, the debate over the efficacy of metaphysical healing provided an important arena to negotiate shifting constructions of gender as it pertained to faith.

This chapter argues that the debate regarding metaphysical healing, in which the stories by Meredith and Bonner participate, was driven by heavily gendered standards of religious discourse. Progressive-era Americans often criticized metaphysical healing because
they perceived it to be dangerous to physical wellbeing or antagonistic to traditional Protestant doctrines. These criticisms were heavily influenced by the religious liberalism prevalent during the period and make an implicit argument about the types of discourse that would support a healthy, godly society. Rhetoricians have largely failed to provide a sustained explanation of how liberalism impacted religious discourse, more often considering how religious discourses have impacted the liberal rhetoric of secular public life. However, the debate over metaphysical healing during the Progressive Era suggests the deep impact liberal standards had on religious rhetoric and the ways in which they were modified to meet the specific needs and concerns of Americans who considered themselves first and foremost Christians.

As this chapter will demonstrate, those writers who published in periodicals on metaphysical healing generally voiced a quite orthodox religious liberalism that appealed to middle-class readers. I will show that women held the same contested relationship to this religious liberalism that they held to liberalism more generally. Seen as incapable of participating in a reasoned discussion on theological issues, women who wrote on or practiced metaphysical healing were generally dismissed as irrational and thus a significant detriment to the wellbeing of American Christianity. Although critics provided a variety of reasons for rejecting metaphysical healing, they consistently highlighted the language women proponents used as evidence of its deficiency. In other words, critics argued that these religious beliefs were inferior because they failed to meet liberal discursive standards. Even more importantly, this analysis suggests that older justifications for women’s religious rhetoric, such as exceptionality or prophecy, were proving increasingly insufficient for a large number of Christians. While later chapters will consider the response of women religious rhetors to this new challenge, this chapter seeks first to consider the enormous impact of
liberal discursive standards on mainstream Christians and their perceptions of a healthy religious community.

Whereas the previous chapter outlined the ways in which nineteenth-century Americans related sacred rhetoric to social and individual wellbeing, this chapter addresses these issues in the context of a specific rhetorical situation: the debate raging in Progressive-Era periodicals over the validity of metaphysical healing. Because I focus here on the public debate on the topic, I consider primarily texts written for the popular press, specifically those listed in *The Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or those accessible in the *American Periodicals Series Online*. The articles under discussion include those highly critical of metaphysical healing practices, as well as those that are sympathetic to these alternative practices. I have not included those written by believers, both because these voices will be the focus of later chapters and because they do not share the argumentative stance of an ostensibly “objective” observer. In other words, I am concerned with articles whose proclaimed purpose is to assess the validity of these religious beliefs based on accepted theological and rhetorical criteria, rather than to convert or justify accepted beliefs. The array of voices included in this chapter is in some ways limited by the forums in which these articles appeared, for the periodicals themselves catered to an audience that was undoubtedly white, middle-class, and Protestant. Moreover, the religious liberalism described in this chapter was not universal, as it excludes the views of Catholics, Jews, emerging fundamentalist groups, and an array of smaller religious communities. Even liberal Protestantism itself was not a monolithic community, as the diverse responses described in this chapter reflect. Nevertheless, I have focused on liberal Protestantism as the perspective most influential in the development of metaphysical healing and, significantly, that most apparent in the debate over its efficacy.
This chapter contains three major sections, addressing the three themes introduced in the previous chapter (Social Progress vs. Individual Enlightenment; Reason vs. Passionate Belief; and Professional Authority vs. Individual Experience). Each major section contains two parts: the first introduces the main concerns and theological assumptions of liberal Protestants as expressed in the debate over metaphysical healing; the second focuses specifically on critiques of the Christian Science denomination and its leader, Mary Baker Eddy. Because of its popularity and the fame of its leader, Christian Science often served as a synecdoche (or perhaps straw man) for all metaphysical religions. The arguments of contemporaries regarding the denomination are thus a good example of the arguments and assumptions made more generally against unorthodox, metaphysical religions. Moreover, this more specific focus will allow me to attend more fully to the rhetorical implications of religious liberalism, as Eddy’s “feminine” language was often central to arguments of critics.

**Social Progress vs. Individual Enlightenment: Envisioning a Civilizing Religion**

Those writing on metaphysical healing in the popular press, like a substantial number of American Christians, sought a progressive theology that would advance human life and conduct. In other words, they sought a theology that would elevate Christians to a fuller understanding of God and thus make the world a better place in concrete ways. To ensure this progress – whether in the form of social justice and reform, individual wellbeing, or the development of moral character – was the function of religious discourse. Consequently, the liberal writers critiquing metaphysical healing developed arguments assessing its ability to advance Christendom, often by considering its scientific character and corresponding ability to improve human life. Although metaphysical healers justified their faith in large part by its practical benefits, critics were less certain that it was moving the “race” toward a deeper
understanding of the principles governing God’s world. This liberal desire to advance human life and society substantially shaped both critics’ reactions to metaphysical healing and their understanding of the purpose of religious discourse.

Late nineteenth-century progressives often mingled the rational and moral in their vision of social advancement, which closely connected the ethos of a Christian to the language they used. The question of metaphysical healing quickly became one of “character”: did metaphysical healing advance Christendom by developing “right disposition and habit of mind,” in the words of one nineteenth-century observer (Goodrich, “Christian Science and the Christian Faith” 8)? Liberal Protestants closely linked “right thinking” and “good thinking,” and they dismissed religious beliefs that exhibited “a spirit of sentimentalism and effeminacy,” as another critic put it (“Truth and Error in Christian Science” 405). “Common sense,” the human faculty capable of discerning moral order, demonstrated the greater good and the appropriate means by which to advance Christendom. A lack of good sense thus became both a character flaw and a threat to social wellbeing, an assumption with substantial implications for religious discourse.

Fostering a Religion for Life

Many liberal Protestants of the late nineteenth-century understood themselves to be at a crossroads between religion and science, a perception driving the public debate regarding both Darwinism and metaphysical healing. The progressive bent of liberal religion aligned it closely with the development of modern knowledge and in opposition to doctrine and orthodoxy; it encouraged a pragmatic approach to faith and reinforced the expectation that religion should have a tangible effect on the life of the believer. However, American Christians likewise resisted succumbing to the secular materialism of science and the soulless
rationalism of high theology. Metaphysical healing was part of a larger ongoing debate within liberal Christianity to find what Dorrien calls a “third way” between these two extremes (xiv). In practice, liberal Christians imagined this “third way” (or mediating theology) to becivilizing and morally progressive, as a theology that would improve life by improving Christian character. The debate over metaphysical healing, then, was part of a larger conversation defining a more complete, progressive Christianity, one in which the purpose of religious discourse was not to save the sinner but improve the conduct and character of believers.

Liberal Protestants as a group were torn between their faith in progress and their nagging sense that something had been lost in the march forward. However, they perceived this lack as less a matter of church authority or doctrine and more as a matter of individual spirituality and character. While they did not advocate returning to older forms of Christianity, the large body of liberal Christians found neither physical science nor the “common-sense” theology of the early part of the century effective in producing better individuals or a better society. One writer expressed the popular sentiment of late nineteenth-century Christians that the “prevailing materialism” left little room for “truth of the higher realm” (Wood 531). From this perspective, Christianity had fallen short in producing not simply more Christians but better Christians. Goodrich, writing in the New York Evangelist in 1900, lamented that “the restless, anxious spirit of our day, together with the dominating influence of material interests have tended to render the modern type of Christianity particularly deficient [in developing character]” (“Christian Science and the Christian Faith” 8). These critics perceived the metaphysical healing movements as a response to a fundamental lack in the modern church and modern life more generally.
Liberal Protestants often justified their views on metaphysical healing by writing the movement and the modern challenges it reflected into a narrative of Christian progress. Critics meanwhile interpreted the movement variously as an improper response or partial solution to modernity’s strains on faith. A short editorial in *The Open Court* in 1890 described the metaphysical healing movement as a “reaction against materialism” that resulted in a “more or less crude superstition” (P.C., “The Reaction Against Materialism,” 2169). The writer considered this reaction to be “most notable among the unchurched, among liberals and freethinkers” – a perspective that too readily dismissed science and progress in dismissing materialism (2169). Other writers were less concerned with reinvigorating science and rendering it compatible with spirituality; they focused instead on reinvigorating Christianity in the face of prevalent materialistic ideas. A 1906 article in the *Outlook* proclaimed:

> Christian Science was born out of a materialistic age: an age which regarded man as a mere mechanical machine…. It was born out of a rationalistic age: an age which confounded dogma with faith…. It was born out of a legalistic age: an age which forgot that Christianity is curative and imagined it to be a mere new form of law…. (“Truth and Error in Christian Science” 405)

The article proceeds to describe truth of Christian Science as its “three-fold affirmation” of “the spiritual nature of man, the immediacy of the soul’s knowledge of the spiritual world, and the curative power of Christianity” (405, 406). The writer is more than willing to describe the “error” of Christian Science as well as its “truth,” but he encourages the church to emphasize its truth (the three affirmations) as means of strengthening Christianity. Both of these writers, despite the lack they perceived in the church, interpreted metaphysical healing in the context of an evolutionary narrative: Americans should either reject Christian
Science as antithetical to Christianity’s progress or take up those parts that will ameliorate the challenges of modern life on Christian character.

The evolutionary narrative so fundamental to liberal thought reverberates throughout the debate on metaphysical healing, although Christians were not in consensus about the movement’s place in the story. In The New World in 1892, S. D. McConnell outlined four phases that religion had passed through in a steady march upward: doctrine, church organization, Reformation (or privileging of individual conscience), and lastly conduct. McConnell concludes his argument by summarizing the distinction he sees between the Christianity developing in the late nineteenth century and those earlier forms dominated by the “theological spirit.” Older forms of Christianity that emphasized doctrine have “portioned out conduct into ‘religious’ and ‘secular,’” while newer forms are beginning to abolish this dichotomy (288). McConnell explains:

So while it is true, in the main, that Christianity has always had its effect in improving the quality of men’s lives, it is also true that it has not always set this before itself as its main purpose. It has been thought of as a devise to secure “salvation.” Now the interest for “salvation” is surely receding behind the interest for “conduct.” The appeal is about to be taken to life. Christianity will more and more concern itself with living. (288)

In other words, McConnell demands that mainstream religion hold itself accountable for improving “actual life,” both morally and practically, not simply with conversion or salvation (287). McConnell praises the “leadership of science and art” as the “guides and pioneers in political and social reforms,” primarily because of the impact of their work on human life. These men are the harbingers of human progress and “are waiting for Christianity to pass into the new phase which will include them in form,” even if they have currently abandoned the formal
confines of the church (286). In short, McConnell suggests that a religious belief should be embraced insofar as it is progressive and that progress should be measured in a belief’s ability to improve human life and conduct.

McConnell’s argument is crucial to understanding the perspectives of both critics and proponents of the new metaphysical religions, and it relies on theological premises that will be continuing themes throughout this project. Although an increasing number of Christians (especially premillennialists) were beginning to question the liberal hegemony in American Christianity, it was still common for the faithful to assume both that Christendom would (or at least should) progress upward and that this progress would be demonstrated in an improved quality of human life. Although metaphysical healing was often justified in these same terms, McConnell offers an off-handed dismissal of these practices because he sees them as contrary to the doctrines of an “enlightened world” (281). According to McConnell and other liberal detractors, “Christian Science” was contrary to the rational and systematic nature of social advancement – a pseudoscience, rather than a genuine one. McConnell asserts that a more developed Christianity will integrate true science that advances “conduct”; he does not suggest that faith should become subordinate to scientific knowledge but that a more complete Christianity will be in harmony with it. McConnell differs from those promoting metaphysical healing less in his ambition for a modern Christianity than in his image of it.

Mainstream Christians often assessed the progressivism of the new metaphysical religions (as well as religious beliefs more generally) in their ability to produce tangible benefits, both for society and individual believers. The importance of the tangible effects of religion on human life became a central factor in whether Americans accepted or rejected metaphysical healing – or merely tolerated it as a step in the nation’s spiritual progress.
Writing from a European perspective, W.F. Cobb compared the attitudes toward religion prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic. Encouraging a moderate stance between practical results and “obsolete thought,” he suggests that the “common aim” of America’s metaphysical movements “is an improved practice rather than a clarified thought” (354). Cobb views all three movements he discusses (Christian Science, Higher Thought, and Spiritualism) as advancements in religious practice, although not in theology. According to Cobb, these religions “wear … the dress of the classroom” but gain followers who are “interested not in the theories of the school, but in bettering the life of the market-place” (354). In many respects, Cobb dismisses these beliefs as uncultured and even ignorant, but he acknowledges the value of practice as well as theology in improving religious life. Liberal Christians like Cobb frequently applauded the practical benefits of metaphysical healing on the lives of believers, even when they dismissed the theology itself as misguided.

While one advantage of these movements was improved physical health, it is important to emphasize that observers often understood the pragmatic element of a faith to be moral rather than necessarily physical. Believers and non-believers alike emphasized the “character” developed by the new metaphysical religions far more than their apparent healing capabilities. In a sermon in the New York Evangelist in 1900, Goodrich explained that “the first fruitage of the new faith is spiritual” and “manifest[s] itself in character” (“Christian Science, Its Strength and Weakness” 10). The writer identifies a “quietness and serenity of spirit” and an “exceptionally vivid consciousness of the divine” as peculiar traits of the denomination, and he encourages his readers to cultivate this temperament while dismissing the flawed theology (10). A brief editorial in The Independent echoes Goodrich, applauding Christian Science in particular:
It is to their credit that their faith shows itself in its works. We do not refer so much to the generosity of their gifts to build noble places of worship.… We have in mind rather that fervor of faith which … makes them fully trust to God and their doctrine of the nature of disease and health when they are sick. (“Christian Science” 1239)

Both writing from the perspective of religion rather than health, neither Goodrich nor the editor spends substantial time discussing cures or presenting them as evidence of the success of the various metaphysical religions. Instead, they suggest that these movements have something to offer Americans because of the disposition they develop – because they appeal to a “good class in the community … [with] a high moral character” (“Christian Science,” The Independent 1240). While liberal Protestants did accentuate the benefits of religion in the here and now, they certainly were not materialists or secularists, and they perceived improved Christian character as not only a practical, tangible benefit of a belief system but as the most fundamental. A more godly character would form the foundation for the broader social changes that Americans desired and alleviate the problems of modern life.

Nineteenth-century psychologist and philosopher William James, in Varieties of Religious Experience, echoed Goodrich’s assumption that the metaphysical religions were useful in developing a “healthy” disposition, despite their flaws. Foremost, James interpreted the mind-cure movement as an expression of the liberal worldview – the “doctrine of general meliorism and progress” that was also apparent in modern science (89). He associated the mind-cure movement specifically with the “advance of liberalism” and described it as a “victory of healthy mindedness within the church over the morbidness with which the old hell-fire theology was more harmoniously related” (89). James defined a “healthy-minded religion” by its emphasis on practical progress, as one in which “good, even
the good of this world’s life, is regarded as the essential thing for a rational being to attend to” (119). In James’s classification system, healthy-minded Christians exhibited the optimism of the liberal – an unwavering faith in inevitable progress and practical success.

Even more importantly, James’s concept of “healthy-mindedness” closely connects these liberal values to the health of the individual psyche. James naturally had a professional investment in psychology that makes this focus on the individual inevitable, but he describes the implications of this approach to religion in much the same character-based language as Goodrich. After highlighting its success in restoring physical health, James suggests that “the moral fruits [of mind-cure] have been no less remarkable.” Focusing on its effect on disposition, he continues “[R]egeneration of character has gone on on an extensive scale; and cheerfulness has been restored to countless homes…. These general tonic effects on public opinion would be good even if the more striking [physical] results were non-existent” (92). James considers these effects on character no less significant – or useful – than the physical cures. Ever the pragmatist, he concludes that the psychological and social effects are so extensive that “we can afford to overlook the innumerable failures and self-deceptions that are mixed in with them” (92). James expresses serious concerns that healthy-minded Christians dismiss the undeniable horrors of the world, but he acknowledges its beneficial effects in developing a positive disposition.

Liberal Protestants were in less accord regarding their vision of religious progress than in their sense that religion should be progressive. Most agreed that a modern religion should serve as a civilizing force and improve human conduct and character in demonstrable ways. However, they varied in the terms in which they defined scientific and religious advancement. Metaphysical healing forced these competing definitions of progress to the forefront, as its association with science and medicine made questions about its
progressivism inevitable. The following section turns to critiques specifically of Christian Science and Eddy. This more specific focus will allow me to connect the concept of “character” so prevalent in writing on metaphysical healing to that of “common sense.” The notion of common sense was as fundamental to liberal religion as it was to liberal thought more generally, although it was defined in terms suitable for a religious context. Liberal Protestants closely correlated not only common sense and progress (as liberal discourses always do) but also common sense and character, which they saw as the manifestation of progress. The language of Christian Scientists thus became of fundamental importance in the great metaphysical healing debate, as it reflected both the reasonableness of these beliefs and the character of believers.

Debating the Progressivism of Christian Science

No theology of metaphysical healing received more attention in the press than Eddy’s Christian Science, a reflection of the perceived threat it posed to mainstream liberal Christianity. In addressing the topic, critics framed the debate around a central and fundamentally liberal question: Was Christian Science reasonable and progressive or superstitious and devolutionary? The answers that were provided by liberal Protestants were closely tied to their understanding of “common sense,” a concept with substantial rhetorical implications, particularly for women. Although it did retain its association with the rational faculty of human beings, “common sense” in nineteenth-century religion was a term laced with moral implications; it was a standard for judging not only the intellect but the character of religious rhetors. Christian Science, with its substantial percentage of women followers, was almost universally constructed by critics as fundamentally anti-liberal – as antithetical to common sense and the progress of Christian character.¹
As in the broader debate regarding metaphysical healing, the desire for a “religion for living” drove the major arguments both for and against Christian Science. Nearly every argument appearing in Progressive-Era periodicals on the denomination adopted one of three major stances, each relying on different notions of a “progressive” religion. The harshest group of critics during this period rejected Christian Science as degenerative and the product of irrational superstition. A second, more moderate group of non-believers encouraged both Christians and physicians to consider the positive results of Christian Science and use them to inform their own practice. Christian Scientists themselves lauded Eddy’s theology for its beneficial impact on their health and character. The evolutionary tenor of the debate highlights a crucial characteristic of liberal Protestant thought: a progressive religion would be judged less by its practical effect on social problems (such as poverty) than by its practical effect on the character of believers. In true Victorian fashion, critics suggested that a reasonable and civilized religion would produce a reasonable and civilized race. This assumption closely bound reason, morals, and progress, with substantial implications for what was considered an appropriate theology and religious discourse.

The simplest and perhaps most common reaction to metaphysical healing practices was to reject them as antagonistic to science and human progress. The most trenchant of critics associated the practice of Christian Science with superstition, or the abandonment of reason for mysticism. Liberal Protestants were deeply suspicious of beliefs, even religious beliefs, that required proponents to abandon what they perceived to be good sense, and they frequently labeled metaphysical healing as dangerous for this reason. Those critics most opposed to Christian Science often described it as a “fad” or “craze” that required believers to suspend good sense for a more pleasant perspective on disease. One hostile writer in 1888 referred to metaphysical healing as a “craze, like roller skating” that was “[m]arked by
obliviousness to frequent failures in the work claimed to be accomplished” and represented “nihilism of all sense and reason” (Darley, “Two Views of Christian Science” 245). Another critic deemed the religion a “singular mixture of undigested idealism, crude pantheism, and mysticism which dismisses sickness with a wave of the hand as a nothing” (Bixby 473-474). These critics, while more cutting than McConnell, rejected Christian Science for the same reasons he had – because they perceived it as incompatible with an “enlightened” world.

Comparisons of Christian Science to “primitive” religions peppered articles and tracts on the subject, suggesting that the beliefs espoused were the product of an uncivilized or uncultured population. One unsympathetic editorial in the Christian Union scoffed that “it would be easier to coin a respectable argument for the ancient witchcraft or modern astrology than for ‘Christian Science’” (“The Latest Fanaticism” 675). James Bixby, in his 1899 article in The New World, compared Christian Scientists to those who believe in “the Devil-born nature of illness,” which correlates physical disease and sin (473). These two religious approaches to illness, Bixby suggest, allow “superstition” to overtake “reason and faith” (472). Christian Scientists and faith healers “embrace theories as opposed to the teaching of Christ[,] as they are inconsistent with the results of modern knowledge.” These misguided theologies allow “murky, mental fogs” to “foster to new birth and form the ancient weeds of superstition” (472). Bixby, like many critics of Christian Science, characterized it as a primitive and superstitious form of religion not appropriate for the nineteenth-century.

The vaguely social-Darwinistic language of critics emphasizes the intimate correlation liberal Protestants saw between social wellbeing and a “civilized” and reasonable religion that rose above “blind faith” or superstition. J.N. Hunsberger began his 1894 piece on the subject of Christian Science with the “well-known fact that primitive man from time
memorial has allowed his thoughts and actions to be governed by the supernatural” (425). Hunsberger insists that “as we advance in the scale of enlightenment … we demand that our ghosts come to us dressed and in their right minds,” even if people will continue to cling to less enlightened beliefs (427). Hunsberger offers little description as to what this “dressed” ghost might look like, but he describes the ostensibly undressed or uncivilized religion as one in which “faith is a higher faculty than reason” (426). Not all religion was incompatible with reason and modern knowledge – just uncultivated forms of spirituality such as Christian Science.

More moderate critics largely shared many of the assumptions of their less forgiving counterparts; however, they viewed Christian Science as an element of evolutionary progress rather than as opposed to it. Religious liberals (like their more secular counterparts) often believed that open exploration and discussion of theological ideas would lead to a more advanced religion. These writers did not promote the acceptance or spread of what they perceived as flawed ideas, but they encouraged the public to carefully assess the various new theologies, dismiss what was detrimental, and assimilate what was beneficial. This stance grew from the faith of liberal Americans that mistakes and missteps were inevitable in the search for spiritual truth – and that time would determine the validity of the various belief systems. As an 1887 editorial in the New York Times reflects, “‘Christian Science,’ both as a system of therapeutics and a system of faith, will have a fair chance to exhibit its value, or the lack of it, as the case may be” (17). Reflection and honest deliberation would determine what precisely this value was, improve the quality of human life, and bring society one step closer to God’s truth.

Even writers who adamantly rejected Christian Science suggested that its successes could help to build a stronger Christian faith, provided that its deficiencies were similarly
acknowledged. Addressing the Christian Science movement, a 1906 editorial in *Outlook* ruminates, “What has given Christian Science its votaries is not the delusion in it but the truth in it. The remedy for the delusion is the discovery of the truth, not the indiscriminate condemnation of both truth and error as an unadulterated lie” (“Truth and Error” 404). The editorial then proceeds to outline which theological tenets of Christian Science should be accepted and which rejected to advance Christianity more broadly. In a sermon explicitly denouncing Christian Science in the *New York Evangelist* in 1900, Goodrich similarly interprets the movement as a potential step in building a more evolved Christianity. Goodrich, a Presbyterian minister, begins his critique by explaining to his readers, “Our method of treating the matter should be rather to appropriate whatever is helpful and from that vantage point of sympathy to judge, with less prejudice, its errors” (10). The reverend identified two important spiritual qualities that Christian Science in particular had developed in its followers, hoping these qualities could be integrated into mainstream Christianity in order to invigorate it. Goodrich’s stance implies that unquestioned adherence to orthodox doctrine would only stymie Protestantism. Instead, religious beliefs must be continually modified, revised, and improved through a process of experimentation – of accepting that which has proven valid and rejecting that which has not.

The evolutionary language of liberal religion makes a powerful connection between the reasonableness of a religion and the character of the believers. From this perspective, those believers who accept Christian Science have succumbed to poor thinking that will have substantial social consequences, regardless of its faith-based nature of the topic. One 1899 article mourned, “Is all our knowledge, gained through centuries of experience and laborious research, of the uses and action of drugs, of bacteriology, of hygiene…. To be relegated to the ash heap of useless endeavor, and blind faith in prayer and the anointing with oils
substituted in their place? Well might one exclaim, with all reverence, God forbid!” (Hailes 306). An 1897 editorial dubbed Christian Science a “bushel of nonsense” that did “widespread and serious moral mischief by promoting the bad habit of ignoring facts” (“Christian Science’ and Science” 498). While it appears odd that the writer would describe the mischief done by metaphysical healing as “moral” rather than intellectual, this perspective reflects his belief that this inclination to ignore facts will stymie understanding and progress. Those who return to “true science,” the writer argues, “will gain a sense of intellectual emancipation such as they never before experienced,” and recognize that the “foundations [of science] are in the truth of things, and that its mission in the healing and regeneration of the human race” (498). While the connection between scientific truth and progress is certainly not unusual or unexpected, the moralistic bent implicit in these argument is crucial for understanding the relationship between liberal Protestantism and a “Christian science.”

Liberal Protestants believed that “right thinking” was as essential to the progress of Christianity as it was to other facets of human life, making this character trait an expression of an individual’s moral as well as intellectual status. A.S. Gumbart, writing in Zion’s Herald in 1899, mourned, “Few people know when a thing is proven, or are capable of weighing testimony.” He warned that a system lacking “rigid discipline” in accepting proof (such as Christian Science) will lead to “self-evident” harm for society more generally (138). A 1908 article in The Nation is even more explicit in connecting the intellectual practices of Christian Science to deficiencies in the moral character of believers. The writer categorizes Christian Scientists as amongst those “who believe that the attainment of pleasure or the avoidance of pain is of highest significance in this world.” To this group he contrasts a second:
There are those ... who feel that ... the greatest nobility of character cannot be gained so long as men fail to face the facts of life as they understand them, that in the long run it will be to the advantage of the race to risk the continuance of some suffering among weaklings whom the arts of magic along can relieve, rather than to curtail the development of clear thinking and rational activity among the common people. (H.R.M., “Christian Science and the Emmanuel Movement” 575)

Christian Science is dangerous because it encourages a lack of common sense and an impoverished character, stymieing society’s natural progress.

It should be emphasized that critics of Christian Science described the character it developed as effeminate as well as irrational. A 1901 piece in the Outlook characterized Christian Science as an “opiate” that “call[ed] on us to shut our eyes to the facts of life while it cries out concerning sin, It is naught, it is naught.” The writer encourages a more harsh theology that recognizes the “terribleness of sin” and “inspir[es] a stronger, more reasonable, and more spiritual hope of redemption” (“Concerning Christian Science” 527). James Main Dixon echoed this sentiment his 1898 article on Eddy’s writing in The Independent. Dixon severely criticized the quality of the work and described it as “a grotesque exaggeration of the weaknesses of the modern pulpit.” The critic has no qualms in equating these “weaknesses” to the gender of the writer. Women like Eddy, the writer laments, “are willing to treat with magisterial fashion any subject under the sun” although they have “evidently failed to master the necessary elementary vocabulary.” According to Dixon, these women claim an authority that is not theirs by right of intellect, education, or experience. He concludes, “Intuition, exquisite feminine intuition, is supposed to take the place of tedious, wrinkle-producing mental drudgery – and doesn’t. The results are deplorable” (“Literature
of Christian Science” 1848). The women Dixon describes appear not only stupid and ignorant but also degenerate and depraved, a corrupting influence on broader society. Christian Science, from Dixon’s perspective, is just another manifestation of the feminization of religion and the resulting impotence of the church.

Critics repeatedly reinforced the characterization of Christian Science as a “woman’s religion,” one unable to uphold the rigorous intellectual standards necessary in the modern world. Writing in the New Englander and Yale Review in 1891, Clyde Votaw compared Christian Science and faith-healing, deeming the first “quasi-philosophical, somewhat elaborate, and very absurd,” and other “a habit as comfortable and convenient as it is unreasonable and absurd” (251, 253). Highlighting the substantial proportion of women in both communities, he justifies his “critical attitude” toward it on the basis of “how little has been contributed as yet by woman, either to philosophy or to science” (249). Votaw’s portrait of the callow but complaisant woman echoes the short stories that began the chapter, a regurgitation of accepted stereotypes. Ernest Hawley, in his 1899 article in The Catholic World, provided a slightly more extensive, if no more original, rejection of the women he perceived to be driving this fad. Hawley does not limit his contempt to Christian Scientists but to all people of “superficial understanding and acquirements” (but “especially women”) who are “seized with the mania of posing before the world as teachers and philosophers” (509-510). These poor role models, Hawley concludes, generate “dissatisfaction among others of their sex,” who subsequently “begin to imagine there is nothing more noble than to stalk upon some platform or pulpit expounding to an interested and admiring audience some new-fangled notions on religion or economics” (Hawley 509-510). These observations, however typical, emphasize that the primary concern of critics
was the public reproduction of deficient scientific or theological ideas, an enterprise in which women were perceived to be heavily responsible. The debate over metaphysical healing demonstrates the paradox of the liberal worldview: superficially it appears democratic, but it ultimately silences those unwilling to accept its terms. Liberal discourse is powerful partly because it constructs “common-sense” as universal; it thus offers those outside the discourse (in this case, silly female Christian Scientists) the hope of redemption through education. This apparent inclusivity is as true for religious discourses as it is for ones superficially secular. Critics often asked misguided advocates of Christian Science to choose science and knowledge over mysticism and ignorance. S.V. Clevenger, writing in 1891, suggested that a “little knowledge” of medical matters would serve as a measure of “self-protection against the practitioners [of medicine] who know as little as they do” (“A Little Knowledge” 363). Such assumptions largely absolved those friendly toward Christian Science of their mistakes. In an earlier 1887 article, Clevenger allowed that believers are “are guiltless of physiological or pathological knowledge, know nothing of the fundamentals of scientific medicine and can be thus uninformed without deserving to be called rascals or generally ignorant.” The unlearned masses could cure themselves (literally and figuratively) by the “exercise of a little medical common sense” (“Christian Science” 322). Clevenger implies that liberal readers, even those who were uneducated, were not intrinsically doomed to be duped by equally ignorant or deceptive healers but might choose to behave as common sense dictated.

However, the notion of “common sense” carries with it a moral imperative. If an audience is free to choose between common-sense and “irrationality,” to choose the latter is to deliberately choose the wrong. For many critics, the rise of Christian Science in the face of common-sense signaled the demise of medical care, Christianity, and human thought.
more generally. An 1899 editorial in *The Independent* echoed the standard claim that proponents of the movement were “those who accept authority… but have no real knowledge of what constitutes proof” (“What to Do” 1576). More importantly, the author of the article expresses less sympathy with Christian Science than with faith healing, which is the product of “ebullient faith” and claims little authority over science. Christian Scientists, by contrast, base their faith “less on their religion than their silly and ridiculous metaphysics.” This faith, the writer continues, is “no more Christian than is Mormonism,” although they “may yet be Christians, for they [currently] may be very illogical” (1577). He or she assumes, like most liberal Christians, that the most Christian (or correct) faith will be the most logical one and in part identified by its reasonableness.

The debate over metaphysical healing demonstrates the close relationship between character and common sense in religious liberalism. Nineteenth-century Americans believed that common sense was crucial in assessing moral hypotheses and thus considered it a fundamental criterion in judging the nation’s moral character. In other words, the reasonableness of the theology became the terms under which its actual progressivism, its potential benefit to society, was measured by those debating its merits. Perhaps surprisingly, the editors of *Outlook* described Christian Science in 1894 as an “intellectual epidemic,” as opposed to a spiritual one: “[Epidemics like Christian Science] are intellectual, not moral, epidemics; rarely inflict a direct moral injury on those who are subject to them; often find the best and purest spirits most susceptible” (“Inoculating Error” 526). However, liberal Protestants understood reason or common sense in somewhat different terms than is typical today, particularly in non-religious contexts. The following section further elaborates on the concept of reason in liberal religious thought and its implications for women’s rhetoric.
Reason vs. Passionate Belief: Demonstrating a Well-ordered Mind

As it rose to prominence in the last decades of the century, the concept of a “Christian science” became a fundamental expression of the liberal search for a progressive religion. Modern science, perhaps the most powerful expression of modernity and progress, became a focal point of theological debate and in some cases the standard by which spiritual development would be judged. Most liberal Protestants characterized the progress they sought as a fuller understanding of religious truth, often assuming the existence of knowable, spiritual laws that could be used to improve human life and society. They dismissed practices that they believed were rooted in superstition or arbitrary church doctrine, as they impeded progress and were suitable for a bygone, largely ignorant age. Given that the most famous community of metaphysical healers, Christian Scientists, deliberately adopted a scientific ethos, it is not surprising that critics judged healing practices more broadly in these terms. These critics frequently justified their views by arguing that metaphysical theologies did or did not express definitive spiritual truths.

Heavily invested in such scientific ideals, critics of metaphysical healing regularly scorned the followers of these movements, as well as the movement’s public figures, for a sentimental worldview that negatively impacted social progress. In part, liberal Christians attacked these banal theologies because they supposedly stifled the intellectual and spiritual growth of American society. Metaphysical healers, these critics argued, privileged emotion and blind faith over reason and thus absolved Christians of the obligation to achieve spiritual truth. However, they also condemned the movement because they perceived its leaders to be deceptive and disingenuous. Liberal philosophy emphasized the internal coherence or logic of a text, which authorized it as true. This logic reflected the mental experience – the individual reason – of the writer (Crowley, Methodical 8). Liberal Protestants claimed that the
writing of metaphysical healers demonstrated convoluted and muddled logic, and they assumed that such poor mental processing was the result of either stupidity or duplicity. Therefore, the language of metaphysical healers – and their corresponding ability to reflect the truth accurately – became a primary focus of the debate over these movements. The highly sentimental works produced by metaphysical healers, critics argued, reflected precisely the poor mental and moral character that would signal the decline of Christendom.

Revealing God’s Order

At the heart of the movement for a “scientific” Christianity was the notion of order. The liberal faith in progress implies the existence of a law-governed order that can be gradually understood and utilized to improve the world. When addressing ostensibly secular concerns, liberal philosophers defined “reason” as the universal human faculty capable of perceiving and comprehending this order. In other words, they understood reason to be the faculty that allowed human beings access to the physical laws of the universe. However, liberals writing in an explicitly religious context frequently described this order as both natural and spiritual. They consequently understood reason to be the faculty that gave human beings access not only to natural laws – but also to the moral laws that gave them purpose. Liberal Protestants varied in their articulations of the relationship between natural and moral laws, but their faith in a moral order necessarily imbued “science” with spiritual overtones. It also implied that to reject reason or common sense was intrinsically sinful, leading a Christian further away from an understanding of God’s order.

In judging whether metaphysical healing was valid, liberal Christians interpreted cures in one of two primary ways: either as miraculous, supernatural events or as replicable manifestations of an unchanging metaphysical law. Most mainstream Protestants believed
that the charismatic gift of healing was limited to the leaders of the early Christian church.\textsuperscript{2}

Therefore, liberal Protestants often painted a belief in healing as irrational and destructive superstition, as a belief that supersedes understanding and precludes the possibility of progress. For example, Leonard Woolsey Bacon argued in \textit{Forum} in 1888 against faith healing of the type practiced by Pentecostals. Bacon suggests that the “gifts” bestowed on the leaders of the church “were not necessarily miraculous” but were “talents fitting them to serve their fellow believers,” such as a natural affinity for teaching, exhorting, managing, or “comforting the sick and sorrowful” (“Faith Cure Delusion” 695). Bacon further questions the assumption that the “childlike” or blind faith privileged in these communities makes their believers a “whit better than the plain, ordinary Christian who loves God and his neighbor” (“Faith Cure Delusion” 692). The scriptural evidence for divine healing is scanty, argues Bacon, making such superstitious practices inappropriate in the modern world.

Critics of this sort generally constructed the various metaphysical religions as pseudo-sciences, a strategy with significant implications for religious discourse. In other words, they suggested that Christian Science pretended to abide by rational standards but failed (consciously or unconsciously) in the endeavor. A short 1887 editorial in \textit{Open Court} judged the work of metaphysical healers to be so “contradictory, and so superficial and undigested” that there was only an “assumed and imaginary connection” between the ideas presented and “the essential principle observed in producing practical results.” Like most writing on the topic, the writer concedes that “there is an intimate relationship between mental and physical conditions” and acknowledges that the medical profession has too often opted for harsh drugs rather than treatments based on this principle (“Mental Healing Craze” 269). However, he insists that the logic of the metaphysical theologies is deeply flawed and fails to represent the actual scientific truth that allows for successful cures by this
means. The writer, like many liberal critics, argues that metaphysical healers proclaim their ideas to be the result of good science, while in actuality providing their audience with an inferior facsimile.

Moreover, many Christians questioned the motivations of metaphysical healers, as they perceived their claims of scientific authority to be deceitful. Liberal Protestants expressed deep suspicion of theories that could not be objectively tested by their own experience. Critics consequently attacked the ostensible proof of successful cures, claiming that the testimonies of patients were based on “falsehood and deception” (Gumbart 138). A. S. Gumbart, writing in *Zion's Herald* in 1899, somewhat begrudgingly acquiesced that “nervous diseases” might respond to mind cures but “den[ied] with all the power of [his] being the scientific accuracy and moral reliability of the great bulk of the testimony given in Christian Science literature” (138). For many liberals, religious leaders like Mary Baker Eddy replaced the authority of individual reason with religious tyranny over their followers. From this perspective, metaphysical healing represented a substantial danger to social and individual wellbeing: a theology that claimed to be scientific and objectively verifiable but was in fact based on the whims of a few powerful leaders.

While many liberals labeled metaphysical healing as antagonistic to reason and social wellbeing, a second group suggested that the practice might reveal spiritual or medical principles that could lead to progress. These liberals agreed that the concept of “miracles” was superstitious and degenerative, but they disagreed that metaphysical healing could only be interpreted in these terms. For example, Celia Parker Woolley argued against a belief in miracles in *The Open Court* in 1894, calling it a “direct outgrowth of belief in a supreme and arbitrary power” (4042). However, Woolley did not reject the possibility of metaphysical
events. Although not an acknowledged devotee of any new religion, Woolley claims that these religions might help to increase human understanding of the spiritual:

It is higher, less familiar law that governs here, we are told, but law still. The spiritual nature of man...[is], according to these beliefs, no longer... [a matter] of mere hope and trust, but... [has] become... [a subject] of demonstrable knowledge. In so far as modern spiritualism and its allied faiths are aiming to establish the spiritual existence of man upon a scientific basis, we should honor them and hold our minds open to receive all the light and information they have to offer. All of these theories are tentative, but suggestive, being signs of the world’s advancing progress on the psychical side. (4026)

Interestingly, Woolley grounds her argument in many of the same assumptions as McConnell, including the spiritual development of man beyond arbitrary authority and the gradual formation of an advanced religion. However, her comments also suggest that many nineteenth-century Americans still believed that supernatural events, including healing, could occur. Rather than dismissing the metaphysical as intrinsically superstitious, Woolley claims that these practices have the potential to uncover God's laws and lead the world on its march forward. As Woolley’s arguments reflect, liberal Protestants often assumed that metaphysical events reflected knowable, spiritual laws; they debated instead whether Christian Science, faith healing, or spiritualism in particular would lead to the discovery of these laws.

Woolly’s stance on metaphysical healing reflects two important assumptions of liberal Protestantism: first, the spiritual world, like the physical one, is knowable; and second, a fuller understanding these spiritual principles would lead to progress. It is important to
point out that liberal Christians of the late nineteenth-century had grown disillusioned with what they perceived as the soulless rationalism of common-sense theologies. In fact, many Americans embraced metaphysical healing because it seemed to reinforce the importance of faith in spiritual understanding. However, the liberal creed of the Enlightenment had so intimately entangled notions of reason and progress that they remained central to arguments about the future of Christianity. In other words, liberal Christians rejected “reason” as the exclusive epistemological foundation for religious belief – but nevertheless assumed that a truly progressive theology would be compatible with it. A short editorial in *Outlook* in 1906 called mysticism and rationalism “coefficients in human development” and argued that “the vision and the prophet must be tested by the reason.” The writer concludes, “The rationalism which despises prophesyings and the self-satisfied mysticism which refuses to submit its visions to the test of experience are alike false because alike partial” (“Truth and Error” 405). Much of the writing on metaphysical healing is a working through of this apparently contradictory worldview – an effort to envision a true faith that did not require the believer to forsake reason.

Liberal Protestants differed widely in their assessment of reason’s place in religion and in their vision of a progressive or scientific theology. In some cases, liberal Christians argued that theological and scientific progress would occur by means of a similar process. They believed that increasing spiritual understanding required the same strategies as those that had led to advancements in the secular world and thus sought a genuine “science of religion.” From this perspective, Christianity did not aim to answer the same questions that natural and physical science did – but emulate its methods. Augustus Blauvelt, D.D., scoffed in *The Independent* in 1874, “It is only through a mere theological blunder that the impression has been permitted to creep abroad throughout the modern world of culture that the
Christian faith and system need in any sense or way to shrink from a truly scientific understanding” (4). Blauvelt used the term “Christian science” a year before Mary Baker Eddy even published her founding textbook, but his essential assumptions remained tenable for nineteenth-century Americans in modified forms decades later.

This emphasis on “scientific” process encouraged debate in the press not only about whether metaphysical healing might occur but about which theory most accurately described the beneficial results achieved by believers. Progress in religion and medicine, proponents argued, would come through comprehension of the spiritual principles undergirding successful cures – in bringing faith down to earth. In an 1896 article in *The Open Court*, Hudor Genone encouraged his reader to consider “[h]ow to serve god with the reason” (4914). For Genone, “experience and experiment” must form the foundation for Christianity as they do for science (4914). He reminds his reader, “[L]ooking backward across the flood of years, how brief the time appears when all the sciences were in precisely the condition in which we now find religion” (4917). Patience, persistence, and devotion would gradually shape a form of Protestantism that would hit upon spiritual truths – and thus make the world a better place. In this view, reason and faith would prove to be complements rather than antagonistic forces.

This emphasis on “scientific” process allowed liberal Christians to reject particular versions of metaphysical healing without rejecting the practice outright. If theology is scientific, some theories of the spiritual order inevitably articulate the truth more fully than others, and Christians must determine systematically which are faulty and which are accurate. In the *Christian Secretary* in 1889, E.W. Hopkins wondered, “As all true Christians have brains and a mind, why may they not be used consistently as factors in the recognition and demonstration of a true Christian Science[?]” Hopkins promoted her vision of a true
Christian Science, as opposed to the incomplete versions attacked in the press. Hopkins defines this true Christian Science as that which was “plainly taught by Jesus and his followers” but makes equally clear that it will warrant its name. Offering examples of her own success in healing, she claims the title of Scientist by virtue of her “practical application and understanding of the teachings of Jesus.” She adamantly criticizes the conflation of the “true system” of Christian Science with the various other versions of mental healing and mind cure gaining popularity across the country. Writers launching attacks on all forms of metaphysical healing, she suggests, are merely constructing straw-man arguments that rely on “poor and unreliable authorities” as opposed to “others of larger experience and a better understanding” (4). Like many others promoting the various metaphysical theologies, Hopkins assumes that scientific verification of spiritual principles is not only possible but necessary for the development of Christianity.

Other liberal Protestants went further than Hopkins, implying an even more intimate relationship between the physical and moral laws governing the world. For these believers, religion not only developed by means of a systematic or scientific process – but reflected the holistic order that bound God’s natural and spiritual laws. A short editorial in the *Outlook* explained to its readers “body and soul are so twisted together in one strand as to defy untwisting.” The article promoted not the heroic medicine of an earlier period but “hygiene” and “prevention” of disease as the path to health. “The laws of health,” the writer concludes, “are moral laws… The true physician at once teaches his patient that the laws of God must not be broken, and that there are laws of mercy also, by which penalty for broken laws may be partly remitted” (462). The world’s order, the writer implies, demonstrates the interrelationship of the moral and physical. Such an argument constructs disobedience to the laws of hygiene and wellbeing as sinful behavior. This assumption formed the
foundation for the clean-living movements of the nineteenth-century, which promoted temperance, abstinence, and rigorous standards in food and dress.\textsuperscript{6}

It must be pointed out that the notion of a “divine science” or “Christian science” was not exclusive to Protestants that might be called liberal. The term “science” held sufficient authority that it was adopted by Christians that held more conservative views. Most often, these more conservative Christians associated a true “Christian science” with biblical literalism, a theological principle gaining significant steam in the late nineteenth-century. In the \textit{New York Observer and Chronicle} in 1899, James McLeod explains that the “right interpretation [of the Holy Scripture] cannot be overestimated,” as “the Bible is the textbook of Christian Science” (101). Offering an alternative exegesis of passages on divine healing, McLeod claims that proponents are warping Scriptural teachings to their own ends and base their belief systems less on the word of God than of man. False Christian Scientists, McLeod claims, are “twist[ing] the Holy Writings into all words of shapes to suit their folly” (102). He denies the Christianity of these beliefs, as they “reject with scorn the Bible idea of prayer which is the offering up of our desires unto God, for this agreeable to his will” (101). McLeod’s “Christian Science” shares little in common with that of Hopkins or Blauvelt – including any association with healing or emphasis on progress.

Liberal Protestants in the late nineteenth-century held a far broader definition of science and reason than that of most Christians today. Many Americans of the period did express concern that the rationalism of science was overtaking the necessity of faith in Christianity, but many others expressed optimism that human intellect could recognize divine truth. These liberal Christians did not believe reason alone could discover God’s order – but they did suggest that it could guide individuals along a moral path. From this perspective, God required faith on the part of his children but did not demand it blindly.
Bacon, in a short 1899 article in the *New York Evangelist*, observed snidely, “There is a prevalent heresy that holds, more or less inarticulately, that nothing is divine unless it is queer” (“A Vindication” 8). Bacon, of course, categorized the proponents of metaphysical healing amongst these simple-minded heretics; others believed that they were of the variety of Christians who sought to understand the spiritual order. In either case, liberal Christians saw a growing understanding of divine truth as the means toward social and spiritual progress. The following section considers the implications of this stance for female religious rhetors. It focuses specifically on the example of Eddy and analyzes critiques of her writing in the context of this liberal emphasis on common-sense and orderly thinking.

**Exposing the Scribbling Woman**

The public conversation regarding Christian Science revolved around the question of its reasonableness and corresponding effectiveness in advancing theological knowledge, which might seem odd given its religious character. However, a consistent theme in has been the liberal link between reason and progress – the assumption that reasoned discourse would lead a deeper understanding of the moral and physical order governing the world. The retort most often leveled by clever critics was that “Christian Science’ [was] neither Christian nor scientific” (A. C. Dixon, “Christian Science” 3). The first assessment, that the theology was not Christian, arose from perceptions that it denied the existence of both a personal God and sin; the second, that it was not scientific, arose from perceptions of its fatuous scholarship and language. This second accusation produced more ink, and it holds important implications for religious discourse during the period.

Not surprisingly, many of Eddy’s contemporaries did not accept her description of her theology as a science. Critics commonly attacked what they perceived to be the
intellectual flaws of Christian Science, as they believed that they could dissuade Americans from the practice by challenging its coherence. One J.M. Buckley began his 1901 article in the *North American Review* with an appeal to “‘[c]ommon sense metaphysics’” (“Absurd Paradox” 22). Buckley explained, “Whatever materialistic, or metaphysical, or mixed theory of knowledge and reality may be held, there is in every sane mind a recognition of permanent relations of one thing or idea to another” (23). Buckley thus contended that Christian Science was an “absurd paradox” whose conclusions did not follow from their biblical premises. Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1904, the pseudonymous “John W. Churchman” agreed that Christian Science was an “intellectual failure.” The writer scoffed, “To gain anything like a clear idea of just what Mrs. Eddy intends the teaching of Christian Science to be is a most difficult matter; for it is never easy to analyze into a systematic grouping of principles, a maze of disconnected and contradictory statements” (434). In some cases, critics attacked the theology as “unchristian,” but they rarely did so without the accompanying analysis of her argument’s logical flaws.

Significantly, the negative assessments of Eddy’s work emphasized her language use, which from the perspective of critics reflected its intellectual faults. Skeptics shared with Eddy the ideal of a transparent and rational language in both public and religious life. Thus, “appropriate” language use, the discernable reflection of an idea’s internal logic, became a primary measure for judging how well-developed and respectable the theology was. Because disordered prose reflects poor logic and an irrational mind, skeptics in Eddy’s time often attacked her through close readings of her supposedly banal language. In a 1899 *North American Review* article, William Purrington warns, “[M]any who, without having read the text-book [Science and Health], fancy they know what it teaches, would be surprised . . . at the vagueness of expression, hopeless confusion of thought, vain boasting, complacent assertion
of impossible occurrences, virulent denunciation of all other systems, and systematic, commonplace advertising that everywhere appear” (“Christian Science’ and its Legal Aspects” 349). Eugene Wood is even harsher in his 1901 *Atlantic Monthly* article focusing on Eddy’s literary skill. Granting the popularity of Eddy’s textbook, Wood nevertheless disparages “what the public wants to read.” The critic condemns the “poor and unsophisticated flavor of Mrs. Eddy’s style,” which is reflected in a limited vocabulary, mixed metaphors, and “cryptic verse” (569, 571). Wood snidely applauds Eddy: “There is none of that so offensive assumption of superiority that manifests itself in words not in common use, compelling the reader to guess at their meaning, or be humiliated by having to turn to the dictionary” (569). For her religious beliefs to be considered valid, Eddy needed to rise beyond the empty metaphors and trite aphorisms that would distract lower minds, and critics argued that she failed to meet this intellectual standard.

Even more tellingly, Eddy’s detractors often associated these literary flaws with her gender and identified her work with the sentimental fiction prevalent during the nineteenth century. While Eddy’s critics did not explicitly suggest that she failed as a writer because she was a woman, they did implicitly associate her and her language with the infamous “scribbling women” of popular fiction – not with rationality but with sentimentality. In an 1897 article, James Main Dixon, armed with the distinguished title of professor, scorned Eddy’s poetry:

> There is a honeyed “jabberwok” sweetness about the flow of the lines which shows a certain talent for verse composition. But when we are to come to the ‘studied argument and much persuasion sought’ that are the glory of a really good lyric, then, indeed, we are left sadly to seek. (“An Evening” 5)
If his audience has failed to make the association to this point, Dixon clarifies, “It is evident to me that the writer is a woman who is not accustomed to deal with realities, but sees things through the haze of a dreamy sentimentalism” (5). Importantly, both the argument and language Dixon chooses to challenge Eddy’s authority is remarkably similar to that of Wood’s *Atlantic Monthly* article on the same topic. This equally authoritative literary critic concludes his article by suggesting that the addle-minded public will pay “double prices” for “the cloying sweetness of optimism enlivened with the peppermint of such sayings as that the man that relies on both prayer and drugs to cure him ‘divides his faith between Catnip and Christ’” (571). While men may succumb to this quixotic mindset, both writers assume, the scribbling women of sentimental literature are far more susceptible. In short, critics denounced Eddy’s work as intellectually destitute, specifically citing its unreasonable, decidedly feminine language.

Mark Twain launched the most sustained attack against Christian Science and relied heavily on an analysis of her writing in an effort to dismantle Eddy’s appeal. The humorist wrote a number of stories and articles in various periodicals on the subject between 1898 and 1903, and he published them together under the title *Christian Science* in 1907. Twain’s primary argument in the opening chapters of Book II is that Eddy could not have written much of the later editions of *Science and Health*, which he saw as competent in its control of English. After comparing passages of the textbook to Eddy’s early poems and other miscellany, he concludes that “her actual share in the work of composing and phrasing these things [in *Science and Health*] was so slight as to be inconsequential” (130). Twain differentiates two voices, one heavily revised and comprehensible, and a second that emerges when Eddy “puts her literary foot down” (130). According to Twain, the “authentic” voice
of Eddy is expressed in “fifteen-year-old” or “bastard English” (116, 117), and it can be distinguished by its primary features:

- Desert vacancy, as regards thought.
- Self-complacency.
- Puerility.
- Sentimentality.
- Affectations of scholarly learning.
- Lust after eloquent and flowery expression.
- Repetition of pet poetic picturesquenesses.
- Confused and wandering statement.
- Metaphor gone insane.
- Meaningless words, used because they are pretty, or showy, or unusual.
- Sorrowful attempts at the epigrammatic.
- Destitution of originality. (130-131)

Like Wood and Dixon, Twain argues that Eddy attempts to mask a lack of substance with a kitschy style. It is telling that Twain assumes that a woman is incapable of producing the second, competent voice – or varying her style through revision and rhetorical acumen. The readers of the partly satiric, partly acrimonious book undoubtedly would have recognized the standard criticisms launched at sentimental fiction and understood its feminine association.

Even more importantly, Twain’s assessment of Eddy’s language is fundamental to why he (as well as Wood and Dixon) believed Christian Science to be so dangerous. He fully appreciated Eddy’s business acumen, calling her “[i]n several ways … the most interesting woman that ever lived, and the most extraordinary” (102); he even acknowledged the benefits of mind cures, famously suggesting that they could cure “four-fifths” of all “pain
and disease” (53). Yet as Garry Wills points out, the humorist considered Eddy’s language to be the reflection of her thought. From Twain’s perspective, Eddy’s tortured sentences reflected her deception of self and others – the “refusal of words to get themselves into a position where they can be tested, weighed, or challenged” (Wills xxxiv). Christian Science “makes no appeal to the intellect” – because its language makes it incapable of doing so (Twain 94). The religion, Twain suggests, is driven by the “unintelligent, the people who do not think,” making its influence a “formidable” danger to mainstream Christianity (96). Unchallenged, Eddy would shepherd the nation not into health and salvation but into sentimentality and disordered thinking.

In many respects, Twain’s *Christian Science* is a microcosm of the strictures facing Eddy as a female religious rhetor. If women rhetors adopted a sentimental or “feminine” style, critics accused them of disorderly and degenerative thinking. If they adopted a rational or “masculine” strategy, critics often argued that they could not do so competently and merely produced a deceptive imitation of true intellectual work. Such a paradox is hardly surprising in an ostensibly secular context. However, female religious rhetors had often justified their authority in terms of their higher spirituality or an exceptional gift from God for speech. The liberal bent of the debate over metaphysical healing undermined these older justifications for women’s religious discourse. The following section extends this discussion by focusing specifically on the question of individual and professional authority as it pertained to the new metaphysical theologies.

**Professional Authority vs. Individual Experience: Following the Wise Man**

The ideals of rationality and individuality are closely bound in liberal philosophy, principles meant to protect the individual and society from the destructive force of tyranny. Despite
their seemingly secular birth, these liberal values have always been in sympathy with those of Protestantism. At the heart of the Protestant tradition is its staunch rejection of orthodoxy and its validation of individual religious experience. Nineteenth-century liberals followed the early reformers in eschewing doctrine and denying the authority of the church authorities, of which the Pope was the most heinous example. What distinguished American Protestants of the nineteenth-century was their willingness to place common sense at the heart of their endeavor for a progressive and genuine Christianity. For these liberal Christians, reason was not the sole epistemological foundation of spiritual knowledge but the central cog in a system of checks and balances that ensured the health of the Christian nation. They emphasized the right of individual Christians to be heard – but demanded that these experiences be weighed and validated in the court of common sense. Even if reason could not uncover spiritual truth unaccompanied by faith or revelation, it was necessary to ensure the orderly progress of Christendom on earth.

The apparently tolerant stance of liberal Protestantism in the nineteenth-century undoubtedly provided a fertile environment for the flowering of metaphysical healing. The emphasis on personal experience validated the numerous testimonials of cures and allowed the movement to grow through the grass-roots efforts of healers. However, women rhetors like Eddy inhabited a unique position in relation to liberalism and often found their experiences discredited in the name of good sense. Many liberal Protestants considered older strategies for developing ethos, such as those used by revival preachers, to be emotional, effeminate, and even dangerous. Dismissed as irrational, female religious leaders often found themselves constructed as the archetypes of arbitrary authority; they represented power unbridled by reason. These women served as the antithesis to the male professional, whose authority was derived not arbitrarily but from his “universal” common sense. In
other words, secular and religious liberals often suggested that (irrational) female
metaphysical healers justified their authority with theories born of their own interests and
whims, rather than rational principles in accordance with spiritual law.

Distinguishing Objective from Arbitrary Medical Authority
In the context of metaphysical healing, the medical field in particular held a vested in stifling
the growth of alternative cures. Not surprisingly, physicians readily excluded metaphysical
healers from the discussion over appropriate health care by dismissing them as irrational and
obeisant. This strategy relied heavily on their audience’s liberal values and reinforced the
professional position of orthodox physicians. These physicians adopted more strict
definitions of scientific reason than were typical of many liberal Protestants, for whom
“common sense” had significant moral connotations. Those practicing “regular” medicine
argued that theories of metaphysical healing were not objective and demanded obedience
blindly; they regularly described proponents of the movement as ignorant, obsequious, or
devoid of “will.” This argument reinforced the professional authority of physicians and
constructed metaphysical healers as the other to their rational scientist. Such a rhetorical
move ultimately staked the medical profession’s claim to healthcare, establishing the
authority of a scientific ethos in such matters.

The metaphysical healing movement likely would have garnered far less attention
from physicians had their professional status been more firmly established. In her
discussion of the movement, historian Rennie B. Schoepflin highlights the tenuous public
position of the medical profession in the late nineteenth century. Physicians during the
period were only beginning to shift their claims for authority from those based on character
to those based on scientific knowledge, and they frequently faced accusations of quackery
A short narrative in an 1894 issue of *Life* voiced the cynicism of the middle class regarding health care. In the story, a clearly uneducated laborer describes a series of meetings he had with a doctor, each of which created new ailments in the process of alleviating the current one. He concludes:

“Wal, by this time, I begun to see through… [the doctor’s] game, an’ to see thet ez long ez I kept goin’ to him he was agoin’ ter give me one kinder sickness to cure another an’ keep himself in a stydy job all the time. So I just stopped eatin’ till my dysyepsy got better and then I quit doctors.
“Now when I’m sick I take Goldberg’s tincture. There’s over forty-seven ingredients into it, an’ no matter what ails yer sum one on ‘em is bound ter hit yer!” (Romaine 156)

The humorous tale is flattering to neither physicians nor the general public. In advocating for a more scientific medicine, the article reflects the public’s skepticism of the self-proclaimed physicians that led many Americans to explore alternative cures. Schoepflin makes a compelling argument that the often hostile attacks on metaphysical healing by physicians reflect their (justified) anxiety about who would define wellbeing and the future of medical treatment (6). The debate over metaphysical healing offered physicians the opportunity to distinguish their professional cures from those satirized in the story, a distinction about which many Americans were dubious.

Despite their professional interests, many physicians expressed a certain level of tolerance for the concept of mind healing. Even those physicians who demanded that its practice be curtailed by law readily acknowledged the influence of the mind over the health of the body. As M.L. Holbrook explained in an 1899 issue of The Phrenological Journal and Science of Health, “There is much of superstition mixed up with such cases [of Christian Science], but they illustrate the power of the mind over the body and are opening up to us methods which, when reduced to a science, will do away with much disease and help cure much more” (87). Sometimes grudgingly, physicians suggested that public discussion of metaphysical healing in scientific terms would eventually educate the public beyond superstition. Many physicians further suggested that failing to address the insights of these alternative practitioners would endanger the progress of the medical profession, however flawed these metaphysical theories currently were. From this perspective, metaphysical healing demonstrated the development of the field from quackery to a scientific profession.
E.S. Martin, writing in *Life* in 1893, suggested that “the great doctors do not sneer [at the faith-cure].” These great doctors, Martin argued, “realizing what a complicated creature man is, observe, reflect, and learn if they can, even from cranks” (118). This process of letting the “cream” of metaphysical healing rise to the top ensured medical progress and, to a certain extent, held physicians accountable for any incompetence.

Despite such expressions of goodwill, these concessions on the part of the medical profession to the power of mind were conditional. While they accepted the importance of open discussion on the topic, physicians felt equally certain that many of these views could be dismissed as faulty. Physicians consequently placed the burden of proof on metaphysical healers to demonstrate the correctness of their therapies – in terms laid out by the medical profession. A 1899 article in *Outlook* concluded, “[M]ental healers ought not to be permitted to practice mental healing as a profession and for pay until they can persuade the community that disease is a mortal thought and that it is an adequate remedy to pay the healer’s fee and think unmortal thoughts” (13). In part, this statement reflects the assumption that a studious and unbiased analysis of the various claims would gradually lead to a more complete understanding of wellbeing, both physical and mental. However, it also limits authority to those rhetors willing to embrace a scientific or “objective” ethos. This particular construction of ethos allowed physicians to distinguish themselves from other medical practitioners and laid the foundation for their ultimate control of medicine.

Physicians justified their jurisdiction over health care by suggesting their ostensibly objective stance was the only safe one, as bias did not cloud its quest for truth or exploration of theories. Physicians continually asserted that the real danger of the metaphysical healing movement was in its dependence on subjective authority. Critics of the movement were often torn between two versions of this argument: on one hand, they suggested that the
practice demanded blind faith in a (frequently disingenuous) healer; on the other hand, they claimed that practitioners gained followers through a pretense to rationality. Occasionally, physicians and other critics fused these two contradictory arguments in cautioning against mental cures. In the *Medical and Surgical Reporter* in 1894, S.S. Towler cautioned, “We pass… [the healing fad] by with a feeling of contempt for both doctor and patients; we say he humbugged them; we see nothing mysterious in the process; and yet when a Christian scientist or quack only imitates the ‘regular,’ we are alarmed at the exercise of a power that cannot be explained” (791). Towler, even as he chides those willing to swallow eccentric or quixotic theories unquestioningly, implies that the public desires a rational explanation for natural occurrences. The assumption linking these two inconsistent views of metaphysical healing is that an objective and rational professional is the solution to the problem.

In some cases, physicians argued that the uneducated public should be protected from itself. In other words, the enlightened and altruistic doctor should be granted authority over the patient’s wellbeing. E.M. Clark in 1894 went so far as to argue that physicians should emulate metaphysical healers in “trading] on the gullibility of the weak in body and mind.” He encourages his colleagues to “use all the powers of… [their] trained mind[s] to dominate the mind of… [their] patients” and to “demand that… [their] patient be his intelligent self, and act accordingly” (466). Clark claims that mental influences should be used to increase the patient’s investment in the “intelligent” authority of the doctor – and his ostensibly rational treatments. Other physicians used language that was less intrusive but no less authoritative. In the same year, Hildegarde H. Longsdorf suggested that legally curtailing metaphysical healing might be a necessary evil. She explained, “I do not doubt that some are cured, and to a rational thinker there is no mystery about the process, but the fact remains that the process cannot be rationally explained, so that the subject of it can
clearly understand it” (175). While mental cures are comprehensible to an expert, Longsdorf suggests, they are beyond the understanding of the public. Both physicians assert their authority on the basis of their professional expertise, authority ostensibly built on a systematic and rational understanding of wellbeing. Neither physician acknowledges that they demand the same “blind” faith from their patients for which they criticized metaphysical healers; they instead imply that their own authority is salutary because it is not subjective but rational and objective.

Rather than assuming the public’s inherent medical illiteracy, a number of physicians adopted the more obvious stance of encouraging their peers to gain a better understanding of the principles underlying mental healing. They assumed that full comprehension of these principles, by both physicians and patients, would eliminate its deficient manifestations. In 1894, F.C. Herr argued that the medical field paid “insufficient attention... to the remedia psychia by Pereira” and that “mental influences as a factor in the causation of disease [did] not receive a tithe of the consideration to which their importance entitles them” (2). He contrasts a conviction in metaphysical healing born of superstition with an understanding of mental therapeutics born of education. With a vigor that borders on comical, the physician rallies his colleagues: “Against all the audacity and impious assumption of these shameless pretenders we must oppose something. What shall it be? I submit it can be only light! knowledge! truth! science!” (2). Herr constructs the debate not as one between religion and science but instead as one between irrationality and reason. If given the former dichotomy, his audience might still choose religion, but if given the second, the appropriate answer seems obvious.

The interest of Herr and the medical field in the outcome of the metaphysical healing debate is obvious. When its authority over health care was threatened by
metaphysical healers, the medical community drew a line between the scientific and irrational. Physicians of the period often assessed metaphysical cures in research-based terms that reflected the profession’s new scientific stance, rather than in the terms of the healers and their patients. For example, the Medical News solicited John B. Huber in 1899 to gather “definite and complete knowledge of the basis upon which the claims of this sect are founded” (“An Investigation into Christian Science” 79). This investigation was not meant to outline the cult as a “psychologic system” but was “confined to an examination of the Christian-Scientists’ method of treating the sick and of the results claimed and obtained in its application” (Jan. 21, 79). Huber provided just such a study, published in four parts, which assessed the validity of proclaimed cures. Not surprisingly, Huber’s methodology, and thus his questions and conclusions, demonstrate little understanding of the religious practices he is studying. He informs his reader:

I have put the question “Do you isolate a patient suffering from an infectious disease?” many times to many Christian Scientists. I consider this question simplicity itself and I think any sane person possessed of merely rudimentary honesty should be able to answer it intelligently and satisfactorily. (Jan. 21, 76)

The concepts of quarantine and infection hold little relevance to Christian Scientists, who believe sickness is an illusion of an error-ridden mind. Huber’s logic is circular, his study suggesting that only medical professionals uphold the professional standards of medicine. So while it offers little useful information regarding Christian Science, the article is enormously significant in reinforcing the medical community’s authority to define appropriate healthcare.
Perhaps the most significant consequence of the debate over metaphysical healing was the opportunity it granted physicians to solidify their professional authority under the banner of reason. Late nineteenth-century Americans often looked derisively on the medical community, due to lax licensing laws and lenient standards for medical colleges. Physicians of the period constructed their professional identity largely by placing themselves in opposition to practitioners who relied on personal or subjective authority, of which metaphysical healers were perceived to be a prominent example. In 1900, G.W. Guthrie proclaimed that “all men liberally educated along medical lines, embracing the fundamental branches of medical education… ought to be united under one banner in the contention against charlatanry, quackery, and deception of every kind” (480). Guthrie unifies those members of the community who are willing to submit to the authority of “science,” while distancing himself from those who define wellbeing in other terms. C.F. Nichols, writing in *Science* in 1892, imposed an even stricter standard on the profession:

Concession on the part of any physician to the childish credulity of a bygone age is simply high treason to his noble profession. A medical man who is still conducting cases of successful treatment should reflect upon his ingratitude to Alma Mater, and upon the comment which must greet a step which seems to stultify his own professional life and give support to a dangerous class in the community. His colleagues will, inevitably, question his sincerity and ask for a logical defense. (43)

Given the historical context of the debate, Guthrie and Nichols claim such inflexible scientific standards for physicians not because they existed but because they hoped to make them true. Such arguments and assumptions signaled a shift from a diverse health care field that considered wellbeing holistically to a medical field that assessed it objectively, a shift that
culminated in the rise of the modern medical school in the opening decades of the twentieth century.

The issue of metaphysical healing, because it aroused such public interest, offered physicians a unique opportunity to construct their identity as distinct from the army of alternative healers practicing in nineteenth-century America. Physicians, in presenting themselves as scientists, defined the concept of “reason” or “common sense” in terms less flexible than liberal Protestants. A Christian or divine science might be called a rational science according to its own terms but not according to the terms of modern science as understood today. The metaphysical healing movement was powerful because it actualized the holistic vision of wellbeing common in the late nineteenth century. Physicians severed physical and spiritual wellbeing in an effort to claim their authority over appropriate healthcare, and in doing so, they significantly limited the terms under which rhetors writing on the subject could build a powerful ethos. As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, the attitudes of the medical profession became more fully entrenched and older visions of wellbeing increasingly obsolete, despite their shared liberal origin. The following section returns to Eddy and Christian Science, considering how this new, less flexible understanding of ethos impacted her rhetorical situation in the debate over metaphysical healing.

Challenging the Authority of the Prophet

Christian Science undoubtedly benefited from the liberal disposition of American Protestantism in the late-nineteenth-century. Liberal Christians of the period questioned authority based on tradition or title, a view that extended the iconoclastic heritage of Protestant thought. Thousands entered the marketplace as healers and gained a public voice
as writers and theorists. However, the pluralistic environment of the late nineteenth-century was not an unequivocal boon for Christian Scientists, particularly for women. Scholars have often questioned the seeming transparency of liberal rhetoric, attacking it for both eliding difference and privileging the “rational.”

Inclusion is unlikely for those unable or unwilling to adopt the liberal values of reasoned discourse and tolerance. As physicians began to solidify their hold over “scientific” healthcare, more narrow definitions of reason began to replace the broader ones often adopted by nineteenth-century liberal Protestants. Such a shift reinforced already existing stereotypes of the female religious rhetor as emotional and overwrought. Critics typecast Eddy as the villain, an irrational and dictatorial prophet driven by her own selfish needs. Such a rhetorical move allowed them to dismiss Eddy as a theologian and rhetor, all the while retaining their claim to tolerance and objectivity.

In spite of the frequent criticism it received in the press, liberal Protestants in general were hesitant to legally curtail the practice of Christian Science, both for idealistic and pragmatic reasons. Even some skeptics invoked the principle of religious freedom, emphasizing the sovereignty of the individual conscious. Such a stance was not intended to advocate metaphysical healing but to protect those individuals who chose to practice it. A short 1906 editorial in *The Independent* concluded:

> We are not here defending the philosophy or the system of Christian Science. We only defend its liberty of faith and recognize the multitude of its adherents, their moral earnestness, their spiritual fervor and the frequent success of their efforts, thru the mind, to heal the ills of the body. (“Christian Science” 1240)

In this statement, the writer stresses the importance of protecting the individual from the tyranny of an orthodox public. Like many liberal Protestants, he suggests that a healthy
society and church requires a space for faith and personal beliefs. A.A. Chevaillier, in an 1890 article, similarly attacks on the basis of individual rights any law that would censor the denomination’s practices. “[T]he Constitution is to-day legally respected,” Chevaillier warns his reader, “although… ignorance, superstition, and prejudice shows there is much educational work yet to be done in teaching people that no truth, whether of creed or dogma, is advanced or appropriated by the human consciousness through futile attempts to force people to see with eyes other than their own” (432). Such consistent calls for religious freedom reaffirmed the sanctity of the individual conscience even when it conflicted with the claims of science.

Religious liberals championed tolerance for unorthodox beliefs like Christian Science not only to protect individual rights but also to ensure social progress. Many liberals believed that open discussion about the denomination was necessary to advance human knowledge, even if they did not support the practice. Critics therefore emphasized that only a full and careful analysis of representative voices could determine the ultimate value of mental healing and the potential of the movement to expand spiritual knowledge. In a brief 1900 article in *The Philistine* regarding Christian Science, Henry Clay M'Dougal emphasized the importance of a free exchange of ideas, “You cannot build a Chinese wall around the human intellect. Hence for me this new departure has no terrors. If good, the people will accept it; if found otherwise, they will in time reject it, and in this, as in all else affecting the welfare of the race, it is safe to trust to the good sense of the people” (1). M'Dougal’s rationale for supporting the rights Christian Scientists (although he himself is by his own admission not even Christian) is the function of robust discourse in promoting “progress and development” (1). Although more explicitly hostile toward Christian Science, a 1910
article in *The Nation* further emphasized the importance of opening a dialogue regarding religious questions. The anonymous writer claims:

No more delicate task… can be laid upon men who seek to think dispassionately and accurately, than that of distilling out observingly the soul of goodness from evil, detaching truth from its encompassing falsehood, and passing judgment upon great movements like Christian Science in a way at once comprehensive, fair, and charitable. . . . In the entire process we have to guard the right of private judgment and individual liberty. (“Mrs. Eddy’s Career” 542)

The writer implies that an equitable person can recognize the true and rational – and therefore justly decree on the validity of metaphysical beliefs. However, a fair judgment depends on a studious and open examination of the facts and the particular system of belief in question.

Even those highly critical of Eddy’s church took great pains to demonstrate that their calls to end the practice were valid and fair, rather than subjective or biased. Christians in the late nineteenth-century largely accepted the liberal assumption that arguments should be judged primarily by “common sense,” rather than subjective ethical standards. Consequently, stressing one’s objectivity became an important rhetorical strategy, even given the religious nature of the topic. William A. Purrington, a frequent critic of metaphysical healing, concluded his 1899 piece in the *North American Review* by offering an adage, “Publicity will destroy the cult [of Christian Science] far more quickly than legislation” (“Christian Science’ and Its Legal Aspects” 361). In a subsequent article later that year, he reiterated the axiom and further explained:
In that belief it is proposed here, with equal fairness, by quotations from her books… to show something of the life, methods, pretentions, methods, and literary output of this remarkable woman, leaving the reader to judge from her own words whether she is … learned, modest, truthful and generous, or… ignorant, irreverent, boastful, and greedy. We assume that candid, intelligent persons, interested in her teachings and alleged marvellous [sic] cures, are willing to learn the truth and try the teacher upon her utterances in a forum of common sense. (“The Case Against Christian Science” 190)

Purrington expresses faith that this process of intellectual inquiry will ensure the appropriate outcome, stifling the spread of erroneous and degenerative ideas and buttressing rational and progressive ones. Even more importantly, he strengthens his authority by rhetorically demonstrating his moral and intellectual integrity in the form of an “objective” analysis.

It is important to note that liberal Protestants often did not extend their sympathy to the woman leading the metaphysical healing movement, even when they were generally receptive to it. Many Christians simply accepted those versions of the practice that they viewed as the least distorted by individual interests, a standard by which Eddy’s theology was generally perceived to come up short. A brief review in the Arena follows the book’s author in suggesting that mental healing has contributed to the progress of the church, but the writer distinguishes “New Thought,” which is valuable, from “Christian Science,” which is not. The writer suggests that Christian Science, because of its leadership by Eddy, did not promote free inquiry but required obedience to authority, while New Thought promoted a rational doctrine. The writer concludes by citing a New Thought manifesto: “There is no room for investigation, liberty of thought, progress or further revelation [in Christian Science]. There is no recognition of related physical science or of evolutionary
development” (qtd. in H.W.D. 404). A review of books on Christian Science in *The Nation* in 1910 adopts a slightly different conclusion, although grounded in the same premises. Reviewing Georgine Milmine’s popular biography, *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy*, the author concludes that the book “demolishes Mrs. Eddy without necessarily demolishing Christian Science” (138). The reviewer does not promote Christian Science or any other metaphysical religion but hints that a worthwhile “Christian science” can be developed if its powerful leader can be stripped of her authority.

Most Americans undoubtedly understood the importance of “common-sense” in religion in the context of the Protestant affirmation of individual spiritual authority. Therefore, metaphysical healing could be supported insofar as it stemmed from rational principles and not obedience to church authority. Many Protestants assailed Eddy’s theology because they viewed it as they viewed Catholicism – merely with Mary Baker Eddy as the power-hungry leader instead of the pope. H.M. Dexter, in *The Chautauquan* in 1890, referred to the leader of Christian Science not only as an “ignoramus” but an “ambitious woman [who] assumes … to be a sort of second Savior of the world” (719). In a leaflet, the Metaphysical Club of Boston even more explicitly centered its criticism of Christian Science on its obedience to earthly authority. The group, in an effort to distinguish its own New Thought system from Christian Science, argued that Eddy’s theology “centered [authority] in one person” and was the “strict and literal interpretation of one individual” (qtd. in H.W.D. 403). Without reason and objectivity to check the authority of the so-called prophet, she could (and likely would) reign arbitrarily and inadequately.

Liberal Protests closely associated a rhetorical strategy seemly untempered by reason with a desire to control. A “eulogy” of sorts in *Collier’s* after Eddy’s death in 1910 linked the growth of Christian Science not to its truth but to the “triumph of personality” (Irwin 16).
In this account of Eddy’s life, William Irwin claims, “When … she established her cult in Lynn and Boston, [her]… personality became an active force. She bent all her followers to her will, or she drove them out, sullen but silenced. Especially did she attract and dominate women” (16). Irwin clearly has little respect for a self-proclaimed prophet that is “vague, contradictory, and untruthful” and women who would be drawn in by a theology that is “grotesque, …contradictory, …[and] violates every law of logic” (16). For critics like Irwin, both Eddy’s behavior and writing belied her assertion that her theology was scientific. If allowed to proceed uncurbed, a duplicitous leader, sustained by a band of fatuous followers, would set the stage for religious tyranny and social degeneration.

Interestingly, the most common metaphor for the relationship between Eddy and her followers was that between orator (or more specifically sophist) and audience. Because religious liberals so closely connected common sense and morality, they believed that an emotionally-driven relationship between rhetor and audience, leader and followers, reflected poorly on both parties. A short article in the Medical News remarked that Christian Scientists are often “persons of social influence, good moral character” but “superficial in knowledge.” The believers are, the writer concludes, those “who can easily be convinced by sophistry, and who cannot follow a truly logical mind in the exposure of fallacy” (116). This common sophistic metaphor arose because nineteenth-century Americans believed that metaphysical healing required a “susceptible” nature and submission of one mind to another. Nineteenth-century writers generally explained such susceptibility in terms of “nerves,” blurring the distinction between physical and moral or mental control. In 1887, John Denison described the success of metaphysical healers as a product of their “nervous organization,” which caused them to differ from other healers in the same way that “the orator… differ[s] from another man equally learned, earnest, and acquainted with rhetorical principles” (253). Conversely,
Denison explains, other individuals have susceptible natures that are “partly hereditary and, in part, the result of habit” (252). Most nineteenth century Americans considered both the willingness to submit and the inclination to dominate equally dangerous to wellbeing of the nation.

More specifically, critics of Christian Science characterized believers as “weak-minded” or irrational, as people easily influenced by others rather than their own good sense. They regularly adopted the derogatory moniker, “Eddyites,” to refer to people who would allow another such authority over them. In an article in Forum in 1888, Meredith Clymer uses a similar premise to dismiss not only Christian Science but metaphysical healing in general as inappropriate. Clymer claims that the foundation for “suggestive medicine” (such as hypnotism) is the “full surrender of will” by the subject to the “absolute power” of the operator (193). Ultimately dismissing metaphysical healing and suggestion as a curative agent, Clymer concludes, “Impressionable natures only, whether hypnotized or in a waking state, can be brought under its influence” (205). The image of the weak-minded Christian Science patient was reinforced by the standard claim of the medical profession that mental suggestion was “most valuable” in the “treatment of ‘nervousness,’ neurasthenia, hysteria, and all functional nervous troubles” (“The Value of Psychical Therapeutics” 746). For liberals, such mental weakness was certainly not to be lauded and must be refuted as potentially dangerous to the individual and society. “Eddyites” lacked the character and common sense to overcome the force of one individual personality over their own, so their beliefs should be addressed and purged to ensure progress.

While most nineteenth-century liberals expressed a certain amount of pity for those who accepted her theories, Eddy herself received no such compassion. Eddy’s critics were frequently torn between their suspicion of religious authority and their scorn for women
with visions of grandeur. Herr denounced the discoverer of Christian Science and her theology:

Mrs. Eddy’s work is nothing but a lofty pretense at a philosophic exposition of her own introspective mental states, and an attempt to apply her deductions to the universal mind. She has fallen into the same egregious error that has characterized the intellectual flights of the medieval sophists, who wrote volumes filled with smooth flowing sentences, but in whose volumes a Philadelphia lawyer could not find any trace of reason or sense. (1)

According to Herr, Eddy not only relies on unfounded and subjective ideas but also fails to recognize it. As Herr describes her, the Christian Science leader is a power-hungry woman who is foolish enough to believe her own hype.

Other critics offered more harsh forms of this argument: they suggested that Eddy was ambitious and greedy, while simultaneously presenting her as delusional and even demented. Clymer sardonically described the healers who followed Eddy’s lead as possessing either “infected minds” or “creed and craft” (202). Those writing on the Christian Science founder often observed both of these qualities. The most well-known version of this argument was the biography of Eddy’s life written by Willa Cather and Georgine Milmine. The portrait of Eddy painted by Cather and Milmine is of a woman desperate for attention and power, one tending toward hysteria and even paranoia. The biographers are rarely overtly hostile, as the narrative alternates between an ostensibly objective analysis of Eddy’s ideas, vivid character sketches of her and her followers, and the occasional, light-hearted barb. If Cather and Milmine are to be believed, Eddy exerted an almost dictatorial control over her followers, especially those who had “something of the mystic in their natures” and “came out of her classroom to find the world had changed”
For example, Eddy encouraged her followers to read nothing but her published works, attempting to curb sedition among her students (362). Yet the biographers are careful to elucidate the self-deception that underlies Eddy’s authoritative leadership. Cather and Milmine accept the common (and unfounded) accusation that Eddy had plagiarized the work of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, explaining, “Surrounded as she was by these admiring students, who hung upon her words and looked to her for the ultimate wisdom, Mrs. Glover [Eddy] became less acutely conscious of Quimby’s relation to the healing system she taught” (161).¹⁰ Like Twain, they imply that Eddy’s words and theories have become tangled and dissociated from reason, a reflection of the disordered and disorderly mind that produced them. Eddy’s words, Cather and Milmine suggest, reflect her skewed vision, her own abnormal psychology rather than reality, and should be treated with suspicion.

The period under discussion in this project is important because it represents a period of flux: many Protestants retained their optimism that science and Christianity could be reconciled, while others limited the possibilities for such reconciliation. Metaphysical healing held its greatest appeal in the late nineteenth-century, a period defined by pluralistic healthcare and liberal Christian beliefs. The medical field’s vehement protests against the practice were a deliberate effort to regain control of American healthcare, rather than an expression of existing conditions. However, critics outside the field increasingly challenged Eddy’s authority in the same terms as physicians, suggesting that she relied on deception to promote subjective beliefs. The affirmation of professional authority in arguments against Christian Science signified the growing rift between “objective” scientific and “subjective” religious discourses, although it did not fully crystallize until the early twentieth century. This affirmation of more rigid standards of liberal discourse increasingly limited the
authority not only of metaphysical healers but also of women who were labeled as inherently “irrational.”

Conclusions

Addressing the legal war over the rights of alternative healers, an 1894 editorial in *The Medical and Surgical Reporter* quipped:

> The humor of the situation is enhanced when we see the efforts of apostles of the immaterial to enlighten politicians who regard nothing but what can be made evident to the sense of touch… They ask the scientist, “What is mind?” and are satisfied with the reply “No matter.” Then they ask, “What is matter?” and receive the evasive reply, “Never mind.” The philosophy is complete. (539)

The editorial implies a sharp divide between the scientific and materialistic worldview of politicians and the prophetic and irrational worldview of metaphysical healers. However, such a division between these two realms was not natural or absolute in the late nineteenth century, despite the efforts of the editors to present it as such. Although they found the unity of the religious and scientific order increasingly difficult to argue, it remained a living option for American Protestants of the period.

Because it raised important questions for liberal theology, the metaphysical healing movement redefined the terms for religious discourse in two crucial ways. First, the pragmatic bent of liberal theology allowed Christians to retain liberal standards of public discourse without minimizing the significance of faith. Americans of the late nineteenth-century regularly asserted the importance of bring faith down to earth, particularly in emphasizing Christian character and conduct. Moreover, liberal Protestants coupled this
pragmatism with progressivism, an optimism that human beings could gradually reach
greater understanding of religious truth. Those Christians adopting this progressive stance
did not suggest that reason should be the epistemological foundation for faith. However,
liberals did imply that reason in religious discourse was necessary for the proper function of
faith on earth, a stance that was the rhetorical expression of liberal Christianity’s pragmatic
tenor. Rational religious discourse was necessary for human theological arguments to be
tested, weighed, and ultimately improved. In other words, liberal Protestants believed that
spiritual Truth existed but that human theology must be continually perfected in its
expression of that truth. Such assumptions meant that the standards of liberal religious
discourse remained at a practical level quite similar to liberal discourses in other contexts –
and raised the same challenges for women rhetors.

Second, the emphasis on character in liberal Protestantism allowed women to adopt
liberal values in terms that were favorable to their participation in public discourse on
religion. Liberal Protestants presented a concept of Christian “character” that intimately
entangled morality and common sense. As I have argued in this chapter, critics consistently
condemned metaphysical healing as an irrational and primitive theology, and they touted the
standard of common sense and rationality to exclude women from public discourse.
However, female metaphysical healers like Eddy drew on traditional concepts of feminine
spirituality: they claimed for the gender the universal faculty of common sense by
emphasizing women’s greater moral capacity. Such a strategy makes their religious rhetoric
quite different from those that emphasized feminine piety or the “extraordinary call” of a
few highly spiritual women. While the strategy presented significant risks to their authority,
it also offered women the opportunity to seize authority as a liberal, speaking subject.
My argument throughout the remainder of this project is that this melding of the spiritual and scientific opened a space for women to rethink their traditional stance as religious rhetors. Women rhetors revised the assumptions of liberal Protestantism in terms that granted them both moral and intellectual authority. The following two chapters address the writing of two important female metaphysical healers and rhetors: Mary Baker Eddy and Emma Curtis Hopkins. As the articles highlighted in this chapter reflect, Eddy’s writing elicited widespread and strident reactions. Christian Science theology served as the exemplar on which critiques for and against metaphysical healing hinged. Eddy’s theology largely defined the questions that liberal Protestants asked regarding metaphysical healing and the relationship between science and religion more generally. An apt representative of the nineteenth-century, Eddy spiritualized liberal ideals and imagined a Christianity that could advance society through abiding Principle. Her vision is of a moral and civilizing order for which the nation must strive. Eddy’s renegade student, Hopkins, offered to her students a philosophy that radically individualized the tenets of Christian Science. Hopkins’ texts, mystical and poetic in their language, often read less as theological principle than as personal meditation. She is, in many respects, the first great figure in the modern genre of Christian self-help literature. In part, my purpose in the following chapters is to suggest that both women warrant inclusion in the historical narrative of liberal Christianity. However, my larger purpose is also to consider the ways in which these women engaged with and modified liberal discursive standards to gain authority as speakers. Eddy and Hopkins represent a liberal tradition in women’s religious discourse that has been largely ignored by rhetoricians, one this project hopes to illuminate.
Chapter 3

Liberty of the Daughters of God:

Mary Baker Eddy and a Rhetoric for Woman’s Hour

On July 4, 1897, Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science church, addressed a crowd of 2,500 church members to commemorate the holiday. After welcoming those in attendance, Eddy began her sermon: “To-day we commemorate not only our nation’s civil and religious freedom, but a greater even, the liberty of the sons of God, the inalienable rights and radiant reality of Christianity” \((MW\,251)\). The sermon redefined liberty as unity with God, as freedom from material unreality and sickness, a common trope in Eddy’s writing. Rather than rejecting the nation’s secular traditions outright, Eddy imagined Christian Science working through the systems of American democracy to create a healthy and truly Christian society. She chose to embrace Independence Day – and the rhetoric of liberal democracy – even as she reconstructed their meaning. Like so many of her fellow New Englanders before her, Eddy spiritualized the secular rhetoric of liberalism and voiced her desire to build a City on a Hill on American shores.

Yet Eddy did not seize on this democratic rhetoric in her Independence Day address in order to justify her right, as a woman, to preach to a large crowd of congregants. Instead she closed her address with an apology of the type common in nineteenth-century women’s oratory:

Friends, I am not enough of the new woman of the period for outdoor speaking, and the incidental platform is not broad enough for me, but the speakers that will now address you – one a congressman – may improve our
platforms; and make amends for the nothingness of Matter with the allness of Mind. (*MW* 253)

Eddy suggests that she has reached a spiritual state that makes her unfit for the material confines of public address; she undermines her authority as a speaker while affirming (or in order to affirm) her authority as a Christian. At this level, Eddy’s rhetoric shares more in common with Phoebe Palmer, leader of the Methodist Holiness Movement, than with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The closing remarks imply that the ethos of the speaker rests in her higher spiritual state (a variation of the “extraordinary call” argument used frequently by Methodist women preachers). Missing from the address are explicit arguments for inherent equality and opposition to arbitrary authority prevalent in the writing of radical nineteenth-century feminists. Distancing herself from secular platform women orators, Eddy associates herself in her closing with the spiritualized Angel of the House, the nineteenth-century feminine ideal.

Despite this apparent rejection of the “new woman” for the older ideal of the Angel, Eddy’s vision of the Christian woman cannot be neatly conflated with earlier images of the domestic, spiritual guide or the exceptional woman touched by God to speak. Her deliberate appropriation of the rhetoric of “inalienable rights” and liberal democracy belie such easy comparisons and cannot be overlooked; it suggests the presence of a far more complex relationship between the discourses of Christianity, liberalism, and femininity in Eddy’s theology and writing. Throughout her prolific career, Eddy mingled these varying discourses in complicated, often contradictory ways. She insisted that material affliction was merely the product of erroneous thinking – while building a religion around healing the sick. She promoted a scientific understanding of the Bible – while questioning the authority of human reason. She embraced the highly spiritualized femininity of the nineteenth-century – while
using it to justify women’s authority in her church. This chapter explores these contradictions in an effort to paint a fuller picture of Eddy as a female religious figure, the most famous (or infamous) of her day.

More specifically, this chapter examines Eddy’s unique theory of religious discourse, which in part adopted but substantially reconfigured the liberal religious rhetoric described in the previous chapter. Eddy participated in broader cultural conversations regarding science and medicine because she both claimed the status of science for her theology and advocated metaphysical healing. In doing so, she could not help but respond to the liberal assumptions shaping these fields in the nineteenth-century, even if she did not unequivocally accept them. Eddy did not espouse a liberalism equivalent to that expressed by scientists, doctors, or even mainstream liberal Protestants, as both her Christianity and her gender substantially influenced her particular brand of liberal religious discourse. As her Independence Day Address reflects, her engagement with liberalism was neither neat nor entirely explicable by standard definitions that assume a secular and male orator invested in Enlightenment ideals.¹

I do not want to characterize Eddy’s theory of religious discourse as unconditionally “liberal” or haphazardly deconstruct definitions of liberal rhetoric to include it. In other words, I do not want to make an argument about liberalism, per se, except to suggest it was not incompatible with religion or intrinsically secular. My primary goal is instead to advance our understanding of women’s religious rhetoric, expanding our sense of the tradition to include theories, like Eddy’s, heavily influenced by liberalism.

I consequently examine Eddy’s expression of each of the project’s three main themes (social reform vs. individual enlightenment; reason vs. passionate belief; and professional authority vs. individual experience). In doing so, I hope to explicate her singular theory of religious discourse, one inextricable from her theology and concept of wellness. While she
could be fruitfully addressed as a practitioner of rhetoric, Eddy is arguably the most prolific female theorist of religious discourse in the nineteenth-century. Her extensive and repeated commentary on language warrants addressing her work as an important contribution to rhetorical theory, for it offers a novel vision of who should speak on sacred subjects and how. I ultimately argue that Eddy melded Christian and liberal values to develop what she understood as a truly progressive Christianity. In integrating these two discourses, she redefined progressive, liberal standards in feminine terms and thus undermined the standard arguments against women’s public speaking and active participation in public religious life.

**Social Reform vs. Individual Enlightenment: Guiding the Spiritual Evolution of America**

Eddy, like most liberal Protestants, stressed the tangible benefits of religious belief and encouraged her followers to take direct action to improve individual and social wellbeing. However, Christian Scientists sought to ease suffering through cures, as opposed to performing the traditional charity work practiced most often in mainstream churches. Eddy consistently argued that the healing work of her students was the only true means towards social wellbeing and progress, even as she received harsh criticism for the denomination’s failure to promote work for the poor. For Scientists, healing was reform work “in the field” and, like other such work, reaped both individual and social benefits. In other words, Eddy’s thought shares many of the same progressive values as more common forms of liberal religion, such as the Social Gospel. However, she stressed that tangible social reform occurs through individual enlightenment at a spiritual level, a premise that holds major implications for her perception of the function of religious discourse.
This section consists of three parts that interrogate the complex relationship in Eddy’s writing between individual, spiritual enlightenment and the progress of American society. The first part outlines the theological underpinnings of healing in Christian Science practice, which is crucial to understanding how individual and social wellbeing intertwined in the new religion. The second part describes the progressive bent of the new religion and the ways in which Eddy’s followers understood their faith in broader social terms. Finally, the third part considers how these theological principles defined the denomination’s engagement with mainstream American society. These beliefs form the foundation for Christian Science rhetoric, as they shaped Eddy’s understanding of the purpose of effective religious discourse. Christian Science discourse differed substantially from rhetoric whose aim was to convert or express repentance, although this type of preaching or exhorting was typical for women in the earlier part of the century. Instead, Eddy suggested that the proper function of religious discourse was to teach the individual Christian, to guide the listener gradually to enlightenment and understanding of divine Principle.

Defining Christian Science Healing and Spiritual Wellbeing

While the significance of healing in Christian Science cannot be overemphasized, the practice stems from theological principles likely quite different from those familiar to non-believers. Most fundamentally, Christian Science defines wellness, both individual and social, as the triumph of spiritual Mind (or “God”) over earthly matter (Eddy, SH 469: 13). Eddy occasionally used the terms “Divine Science” or “Science of Mind,” as well as “Christian Science,” and she defined the term succinctly as “the law of God, the law of good, interpreting and demonstrating the divine Principle and rule of universal harmony” (RDS 1). As this brief definition suggests, Christian Science is a theology of Oneness – of
unity. Eddy’s theology begins with a single premise: “God is good, ever-present, and All” (NY 17). If evil, sin, or sickness exists, it must be a part of the All that is God. However, God is absolute good and therefore cannot contain evil. Eddy concludes, “Matter, or evil, is the absence of Spirit or good. Their nothingness is thus proven” (NY 17). His whole world must be good and sinless if God is omnipresent and omnipotent. In other words, Christian Science is not a theology of asceticism, a rejection of a sinful world. (Such a theology acknowledges the presence of evil and shuns it.) Believers instead insist that sin, evil, and alienation from God are the illusions of an error-ridden mortal mind.

The practice of healing in Christian Science merely follows the premise of God’s omnipresent goodness to its logical conclusion, at least as Eddy understood it. Given the premise that matter and evil cannot exist, sickness, an ailment of matter, must also be the product of an individual’s misunderstanding of God and biblical teachings. Spiritually aware people, therefore, have the power to heal themselves and others through prayers and practices that acknowledge the power of spiritual Mind over earthly matter. Rejecting evil, sin, and sickness, the Christian Scientist can demonstrate the true significance of the Bible’s teachings and Jesus’s healings and bring about the triumph of Spirit on Earth. Christian Scientists must believe that all disease and physical ailments, from nervous conditions to cancer, can be cured spiritually rather than physically or risk undermining the central tenet of the theology. God cannot be All if any such illnesses exist. Eddy repeatedly stressed that this conclusion must be true, although she adopted a pragmatic, evolutionary approach to practices such as surgery:

Christian Science is always the most skillful surgeon, but surgery is the branch of healing which will be last acknowledged. However, it is but just to say that the author has already in her possession well-authenticated records
of the cure, by herself and her students through mental surgery alone, of broken bones, dislocated joints, and spinal vertebrae. (SH 402: 1-7)

Eddy did not forbid her followers to hire a surgeon or encourage her healers to tend broken bones, as the majority of Christians had not advanced far enough spiritually. But eventually, a world where surgery occurred mentally and cancer did not exist would be possible as Christians reached enlightenment through Science.

Eddy’s privileging of Mind over matter prioritized the inner life and deemphasized the external world in religious practice, a significant departure from social Christianity. Progress would occur by means of individuals reaching a new understanding of God, rather than by charitable or liturgical actions in the material realm. Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, the Christian Science textbook, reads:

Audible prayer can never do the work of spiritual understanding, which regenerates; but silent prayer, watchfulness, and devout obedience enable us to follow Jesus’ example. Long prayers, superstition, and creeds clip the strong pinions of love, and clothe religion in human form. Whatever materializes worship hinders man’s spiritual growth and keeps him from demonstrating his power over error. (SH 4:27-5:2)

Eddy consequently did not emphasize ritual, sinless behavior, or good works in the traditional sense; instead, she worked to lead her followers to enlightenment, to comprehension of their personal relationship, their unity, with God or Mind. In order to achieve these goals, Eddy established the Christian Science Publishing Society to create and distribute reading materials to American homes. This stress on religious education through written language reflects the inherent individualism of Christian Science spirituality and relatively lesser weight placed on church services. For Eddy and her followers, the
systematic instruction of individuals in the truths of Science would gradually lead to a more Christian world, one that had escaped the bonds of materiality.

Given this focus on individual enlightenment, Christian Science healing is less a ritual than a means of spiritual education. A healer helps a patient achieve physical health through systematic instruction in the Principle of Mind or God. Most healers practice their craft in physical proximity to their patients and use conversation as the primary tool for curing them (although Scientists do believe it is possible to perform “absent cures” across a distance).4 In a manuscript describing the proper process for metaphysical healing, Eddy directed, “Argue the patient’s case silently at first, after this if you can fix the Truth stronger in thought by it talk audibly to them” (MBEL, “Private Directions for Metaphysical Healing,” A10528).5 Through this process, healers attempted to persuade their patients that their belief in disease was erroneous and provide them with an alternative explanation for their ailment. The body would be cured by treating the mind and spirit. “Find the mental thought behind the physical one always, for this it is that produces the discord,” Eddy explained to her student, “but that which errs is ignorant of itself or the error and YOU must find it out” (MBEL, “Private Directions for Metaphysical Healing,” A10528). In other words, the patient suffered not from a sickness but a “belief of sickness,” so the healer succeed in curing the patient by changing the belief, not the body (MBEL, “Private Directions for Metaphysical Healing,” A10528). Healers teach (or preach to) their patients, no more, no less, leading them to an understanding of God.

The work of the Christian Science healer enacts a moral as well as physical change in the suffering individual, for to enlighten the spirit is to heal the body. Missionaries working with the sick often view their work as means of emulating Jesus' compassion, and they hope to open their patients' minds to God by alleviating their suffering. For most medical
missionaries, medicine holds a secondary status to conversion. In Christian Science healing, no distinction exists between spiritual enlightenment and physical relief, for achieving one will ensure the other. Eddy encouraged her workers in the field, “You must take up the moral as well as the physical errors of your patients, and ‘cast out devils’ when you heal; thus ‘preaching the gospel to all nations,’ speaking Truth to all error” (MBEL, “Private Directions for Metaphysical Healing,” A10528). Through the intimate process of the cure, Christian Science healers provide their patients with a new mental schema for understanding disease – a new worldview that brings them closer to God. No real distinction exists between individual enlightenment, spiritual wellness, and physical health in Eddy’s thought, for all reflect a person’s harmony with the Principle of Christian Science.

However, to define Christian Science healing solely in terms of a new state of mind or belief system misses a central implication of the theology. Individual enlightenment is the foundation but not the complete manifestation of Christian Science. Healing in Eddy’s thought instead associates this personal coming to God directly with tangible benefits in the world; it links the individual and spiritual to the social and concrete. Eddy foremost insisted that the physically and spiritually salubrious effects of Christian Science would be visible in the life and health of the individual. If Christian Science did not display tangible benefits, then the believer had succumbed to matter and erroneous thinking. Eddy explains:

Christian Science reveals incontrovertibly that Mind is All-in-all…. This great fact is not, however, seen to be supported by sensible evidence, until its divine principle is demonstrated by healing the sick and thus proved absolute and divine. This proof once seen, no other conclusion can be reached. (SH 109: 4-10)
Cures in Christian Science are not a reflection of the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit, as they are in Pentecostal healing, for example; nor is caring for the sick a charitable work meant to relieve human suffering. Instead, cures are discernable proof that the “one Principle” of Christian Science is accurate – and evidence that an individual has abided by its spiritual laws (SH 112: 16-17). Testimonies of healing work, in other words, function quite literally as scientific evidence both of the individual’s spirituality and the accuracy of Eddy’s teachings. While individual enlightenment was the foundation for spiritual wellbeing, personal health and ultimately a Christian society were the inevitable rewards of a life lived according to the principles of Science.

Like all “sciences,” the theology took upon itself an empirical burden of proof, Eddy and her followers providing demonstrations like those of Christ in the Gospels. “Christian Science,” she reminds her readers repeatedly, “is demonstrable” (SH 112). Today, the final pages of Science and Health still contain numerous tales of those cured by reading the book, testimonials meant as evidence of the theology’s accuracy. As an example of one such demonstration, Eddy asserted that she had healed herself of significant injuries from a fall on ice. This event, cited as the moment that Eddy “discovered” Christian Science, was not meant as proof of her individual authority but of the validity of the Principle. Eddy narrates the episode in her autobiography: “During twenty years prior to my discovery I had been trying to trace all effects to a mental cause; and in the latter part of 1866 I gained the scientific certainty that all causation was Mind, and every effect a mental phenomenon (RI 24). Eddy further explains how she gradually came to understand the manner of her cure over time though intensive Biblical study. As Eddy’s story implies, a cure serves as evidence that a Scientist has discerned (or begun to discern) the Principle correctly, much as experimental proof validates a scientist’s hypothesis. The more correct a Scientist’s
understanding of the Truth, the more powerfully and convincingly he or she can demonstrate it to others. Therefore, the foundational narrative of Christian Science does not deliver a prophecy per se but instead offers proof of the theological principle of Mind over matter.

While healing was the Principle’s most important manifestation, Christian Scientists did not limit their quest for practical demonstrations of their theology to cures. As their actions and spiritual and prosperous lifestyles demonstrated the Truth of Christian Science, Eddy held both herself and her disciples to a high standard of behavior. Demonstrations of Christian Science will manifest themselves in everyday actions, which must always show avoidance of error. Eddy reminded her followers, “[God] must be ours practically, guiding our every thought and action; else we cannot understand the omnipresence of good sufficiently to demonstrate… the Science of the perfect Mind and divine healing” (RI 28). Martha Wilcox, a worker at Eddy’s Chestnut Hill home, mused, “[Eddy] showed me that unless I were faithful and orderly with the objects of sense that made up my present mode of consciousness, there could never be revealed to me the truer riches or the progressive higher revealments of substance and things” (93). In other words, Eddy demanded that her house be immaculate, and she refused to accept objects as “lost” (which often made life difficult for her workers when they had never seen said object in the first place). When Wilcox failed at her “mental work,” allowing error to overcome her, Eddy hung a sign on her door for two weeks that reminded her, “Faith without works is dead” (100).

In her foundational textbook, *Science and Health*, Eddy outlined a vision of healing that was undoubtedly unique and in many respects revolutionary. Her writing continued a conversation about the connection between sin and sickness and about the power of the mind over that of the body – ideas already familiar both to Progressive-Era Americans and
to Christians today. But Eddy radically reformulated these premises – carrying them out to new and often startling conclusions. As the guiding assertion of her theology, she abolished sin and sickness by granting Mind absolute (rather than partial) control over matter. Just as significantly, Eddy demanded that this Principle be reflected in the lives and bodies of her followers, and she pursued “scientific evidence” of her beliefs. As the rest of the section will illustrate, this insistence that religious beliefs have demonstrable effects has two crucial implications for this discussion: first, it allowed Scientists to read their faith as fundamentally progressive; and second, it allowed them to understand their religious practices in social rather than individual terms.

Advancing Christendom through the Principles of Science

Despite the stress on individual enlightenment in the practice of healing, Eddy undoubtedly believed that her work ensured social and religious advancement more broadly. Secular and Christian reformers of Eddy’s day held varying definitions of what America’s progress should look like – the elimination of poverty, temperance, civil equality, pacifism, or some combination of a startling array of other ideals. Eddy largely avoided any firm stance on these various social issues, which frequently evoked criticism from their proponents and activists. Ignoring accusations that she promoted profit-driven healing work over charity, she boiled down America’s advancement to a single criterion: its spiritual progress towards the Truth of Christian Science. Spiritual progress, Eddy suggested, would inevitably lead to progress in the forms sought by other reformers. Eddy did not applaud advances in modern knowledge in the same terms as mainstream liberal Christians, but she envisioned her faith as one of hope and advancing thought. Christian Science was, its founder suggested, the
last, great step in the evolution of Christian society. Work toward that Cause was work for the betterment of all mankind, both spiritually and physically.

Eddy’s progressive stance echoed the liberal, modernist ethos of the late nineteenth century more generally, although it articulated this sense of humanity’s evolution in emphatically spiritual terms. Eddy presented Christian Science not as a ray of light in a corrupt society but as the next step on the path toward Christian Truth. More specifically, spiritual understanding progressed in a linear fashion: Judaism, early Christianity and Catholicism, Protestantism, and finally Science. Eddy taught her followers that

In the record of nineteen centuries, there are sects many but not enough Christianity…. The modern lash is less material than the Roman scourge, but it is equally as cutting. Cold distain, stubborn resistance, opposition from church, state law, and the press, are still the harbingers of truth’s full-orbed appearing.

A higher and more practical Christianity, demonstrating justice and meeting the needs of mortals in sickness and in health, stands at the door of this age…. (SH 224: 11-24)

Eddy envisions a society moving upward to full comprehension of Jesus’s teachings and cures, still mired in the past but beginning to recognize new possibilities. Critics of Christian Science often recited the platitude that Christian Science was “neither Christian nor scientific” (Purrington, “Eddyism Before the Law” 358; McLeod 102). Scientists, by contrast, repeatedly emphasized the relationship of their advanced religion to the mainstream church. In the title of his 1913 article, J. Winthrop Hegeman inquires, “Must Protestantism Adopt Christian Science?” Whereas critics denied Christian Science its Christianity, Hegeman posits that “[Christian Science] stands related to Protestantism
somewhat as the primitive Church to the Jewish religion” (834). He consequently insists, “Protestantism must substantially adopt the faith and practice of Christian Science if its churches are to fulfill their mission to the world” (823). This faith in progress and sense of their own part in that development was as firmly rooted in the identities of Christian Scientists as it was in that of natural scientists.

This perception of Christian Science as a more progressive version of mainstream Protestantism defined even the structure of Eddy’s writing – which deliberately places the theology in the context of a broader community of Christians. In much the same way as Christians read the Old Testament through the lens of the Gospels, Eddy taught her followers read the Bible through the lens of *Science and Health*. The final chapters of the textbook promise a “key to the scriptures,” and they provide a line by line exegesis of large portions of the first and last books of the Christian Bible, Genesis and Revelations (titled Apocalypse by Eddy). This exegesis, with its parallel biblical quotations and Scientific translations, provides more than an interpretation of the original text; it instead appears visibly and metaphorically as a revision, an extension of the scriptures that not only clarifies but expands and improves spiritual understanding. The very structure of *Science and Health* is meant as a repeated reminder of the place of Christian Science in the evolution of Christianity.

Similarly, the Christian Science service that Eddy developed expands upon mainstream Protestant practices, providing listeners with a sense of the faith’s greater purpose beyond individual salvation or enlightenment. The service literally contains both the old and the new, expressing the evolution of Christian practice. For example, the congregation and the Readers who lead the service participate in a call-response version of the Lord’s Prayer:
Our Father which art in Heaven

*Our Father-Mother-God, all harmonious*

Hallowed be thy name.

*Adorable one.*

Thy kingdom come.

*Thy Kingdom is come; thou art ever-present. (SH 16: 26-31)*

The hymns of the Christian Science service – which were familiar Christian melodies with new, Christian Science lyrics – would have been both familiar and new to early Scientists who spent their childhoods in other denominations. Michael Feehan calls this element of Eddy’s rhetoric “translation,” a process in which a listener is asked approach the old from a new position, a process of re-seeing and revising, a Burkean perspective by incongruity. In the historical context of early Christian Science, however, its relationship to the past and mainstream Protestantism was just as important as the novelties of Eddy’s theology in advancing its progressive identity. In its form and content, the Christian Science service reinterpreted a well-established Protestant tradition, and it gained much of its significance by representing itself as that tradition’s more evolved offspring.

Eddy’s theology, from her textbook to her denomination’s services, continually demanded that her followers see their activities in the broader context of the reformation of Christian society. For believers, the Christian Science church was the driving force behind humanity’s natural (if not exactly inevitable) spiritual progress. Eddy explained to her followers, “As the crude footprints of the past disappear from the dissolving paths of the present, we shall better understand the Science which governs these changes, and shall plant our feet on firmer ground… There should be painless progress, attended by life and peace instead of discord and death” (SH 224: 4-10). Such language stresses the hope of progress
as Christians become enlightened through the teachings of spiritual Science. Such enlightenment of society, if necessarily gradual, is inevitable and natural. Eddy deliberately represents the change she advocates not as revolution but reform, not as sudden revelation or judgment, but as the coming into being of the ideal society over the course of human history. Repeatedly chastised in the press for her apparent condemnation of marriage, Eddy clarified, “Is marriage nearer right than celibacy? / Human knowledge inculcates that it is, while Science indicates that it is not. But to force the consciousness of scientific being before it is understood is impossible, and believing otherwise would prevent scientific demonstration” (MW 288). A truly spiritual society could not be expected now but would emerge as Scientists slowly and steadily continued their work.

Moreover, Christian Scientists extended their pragmatic approach to religion to the social advancements they sought. Just as individual enlightenment was reflected through healing, religious progress must (and would) be visible in concrete social improvements. Christian Scientists regularly adopted the rhetoric of social reform typical in the Progressive Era, implicitly associating their activities with other varieties of social and missionary work. Believers universally referred to their united efforts to spread the gospel of health as “the Cause,” as did Eddy. The prophet herself, while called Mother by those close to her for many years, asked that she be referred to as “the Leader” when her movement coalesced.

While some worked at Eddy’s home, many reforming Scientists worked “in the field,” or in the cities, performing cures on believers and non-believers alike. Others devoted themselves to the Publication Committees, making “use of the press in behalf of the Cause,” as believer Irving Tomlinson put it (147). “[C]ases of healing sent to [Eddy] by letter were published,” Tomlinson recalls, “Wednesday evening testimony meetings reported; her annual messages to The Mother Church printed; lectures inserted into local papers; false charges again
Christian Science practice answered; and misrepresentation by critics corrected” (147-8).

Christian Scientists had a platform and a burden of proof, and they believed that they had to take deliberate action to better humanity.

The guiding aim of Christian Science – to bring Spirit to reign on Earth in the day to day activities of mankind – united both the religious and social aims of the denomination.

Perhaps no example conveys the sense of Christian Science reform better than the legend of the building of the Mother Church in Boston (see Fig. 2). Eddy demanded unequivocally that the church be completed, debt-free, and ready for services by the last Sunday in December, 1894. Eddy’s followers united behind their Leader’s call to arms, donating the entire cost of the edifice and frequently labor. The story of the Church’s construction, which was completed on time and cost approximately $250,000, has passed into Christian Science lore. To believers, the church stands as an example of the power of Spirit to accomplish what are deemed impossible ends.

One of the original Directors responsible for overseeing the building project, Joseph Armstrong, rejoiced, “Only future ages can fully appreciate and understand the mighty triumph of good over evil, of spirit over matter, manifested in the circumstances connected with the successful erection of this beautiful building” (96). Although the legend is recounted by Scientists as a victory over the material obstacles of time and money, it also implies the importance of spiritual progress in a tangible form. 

Fig. 2
The Mother Church and Extension
Boston, 1908
Of central importance to the story is the material relic of the Mother Church itself, which was viewed by Scientists as both a spiritual and social improvement. When the Mother Church Extension was added to the original building in 1906, Eddy charged Margaret Williamson with writing the narrative of its construction.14 Williamson described the illusive character that the early designs of the Extension hoped to grasp:

[T]hey harked back to all the mightiest and most beautiful structures of the world – buildings which are the common heritage of cultured men everywhere. Surely, something of their beauty could be captured for embodiment in this future temple of a gloriously new and forward looking land. (33)

The final, neoclassical design, while recalling the Basilica, was equally in the tradition of the Capitol Building and countless other public edifices that were erected in a neo-classical style in Eddy’s time. These buildings emerged in the late nineteenth century as part of the City Beautiful movement, whose “goal was to bring classical beauty into an urban scene that was rejected as being chaotic and untidy” (Carr, et al. 59). In order to achieve this state, City Beautiful structures aimed to merge with their environment in aesthetically appealing ways; they aimed to be “forward looking,” as Williamson alludes, and to bring a better world into material being. The desire for order amongst the madness of capitalist enterprise dovetailed nicely with the Protestant tradition of the City on a Hill, the “spiritual reality of the kingdom of God present here and now” (Ives 90). In the eyes of Christian Scientists, the Mother Church made the city a happier, healthier place than it had been before its existence. The beautiful dome reaching up into the Boston sky is the demonstrable result of Scientists’ hard work for the betterment of humanity – work more effective in achieving progress than standard charity.
Eddy received frequent criticism throughout her lifetime for not emphasizing good works in the practice of Christian Science, an unsurprising response from a nation heavily influenced by Social Gospel Christianity. However, such an argument ignores both the progressive and pragmatic bent of the denomination. Believers were obligated to demonstrate their faith, demonstrations that would advance Christian society in concrete ways. Carol Norton, a frequent lecturer on Christian Science and Eddy’s contemporary, described the faith as “practical idealism,” a theology whose “purpose is to convince mankind that the ideal is the commonsense and practical in life” (296). According to Norton, the principles of Science would lay the foundation for both a healthy, prosperous society and a healthy, prosperous life for the individual. Similarly, Christian Science historian Stephen Gottschalk compares Eddy’s religion to the American philosophical tradition of pragmatism, suggesting that they share “an attitude which insists that coherent theory must be related to practice, that the meaning of a concept is to be found in its bearing upon experience, and that the truth of an idea is to be tested by the actual consequences of believing in it” (Emergence 276). The effect of Christian Science, believers suggested, would be seen in both greater personal health and fewer social ills. So while she defined reform work differently than mainstream Christians, Eddy not only encouraged it in the form of healing but also developed the idea as a central tenet of her theology.

Reforming the American Nation

Its identity as a progressive and modern religion placed Christian Science in sympathy with the secular liberal ideals of American society. Eddy rarely addressed political issues directly or publically supported secular causes. Nevertheless, the Leader of Christian Science readily invoked the standard secular imagery of the American nation, as she did during her Fourth
of July speech. Eddy justified the atypical practices of Christian Science, particularly healing, on the grounds of religious freedom, a powerful appeal for her largely American audience. But more importantly, Eddy adopted the individualistic and anti-authoritarian attitude of religious and secular liberals and embraced the adage that “the government which governs best, governs least.” America in other words did not provide political and social structures that would allow spiritual growth – but instead limited the formation of structures that would stymie it. Eddy painted the liberal values of American Protestants in spiritual hues, melding the two together in her narrative of spiritual progress. In doing so, Eddy promoted the participation of her followers in American public life and encouraged them to see their reform work in that context.

Like many of her fellow New Englanders before her, Eddy characterized the ideals of America as fundamentally Christian ones. Eddy readily adopted the long-standing tradition of representing America as the New Jerusalem promised in the Bible; she followed John Winthrop, Jonathan Edward, and Lyman Beecher in urging the nation to be as a “City upon a Hill.” In her Miscellaneous Writings, Eddy begins an allegory adopting this imagery, “Picture to yourself ‘a city set upon a hill,’ a celestial city above all clouds, in serene azure and unfathomable glory” (323). In the tale, a Stranger, who represents Christ, descends the hill and guides a group of travelers up the ascent. Those travelers who attempt the journey burdened with the “heavy baggage” of “worldly policy, religion, politics, finance, and… [the] search for wealth and fame” fall into the rocks; the man who left his material belongings follows the Stranger into the city (MW 327). Eddy concludes:

He alone ascends the hill of Christian Science who follows the Way-shower, the spiritual presence and idea of God…. [G]ive up thy earthly weights; and
observe the apostle’s admonition, “Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before.” (MW 328)

Those who are willing to give up matter (or secular interests) to embrace Mind (or God) through Science, Eddy suggests, will achieve the Kingdom. The image of the City has traditionally reflected in American religious discourse the possibility of sainthood for the ordinary Christian and the creation of God’s kingdom here on earth (Porterfield, “Protestant Experience” xviii-xiv). For Eddy, the metaphor complimented the pragmatic bent of Christian Science practice, as it granted individual actions a tangible, spiritual purpose in the creation of the “city on a hill.”

Eddy’s allegory reinforces the identity of Christian Science as a pragmatic religion of reform, but it also indicates her understanding of America as an intrinsically Christian nation with a spiritual purpose. Given its prevalence in American religious discourse, Eddy’s readers would have had little difficulty inferring the broader quest to create a godly society from the individual quest for sainthood described in the story. Eddy believed that America held a central place in the development of Christian Science – an argument that the “City on a Hill” allows her to make in poetic fashion. Speaking directly to Americans in her seminal textbook, Eddy makes this argument explicit:

The history of our country, like all history, illustrates the might of Mind, and shows human power to be proportionate to its embodiment of right thinking. A few immortal sentences, breathing the omnipotence of divine justice, have been potent to break despotic fetters and abolish the whipping-post and slave market; but oppression neither went down in blood, not did the breath of freedom come from the cannon’s mouth. Love is the liberator.
Legally to abolish unpaid servitude in the United States was hard; but the abolition of mental slavery is a more difficult task. (SH 225: 14-25)

Eddy attributes the abolition of slavery and American freedom more generally to the liberal ideals of the Declaration of Independence – to those “few immortal sentences.” However, she implies that these sentences are successful because they are Scientific, a true representation of Spirit. While Americans cite the Declaration to justify abolition, they will begin to interpret this historical act through the lens of Christian Science. The nation as it progresses will gradually understand the true Scientific implications of its ideals and reach the full expression of the Principle, when “mental slavery” as well as physical slavery will be abolished.

Eddy’s writing often blurs the distinction between the secular liberal values of America and the spiritual values of Christian Science, continuing the blending of these two traditions visible in the “City on a Hill” allegory. Just as she transformed Protestant hymns and prayers into Christian Science versions, Eddy deliberately layered the texts of the liberal tradition with Scientific language. Relatively early in her career as religious figure, Eddy gave a sermon that she entitled, “Bill of Rights for 1880.” An affirmation of religious freedom and the right to practice metaphysical healing, the sermon begins, “Since ever the stars sang together… man’s Bill of Rights have been sacred, for they are charted by Almighty God, sustained by eternal justice, and patented by Immortality” (MBEL, A10082). Eddy does not mean her Bill of Rights to replace the one more familiar to Americans; rather, she translates it to reveal its accurate spiritual meaning. She offers her first amendment to the reader:

That according to the Constitution of these United States, and in fulfillment of the Divine economy, man is endowed by his Maker with certain inalienable rights, among which are “Life, liberty, and the persuit [sic] of
happiness” – therefore that any legislation or law intermeddling therewith, is wholly unconstitutional and unchristian. (MBEL, A10082)

The second amendment grants individuals the right to choose their physician, the third the right to choose their religion, and the fourth the right to make decisions as a “free moral actor” (MBEL, A10082). Each amendment (but particularly the final amendment) reinforces the liberal ideal of individual rights but places it in a spiritual context. It is the spiritual righteousness of the liberal principles of America’s founding documents that justify their implementation in secular life.

In particular, Eddy’s frequent appeals to the principle of religious freedom reflect her engagement with America’s secular liberal values. Many religious minority communities embraced the image of America as a “City on a Hill,” including Jews and Mormons, because of the policies of religious freedom embedded in this Protestant ideal (Porterfield, “Protestant Experience xxiv). As both Eddy’s allegory and “Bill of Rights” suggest, the creation of the Kingdom of God depends on the free moral choice of those who enter. Her sect growing rapidly in the last decade of the nineteenth century, Eddy issued a harsh denunciation of restrictions on religious practice and went so far as to equate the position of Scientists to that of slaves. She exclaimed, “The cry of the colored slave has scarcely been heard and hushed, when from another direction there comes another sharp cry of oppression. Another form of inhumanity lifts its hydra head to forge anew the old fetters; to shackle conscience, stop free speech…. Shall religious intolerance, arrayed against the rights of man, again deluge the earth in blood?” (MW 246). In part, Eddy’s argument reflects her acceptance of spiritually righteous liberal values, but it also reinforces the individualism of both the Protestant and liberal traditions, both of which privilege minimal restrictions on the individual by secular or religious authorities. These two features of Christian Science
thought – the spiritualizing of secular ideals and the emphasis on the individual conscious –
defined Eddy’s (and her followers) engagement with American public life.

It is important to point out that Eddy did not attack or challenge the nation’s
founding values – but insisted that her religion would thrive if America would remain true to
its ideals and protect individual rights. Eddy often attacked the mainstream pulpit and press,
but rather than demanding new structures or values, she demanded that these public voices
live up to the principles they espoused. Ever the subject of harsh criticism in the press,
Eddy nevertheless proclaimed that “[w]hen the press is gagged, liberty is besieged; but when
the press assumes the liberty to lie, it discounts clemency, mocks morality, outrages
humanity, breaks common law, gives impulse to violence, envy, and hate, and prolongs the
reign of inordinate, unprincipled clans” (MW 274). The press, pulpit, and liberal
government of the United States, first and foremost, must support and allow for the
attainment of spiritual enlightenment. Corrupted, these institutions stymie the growth of the
nation and become the necessary object of “civil and religious reform”; enlightened, they
support the progress of the race (MW 246).

Given her stress on spiritual growth and individual moral choice, Eddy addressed
social or political issues only insofar as she believed they accomplished the ends of Christian
Science. When asked about her political views, the leader of Christian Science claimed that
“human law is right only as it patterns the divine” and asked followers to consider their
actions against spiritual law (FCC 283). In 1908, Eddy printed a short statement in the Boston
Post regarding political participation by Scientists. After emphasizing that “those who are
entitled to vote should do so,” the article presented Eddy’s official statement regarding the
issue: “I am asked, ‘What are your politics?’ I have none, in reality, other than to help
support a righteous government; to love God supremely, and my neighbor as myself” (FCC
Similarly elusive, Eddy printed in her *Miscellaneous Writings* a poem provocatively titled, “Women’s Rights.” Although it does not reject secular rights for women *per se*, the poem defines a woman’s right as “the right to work and pray, / ‘To point to heaven and lead the way’” (*MW* 389). The reader, likely expecting to hear Eddy’s views on suffrage or women’s rights more generally, is instead forced to adopt a spiritualized interpretation of these issues. Eddy insisted that her followers translate any secular issue in terms of its spiritual consequences, an approach that not coincidentally made reform work by women less threatening.

The mingling of Christian and liberal values in her writing allowed Eddy’s followers to perceive their reform work in a broader social context. However, because Christian Scientists believed their actions had public significance, the implications for women’s participation were, not surprisingly, contradictory. On one hand, Eddy argued that God was “All in all” and thus “masculine, feminine, and neuter,” making feminine spirituality essential for the progress of Christian Science (*MBEL*, “Man and Woman,” A10142A). The Leader of Christian Science, even as she deflected questions regarding hot-button secular and political issues, did not shy from addressing the question of gender as it related to her fundamental theological principles. Willing to act as “referee” on the subject, Eddy emphasized that “one [of the feminine or masculine] was not less, or more, important in God’s sight than the Other” and that “God’s order has been infringed, and made to represent two sides of a sphere so called, instead of the round whole” (*MBEL*, “Man and Woman,” A10142A). This affirmation of female spirituality drew thousands of women to the church. Seventy percent of Christian Scientists during the period were women – a figure unmatched by any other denomination (Ivey 30). Eddy substantiated this theological principle with her actions by providing exceptional women followers with important
positions in the church, a trend made less threatening by her ability to reframe sensitive political issues in largely spiritual terms.\textsuperscript{16}

Eddy addressed suffrage and women’s rights (when she explicitly did so) much as she did other social practices or laws that she believed conflicted with true Christian Science. If America was to mature into its social and spiritual ideal, its policies must recognize that God made man and woman spiritually equal. “The question of woman’s wrongs and woman’s rights,” Eddy argued, was the “dire effect of one lie producing another,” or the error that recognized matter and separateness producing the error of sexuality and gender inequality (\textit{MBEL}, “Man and Woman,” A10142A). In her chapter on marriage in \textit{Science and Health}, Eddy more deliberately considered the implications of this view on civil life. Given their spiritual equality, the “unfair differences” that civil law established between the “rights of the two sexes” should be remedied, as there is “no precedent” for “accord[ing] woman less rights than does either Christian Science or civilization” (\textit{SH} 63: 12-17). Eddy called for legal protection for a woman who has been abandoned by a “dissolute husband,” including her right to hold property and work for wages (\textit{SH} 63: 26-32).\textsuperscript{17} In this same vein, she expressed support for women’s suffrage if it would “remedy the evil without encouraging difficulties of greater magnitude” (\textit{SH} 63: 21-22). In any case, Eddy concluded that the most “feasible” and “rational means of improvement” in women’s social status was to encourage the “elevation of society” through Christian Science. A Scientific society – like Eddy’s church – would be guided by productive, active, and moral men \textit{and} women, as God intended.

On the other hand, Eddy mitigated her regular affirmation of women’s spiritually in the face of nineteenth-century social conventions and expectations. She criticized the “narrowness and jealousy” that would “confine a wife or husband forever within four walls”
but confirmed a necessary division of labor based on gender (SH 58: 16-17). The
“annoyances and cares of domestic economy” were outside the purview of men, Eddy
explained, while an understanding of “political economy” was beyond women (SH 59: 9-11).
An astute administrator and businesswoman, she acquiesced to the popular opinion that
public roles were best suited to men. Speaking specifically about its institutional
administration, the Leader of the church explained:

> I have from the beginning of my labors uniformly associated man and
woman in all endeavors to demonstrate Christian Science, physically, morally,
and spiritually. I have given the preponderance to the masculine element in
my organizations for carrying out the functions of Christian Science. There
is but one woman to three men on the Board of Education. The Board of
Trustees are all men. The Board of Directors of the Mother Church are all
men; the Board of Lectureship has eleven men and two women. The
Publication Committees all are men.¹⁸ (MBEL, “Man and Woman,”
A10142A)

Eddy was willing to place some women in positions of power – provided that number was
not too great or the roles they held too inappropriate. Her desire to grow her religion forced
conciliation between her theological ideals and social practice, as her audience remained
heavily invested in the gender status quo. Her radical renunciation of gender and her far
more moderate approach as an administrator forced Eddy to inhabit deep contradictions –
contradictions not surprising in a driven woman who had achieved wild success but who
could not entirely extricate herself from the image of femininity that had dominated much of
her life.
A reoccurring theme of the remainder of this chapter will be the contradictory implications of Eddy’s progressive, liberal theology for women in public religious life. Christian Science offered women the opportunity to see their work as central to the progress of society, but it deflected potentially radical beliefs regarding gender into appropriate religious pathways. Eddy believed that the individual freedoms granted to American citizens provided an environment in which human progress could occur, provided that these rights were protected for people of both genders. Despite protests to the contrary by her detractors, Eddy embraced the progressive ethos of her era and the widespread call for social reform by men and women; she simply believed that healing was the only reform work that produced real change. The function of religious discourse, in Eddy’s mind, was to promote individual enlightenment, spiritual growth at a personal level that would lead to a more godly society.

The rest of the chapter explores three major implications of these assumptions on Eddy’s religious discourse, specifically related to gender. First, the Christian Science Leader attempted to create a “scientific” language that would reflect the progressive, liberal identity of the denomination. Although theologians of the nineteenth-century often claimed their work to be scientific, the rationalistic idealism of Christian Science substantially reframed the terms on which this claim was made. Second, the Christian Science rhetoric that Eddy produced reinvented these masculine liberal values as feminine, opening a space for a “reasoned discourse” that included women. Finally, Eddy’s spiritualizing of liberal values allowed her female followers to interpret their religious practices as a public act without relinquishing their moral authority as “good women.” Although liberal standards of discourse had often been used to exclude women from religious and secular life, Eddy
ultimately reframed these values in terms that would lay the foundation for substantial religious discourse by women.

**Reason vs. Passionate Belief: Transcending the Dichotomy through Science**

Eddy’s post-millennial progressivism appealed to a large number of Protestants, as it in many ways echoed the liberal theology of the mainstream church. Christian Science is more distinct, however, in the extent to which it linked this progress specifically to expanding scientific knowledge. Eddy unabashedly and vociferously claimed for her theology the authority of a “science,” although her definition of the term differed significantly from that of the biologist. She argued that her theology warranted the label of a science because it articulated Principle – an unvarying law that reflected the divine order of the universe. The theology is a form of rationalistic idealism, premised on the belief that human beings grasp reality through mind rather than matter. Eddy’s particular brand of idealism is staunchly Christian and highly feminized, in many respects a conglomeration of popularized idealistic ideas that suited her aims and concerns. But regardless of its philosophical pedigree, this idealism provided Eddy with the tools to spiritualize the faculty of reason and make law-governed science compatible with faith.

This section consists of three parts that articulate the terms in which Eddy reconciled the existence of discrete and knowable spiritual laws with the possibility of divine revelation. The first subsection outlines the terms in which Eddy understood her writing to be “scientific.” The second addresses the question of faith in Christian Science, which Eddy perceived as essential but insufficient for spiritual progress. The last subsection examines how Eddy justified her revelation as absolute, although revelation and science appear incompatible foundations for truth. The relationship between these three concepts in
Eddy’s theology – Science, faith, and revelation – had a profound effect on her vision of an ideal religious discourse. Eddy ultimately argued for a transparent discourse that could transcend the material and reveal the spiritual – a scientific language suited to a scientific theology. While Eddy’s vision of language did preclude emotive revivalist preaching, it did not diminish the importance or faith or the authority of her personal revelation. This affirmation of science, like so much of Christian Science thought, held both opportunity and danger for the female orator, as it was premised on entry into a discourse from which women had almost always been excluded.

Developing a Scientific Language

Eddy’s quest for a scientific theology, perhaps more than any other characteristic of her thought, reveals the substantial influence of liberal standards of discourse on her writing. At its core, the faith of the liberal is the faith that knowledge – a growing understanding of the world – will improve human life. Modern science is perhaps the most complete expression of that faith. However, the religious liberalism of Eddy’s Christian Science varies in certain respects from the Enlightenment version that drives the scientific fields. Liberal thought, as it is expressed in canonical Enlightenment philosophy, assumes that an argument’s authority derives from its “common sense” or logic. Such a premise has typically devalued appeals to tradition, religious authority, or faith, on which religious discourse often depends (Crowley, Toward 15). Standard definitions of liberalism are thus only useful up to a certain point in describing religious liberalism broadly or Christian Science specifically. A discussion of faith-based liberalism requires a more elastic understanding of reason, common sense, and perhaps science, than “secular” definitions allow.
Eddy herself found the key tenets of liberalism far more pliable than do many Americans today. She freely adopted the liberal assumption that the world was governed by discrete principles and that human beings possessed the faculty to discern them. But she understood those principles – and the corresponding human faculty – as intrinsically spiritual. The final two parts of this section will focus specifically the issues of faith and revelation, which make Eddy’s Christian liberalism distinctly different from one attuned primarily to the political sphere. This first section, on the other hand, outlines the Christian Science view of scientific Principle, which reflects the theology’s underlying affinity with a liberal perspective. Most non-believers assume that Christian Science is intrinsically conservative, given that its followers reject conventional medicine. However, Eddy deliberately identified her theology as a Science – a term meant to invoke both the idea of progress and advancing knowledge. Eddy only rejected “modern knowledge” if the concept is limitedly defined as improved understanding of physical or biological laws. In other words, she did not repudiate the scientific ideal, merely bad science (including those ideas regarding the material world promoted by physical and life scientists). Eventually, Eddy believed, the world would be guided by those principles that are truly Scientific, reflecting God’s laws rather than the anthropomorphic ones of material science.

Eddy foremost believed that spiritual and scientific law shared a common character as the reflection of an immutable, law-governed system. Affirming the Protestant tenet of Scriptural primacy, she argued that (just as scientific law was manifested in the physical world) spiritual law was manifested in the Bible. The Bible expressed a theological Principle that was as eternal and enduring as a scientific Law – one that truly reflected an omnipresent God. The immutability of this Principle, Eddy explained, meant that a true and scientific theology could be developed to reveal it:
Theology is the Science of God & the universe. In other words it is Divine Science no human attribute hypothesis or dogma enters into it. A single human concept were a foul blot on its pure escutcheon. Throughout, it is spiritual immutable indisputable demonstrable [.] (MBEL, “Not Theory, But Theology,” A10388)

While she did not promote a literal interpretation of the Bible, Eddy firmly believed that its pages contained all necessary spiritual knowledge. The text of the Bible represented “Divine Science” in its unchanging form, untainted by human or material influence. “The truths of Christian Science,” she suggested, “are not interpolations of the Scriptures, but the spiritual interpretations thereof” (RI 33). Rather than as an extension of the Bible, Eddy represented her textbook, Science and Health, as a more accurate account of scriptural teachings than had existed previously. From Eddy’s perspective, the Bible had always demonstrated the tenets of Christian Science; only a spiritual awareness of the truth, not the Principle itself, was novel.

In presenting her theology as a law-governed system, Eddy asserted that Christian Science could meet the criteria of a verifiable scientific truth. Christian Scientists readily adopted the fundamental assumption of the scientific community: a theology (or hypothesis) is proven correct when validated by observable, empirical, and measurable proof. Eddy frequently equated Christian Science to mathematics when describing this process of verification:

If mathematics should present a thousand different examples of one rule, the proving of one example would authenticate all the others. A simple statement of Christian Science, if demonstrated by healing, contains the proof of all here said of Christian Science. (SH 546:31-547:3)
As a result of this stress on tangible proof, *Science and Health* concludes with a large number of testimonial narratives – narratives whose primary rhetorical effect is not as individual tales of enlightenment but as an indisputable compilation of evidence. Literary critic Nina Baym (as well as Christian Science historian Stephen Gottschalk, upon whom she draws heavily) highlights Eddy’s emphasis on cures as a reflection of her deliberately scientific standpoint. Baym explains that, while her work was at obvious odds with the scientific and medical professions, Eddy echoed their empirical language with her own “protocol of evidence and proof” – an apparently rational and thus scientific approach (200). In accordance with her scientific frame of reference, Eddy cited cures as indisputable evidence that Christian Science was correct, rather than as significant in and of themselves.

However, the “scientific” character of Eddy’s work is as much her approach to argumentation as it is her method of verification. Eddy insisted, like natural scientists, that a “scientific” form was necessary to express a scientific Truth. Although she regularly voiced suspicion of human or material reason, Eddy nevertheless described her theology in the language of formal logic. Theology, like logic, is ideally expressed in a form exact and objective:

Science relates to Mind, not matter. It rests on fixed Principle and not upon the judgment of false sensation. The addition of two sums in mathematics must always bring the same result. So is it with logic. If both the major and minor syllogism are correct, the conclusion, if properly drawn, cannot be false. So in Christian Science there are no discords nor contradictions, because its logic is as harmonious as the reasoning of an accurately stated syllogism or a properly computed sum in arithmetic. (*SH* 128:27 – 129:1-4)
Such rhetoric allowed Eddy to challenge the establishment, as Baym put it, “not for being overly scientific, but insufficiently so” (201). While more unusual in twentieth-century Christianity, Eddy’s quest for a science of religion would have appeared perfectly ordinary to her contemporaries. Religion, like the developing fields of medicine, psychology, and linguistics, sought scholarly progress – progress in understanding through careful reasoning. Grounded in divine Principle, Christian Science was, at least for believers, a science.

In line with her aim of expressing a spiritual science, Eddy sought in discussions of theology a language that was transparent, devoid of the obscuring influences of emotion or consideration of context. Rather than the poetry of the Bible or the oratory of the pulpit, Eddy adopted an analytical language and built her argument on propositions and syllogisms that would demonstrate her deductive reasoning. The author of Science and Health most concisely articulated her theology in the series of affirmations and denials that ground Christian Science; she explains:

The fundamental propositions of divine metaphysics are summarized in the four following, to me, self-evident propositions. Even if reversed, these propositions will be found to agree in statement and proof, showing mathematically their exact relation to Truth. DeQuincy says mathematics has not a foot to stand on that is not purely metaphysical.

1. God is All-in-all.
2. God is good. Good is Mind.
3. God, Spirit, being all, nothing is matter.
4. Life, God, omnipotent good, deny death, evil, sin, and disease. – Disease, sin, evil, death, deny good omnipotent God, Life.
Which of the denials in proposition four is true? Both are not, cannot be, true. According to the Scripture, I find that God is true, “but every [mortal] man a liar.”

The divine metaphysics of Christian Science, like the method in mathematics, proves the rule by inversion. *(SH 113: 9-25)*

Thus, Eddy concluded, matter, sin, and sickness do not exist, based on these “fixed rules” *(SH 113)*. The form of these conclusions, a systematic list of propositions, suggested to believers the precision of a law (even though such a position may seem disconcerting to many contemporary observers). While faith remained an essential component of their spirituality, Christian Scientists saw in Eddy’s denials and affirmations a truth as indisputable as the law of gravity.

Eddy’s descriptions of the ideal, scientific theology implied that it should be fundamentally a-rhetorical. An accurate expression of Truth would be beyond language, entirely Mind or Principle, mathematical rather than contextual. Eddy explained to her followers that “English is inadequate to the expression of spiritual conceptions and proposition, because one is obligated to use material terms in dealing with spiritual ideas” *(SH 349: 13-18)*. Therefore, the founder of Christian Science strived for the language that would best, if not perfectly, represent the spiritual knowledge she hoped to offer the world. As it represented spiritual Truth, Eddy described the writing in *Science and Health* as transcendental: “Learning was so illuminated, that grammar was eclipsed. Etymology was divine history, voicing the idea of God in man’s origin and signification. Syntax was spiritual order and unity. Prosody, the song of angels, and no earthly or inglorious theme” *(RI 11)*. She repeatedly revised her mammoth textbook so that its language would match as precisely as possible its spiritual meaning. *Science and Health* appeared in 236 separate editions between
1875 (when the first edition was published) and 1911 (the year following Eddy’s death). Detractors (particularly Mark Twain) claimed the astonishing number of new editions was merely a strategy to turn a larger profit (Badaracco 74-75). However, the constant revisions correspond with Eddy’s vision of proper theological language, signifying her struggle to emulate the perfection of the divine in the exactness of her words. In Christian Science, as in mathematics, the force of Principle should overwhelm the individuality of the speaker or their rhetorical devices. Logos – the Word – is all.

Eddy’s vision of a true and divine Science should not be confused with the deism common amongst eighteenth-century intellectuals. A son of the Enlightenment such as Thomas Jefferson would never have considered abandoning the material world in the way that Christian Science demanded. Deism is in many respects the antithesis of Christian Science in suggesting that the natural order is the only means by which humans can understand the divine. However, Eddy’s scientific theology likewise did not allow for “miracles,” in the sense of events arising through divine intervention in the natural order. For Eddy, cures were not singular, isolated events but demonstrations of Principle that could be accomplished by any Christian willing to relinquish the material world. Critics often suggested that this understanding of Principle required little faith or sacrifice on the part of the believer, despite Eddy’s protests. The remainder of this section, then, describes a Christian science in which revelation is possible and faith necessary.

**Growing from Belief to Understanding**

The most striking feature of *Science and Health* for new readers is often its attempt to balance science and revelation, reason and faith, and the apparent ambiguities that effort creates. Yet Eddy upheld without question the necessity of faith in religious life and revelation in spiritual
progress, even as she described Truth as absolute, knowable, and demonstrable. A member of the New York Publication Committee and an important voice for Eddy in the press, McCrackan explained to the public in 1901, “The door to spiritual understanding will open only to those who will knock, and they who are not thirsty cannot drink” (“Simple Logic” 232). A Christian could only recognize the truth of Eddy’s prophecy – its “simple logic,” as McCrackan described it – if spiritually prepared to do so. Faith in Christian Science is a necessary prerequisite to spiritual understanding at the deepest level, if not sufficient alone.

Despite claims to her theology’s position as a Science, Eddy described the process of apprehending Truth in terms that were heavily idealistic. For this reason, critics in her time often associated her theology with transcendentalism or romanticism more generally. Indeed, Christian Science does share the assumption of these idealistic philosophies that mind or ideas form the basis for reality or Truth. Such a perspective is evident both in Eddy’s use of the word Mind as a synonym for God and her uncompromising rejection of the material world and sense experience. However, Eddy went further in associating human reason, as well sense experience, with the unreality of the material world. “Evidence drawn from the five physical senses relates solely to human reason,” Eddy explained, “and because of opacity to the true light, human reason dimly reflects and feebly transmits Jesus’ works and words. Truth is revelation” (SH 117: 24-28). In Christian Science theology, Mind (which equates to God or Spirit) exceeds and supersedes what can be perceived through limited, error-prone senses. Eddy chided those theologians who had based their “arguments and conclusions” not on “revelation” but only on “the sand of human reason” (UG 9). Non-Scientists wrongly cling to their material senses, attempting to discover Truth through mortal mind and human reason. Defined in these idealistic terms, knowledge in Eddy’s writing reflects not a material or rational but spiritual understanding of truth.22
Despite these similarities, Eddy’s theology differed from some idealistic philosophies, particularly romanticism and transcendentalism, in that she did not conceptualize Mind as intrinsic to the individual or the apprehension of Truth as a personal process. Eddy frequently uses the term, “intelligence,” in her writing, which is helpful for articulating the relationship between God, the individual, and Truth in her theology. In her textbook, Eddy describes intelligence as “omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence…the primal and eternal quality of infinite Mind, of the triune Principle, Life, Truth, and Love” (SH 469: 8-11). This rather vague statement can be better understood in light of two standard denotations of “intelligence.” First, Eddy seems to draw on the theological definition of “intelligence” as an enlightened, incorporeal being. The word in this sense reflects the unity of God and man, as Eddy is clear that there is no mind distinct from God. She argues repeatedly that there is no “intelligence” in matter, as mortal mind only “transmits its own images, and forms its offspring after human illusions” (SH 259: 22-31).

Second, Eddy seems also to adopt the more common definition of intelligence as the innate capacity for understanding truth. This faculty as reflected in human beings is divine and exists in spiritual man as a reflection of his unity with God. Therefore, intelligence can be interpreted as that spiritual element of mankind that allows him to grasp divine Truth; this faculty, like the Truth it allows a person to grasp, is not individual or internal but divine and omnipresent.

In conceiving of Truth as absolute and independent of humankind, Eddy implied that a Christian can be correct or incorrect in their expression of faith and be faithful without being spiritually enlightened. Therefore, she carefully distinguished between faith that is merely belief and faith that leads to true spiritual understanding. She described the process by which a Christian reached genuine spiritual enlightenment:
Faith is higher and more spiritual than belief. It is a chrysalis state of human thought, in which spiritual evidence, contradicting the testimony of material sense, begins to appear…. Until belief becomes faith, and faith becomes spiritual understanding, human thought has little relation to the actual or divine. (*SH* 297: 20-31)

As this passage suggests, faith in Christian Science is a necessary but insufficient condition to recognize spiritual Truth. Blind faith that is “mere belief,” Eddy explained to her followers, “is as a pendulum swinging between nothing and something, having no fixity” (*SH* 23: 16-19). A Christian might believe in God’s truth without understanding it, just as people before Newton trusted that an apple would fall without understanding the gravitational forces involved. However, those who believe blindly will never be able to demonstrate a principle in order to advance society. For Eddy, true understanding of the spiritual principles involved distinguished Christian Science from other faith-cures. Responding to those who compared her theology to other metaphysical healing practices, she explained, “It is often asked, Why are faith-cures sometimes more speedy than some of the cures wrought by Christian Scientists? Because faith is belief, and not understanding; and it is easier to believe, than to understand spiritual Truth” (*RI* 48). Faith-cures, Eddy assured her follower, would only prove temporarily effective, for they did not address the underlying cause of error. Because they never moved beyond belief to understanding, these practices could never successfully demonstrate divine Principle by achieving a lasting cure.

In describing her process of spiritual enlightenment in this way, Eddy suggested that a Christian will not need to choose between the logical and metaphysical. She contended that God did not ask individuals to exhibit blind faith out of fear or awe – but demonstrated comprehensible Principle through cures and other triumphs of Mind over matter. Although
she denied sense experience, Eddy firmly rejected metaphysical practices, such as
spiritualism, that placed metaphysics outside the realm of comprehension: “It is mysticism
which gives spiritualism its force. Science dispels mystery and explains extraordinary
phenomena; but Science never moves phenomena from the domain of reason into the realm
of mysticism” (SH 80: 13-18). Rather than characterizing the divine as mystical, mysterious,
and arbitrary, Science articulates eternal Principle and therefore is apprehensible. Reason, as
well as faith, forms an essential foundation for spiritual enlightenment, as it can “inform the
sentiments and awaken the man’s dormant sense of moral obligation” (SH 327: 27-31).
Eddy’s confirmation of reason in this sense seems to contradict her claim that it is an
insufficient means to truth. However, she could not claim her theology reflected Scientific
Principle and simultaneously deny that it was not comprehensible by rational standards.

The foundational narrative of Christian Science itself reflects the way in which Eddy
reconciled her position as a Christian idealist and rational scientist. Eddy told the story of
her great discovery in her autobiography as a faith-based revelation, explaining that “the
Scriptures had… a new meaning, a new tongue” at that moment and that their “spiritual
signification appeared” (RI 25). However, she suggests, this cure was “in perfect accord with
divine law,” although she did not understand that law immediately (RI 24). As Eddy tells the
story, she released her dependence on matter, based on her faith that God is All; in doing so,
she was able to recognize her cure not as an isolated miracle but an expression of Scientific
law. This narrative affirms that spiritual understanding was discovered through revelation
but confirmed as Truth by reason. Rather than requiring Eddy to abandon logic, the
articulation of true Principle in Christian Science “convinced reason and coincided with
revelation” – leading to a state of spiritual understanding (SH 522: 23-24). In other words,
Christian Science was always reasonable – but only when revelation demonstrated its truth
was this logic recognized; reason was not sufficient for spiritual understanding – but it was not antithetical to it.

Eddy’s concept of ideal religious discourse was heavily influenced both by the theology’s idealism and its representation of Truth as absolute and independent of humankind. As a manifestation the idealistic spirit of Christian Science, Eddy often encouraged students to speak extemporaneously and intuitively and to avoid relying on their own reason or education. She advised one student to “interpret not so much the letter as the spirit of Christian Science,” in order to assure her speech arose from the divine and not the human element (MBEL, Letter to Julia Field-King, F00093). In crafting sermons or literature for the periodicals, Scientists should “preach from the heart [rather] than the head and prepare from the heart and not the pen the offerings they lay on the altar of worship” (MBEL, Letter to Ruth B. Ewing, L08502). A “good reader or speaker” would not need “prolonged study” at a formal institution (MBEL, Letter to James A. Neal, L08883). From Eddy’s perspective, a preacher or lecturer heavily invested in such formal rhetorical study would rely on human reason rather than divine Mind. For example, Eddy instructed her adopted son “not [to] mix the study of ellocution [sic] with [his] persuits [sic]” because it was “too material” (MBEL, Letter to Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, L01887). In order to combat this material element, students should “practice reading and speaking EXTEMPORATE” and “[s]peak without notes” when delivering sermons or lectures (MBEL, Letter to James A. Neal, L08883; MBEL, Letter to Julia Field-King, F00093). The human element in rhetoric would only cloud the spiritual content of the message, which should be the product only of divine intelligence.

However, Eddy’s advice to “speak from the heart” should not be interpreted as that of the Romantic. Eddy did not believe in imagination or emotion as the foundation for
understanding, which would produce knowledge as material and erroneous as human logic. In Christian Science theology, Truth would not come not from within but from God, and enlightened speech would be that which transcended the personal and material. “God,” Eddy promised, “makes [a good speaker] at short notice” (*MBEL*, Letter to James A. Neal, L08883). Effective religious discourse would be the product of “giv[ing] all leisure hours to Science and the Bible and prayer and meditation” – the product of the divine Mind (*MBEL*, Letter to Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, L01887). In other words, Principle, not a rhetor, would be the source of enlightened religious discourse. Eddy taught one rhetor-Scientist:

> Now speak without Mss. You have only to prove your faith in Him who puts words into your lips and hath said “take no thought what ye shall speak”[.] Prepare your thoughts before hand by due meditation and prayer. Then go forth in His name, in the science of thoughts, and expression, governed by the divine Mind. You are not afraid to do His will. Love will care for you and “fill your mouth with arguments and lips with praise,” the Scripture saith. (*MBEL*, Letter to Ruth B. Ewing, L08511)

In part, Eddy’s comments emphasize the need to transcend the material so that Spirit could “fill [a speaker’s] mouth and “put words into [his or her] lips.” But they also suggest the importance of preparation and previous study in the “science of thoughts,” a comprehension of Principle that develops as a speaker grows spiritually. If they are to preach or teach, a Scientist must have moved beyond belief to understanding; rather than a confession of sin, appeal for forgiveness, or panegyric, his or her words should be an articulation of divine Principle. Eddy insisted on lecturers, writers, and editors for her denomination who were spiritually advanced: highly educated in her theology, if not in the secular classroom. Such a
standard was necessary to ensure that Christian Science discourse faithfully represented God’s Truth and not internal, material beliefs.

As Principle was the foundation of effective religious discourse, the Leader placed little stock in speech that was spontaneous and emotional but lacked spiritual understanding. Eddy certainly would not have encouraged the ecstatic speech of the revival camp, because it both privileged human emotion in religious experience and largely countenanced the public speech of all faithful Christians. She likely had this type of religious expression in mind when she somewhat snidely suggested that a “self-satisfied ventilation of fervent sentiments never makes a Christian” (*SH* 7: 21-23). Such “material ecstasy and emotion” stemmed from “[p]hysical sensation” rather than “Soul” (*SH* 7: 17-18). In a sense, prayers or sermons of this kind were not transcendent enough, for they maintained belief in matter and sensation. Eddy taught her followers that a person could not be “present with the Lord” if he or she were “sensibly with the body”:

To be “present with the Lord” is to have, not mere emotional ecstasy or faith, but the actual demonstration and understanding of Life as revealed in Christian Science. To be “with the Lord” is to be in obedience to the law of God, to be absolutely governed by divine Love,—by Spirit, not by matter. (*SH* 14: 1-13)

Eddy implies that the confessions and exhortations so common in revivals meant little without actions to support them – demonstrations and cures that evidenced a Christian’s spiritual understanding. Even if sincere, emotional, and ecstatic speech reflected a continued attachment to matter and the body and thus a weak grasp of divine Principle.
Prophesying a Scientific Truth

Given her emphasis on sound, scientific reasoning, Eddy characterized her revelation regarding Christian Science and her place as prophet quite differently than is typical in other new religions. Critics (Mark Twain was the most vocal) continually accused Eddy of deifying herself, whether as the second coming of Christ, the new Virgin Mother, or the woman with the crown of twelve stars of Biblical prophecy. However, Eddy just as consistently denied any “aspiration” to be “a first or second Virgin Mother” and instead claimed to “stand in relation to this century as a Christian Discoverer, Founder, and Leader” (FCC 303, 302). Eddy suggested that she had “discovered” a spiritual law in much the same way an experimental scientist might discover a natural law; she called her self-cure in Lynn “the falling apple that led me to the discovery how to be well myself, and how to make other so” (RI 24). Eddy described this new awareness not as a sudden sign by God but as a gradual illumination that she only “understood… after[wards]” (MBEL, Letter to Joshua Bailey, A12065). This depiction of theological discovery lacks the spontaneous drama of prophecy, instead emphasizing a slow process of deepening understanding through careful study of the Bible.

Nevertheless, Eddy also believed that her discovery represented absolute and eternal Truth, so she assumed definitive authority over the product of her revelation. As believer L. Ivimy Gwalter explains, the revelation of Christian Science demonstrates the “yielding of material sense to the absoluteness of God,” unvarying divine law as prophesized in the Bible (111). This revelation came not from human thought but from God, not from within but from outside, making its occurrence “definitive” (Gottschalk, Emergence 119). If Christian Science was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy to the world, it was a discovery that could not occur twice or represent a merely personal revelation. Such a concept of revelation...
granted Eddy authority as prophetess over the expression of Christian Science. Her
discovery, revealed by God, established that she had a fuller comprehension of divine law
and more advanced spiritual understanding than others. The Leader explained to her
student, “My life, my teaching, my cup are all distinct from my students in their degrees, and
we would not have the learner of music take for exhibition a composition of the masters that
he did not himself fully understand” (MBEL, Letter to David A. Easton, L04695). No one
but the prophetess, given her humility and ability to overcome material error, could as fully
and accurately articulate the final truth of Christian Science.

For non-Scientists, Eddy’s representation of her theology as a Science (a preexisting
law absolute and independent of human activity or understanding) might seem to contradict
her representation of it as a revelation (a divine principle actualized on earth through a select
individual). However, Eddy’s particular articulation of Scriptural authority allowed her to
reconcile faith with universally knowable, scientific law. Eddy assumed that the spiritual
world abided by scriptural laws, even if one had not achieved the necessary spiritual insight
to understand these principles. This assumption allowed Eddy to negotiate an apparently
untenable position. She insisted that “[n]o human pen nor tongue taught [her] the Science
contained in [Science and Health].” Instead, “the Bible was [Eddy’s] only textbook” in
formulating her theology because it was untainted by the material world or human opinion
(SH 110: 13-18). Although the Bible could be interpreted variously, only one such
interpretation, the revelation of Christian Science, reflected the Word accurately. Jesus alone
had fully understood the message relayed in the Bible – until God touched Eddy and
“illuminated” the Scriptures so that she could see the Truth. At this moment, “reason and
revelation were reconciled” (SH 110: 13-18). For Eddy, the words of the Bible expressed
abiding Principle or Scientific law, but the comprehension of these words required revelation.

Given this vision of her theology’s relation to the Bible, Eddy carefully supervised the writing and lecturing of her followers to ensure their accuracy with her revelation of Scientific principle. Such tight control over the texts of her followers reflected Eddy’s understanding of Christian Science as both definitive revelation and unvarying Scientific law. Advising him to sermonize only on known Principle, Eddy gently chided a student, “Beware of… het[e]rodoxy. Science and Health and the Scriptures contain none of it. Go back to your sensible sermons based on them and leave at once your semi evolution reasoning[.] Your new points mixed with C.S. were only changed forms of Pagan philosophy” (MBEL, Letter to John F. Linscott, L04106). The only means of ensuring such accuracy was to speak solely on those Principles revealed to Eddy in *Science and Health*. She similarly cautioned another follower, “I liked your close reasoning & Christian sentiment in that sermon until you departed from your side of the Q lost yr own Common Sense grew caustic, personal & became yrself the victim of Animal propensities alias magnetism” (MBEL, Letter to Lanson P. Norcross, L14065). Eddy worked to ensure that believers were not led into error by less enlightened teachers than herself, carefully monitoring her lecturers and the editors of the denomination’s periodicals. Students must not attempt to recite Biblical truths if their spiritual understanding was underdeveloped, she warned, for “[g]reat harm has come from students handling subjects of mine before they have grown to them” (MBEL, Letter to David A. Easton, L04695). The Leader demanded that her students construct their texts around only what could be known: the Scientific Principle governing the world as prophesized in the Bible, revealed to her by God, and finally articulated in her textbook.
Eddy saw no contradiction in representing her theology as both a science and a revelation, as both perspectives characterized it as specific, irrefutable, and eternal, and she developed her understanding of liturgical rhetoric in accordance with this seemingly antithetical position. Foremost, she abolished the practice of preaching in her church in 1894, in order to both reinforce the authority of the Scriptures and further eliminate any material or human element from the sermon. From that point forward, two lay Readers, one male and one female, led the service in all of the denomination’s churches rather than a pastor, reading from the Bible and *Science and Health* and performing other designated tasks (*MW* 316). Although sermons remain a part of the Christian Science service, they “are made up wholly of passages from the Bible and the Christian Science text-book [*Science and Health*]”; thus, “they contain nothing of human opinion” and “are devoid of man-made theories” (“The Christian Science Sermon. I. Makers of the Sermon.” 5). More specifically, Christian Science sermons consist of a sequence of passages from the two books, carefully arranged to articulate a theme. These themes, chosen by Eddy, follow the order she generally used in her classes at the Massachusetts Metaphysical College (“The Christian Science Sermon. I. Makers of the Sermon.” 5). Only that which had been revealed by God and demonstrated Scientifically – the content of the bible and the Christian Science textbook – would be spoken from the pulpit.

Furthermore, the structure of the Christian Science sermon itself is meant to reflect its nature as divine Principle. Aiming for spiritual exactness, each lesson has a “God-given structure, with foundation, walls and arching roof,” and progresses through an “introduction, body, and conclusion” (“The Christian Science Sermon II. The Make Up of the Sermon.” 4). The “purpose” of the sermon, the theological Truth it is meant to teach, “guide[s] the selection of… proper passages” for the text (“The Christian Science Sermon.
II. The Make Up of the Sermon.” 4.) Each part and passage contributes in specific ways to the overall spiritual message, “even as head, trunk, and limbs, as parts of the whole body, have their special functions, and minister in their special ways to the whole” (“The Christian Science Sermon. II. The Make Up of the Sermon.” 4). In its ideal form, the Christian Science sermon reflects the Word of God – Scientific Principle – as divinely revealed in the Bible.

The focus of this section has been the significant rhetorical implications of the complex mingling of revelation and science in Christian Science theology. Eddy advocated a transparent language, one that reflected the Principle made comprehensible by her revelation. However, this theological stance had equally profound implications on Eddy’s conception of religious authority – her understanding of who could responsibly speak on sacred subjects. The Leader of Christian Science was and remains to her followers a prophet, the mouthpiece of divine revelation. As such, Eddy holds a singular and unassailable position within her denomination. Nevertheless, this position did not and could not require arbitrary or blind obedience to the leader of the church. The liberal and scientific bend of the religion in fact precluded Eddy from justifying her right to speak solely based upon the authority of her position as prophet. The following section consequently addresses the question of authority in Christian Science, specifically with respect to gender.

**Professional Authority vs. Individual Experience: Championing the Impersonal Pastor**

Although Eddy adopted an explicitly progressive stance in presenting her faith as scientific, her formulation of religious leadership is arguably her most radical revision of traditional Christianity. Christian Science was not unique in questioning ministerial authority, as this
was an important component of liberal religion and Protestantism more generally. According to Gary Dorrien, liberals emphasized that “the problem [of increasing infidelism] was not the Enlightenment, but rather the ecclesiastical power of a discredited orthodoxy that refused to reform” (xxi). However, religious liberals questioned the source and extent of ministerial authority rather than radically rethinking its structures. By contrast, Eddy argued for an “impersonal” Reader rather than a personal pastor in a move that was consistent with her antimaterial theology; she completely rejected an established clergy, a decision that had substantial implications for gender roles in the church. This revision of the role of the minister – and consequently the sacred orator – reinforced the progressive stance of Christian Scientists, challenged the ideal of the masculine preacher, and thus opened a space for women to hold more public roles in the church.

This section consists of three parts that explore the implications of the “impersonal pastor” for women in the Christian Science church. The first part outlines Eddy’s theory of “ impersonality,” which provided her theological justification for abolishing preaching from her church. The second part considers the terms under which this view countenanced the authority of the individual Christian versus that of church leaders, including Eddy herself. The final section addresses gender specifically, as the vision of an immaterial preacher held immense implications for women so often associated with matter. In Eddy’s theological worldview, women, more often than men, possessed the intrinsic spiritual quality, intelligence, to transcend the material. Eddy understood the order governing the universe as a moral and spiritual one, an order women’s particular faculties made them better able to recognize. In defining intelligence in this way, she embraced the nineteenth-century image of woman as intrinsically spiritual – without relinquishing the authority granted to her as a
rational thinker and speaker. The irony of this stance, which did support various public roles for women in the church, was that this role would never be one of the preacher.

Transcending Material Personality

Scholars in the field of science studies have often pointed out that scientific rhetoric attempts to mask its own situatedness and rhetoricity. The deliberate use of passive voice and other impersonal constructions in the methods section of scientific and technical documents, for example, insinuates (falsely) that the person of the researcher is insignificant. If a scientific principle is to be presented as universal or true, it cannot depend on the person studying or revealing it. Eddy’s “scientific” writing not surprisingly shares this presumption with its research-based counterpart, although its rhetorical strategies differ. In the case of Christian Science, the concept of a universal or transcendent rhetor is deeply embedded into the theology of the denomination. Eddy, ever a pragmatist, did not ignore the importance of addressing an audience, but she nevertheless presented the ideal speaker and writer as one who could transcend his or her individuality for the universality of divine Principle.

An important manifestation of Eddy’s anti-material theology was her rejection of “personality,” those corporeal qualities usually associated with a person’s individuality. Eddy argued that human beings did not possess any individuality connected to their “material personality” or physical body, only a “spiritual individuality” that “reflect[ed] God” (SH 337: 2-5). Any attention to personality at the material level would lead to Error. Repeatedly, Eddy encouraged her students to “remove from their observation or study the personal sense of any one, and not to dwell in thought upon their own or others’ corporeality, either as good or evil” (MW 309). By contrast, the advanced student of Science could rise beyond material personality to “mediate… most on infinite spiritual substance and intelligence”
Personality, varying and corporeal, is in direct contradiction to divine Principle, eternal and absolute. Therefore, Eddy preached, “To impersonalize scientifically the material sense of existence – rather than cling to personality – is the lesson of to-day” (MW 310). An individual reliant on personality, whether their own or another’s, would necessarily be led astray.

Consequently, the Leader sought an impersonal religious discourse – one that transcended material personality to become all Substance or Spirit. Speaking of her own experience preaching early in her career, Eddy claimed to have led “by [her] own state of love and spirituality… and [e]specially by feeling myself and uttering the spirit of Christian Science together with the letter” (MBEL, Letter to David A. Easton, L07876). In other words, an inspired verbal presentation (whether a speech, written text, or reading) was the product of the orator’s unity with God. Moreover, speakers reached their audience by means of that divine element they shared. To describe this state, Eddy offered an axiom to a student: “The heart must overflow If thou anothers heart wouldst reach’…[;] let God give you utterance to speak through you and to you and your hearers (MBEL, Letter to Ruth B. Ewing, L08507). If an orator is able to transcend material personality, he or she will guide an audience to a similar understanding of Principle, of the nothingness of matter. If a speaker deigns to reach an audience through personality, both parties will succumb to error and be worse rather than better for the interaction.

This need to transcend material personality extended not only to the composition of texts but also to their public reading during the service. The appropriate delivery of the passages from the Scriptures and Science and Health during the services was crucial if the audience was to correctly interpret their message and relinquish matter for Spirit. Despite their limited control over the composition of sermons, these figures had enormous influence
over the audience through their presentation of the divine message. Eddy recommended that a Reader be “not worldly wise but unworldly” and chosen “not for personal attachment nor for fullness but emptiness” (MBEL, “Words to Watchers,” A10512). When successful, the Reader transcended the corporeal self and, at a certain level, became the message he or she delivered. As “an ambassador of the King,” the individual reading the Bible or *Science and Health* was “nothing in himself, everything in the message which he [brought]” (“The Christian Science Sermon. III. The Interpretation of the Sermon.” 4). In other words, the ideal Reader is one that recognizes that he is “sufficient for his task only because he knows that the work is God’s” (“The Christian Science Sermon. III. The Interpretation of the Sermon.” 4). Those who give voice to the divine message should not be defined by a title, argument, or personal qualities – but exhibit only impersonal Spirit to their audience.

The extent – or perceived extent – to which Christian Scientists were able to transcend material personality became the fundamental determinant of their character as Christians and speakers. Viewed through the lens of impersonality, the transparency of a speaker’s language reflected his or her spiritual enlightenment. Eddy regularly critiqued her followers in these terms, always to teach and sometimes to chastise. Given its significance in the proper instruction of believers, she nearly gushed to her Board of Directors when she found a reader that “[read] anything and everything in its spirit, not for show” (MBEL, Letter to CS Board of Directors, L02750A). The Leader encouraged her adopted son, Ebenezer Foster Eddy, to abide by this same standard, requesting before a lecture that he “loose all self in reading [the sermon] and feel the tenderness and devotion it expresses” (MBEL, Letter to Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, L01972). Foster Eddy was apparently less than effective in this endeavor, for Eddy later asked that he not be allowed to read her work at a church dedication in Chicago. “He put so much of himself in his reading it clouds the
subject,” she confided (MBEL, Letter to Edward A. Kimball/Ruth B. Ewing, L07464). These criticisms and praises reflect far more than Eddy’s assessment of a speaker’s skill in delivery. Instead, a speaker’s ability to transcend material personality correlated to his or her understanding of divine Principle – and thus to his or her level of spiritual development.

Eddy’s impersonal theology significantly impacted the forms of religious expression valued in the Christian Science church – and, most importantly, signaled a shift in emphasis from spoken to written language. Well aware of the impact of delivery, Eddy suggested that spoken language allowed even more room for the intrusion of personality into one’s words. She explained, “Until minds become less worldly-minded… and have profited up to their present capacity from the written word, they are not ready for the word spoken” (MW 316). Both speaker and audience needed greater spiritual understanding to avoid the dangers of the material. As a consequence of this view, Eddy encouraged her followers to prioritize their study of the written texts of the Christian Science faith – the Bible and Science and Health – as opposed to attending lectures or church services:

> [I]t is not absolutely requisite for some people to be taught in a class, for they can learn by spiritual growth and by the study of what is written. Scarcely a moiety, compared with the whole of the Scriptures and the Christian Science textbook, is yet assimilated spiritually by the most faithful seekers; yet this assimilation is indispensible to the progress of every Christian Scientist. (MW 317)

As the most pure expression of Principle, these texts provided all that was necessary for spiritual growth through Christian Science. Eddy did not necessarily object to more traditional, spoken forms of religious practice, but she believed that they were not necessary for salvation or enlightenment. While secondary sources like lectures or sermons can be
useful, the primary sources, the Scriptures and the Christian Science textbook, are those that lay the foundation for deep understanding.

Eddy’s idealism limited her sense of the contextual nature of language, given that she understood it as an expression of absolute Principle. Nevertheless, she fully appreciated the importance of appealing to an audience if she was to both grow her denomination and educate the American public in its tenets. In a letter beginning to consider the qualifications for the position, Eddy warned that “readers shall be selected with much wisdom as much depends on them in interesting an audience” (MBEL, Letter to Unknown Party, L10842). In certain respects, this attention to audience, as well as Eddy’s descriptions of the ideal reader, contradicts her emphasis on spirituality over personality. Eddy asked the Christian Science Board of Directors to select Readers based on “their appearance on the platform, their voice, and eloquence,” in addition to the most important qualification, “a thorough understanding of C.S.” (MBEL, Letter to Christian Science Board of Directors, L00405). Eddy even advised one student to devote “much time for study and contemplation” so that he might compose sermons that were “not at all commonplace but well chosen, eloquent, and adapted to the Boston high culture” (MBEL, Letter to David A. Easton, L07876). Eddy recognized, despite her insistence on an impersonal language, that an audience would not be persuaded by language that did not meet their needs, concerns, or expectations.

Eddy’s view of the transcendental nature of language was mitigated by her belief that enlightenment was a gradual process rather than immediate state. This assumption allowed her to reconcile her sense of Truth as absolute and her somewhat more pragmatic approach to educating the public in Christian Science. Most importantly, she stressed that a speaker must address audiences at their level if he or she was to be persuasive, for the public likely was not yet ready to comprehend Principle in its fullest manifestation. Eddy suggested to
one student that he reshape his sermons so that they corresponded to his audience’s level of spiritual understanding, explaining:

Watch the signs of the times and if your pearl is too pearly for the pigs at present put it up in its casket and take the next attenuation of your subject and wait for the public growth, i.e. Be more gentle in denunciation, propositional, and bait your read till all are more ready to swallow your pearl.

(*MBEL*, Letter to Septimus J. Hanna, L04976)

Eddy advised nearly the same approach in a letter to Alfred Farlow, who led the Committees on Publication, encouraging him to “learn how to catch fish.” With this advice, Eddy did not so much mean that the content of the argument or lesson should be changed so much as that it should be modified to suit the background level of the audience. She firmly stated that her lecturers should not “believe one of [the audience’s] errors or admit one of them to be true,” for to do so would be to lead the audience further from rather than nearer to Principle. Instead, the enlightened speaker through their words should guide the audience to gradually greater levels of comprehension of Principle. “Feel your way gently in your lectures until you get your audience interested and pleased,” she concluded. “Jesus walked with them at first before he led them, and in this way he got their ear and sympathy” (*MBEL*, Letter to Alfred Farlow, Z00046). With this description, Eddy represents the speaker-audience relationship as dialectical and describes it in terms similar to the mentor-student relationship of the Platonic dialogues. Rhetoric and attention to audience does not disappear entirely, given the undeveloped state of the public, but it does become subordinate to absolute Truth.
Democratizing Spiritual Authority

Throughout its various manifestations and alterations, Protestant thought retained a deep suspicion of arbitrary authority. Eddy received nearly constant criticism from those outside the denomination for her perceived power over her followers, an accusation often leveled at new religions or “cults.” This accusation contains some manner of truth, given that Eddy believed her revelation was absolute and singular. However, the liberal and Protestant slant of the religion, as well as her inclination to remain a somewhat absent presence as leader, mitigated the authority she individually possessed. Eddy undoubtedly determined the structure of her church and maintained ultimate control over its practices. But she genuinely believed that instruction in the Principles of Christian Science, and thus her leadership, ultimately occurred through her written words rather than her physical presence. The Leader of the Christian Science church felt little compunction in excommunicating followers that strayed too far from theological Principles she understood as both true and right. However, Eddy repeatedly affirmed the right of the individual Christian to guide his or her own spiritual development, and she hoped for the day when the Bible and *Science and Health* would be all that was necessary for the Christian to do so.

If the emphasis on impersonality limited the authority of the Christian Science rhetor, it also shifted the terms under which Eddy would be authorized to speak as a religious leader. Partly in response to this criticism and partly due to her theological stance, Eddy downplayed her status as prophet within the Christian Science church – insofar as her discovery was linked to her personal ethos. The Leader warned an overly complaisant follower that “to refer to what God has done through me is all right – but to name ME in it is NOT NECESSARY, and at present it is very unwise” (*MBEL*, Letter to Julia Field-King, F00528). This attention to her individual person bordered on the material and error, Eddy
implied, and further fueled criticisms. Any discussion of the discovery of Christian Science must focus on the Principle itself as opposed to its discoverer. Largely for this reason, the Leader declined to preach publicly except on rare occasions after 1890.

Nevertheless, Eddy was not above reminding her followers that her discovery of Christian Science reflected her more advanced spiritual state. She lamented to her friends and followers, the Hannas, that her desire to transcend the material made her “long for the inexpressible too much to be fit for society.” In recognizing the Principle of Christian Science, Eddy had “out-grown [her] swaddling clothes,” or her material body, which had begun to “pinch and disturb” her (MBEL, Letter to Septimus J. Hanna and Camilla Hanna, L05014). This particular articulation of her status as discoverer allowed her to retain strict control over the denomination’s practices and theology, as the most enlightened member of the church, while rejecting any claim to authority merely as prophet or exception. Eddy had no equal in spiritual intelligence, in her mind or the minds of her followers, although all human beings were equally capable of transcending matter.

As well as shaping her presentation of herself as prophet and Leader, Eddy’s ambition to overcome material personality dramatically influenced the denominational structures of the Christian Science church. As she advanced in age, contemporaries often asked Eddy who would succeed her in the church, but they likely never anticipated her response. Eddy appointed her textbook as the “impersonal pastor” of the Mother Church shortly after its dedication in 1894, hoping to eliminate any potential controversies after her death and, in her mind, avoiding the danger of a forceful personality misguiding the church. In April 1895, she published an announcement in the Christian Science Journal that replaced preachers with readers in all branch churches (MW 313; Gottschalk, Emergence 192; Rolling 226-7). She considered Science and Health to be the highest expression of divine Principle,
outside of the Bible, and thus the safest guide for her followers. That Eddy chose to grant the title “pastor” to an inanimate object likely seems strange outside the context of her anti-material beliefs. However, the word, “pastor” stresses the role of the individual as teacher and spiritual guide. *Science and Health* was inspired and less encumbered by material personality than a preacher; it was the greatest possible expression of true immateriality available to human language. To name *Science and Health* as a pastor was therefore to suggest that Principle, not person, was the authority and teacher of the faith.

As the accession of *Science and Health* suggests, Christian Science minimizes the significance of the earthly organization of the church. Eddy repeatedly reminded her followers that the only essentials to achieve spiritual understanding are the Scriptures and *Science and Health*, stressing the spiritual education of the individual through the study of these books. In her biography, Eddy even expresses hope that the “corporeal organization [of the church] deemed requisite in the first stages of mortal existence” will be “laid off, in order to gain spiritual freedom” (*RI* 41). Reliance on either a pastor or a church hierarchy reflects reliance on Matter and on Error and must be relinquished as spiritual progress occurs. Eddy thus concluded that “material organization [of a church] has its value and peril, and that organization is requisite only in the earliest periods in Christian history” (*RI* 41). In other words, the spiritual progress of the world through Christian Science would make the structures of the church obsolete. Guided by the Bible and its spiritual signification, the Christian Science textbook, the individual could direct their own spiritual growth.

The progress of the Church, for Christian Scientists, required its leadership and discourse to move beyond the pulpit into other channels. As the church matured, religious leadership served a more administrative function, and discourse on spiritual issues shifted
from the pulpit to the press and other print materials. The Christian Science Publishing Society, Committees on Publication, and Lectureship Committee provided alternatives to traditional preaching. These duties, which were often held by women and involved extensive writing, demanded a fundamentally different ethos than that of earlier female preachers. Like these preachers, the women Eddy hired for these roles discussed complicated theological problems, presented them to a public, and believed themselves guided by personal, spiritual enlightenment. However, unlike early preachers, these orators and writers could not present themselves as exceptions, driven like the prophets by a spiritual calling that superseded their domestic obligations as women. The doctrine of impersonality precluded exceptionality, allowing for a wider range of women in public positions. In other words, the rejection of ministerial authority not only created a more enlightened Christianity as Eddy understood it – but paved the way for a far greater sense of equality within the congregation than even a relatively liberal mainstream religion allowed.

Eddy’s concept of impersonality led to a relatively democratic view of religious authority – not atypical in American liberal religion. In Eddy’s view, all Christians were intrinsically equal in their inherent unity with God, although they were not equal in their level of spiritual intelligence. Eddy suggested that formal education in theology was of minimal importance to an individual’s spiritual understanding. She insisted, “To measure intellectual capacity by the size of the brain and strength by the exercise of muscle, is to subjugate intelligence, to make mind mortal, and to place this so-called mind at the mercy of material organization and non-intelligent matter” (SH 165: 6-11). In accord with this emphasis on spiritual rather than academic learning, she told her flock in her autobiography that, after her discovery, “most of the knowledge I had gleaned from school books vanished like a dream” (RI 20). Although the revelation of Christian Science could only come once,
Eddy explicitly recognized that its manifestation was not limited to a few select individuals. Any Christian Scientist able to overcome matter might accomplish cures according to its tenets. In a short piece in the *Christian Science Sentinel*, Eddy explained, “My published works are teachers and healers; my private life is given to a servitude, the fruit whereof all mankind may share. Such labor is impartial, meted out to no one more than another” (“Question Answered” 816). Armed with Principle, all believers could demonstrate their unity with God and the transcendence of the material through Spirit.

Therefore, religious authority in Christian Science is highly individualistic, at least theoretically, demonstrating the skepticism of earthly authority apparent in the Protestant tradition. Because the dangers of impersonality are so great, Eddy warned her students to be incredibly cautious in adopting the religious instruction of another Christian. She advised her students “not [to] allow their movements to be controlled by other students, even if they are teachers and practitioners of the same blessed faith” (*RI* 67). In part, Eddy encouraged such suspicion so that her followers might avoid manipulation, but even more importantly, she did so because she believed that spiritual enlightenment was the product of the individual’s inherent unity with God. She argued that “scientific foundations are already laid in [the students’] minds which are not to be tampered with” by a teacher. Given these internal resources, Christian Scientists “are prepared to receive the infinite instructions afforded by the Bible and my books, which mislead no one and are their best guides” (*RI* 69). The seeker could remain confident that Bible and *Science and Health* are the product of Principle, as opposed to material personality, and thus appropriate guides in learning Christian Science.
Eddy did not consider the tenets of her theology to be negotiable, but she did staunchly and consistently uphold the right of the individual to determine his or her own spiritual course. Reminding her followers that “God is their only leader,” Eddy explained:

The divine Principle of each individual governs his individuality & to usurp this divine prerogative is in defiance instead of compliance with Science. As well as the planet Mars supervise & direct the path of Jupiter as one human mind arbitrarily dictate to another his course heavenward. (MBEL, “Not Theory, But Theology,” A10388)

Despite her position as prophet, Eddy limited her status as an exception; she could not offer a person redemption or salvation or enact cures arbitrarily. These tasks, when accomplished, were the product of the individual’s expression of Spirit. Eddy rather modestly claimed that “[a]ny success that I may have achieved in leading human thot [sic] upward has arisen solely from getting out of God’s way so that not mine but His will be done” (MBEL, “Not Theory, But Theology,” A10388). While this modesty is likely in part rhetorical, Eddy undoubtedly believed that the Principle she discovered did not depend on her for its particular composition – and adopted this somewhat detached stance as a consequence. This theme of spiritual independence is echoed throughout Eddy’s oeuvre.

Heralding Woman’s Hour

The tenets of radical Protestantism, particularly the privileging of scriptural authority and individual spiritual experience, have often served to justify women speaking on sacred subjects. For example, early Methodist and Baptist women often exhorted or shared their conversion experiences in a public environment, buttressed by these premises. These same tenets remained central in Christian Science, if their theological premises were somewhat
different than in mainstream churches. However, the emphasis on immateriality in Christian Science added another layer to older Protestant affirmations of the individual’s spiritual authority, particularly for women. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the sentimental figure of the “Angel of the House” had largely replaced that of the carnal seductress. Eddy understood this image of ethereal femininity in terms that made it highly consistent with her anti-material theology. In most cases, the spiritualized image of the Angel was used to relegate women to the private sphere. But Eddy’s anti-material theology merged the moral authority of the Angel with the intellectual authority of the scientist, seizing the public space of “science” as the particular purview of women.

This chapter has emphasized the liberal bent of Eddy’s theology, but in the past, this view has been trumped in scholarship by an inclination to place her in the context of nineteenth-century sentimentalism. Indeed, much of Eddy’s discussion of gender falls in line with that of her more conventional nineteenth-century sisters. Sentimental Christianity affirmed social hierarchy as an essential component of the divine order and reinforced the belief that gender distinctions were natural and inevitable (Porterfield, Protestant Experience 123). Thus, strong and virile men should protect the chastity of the weaker sex and the sanctity of the domestic space, while demure and inherently spiritual women should serve as the moral guides of their families and the race. At least partly invested in these cultural beliefs, Eddy presented Christian Science as a force in the spiritual and moral improvement of the race and frequently suggested woman’s greater capacity for spiritual understanding. But in order to fully understand Eddy’s theology, these sentimental values must be considered beside her affirmation of scientific law and investment in a transparent language.

Christians invested in sentimentality assumed that both the masculine and feminine were necessary for the harmonious functioning of society and the universe (even if they
privileged one half of the dichotomy). Extending and revising this assumption, Eddy argued that both masculine and feminine qualities were equally important for spiritual wholeness. This gender equality was not simply a stance of the Church on a social issue but a necessary conclusion of her central principle of spiritual unity. If God was “All,” He necessarily transcended the confines of gender as well as matter. Thus, Eddy concluded, the “union” of these two qualities “constitute[d] completeness” (SH 57: 4-8). In a 1900 sermon titled, “Man and Woman,” she explained how the “premises of [Christian] Science” necessitated the “equality” of the two genders:

> God made the male and female from the beginning, and they were in His image and likeness – not images, but IMAGE. In the divine Mind there is no sex, no sexuality, and no procreation; the infinite Mind includes all in Mind. (MBEL, A10142A)

Distinctions of gender are “human concepts,” Eddy assured, because they relate to matter and do not reflect the divine Mind (SH 516: 31). She dismissed the terms “sex, sexuality, sensuousness, matter” as “falsity” sprung from the “objective state of what is called mind separated from God, the One Mind” (MBEL, “Man and Woman,” A10142A). At the theoretical level, Eddy justified gender equality by abolishing the dichotomy altogether in the name of the ubiquity of Mind.

For Eddy, a spiritual individual or society would find a balance between typically masculine and feminine qualities. To articulate this balance, Eddy developed her concept of the “Father-Mother God” – a term that acknowledged both facets of the divine Mind.31 As the Scientific ideal, the divine Mind demonstrated harmony between the gentle virtue of the feminine and the righteous virility of the masculine. Eddy further explained that, at the individual and social level, the masculine mind could gain a “higher tone” from the feminine
and the feminine mind gain “courage and strength” from the masculine (SH 57: 4-8). Any imbalance between these two qualities was the result not of the divine order but a human one. Thus Eddy characterized the privileging of one gender in human affairs not as natural but erroneous:

If at any period the reflection of the masculinity of God seems more apparent and desirable to the human senses than the reflection of his femininity it is because the human perception, apprehension, and understanding have not kept pace with the Divine Love and order that characterize the period which manifests the dual nature of God, and the equality of man and woman. (MBEL, “Man and Woman,” A10142A)

In certain respects, Eddy’s description of gender balance envisions a “both/and” character that conflicts with her insistence that gender is a human construct that is transcended in the spiritual realm. She does not confine the expression of feminine qualities to women or masculine qualities to men, but she does preserve the association of certain qualities with either the masculine (such as strength) or feminine (such as a higher moral tone).

Rather than to a society where these labels disappear, Eddy seems to restrict her practical aspirations to a society in which one gender is not privileged over the other – a limitation most apparent in her description of marriage. In 1905, Eddy wrote a letter to the Boston Herald, titled “The Prevention and Cure of Divorce”; she proclaimed the end to this social problem when “male and female [are] one – sex or gender eliminated” and when “the designation man mean[s] woman as well” (FCC 268). At this point in human progress, marriage would not signify union between a man and woman but “man’s oneness with God, - the unity of eternal Love” (MW 286). Yet even as she imagined a world without sex and thus marriage, Eddy admitted that this state would be impossible until society advanced
spiritually. Acknowledging that “to abolish marriage at this period, and maintain morality and generation, would put ingenuity to ludicrous shifts,” she adopted a more feasible approach for nineteenth-century Americans (MW 286). This more feasible path to domestic comfort involved a harmony between the masculine and feminine in which each “fulfill[ed] the different demands of their united spheres, their sympathies… blend[ing] in sweet confidence and cheer, each partner sustaining the other” (SH 59: 11-14). Eddy argued for the equal importance of the masculine and feminine spheres, but she retained the belief that “woman’s world” of the “home” made her social obligations different (MW 287). Eddy continually struggled in her writing between her desire to transcend gender and her unwillingness to completely relinquish the role of the feminine – a struggle that reflects both the practical and unconscious strictures placed on her as a nineteenth-century woman.

In her quest to restore gender balance, Eddy reclaimed the feminine and ultimately reinforced nineteenth-century female archetypes. She took great pains to associate woman with the highest principle of Love and to promote a distinctly feminine spirituality, even as she insisted on unity. Although she believed “[t]ruth’s spiritual idea” combined “[m]an and woman,” Eddy claimed that the Love represented by the maternal God was the highest principle (UG 52, 51). Reclaiming Eve from disgrace as man’s temptress, she explained that “[t]he Mind or intelligence of production names the female gender last in the ascending order of creation” (SH 508: 21-23). Eddy similarly claimed the highest spiritual station for women in her interpretation of Revelations, teaching her followers that “the beast bowed before the Lamb: it was supposed to have fought the manhood of God, that Jesus represented; but it fell before the womanhood of God, that presented the highest ideal of Love” (CH 10). Eddy thus explained to her followers, “Man is the generic term for all humanity. Woman is the highest species of man, and this word is the generic term for all
women” (UG 52). To this day, an image of “Woman-God Crowned” in stained glass flanks the readers’ platform of the original mother church, a tribute to feminine spirituality and maternal Love.

Eddy’s association of the feminine with the spiritual and moral was hardly novel, as scholars have frequently commented on the “feminization of religion” in the nineteenth-century. Even as she frequently described her theology as mathematical, Eddy just as regularly demonstrated her investment in what Fiedler called the “Sentimental Love Religion.” Christian Science, for Eddy, offered an escape from the unsympathetic Calvinism that pervaded her childhood in early nineteenth-century New England. Associated with divine Love, the maternal Godhead came to represent for Eddy precisely that quality that the mainstream church was lacking. Eddy closely associated sickness and theological error with the patriarchal Congregational church of her youth (perhaps at the time of the events or likely just in later narratives for her followers). In her autobiography, the elderly woman told of her deepest, childhood anxiety, which arose from the concept of predestination; she worried herself physically ill that she would be saved while her “brothers and sisters were to be numbered among those who were doomed to perpetual banishment from God” (RI 13). In the story that follows, Eddy criticizes her father’s “relentless theology” and describes the impotence of the doctor who was summoned to cure what ailed her (RI 13).

Even more tellingly, Eddy describes her recovery from this illness as a victory of the feminine qualities of love and compassion over the harsh, masculine doctrines of Calvinism and medicine. Rather than the masculine figures of her father and the doctor, only Mary’s mother could ease her agony. Abigail Baker, very much the nineteenth-century woman, cooled her daughter’s feverish forehead and encouraged her to “lean on God’s love” (RI 13). With this comforting thought, Eddy overcomes her illness and lingering belief in
predestination, which “forever lost its power” (RI 13). In her copious biography of Eddy, Gill corroborates the story (and offers another suggesting that Mary poked her father with a shawl pin while he was sermonizing at home), and she associates this abandonment of Calvinistic doctrine with the “feminization of religion in the nineteenth-century” (12). In the tales of the founder’s life, not paternal law but maternal love saved the future Leader from sickness and spiritual misunderstanding. Filling the lack of feminine spirituality in the mainstream Christian church thus became a primary function of Christian Science for Eddy – and one of its major contributions to America’s religious progress and spiritual wellbeing.

These sentimental influences, at least superficially, seem to be irreconcilable with Eddy’s scientific impulse. But in order to fully understand Eddy’s theology and her concept of reason, it is important to understand the link many Progressive-Era Americans made between science and a distinctly feminine morality. As has been argued previously, Christian Science rests on the belief that the world is governed by an unchanging spiritual order, scientific laws that guide the universe on the moral rather than physical plane. Satter’s study, Each Mind a Kingdom, suggests that these beliefs were typical of women reformers and other proponents of a “women’s era” in the late nineteenth-century; she convincingly outlines the association they made between a scientific, moral order and the fairer sex: “[S]cience was the study of universal laws. Universal laws must by definition be the same as the laws of morality and Christianity. Since refined women were the embodiment of spiritual Christianity, they had a natural affinity with science” (46). Certainly, science and reason hold a distinctly different flavor when defined in these terms, but these reformers retained the affiliation between (spiritual) science and social progress. Although they varied in their interpretations of this new era, women like Eddy who embraced this logic argued that the world would progress by minimizing the distinctions between the sexes. In a world so
heavily denominated by men, achieving this new state meant these men should embrace feminine morality and women embrace masculine intellect and courage (Satter 41-42).

This redefinition of reason and science as distinctly moral and feminine holds two primary consequences in Christian Science theology. First, Eddy generated female authority by associating traditionally feminine principles with Mind, spiritual and Scientific Truth, and redefining intelligence as spiritual understanding. The figure of Eve, specifically her admission to God of her fall, served in Eddy’s writing as a trope for achieving spiritual understanding through Christian Science. As a newly appointed lecturer, Annie Knott once explained to Eddy that even those loyal to the movement would not come to hear her lecture because “people in general preferred to have a man” (82). Eddy replied, “[W]ho reflects the most intelligence, the man or the woman? Take Adam and Eve, was it not the woman who first discovered that she was in error and was the first to admit it?” (Knott 83). In her reply, Eddy clearly suggests that the feminine qualities Eve represented gave her greater spiritual understanding – a higher “spiritual I.Q.” – than Adam. “To me this was a new definition of intelligence,” Knott reflects, “and I never lost sight of it” (83). According to Eddy, this same intelligence inherited from Eve “enabled woman to be the mother of Jesus” and “to be first to interpret the Scriptures in their true sense” (SH 533: 26 - 534:7). Eddy laid woman’s claim to the attribute of spiritual intelligence – demanding commensurate authority for Eve, Mary, Knott, and herself as discoverer of Christian Science.

Second, Eddy’s reversal of the standard gender hierarchy involved not only privileging feminine qualities – but also flipping the association of Woman with matter. She argued that the spiritual influence of women could combat the destructive tendencies of matter, undermining the standard gender dichotomy that linked women to the material body.
Perhaps the idea most often quoted by scholars, Eddy characterized woman as a warrior against “materialistic hypotheses” and urged her to “[go] forth to battle with Goliath” (SH 268: 9-12). As this characterization suggests, Eddy perceived the primary conflict in Christian history as that between Woman and matter (not between the feminine and masculine). As Satter explains, “[w]hile man was strongly associated with matter, it was matter, and not man, that woman battled” (68). Satter convincingly describes Eddy’s theology as participating in contemporary conversations about male and female desire and their moral implications. More specifically, Christian Science served as the most visible representative of an “anti-desire wing” of the broader New Thought movement, which “valorize[d] self-denial, the absence of desire, and the triumph of womanhood” (Satter 58).

Ironically, Eddy undermined one feminine stereotype by embracing another; she challenged the coupling of women and matter by granting her the qualities of the iconic Angel. The ideal woman was spiritual, moral, and in an almost literal way, ephemeral.

However, it is important to note that Christian Science placed great emphasis on the full participation of women in the spiritual reformation of American society, even more so than that of men. Eddy’s rejection of the material world and privileging of divine and maternal Love did not imply the relegation of Christian Science women to the domestic realm, as sentimental religion often did. Encouraging social and religious reform by women, Eddy triumphantly declared:

[The] movements of the [materialistic portion of the pulpit and the press] indicate fear and weakness, a physical and spiritual need that Christian Science should remove with glorious results. The conclusion cannot now be pushed, that women have no rights that man is bound to respect. This is
women’s hour, in all the good tendencies, charities, and reforms of to-day.

(MW 245)

Women, for Eddy, represented the new, enlightened nation that was dawning with the rise of the Christian Science church, and they were obligated to help bring Biblical prophecy to pass. In 1895, a brief article in Boston’s *The New Century* reinforced the centrality of women in social progress and merged the standard, Progressive-Era imagery of reform with that of religion. Reprinted in Eddy’s *Pulpit and Press*, the article described the “new woman” as one who will “scorn self for the sake of love and her handmaiden duty” and “seek the brightness of truth not as the moth to be destroyed thereby, but as the lark who soars and sings to the great sun” (*PP* 81). The article builds into a crescendo, and it foretells the coming of the woman with “a crown of twelve stars” of biblical prophesy. “Then shall wrong be robbed of her bitterness and ingratitude,” proclaims the writer, “while side by side, equal partners in all that is worth living for, shall stand the new man with the new woman” (*PP* 84). This enlightened woman, serving as spiritual guide, represents a world that has both transcended gender and embraced feminine Reason – a truly spiritual society.

Christian Science reinforced the sentimental image of woman as spiritual guide, drawing on the moral authority it provided to justify their full participation in public religious life. Eddy freely appropriated those aspects of science and sentimentality that would make her theology and her leadership as a woman amenable to late nineteenth-century Americans. In doing so, she inhabited what often seems to contemporary readers a mass of contradictions. Eddy demanded that her theology be granted the authority of science, while representing herself as the moral and chaste woman that remained the ideal in her time. These contradictions only begin to resolve themselves when coupled with the nineteenth-century assumption that science served a moral purpose and reflected the moral order of the
universe. Redefining intelligence as moral and spiritual understanding, Eddy subsequently claimed this human faculty to be a distinctly feminine one. She demanded, for herself and her followers, authority as Woman and Scientist – as the agent of a new spiritual order.

**Conclusion**

Perhaps nothing represents the complex contradictions Eddy inhabited – and asked her female followers to inhabit – than a pair of images reproduced for Christian Science texts.

The first portrait, used to illustrate Eddy’s poem, *Christ and Christmas*, presumably portrays her discovery of Christian Science (see Fig. 3). Eddy is alone with her Bible and a candle, lost in deep thought, and illuminated by a ray of light from above. Simply dressed, the woman is not conspicuous; her look and lonely surroundings suggest that she has sacrificed much. She might appear, if her identity is unknown and her gender ignored, to be a scholar studying by candlelight, the light shining upon her that of knowledge. Given the Christian Science context of the image, the light bathing Eddy represents Principle, simultaneously both God and understanding. Ultimately, not the woman but the Book she studies is most important, for it glows while her face remains dim and obscured by her hand.

The second image, a photograph as opposed to an artistic representation, is one of the most famous and frequently reproduced images of the Leader of Christian Science. As opposed to the first image, the photograph portrays Eddy in the period after she has
achieved recognition (see Fig. 4). She stands upon her balcony at her home, Pleasant View, addressing a crowd of followers, her hands raised in a gesture that seems to suggest both dominion and reverence. Dressed in formal attire, the woman is clearly one of significance and means. Even if the image is modified to eliminate the surroundings (as it often is), the woman clearly holds a crowd captivated by her appearance. Without context, the woman might appear to be a queen. And like a queen, her presence as a symbol appears more important than anything that she might say to the crowd below. Both Eddy’s choice of dress and the frequent reproduction of the image might appear strange, given the criticism Eddy received for exercising authority over her followers. However, her appearance embodies the idea of respectable womanhood, the antithesis of the vulgar and obstreperous suffragette so common in nineteenth-century popular culture. The woman in the photograph is a figurehead acknowledging a crowd, not an orator and reformer speaking to one.

These two vastly different representations of Eddy are in many respects impossible to reconcile neatly. The woman of the first image shies away from recognition and worldly concerns, while the woman of the second superficially embraces both. Yet in both cases, the person of Eddy seems overtaken by the Principle that she represents. The woman of both pictures is disembodied and reconstructed as a symbol of transcendent feminine spirituality.
Eddy, of course, wanted to be perceived in such a light for theological reasons and carefully shaped her own public persona. Of more importance to this argument is that she asked other women, other rhetors, to present themselves in these terms as well.

Without question, Eddy’s theology opened doors for women to enter public life. The women that she taught became healers, administrators, editors, Readers, and writers in substantial numbers. Knott eventually sat on the Christian Science Board of Directors, while Augusta Stetson led the powerful First Church of Christ, Scientist, New York, until her excommunication. Emma Curtis Hopkins, a renegade student, founded her own healing empire and is frequently referred to as the “Mother of New Thought.” However, these opportunities came with certain costs, tied closely to nineteenth-century notions of gender. First, Eddy offered the authority of a scientific language to female speakers – but in terms that relied heavily of nineteenth-century notions of true womanhood. She offered women a voice – provided that they were willing to relinquish their bodies and embrace their higher spirituality. Second, she provided an alternative to the traditional religious discourse from which women had always been excluded – not a revision. Even if Eddy had not banned preaching in her church, Christian Science would not have paved the way for a “womanly” or “feminine” style of preaching to challenge the masculine one of mainstream churches.

Eddy’s investment in true womanhood contradicts in important respects the liberal influence that has been the focus of this chapter. Liberalism applauds an individualism that conflicts with Eddy’s insistence that a rhetor must “disappear” in order to truthfully speak. Speaking of another Christian rhetor, Mary Astell, Sutherland warns against reading our own liberal views onto the women we study. She explains, “Too often we assume that the motivation of any woman writer of the past was to be heard: to raise her own voice, to be listened to, to be taken seriously, for herself” (20). Sutherland’s warning is highly apropos
when considering Eddy’s highly Christianized worldview and writing. Eddy, like Astell, was motivated to write “not that [she might] enjoy the pleasures of freedom, but that [she might] do their duty in serving God and the public community” (28). The purpose of her arguments was not to gain women the right to speak, vote, or participate freely in public life. In fact, Eddy in many ways assumed her right to speak as a Christian, as well as the right of her female followers to do the same. Eddy’s writing is not a defense of women’s preaching in the lines of Fell, Palmer, or Willard. Feminist scholars are interested in studying women preachers in order to provide an alternative to masculine versions or to write women’s words into histories that have ignored them. Eddy merely aimed for a rhetoric that suited her theology, which was not preaching at all.

However, it is important also to recognize that Eddy was a nineteenth-century American living in a nation imbued with liberal values. I have over the course of the chapter tried to address both the ways in which Eddy’s rhetoric was heavily influenced by that liberalism, as well as the ways in which its Christianity provided that liberalism with a different shape. While she had little interest in the right to speak in and of itself, Eddy was deeply invested in the right of the individual Christian to guide their own spiritual lives and in religious freedom as a social and political ideal. These values are reflective of a faith in progress and human advancement that is undeniably liberal. Christian Science proclaims its birthplace in its attitude and ideals – its pragmatism, its optimism, its faith that human beings can overcome even the circumstance of ill health. It is deeply American, a heritage that is not undermined or in conflict with its Christianity. Ultimately, Eddy’s particular vision of liberal Christianity and her substantial success laid the foundation for other powerful female religious leaders to emerge, including Hopkins, to whom the next chapter turns.
Chapter 4

“I AM the radiant Logos in Mind”:

Emma Curtis Hopkins, Spirituality, and the Divine Dialectic

On the final page of her 1892 book, Résumé, Emma Curtis Hopkins encouraged her students to “fill the blank pages with quotations from philosophers, poets, mystics” and “[p]ut with them… original inspirations as they… come to… [them].” The proclaimed “teacher of teachers” promised her pupils, “So will you write your name with the stars, and make the foundation of an original book.” Hopkins expressed hope that one special student would fulfill a great prophesy, producing a “little book” from his or her musings that would signal a new dispensation (R 79). The practice book to Hopkins’s magnum opus, High Mysticism, Résumé is littered with asides and participatory activities for the reader: biblical passages to remember, pages for note-taking, and model prayers and treatments. Hopkins adopted the role of teacher and mentor in both the presentation and content of her work; she portrayed her own “little books” not as doctrine but as catalysts for the spiritual development of those listening. Perhaps more than any other of her books, Résumé reflects Hopkins’s faith that a self-reflexive stance and enlightened conversation would propel the spiritual advancement of humankind.

Hopkins shared with her mentor, Eddy, an investment in individual spiritual authority, but despite this commonality, she developed a rhetorical theory rooted in dialecticism that differed substantially from Eddy’s. On the surface, the two women appear to be kindred spirits both personally and intellectually. Hopkins and Eddy undoubtedly found common ground in their unhappy marriages, home lives from which their religious work gave them respite. Hopkins readily embraced Eddy’s theological assumption that sin
and sickness were an illusion, attending a formal class at Eddy’s Massachusetts Metaphysical College after meeting her in 1883. The aspiring healer so impressed the leader of the Christian Science church that she was appointed the first editor (other than Eddy herself) of the Christian Science Journal the following year. As her theology developed, Hopkins retained the “scientific” and intrinsically liberal character of Eddy’s theology.

However, Hopkins quickly demonstrated a propensity to mysticism and, from Eddy’s perspective, a troubling indulgence of personal spiritual revelation in her students. The younger woman, better educated than her mentor, often drew on her eclectic background in world religions and sought evidence for spiritual truths outside of Science and Health. Eddy dismissed Hopkins from her position at the Christian Science Journal in October 1885, likely because this eclecticism implicitly challenged the authority of Eddy’s revelation (Harley 19). With the help of Mary Plunkett, another renegade student of Eddy, Hopkins moved to Chicago shortly after her dismissal, began to teach and write independently, and founded the Hopkins Metaphysical Association in 1886. Although she retired from teaching and moved to New York in 1895, the students that Hopkins taught during her wildly successful Chicago years formed a core of missionaries that spread “New Thought” doctrine to adherents across the United States, including Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, Malinda Cramer, Annie Rix Militz, Ernest Holmes, and Nona Brooks. Such a loose, non-denominational structure better suited Hopkins’s theological curiosity and individualistic spirit, and it served as a fruitful environment for the democratic spiritual instruction that would earn her the title of New Thought’s foremost Teacher.

These liberal characteristics of Hopkins’s thought are manifested in a dialectical vision of spiritual development and religious discourse that differs significantly from the transparent, “scientific” discourse of Eddy’s Christian Science. Whereas Eddy believed
Science and Health to be absolute revelation, Hopkins never rejected personal revelation as a theological possibility and thus emphasized the process of individual spiritual enlightenment. Hopkins argued that a believer could triumph over the illusory material world, including sickness and sin, by embracing his or her “I AM” or divine nature. Such spiritual enlightenment required both embracing one’s authority as divine and simultaneously surrendering to God absolute power. This simultaneous affirmation and denial of individual authority reflects Hopkins’s dialectical understanding of spiritual growth, a process by which the believer could come to understand God through a combination of listening and learning, speaking and teaching.

Although she herself does not use the term, “dialectic,” Hopkins describes spiritual understanding as a two-faceted dialectical process with an internal and an external component. She taught Christians to embrace their own divine authority, a reflective process that required both speaking the Truth and listening to cues from one’s inner “I AM.” Because thought and language construct reality, the faithful come to understand through this process their true, divine Self. However, the unenlightened oftentimes need to hear the Truth spoken by another before they can embrace their divine essence. Consequently, the traditional preacher largely disappears in Hopkins's thought to be replaced by that of the teacher, a figure that better exemplifies the difficult process by which both speaker and listener learn to embrace their latent divine Self. Hopkins believed that the stronger mind would shape the relationship between student and teacher: it would be mutually supportive if it increased their understanding of their divine nature or mutually destructive if it reinforced spurious “race laws.” Thus, the internal dialectic is primary to understanding Truth but supported by the external one between teacher and student.
This chapter emphasizes Hopkins’s concept of spirituality, in the context of her dialectical vision of religious discourse. Like Eddy, Hopkins warrants consideration not only as a historically significant religious leader but also as a creative theorist of religious discourse. This chapter adopts the same structure as the preceding ones, addressing each of the three major themes of the project (social reform vs. individual enlightenment; reason vs. passionate belief; and professional authority vs. individual expression). The teacher’s debt to the liberal religious tradition is reflected in her staunch support of individual religious experience, emphasis on personal spirituality, and willingness to embrace religious traditions outside Christianity. I argue that Hopkins developed a democratic theory of religious rhetoric that encouraged both mutual discussion and individual expression. However, the mysticism of Hopkins’s New Thought dissociates spiritual experience from both the material world and the religious community, allowing little opportunity for resistance to the institutional structures of mainstream religion.

Social Reform vs. Individual Enlightenment: Improving Lived Experience Within

The significance of spirituality – of personal closeness to God – is perhaps the greatest indication of the liberal lineage of Hopkins’s New Thought. In his Restless Souls, religious historian Leigh Eric Schmidt traces the growth of “spirituality” in its current sense to the “romantics and reformers” who were the “motley bedfellows” of religious liberalism in the late nineteenth century. Schmidt identifies six characteristics shared by these liberals, characteristics that defined the new sense of spirituality that emerged during the period:

- individual aspiration after mystical experience or religious feeling;
- the valuing of silence, solitude, and serene meditation;
- the immanence of the transcendent – in each person and in nature;
• the cosmopolitan appreciation of religious variety as well as unity in diversity;
• ethical earnestness in pursuit of justice-producing reforms or “social salvation”; 
• an emphasis on creative self-expression and adventuresome seeking. (12)

Schmidt’s definition of religious liberalism reflects his subject selection of romantics, transcendentalists, and more radical liberals, making it largely inadequate to characterize the brand of liberalism reflected in the Christian Science theology of Eddy. However, it serves as a useful starting point for characterizing the mystical liberalism of Hopkins and its interior turn. Whereas Eddy embraced the scientific spirit of liberal thought, Hopkins seized on its individualism and thus adopted a tolerant stance toward a wide variety of individual and cultural expressions of faith.

In directing religious experience inward, the mysticism of New Thought theology ultimately directed change inward as well, retaining the progressive ethos of liberal religion but abandoning its reformist ends. For Hopkins, personal religious experience was paramount; she promoted individual reflection as the foundation of spiritual growth, a dialectical process that required followers to both submit to God and declare their authority as divine. The first part of this section focuses on Hopkins’s conception of language as objectified thought, a theory rooted in mystical assumptions about human nature and language. The second part considers the implications of this mysticism for her understanding of spiritual advancement and vision of reform. As this section will suggest, Hopkins minimized the importance of social or cultural reform, seeking to improve not lived experience in the world – but lived experience within.
Speaking Reality into Being

Hopkins and Eddy both adopted the same theological premise for the possibility of metaphysical healing – the omnipresence of divine Good. Nevertheless, the two women diverged significantly in the inferences they drew from this truth, particularly regarding language. Most visibly in her later work, Hopkins minimized Eddy’s focus on “scientific” language and instead portrayed words as actualized thoughts responsible for constructing reality. She argued that both the so-called material world and language were symbols of thoughts – reflections either of mortal mind or divine Mind. Hopkins believed in thought transference and thus the possibility of “silent cures.” But language, particularly naming, held substantial power in Hopkins’s theology as a medium for transferring thoughts between believers. An enlightened person literally could call into existence divine Truth for those still mired in illusory “race laws,” helping to advance society toward its true spiritual state. In other words, thoughts and their concrete manifestation, language, were the means by which change and spiritual growth occurred. Even as it prioritized lived experience, such assumptions collapsed individual perception and reality and dissociated experience from the material world.

Hopkins offered divine unity as her most basic theological principle, professing that human beings are one with God and thus share with Him a divine identity. Even as her theology developed after her estrangement from the Christian Science church, Hopkins echoed Eddy in claiming that “if the ALL is eternal, immortal mind, the nothing must be temporal, moral, no-mind, pure nothing, no mind at all. The ALL Mind is Immortal Mind. The no-mind is mortal” (CL 65). In other words, nothing exists that is not Good, including sickness and sin, because All is divine. However, Hopkins emphasized the divine identity of the individual in terms that her Christian Science mentor did not. The teacher declared to
her students that by seeking out their “interior God-point” that they would “see as God sees and know as God knows” (R 61). Believers would “recognize… themselves” by coming to understand “what and where the being who created… [them] surely is” (CL 40). In other words, humankind shares divine power because they cannot be separated from God.

Hopkins explained that human beings are merely “many expressions” of the “Supreme Self” that is manifested as “the Self of Jesus, or your self, or myself” (R32). Such a vision empowered students by suggesting that the aim of faith was not salvation given by God – but salvation through recognition of one’s own divine authority. She concluded, “You can see for yourself that your soul does not need saving; it needs to be made visible” (SCMP 59). These teachings not only provided Hopkins’s followers with a sense of control over their bodies and souls – but also made personal spirituality central to religious practice.

Based on the principle of divine unity, Hopkins inferred that thoughts, rather than material objects or sense perceptions, defined reality and human experience. For Hopkins, matter – and thus a person’s sense perceptions – are not true because they are not divine. Instead, thoughts (or mind) quite literally manifest themselves before the thinker.

“Thoughts are things,” Hopkins claimed, “Things are objective thoughts.’ That is, we see as objects our own thoughts. If we think the thoughts of God we see delightful things” (CL 167). In other words, reality will manifest itself to us as divine if we understand it to be so – or manifest itself to us as evil if thoughts of sin and sickness are accepted as true. Hopkins warned her students, “We have imagined things and then seen them. It is not till we think exact Truth that we see the true world./ Guard well your thoughts.” Hopkins often encouraged her followers to keep diaries as “self-treatments,” reflections that would help the writer to direct their thoughts to the divine and actualize it in their lives.
In adopting this idealist conception of reality, Hopkins significantly blurred the
distinction between the world and lived experience of the world. In her own “self-
treatment,” she described reality as a “photograph” and represented “exactly what was going
on when… [she] looked into the camera.” The world, she concluded, is entirely the “work of… [her own] hands” (ST 60). Such an explanation emphasizes the epistemological
foundation for truth in the context of human experience, and it places responsibility for
manifesting that Truth on the believer. Hopkins describes the relationship between eternal
and lived truth:

The original mind creates. We – the likeness of that Mind – do a like work.

Not the work of creating, but a like – the image of reflection of the Real – the
seeming to create, which is not actual creating, but only the making manifest of
that which is already created. (CL 90)

As this explanation reflects, Hopkins did believe in the existence of an ontological Truth:
God, the Good, or Mind. Like a scientific law, this Truth remained eternal and unvarying,
regardless of human beings’ perception or understanding of it. However, divine principle
becomes True for human beings insofar as they accept God’s omnipresence, dismiss the
material world as illusory, and manifest divine authority through their character, words, and
cures. Hopkins’s writing reflects this emphasis on the lived experience of truth, offering
model prayers and descriptions of cures meant not to describe Truth but to provide a
process for bringing it into being.

An expression of her emphasis on lived experience, the most apparent theological
outgrowth of Hopkins’s privileging of thought over matter is a well-developed theory of
metaphysical healing. Like her New Thought counterparts, Hopkins presented mind cures
as the most basic manifestation of divine unity. If nothing exists outside of God’s goodness,
then sickness and sin are merely an illusion that can be overcome through spiritual enlightenment. The teacher explained that “[s]infulness with its sickness and death” is encountered by those with “aberrated vision, or downward gaze,” a gaze directed at matter rather than Mind (R 12). From this perspective, the physical body becomes a reflection of one’s thoughts or internal character, as opposed to a physical object acted upon by outside forces. As divine entities, human beings “are always showing forth a body such as… [their] thoughts used to be, or such as are the thoughts of somebody else with whom… [they] have associated” (CL 111). In her *Class Lessons of 1888*, Hopkins again adopts the metaphor of photography to describe the relationship between the divine and material reality as reflected in the human body, suggesting that impure thoughts affect the “harmonious mixture of warm red blood gobules, rapidly transforming them to watery humors and acid secretions – photographing by a law of mental photography upon a sensitive plate called physical body” (CL 63). In other words, the thoughts of the believers are manifested on their physical body, making their spiritual state visible to themselves and to others.

Despite the similarities of her theory of metaphysical healing to Christian Science, Hopkins extended these assumptions about materiality beyond those of Eddy. Most significantly, she claimed that the concrete manifestations of spiritual thought included not only physical health but also symbolic language. For Hopkins, symbols could most accurately transmit spiritual truth to the audience, provided that they were interpreted through the lens of divine unity. Hopkins believed that the most spiritual theologians expressed their divine essence through their symbolic language, often but not exclusively in the scriptures of great world religions. “John the Revelator was God-taught,” she wrote, and “saw all truth in symbols, or pictures” (R 2). If approached in the right spirit, these symbols and myths could reflect the inherent divinity of the Self, even when both speaker and
audience could not initially grasp the significance. The great “law of the unreality of what seems [i.e. matter],” she explained, “was told of old by myth or allegory” and could be taken up by those “bold and unprejudiced enough to take the meaning” (CL 45). Hopkins thus chose to adopt an abstract, poetical style, rather than emulating Eddy’s ostensibly transparent or scientific language. Such language corresponded with Hopkins’s suspicion of sense perception and literal interpretations of experience, and it provided an alternative to the syllogistic language of Christian Science.

The relationship Hopkins defined between thought and reality made language central to spiritual growth. It is important to emphasize that, in Hopkins’s theory, symbolic language does not reflect the spiritual understanding of the person speaking – but instead consummates Truth as a lived experience. Words bring the divine into being as reality, for “Truth… [is] not manifest until it… [is] stated” (ST 3). Hopkins taught:

The shadow is the thought that we must understand more of the Principle before we can demonstrate it. This is not true. We must demonstrate it in order to understand it. By demonstration is meant faithful declaration of the law at all times and under all circumstances. (CL 197)

For this reason, the teacher encouraged her students to “speak positively” and “be explicit” in naming the good that they desired (CL 127, 145). For Hopkins, the only effective means of making the Good come to pass was to “[d]eclare that it… [was] brought to pass already” (CL 145). In other words, language served as the medium uniting the eternal soul and lived experience, as it demonstrated the recognition of divine Truth. “Body, and its speech,” Hopkins declared, “are woven into relationship with the Soul, or Self, or esse, by recognition” (R 28). For Hopkins, the act of speaking the Good – recognizing it by naming it – brings it into being in a healthy body and spiritual life.
Hopkins’s theory of language evokes associations with postmodern theory, of Friedrich Nietzsche’s declaration that the definition of a mammal is “anthropomorphic through and through” (1175). Much like theory after the “linguistic turn,” her New Thought theology assumes that language holds no intrinsic relationship to the material world and reproduces its own internal truth. And like postmodern theory, Hopkins’s thought can (and likely should) be criticized as impotent in its apparent detachment from the harsh material realities of human existence. However, it should also be noted that Hopkins’s New Thought rhetoric, given its religious purpose, cannot and does not reject an absolute Truth. Therefore, the theology retains a sense of the purpose and possibilities of speech that is both more narrow and more hopeful than superficially similar postmodern theories. The remainder of the section considers the implications of Hopkins’s rhetorical theory in this context, particularly as it relates to the questions of liberal progressivism and spiritual reform raised in earlier chapters.

Molding a More Spiritual Character

Both Eddy’s Christian Science and Hopkins’s New Thought stress the possibility of transcendence – of reshaping the material world by escaping its grasp. Yet to read the texts of both women is to recognize that they diverge significantly in their understanding of this state. In shaping her own original thought, Hopkins minimized Eddy’s interpretation of cures as evidence of scientific law. While cures themselves remain a significant facet of Hopkins’s thought, her work reflects her interest in interiority as it relates to religious experience. In this respect, Hopkins and her New Thought colleagues are the ancestors of current New Age sages, hoping to foster the spirituality of the mystic in their followers. Hopkins possessed the spirit of a romantic, painting the enlightened as pilgrims as much as
teachers. Consequently, she rarely addressed social problems even in the limited sense that Eddy did, confident that strengthening the spiritual character of the individual would improve human experience. In short, Hopkins sought to improve not lived experience in the world – but lived experience within.

Hopkins most obviously exhibits her mystical tendencies in her emphasis on “character” over religious practice. “Mysticism,” Hopkins explains, “is not a science of goodness and badness of conduct” but “the science of that which harvests as good or bad conduct” (HM 131). In other words, religion in its true form, what Hopkins eventually called “High Mysticism” does not distinguish good from evil, as evil does not exist; instead it is the “science of the genesis of conduct and the genesis of thoughts” (HM 131). Hopkins means, in making such a distinction, to reinforce God’s position as the origin of all true thought and religion’s role in bringing that Truth into being. Such a mystical religion does not require standard forms of behavior, such as those illustrated by religious ceremonies or commandments. It requires in place of such practices “perfection of character, and power in [healing] work” that will prove to others that “[t]he child of Good is in nature and office perfect” (CL 90). Hopkins even interpreted healing, the most concrete expression of spiritual enlightenment, through an internal rather than external lens, claiming that “[i]n searching for health we really are seeking to be spiritually minded” (CL 16). Training future healers, Hopkins taught her students that the “causes” of sickness were “in character” and that to remove them, they “must understand mind, which makes character” (CL 82).

Spiritual individuals, then, embrace the Allness of God, which is subsequently manifested in good character and physical health.

Despite this attention to personal spirituality, Hopkins linked the individual and social in a strikingly literal manner: she believed that individuals could perpetuate communal
“race laws” by transferring their thoughts (both good and bad) to others. Because she dismissed the reality of matter, Hopkins believed that divine or misguided thoughts could be passed from one individual to another. Thus spirituality and the divine understanding it reflected could spread from one to another, bringing humankind closer to God. Hopkins explained this principle of thought transference: “When Truth is the supreme theme of our mind we are life and health and peace to our neighbors…. It is the Truth that does this work. It is not the influence of our personality in any sense, if we are occupied in thinking true thoughts” (CL 124). She thus encouraged her students to “write to the angel of some otherwise unreach<ref>able neighbor” in order to demonstrate his or her “Sonship to God and their inheritance of the Jesus Christ character, free from the law of matter” (R 77). Even as she cited other mystics, ancient and modern, Christian and non-Christian, Hopkins suggested that they had “always failed in proportion as they have insisted on the wickedness and failings of their neighbors” (R 53). An investment in the sins of others undermined divine Truth, corrupting oneself and one’s neighbor. By contrast, an individual could arouse their neighbors’ divine nature with the “true description [that] is perpetually in our heart, and in our thought, and in our speech.” This “new tongue” or “new prophesying” would bring about a more enlightened world through the divine, creative power of thought (R 42).

Given the transference of both good and bad thoughts between people, the purpose of reform was to revise the perverse thoughts that had infected society and bring to light individuals’ inherently godly character. Hopkins assured her students that all human beings possessed a divine nature, producing a “vague conviction in the race mind that Truth is a saving principle capable of emancipating us from evil conditions” (CL 128). However, misguided seekers for truth all too often absorb mistaken “race law[s]” from the ignorant around them that reinforce notions of sin and sickness (CL 192). Hopkins gently chided her
followers, “It is not culpability but race mistake that rests upon all these [unsuccessful] teachers. Right in the face of the Good at hand, and the incessant announcement of it by the inspired, they have looked to ways that would fail” (CL 132). The mind, although inherently godly, becomes “selfish or jealous when it holds or reflects that quality from the race mind surrounding it” (CL 154-155). Because people share these collective beliefs or race laws, the problem of fallacious, mortal thought is as much social as it is personal.

According to Hopkins, race laws have brought on not only sickness in the individual body but also “the conflict of caste, and the dissensions of nations” (CL 205). From this perspective, to improve thought and character is to improve society, however indirect the association between spirituality and social justice might appear superficially.

Consequently, the progressive energy of New Thought adherents was directed toward overcoming abstract “race laws” as opposed to concrete social problems. In other words, the enlightened individual could become “fit soil for all these seed thoughts to spring up for the sustainment of others in need,” once his or her “character is established, or mind is made firm” through Truth. Such individuals “are commended to accomplish, and teach, and preach” in order to assure “[t]he evolution of the race from error” (CL 77). Hopkins spoke regularly of the “New Language” that would herald a better world (HM 97). She proclaimed:

The day is at hand, and now is, when a Science of Religion will be reasoned out treating of the relation of the finite mind to the infinite, and of body to soul. It will be taught in the new church that shall guide and control the coming ages; in fulfillment of prophecy. It will at first be unwelcomed, derided by the strong laws of the sciences in vogue and favor; but with
heaven for its beams and rafters, and its foundations set into the rock of Everlasting Truth, it shall stand unshaken. (CL 107)

Hopkins’s rhetoric conveys a sense of purpose that reveals the liberal bent of New Thought theology. Healers and teachers guided by divine principles could not create true thoughts but could reproduce them, cracking the façade of commonplace but deluded public beliefs.

Hopkins’s brand of liberal progressivism holds two important and related implications. First, religious discourse holds a crucial function in spiritual progress, given its character as objectified thought and its role in transferring thoughts from one individual to another. Hopkins informed her students that the “[n]ame of God does not bring the memory” of the divine self. However, the speaking of this Truth does “seem to stir the memory, for memory is a path to something over some words” (ST 9). Language can awaken faith in listeners, a sense of their inherent divine essence that had become clouded by the erroneous beliefs of those around them. Speaking the word was a form of good works, more critical in advancing the world’s spiritual state than charity or arbitrary religious rituals. Hopkins assured her students:

The word and the work of the enlightened stand equally in favor with mankind. If thou canst speak so as to give thy one taste of bliss as thou recallest unto him one slightest memory of the Paradise from whence he first came out, he will take slight heed of whether thou canst heal the sick or raise the dead. (ST 19)

The teacher did not encourage her students to isolate themselves from the corrupt, material world as its damaging race laws, as ascetics and Gnostics often do. Instead, sharing the Truth with others, whether through written texts or spoken dialogue, was a central component of New Thought practice, as it strengthened the faith of speaker and listener.
Second, Hopkins limited the significance of any material effects of her theology, even as she deemed concrete improvements possible within her system. She promised her students that “[a]ll reasoning has the effect of controlling the environment” and that they could change their “whole life conditions” by changing their “modes of reasoning” (SCMP 39). In other words, no matter, no external or mortal force, exists to limit the fulfillment of human desire. However, Hopkins was equally explicit in her reminder that individuals should not aim to improve material conditions because the world is already divine and perfect; she insisted:

Of course the student of Spiritual Life understands that in reality there are no “works” to be accomplished. It is an axiom that *It is finished*. It is an inspiration to realize in the classroom that all so-called healing is but the opening of our judgment to see that what God made is *very good*, and that all that was or is or shall be made is God-made. (*CL* 159)

One need not correct social inequities or relieve human suffering, Hopkins implies, because neither injustice nor suffering exist in reality. Historian Catherine Tumber is deeply critical of what she deems a form of nineteenth-century Gnosticism, tracing the rise of New Thought to a decline of public life and civic debate during the period. According to Tumber, New Thought theology eroded civic virtue by identifying individual moral character as the basis for ethical life. Such an analysis ignores the ways in which the movement empowered its followers, particularly women, as it associates “moral agency” only with systematic political action. Nevertheless, it accurately identifies the limitations of spirituality as the foundation for reform – and Hopkins’s apathy toward the material problems that attracted the attention of Social Gospel advocates.
Writing in her diary, Hopkins reflected, “I see now the ministry of Truth. I see now the ministry of all religions. It is to unite the tongue and the heart. Will not the fingers write what the hearth feelth and the mouth speaketh?” (ST 48). This reflection suggests the importance of language held for Hopkins in the development of spiritual understanding. Religious discourse served as the most powerful medium by which to link personal and collective spirituality, the means of transferring a living understanding of the divine essence from one human being to another. Hopkins understood language as an active force that could make Truth a reality by making individuals conscious of it in their lives. The teacher understood her work as a “ministry,” one that could improve the lived experience of listeners by uniting the divine “heart” with the “tongue” that makes thoughts a reality. Nevertheless, this empowering vision of language limits the locus of spiritual change to individual perception and character. The following section further considers the impact of Hopkins’s mystical spirituality on her rhetorical theory, outlining the ways in which her work blurs ethos, or the faithful character, and Logos, the Word of God.

**Reason vs. Passionate Belief: Blurring Ethos and Logos**

Eddy represented her theology as the project of divine inspiration but privileged a reasoned understanding of this Truth over blind faith. In Hopkins’s New Thought, faith and reason are far less distinct. Throughout her oeuvre, Hopkins equated thought and reality, making the individual responsible for creating Truth as a lived experience. Enlightened people, or those with high character, demonstrated the Allness of God through their lives. However, Hopkins never abandoned Eddy’s assumption that Christianity was a Science and could be expressed as an absolute principle or law. She suggested that the divine faculty in all human beings, their inner “I AM” allowed them to perceive this law and recognize it as true. This
understanding of spirituality collapsed the distinction between an individual’s spirituality and universal principle expressed as rational argument.

The following section considers this blurring of ethos and Logos (understood as the Word of God or divine principle). The first part of the section more fully considers Hopkins’s conception of the divine faculty in human beings. For Hopkins, this faculty manifested itself in desire, a will to Good that was both subjective and universal. The second part describes the relationship between faith and reason in Hopkins’s New Thought, describing their intimate association. Faith, for Hopkins, buttresses understanding, intimately linking the subjective character of the faithful and their rational expressions of the Truth. If desire is the expression of people’s instinctive need for the Good, then faith is the conscious and willed manifestation of this desire. These two terms in Hopkins’s thought most fully express the internal dialectic, both receptive and expressive, that resulted in spiritual enlightenment.

Desiring Divine Law

Even after leaving the confines of the Christian Science church, Hopkins continued to refer to her theology as a “science.” Hopkins even titled her 1888 book, *Scientific Christian Mental Practice*, although the system it described varied substantially from Eddy’s. Of course, Hopkins interpreted the term “science” somewhat differently than her mentor and, more importantly, understood its significance for religious discourse very differently. For Hopkins, her theology qualified as a science because it revealed a principle, a “comprehensive law or doctrine from which others are derived” (*HM* 76). While Eddy sought to express divine law through a scientific, transparent language, Hopkins emphasized the existence of a human faculty (which she usually called “intelligence”) that sought out
divine Truth. She described this faculty in seemingly equivocal terms. For Hopkins, this faculty expressed itself as “desire,” a desire that was both empowering and prohibitive. On one hand, Hopkins affirmed individual desire, as she believed that people would naturally desire the Good. On the other hand, she encouraged her followers to submit entirely to the authority of God, to the law or principle of divine Truth. As this dual nature reflects, “desire” became the most important term in Hopkins’s thought for reconciling the seemingly contradictory principles of unvarying law and individual spiritual authority.

Particularly early in her career, Hopkins explicitly presented true theology as a science whose aim was to systematically outline the laws of the spiritual world. Both implicitly and explicitly, she seized on nineteenth-century Americans’ enthusiasm for scientific study:

The word *science* is a rallying cry in every department of effort and line of pursuit. This is the age of investigation of phenomena, and their relations to the wants and affairs of the people. It is conceded that when the science of it is mastered, or that which details the practical workings of a principle, and explains how to set it into action, even prayer-cure may be explained, and understood, and that everybody praying according to law might find answer according to law, just as every skillful manipulator for the keys of the electric machine is master of the subtle fluid itself. Thus, the process known, the principle is revealed. (CL 30)

This explanation reflects two primary assumptions of Hopkins’s New Thought: first, the spiritual world operated according to a fixed principle (or “mystic law”) as opposed to the arbitrary will of God; and second, this principle could be revealed to believers through a systematic process (HM 77). From this perspective, human beings possessed the faculty (or
“logic”) to “[reason] out the laws of the action of Mind as it conquers the universe with righteousness” (SCMP 69). In short, the spiritual laws of the universe could be outlined systematically, allowing every human being to discern their absolute “logic.” Such a description allowed Hopkins (and her followers) to call upon the authority of Reason, without abandoning its mystical and individualistic spirit.

Although she shared Eddy’s emphasis on law and logic as a metaphysical “scientist,” Hopkins reframed the terms under which such a theological characteristic would be expressed. She discarded the syllogistic language of Eddy’s Science and Health and instead focused on the process by which individuals came to understand. In other words, Hopkins developed a “scientific method” that reflected her emphasis on lived experience. She explained, “In all Science, the steps are sequential. That is, one step follows another reasonably. In revolutionizing the mind’s beliefs by a new set of arguments, the turns of change follow each other with unvarying order” (CL 43). Her major texts are always divided into a series of twelve lessons or chapters, her articulation of this necessary sequence. The most important facet of this process is a series of denials (of matter) and affirmations (of God). During their study, Hopkins’s students rehearsed five denials to bring them to an understanding of the unreality of matter:

1. There is no evil.
2. There is no matter.
3. There is no absence of life, substance, or intelligence.
4. There is nothing to hate.
5. There is no sin, sickness, or death. (SCMP 46)

These fledging mystics followed these denials by stating corresponding affirmations of the Allness of God:
1. My Good is my God. My God is Life, Truth, Love, Substance, Intelligence – omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent.

2. In God I live and move and have my being.


4. The I AM works inevitably through me to will and to do that which ought to be done by me.

5. I am governed by the law of God and cannot sin or fear sin, sickness, or death. (SCMP 56)

These words (or some variation of them) would erase the erroneous “race laws” in the believer’s thoughts and make Truth a reality in their life. This systematic process, rather than “scientific” language, demonstrated Truth to believers; if they followed it, they instinctively would recognize its logic as demonstrably True and achieve spiritual understanding.

Hopkins was certain that the process she recommended would successfully reveal Truth, as humankind’s nature was inherently divine and sought the Good. It is important to emphasize that Hopkins described salvation as an internal experience, a perception or desire, as opposed to something bestowed upon people by an external entity. “There is a consciousness of cold, there is a consciousness of heat,” she taught, “so there is a consciousness of God” (HM 106). Even more importantly, Hopkins encouraged in her students not repression but release from previous social or religious constraints. She assured her students that their true desires were driven by their divine soul – and were thus Good:

Some make the mistake of thinking that they must choose only such blessings as may be best for them. But the desire in all instances is a hint of the thing we ought to have. To say that the will of God is to be done, and to
submit to it with certainty that it is the good, will in every instance end in the blessing coming about according to our desires. (*CL* 59)

Of course, Hopkins warned her students that they could be mistaken about their true desires, if they pursued matter as opposed to divine Mind. However, the faithful could achieve “health and strength and perfect living,” if they carefully followed the cues of their divine essence, the “signals thrown out, signs of the way of things that we have a right to” (*CL* 52). Declaring her own and her students’ freedom, Hopkins rejoiced, “[T]he Good which you are seeking is your God” (*SCMP* 16). Although seemingly contradictory, a desire for Hopkins was both subjective expression and absolute divine law.

The reciprocal nature of desire in Hopkins’s thought formed the foundation for a dialectical description of religious experience. Even as she affirmed human desire and subjective religious experience, Hopkins was careful to counter any accusations of theological relativity. The teacher often encouraged her students to speak, in order to make the truth manifest, but she coupled this recommendation with one to listen. Only by listening could one be certain to follow the true path – divine rather than material desires. “The law of listening is the law of joy,” she told her followers, “The upward watcher gets his inner ear opened to know how matters and things are progressing” (*R* 53). Listening served in Hopkins’s thought as the counterpart to speaking, as both were necessary to fully embrace a nature that was simultaneously personal and divine. While speaking manifested the divine as reality, the metaphor of listening represented for Hopkins the soul’s submission to God. She asked her students to “adopt a listening attitude before one whose Free Omnipotence we have praised” and be “ready… to hear the words which strike into view the answer to our prayer” (*R* 49). For Hopkins, listening buoyed speech, assuring that the believer was not overcome by personal emotions, interests, or problems.
Given the emphasis on personal spirituality in New Thought, it is not surprising that the “listening attitude” Hopkins encouraged in her students was directed inward toward the divine Self. From Hopkins’s perspective, people recognized divine Truth because each human being possessed the internal faculty to distinguish its logic from error. Religious discourse and Scripture remained an important means of spreading the Gospel and reinforcing faith – but were only significant insofar as they became a catalyst for correct reasoning on the part of the individual. As this faculty was both universal and individual, it served as the nexus between the absolute and the subjective and expressed itself in desire. Moreover, it allowed Hopkins to seize on the authority of Reason without undermining the significance of individual religious experience.

**Understanding Faith**

Hopkins described divine desire as a human instinct, a natural inclination to the Good. Like desire, faith is an expression of humankind’s divine nature, both personal and universal, but it differs from desire in that it is a conscious and willed expression of divine authority. For Hopkins, a person’s path to spiritual understanding and salvation begins with faith. The teacher encouraged her students to speak their faith, as those thoughts made the divine immanent. With faith established, the student would understand the divine Reason underlying the statement that God is All. For Hopkins, faith creates Reason – or establishes it as universal Truth. In describing the relationship between faith and reason in this way, Hopkins blurred the distinction between ethos and logos. In a very real sense, the faithful character was Reason – both the reflection of it and the catalyst for it coming into being.

Hopkins described faith as the conscious demonstration of the divine nature of human beings and thus the omnipresence of God. People, when acting in faith, recognized
the part of the Self that existed before the material body, the divine within. In order to
achieve spiritual understanding, Hopkins explained that “[e]very mind must come to the
ground bed of its own quality,” the divine, by “spring[ing] forth its thoughts from its own
faith” (CL 53). The active quest for our divine identity, Hopkins taught, reinforced faith.
Hopkins encouraged her students to cultivate their spirituality: “The farther toward the
celestial zenith we send the limitless eye, the deeper is our assurance of our own divine origin
eye can find” (HM 4). While she generally described desire as instinctive, Hopkins stressed
the active nature of faith and the importance of will in achieving enlightenment. “Faith is
the most intense form of mental action,” she explained, and “by careful statement is born
through sore travail. We must give birth to it by a volitional effort of the will. / I will believe
in the statements of Science. They are true” (CL 50). Faith, in other words, required the hard work
of thinking right thoughts and manifesting divine Truth.

While Eddy described reasoned understanding of God as higher than blind faith,
Hopkins theorized faith as the point of origin for understanding. Hopkins argued that
human beings inherently desired the Good, a faculty actualized by faith. She warned her
students that they must “start out with speaking spiritual truth” and that “by and by” they
would “understand” (CL 87). A rational understanding of Truth would be the culmination
of the hard work of faith in the face of material illusions. Hopkins taught, “Understanding is
the gift of God to his children as the reward of faithful reasoning in the name of Truth itself,
for the help and salvation of our fellow-men” (CL 84). For Hopkins, the “statements of
science” did not immediately manifest themselves but “[take] some resistance on our part
against sense evidence.” Students must “take this stand [for Science] and hold it,” before
they are able to make it of “practical benefit” through cures. “We must do the will, before
we prove the law,” Hopkins concluded, “that is, we must speak the Truth” (CL 71).
Because thought was reality for Hopkins, individuals did not believe because they understood but understood because they believed.

Not surprisingly, Hopkins understood having faith to be largely equivalent to expressing it. Because thoughts create reality, faith progresses to understanding by the statement of God’s omnipresence. Hopkins explained that “[understanding] is found by our declaration of it” and “made potent to us by our naming of it” (CL 107). For the believer, self-conscious declaration serves as the first step on path to spiritual enlightenment:

The intellectual or sense side claims power, and claims responsibility, and therefore must consent by its own word to be taught at the feet of the science, or work, or word of the Divine Presence. When we first hear or accept the Truth, it is by intellectual assent or with the conscious mind. We repeat the words that carry with them dematerializing effectiveness. (CL 69)

Even though each individual possesses the desire for Good, the ignorant often need the explicit vocalization of Truth to demonstrate it and make it a reality. The conscious mind, Hopkins reminds her students, “is that with which we first hear the word of spoken Truth” and the primary path “from misconception to perception” (CL 88).

Even given the importance of speaking, Hopkins described faith as she described all religious experience – as an almost contradictory process involving instinct and will, listening and speaking. She did not expect her followers to rely only on belief, provided that they spoke their faith; she claimed that Reason would bear out the claims of faith once it was established. She exalted, “We must have reason for the hope that is in us” (CL 187). In other words, believers would not be left alone with faith but see that faith confirmed by God through their own divine reason. Hopkins explained that “the proper ground for faith in every department of science is knowledge of the law of relations – that is, by knowing that
certain things are true, we are obliged to conclude that certain other things are true.” As a
divine science, “[f]aith is conviction based upon knowledge” (CL 51-52). Because it
reinforced faith, understanding allowed the believer to achieve the full potential of their
divine nature. Hopkins suggested that “health which is not declared from the mind that is
grounded in spiritual understanding” could be “broken,” as “[i]t is only the belief of health,
not the understanding of it” (CL 91). True understanding, coupled with faith, would allow a
person to resist the race laws that only appeared true and reasonable.

The relationship between faith and reason echoes the dialectic between personal and
divine authority as manifested in desire. Following Hopkins’s guidelines, the spiritual
individual reflected upon Truth in relation to his or her life, speaking and listening, believing
and understanding, strengthening his or her knowledge of divine truth through these self-
reflexive processes. Given the importance of thought in creating reality, Hopkins privileged
the internal dialectic as the foundation for spiritual enlightenment. “What you understand
never leaves you,” she warned, “What you believe because other tell you, may slip from you”
(CL 83). Yet this admonition was not meant to encourage a state of unfettered spiritual
relativism. Hopkins foremost was a teacher and recognized the importance of instruction in
the appropriate pathway to Truth. The final section of this chapter considers the question of
professional authority in religious instruction, emphasizing the external rather than the
internal dialectic that Hopkins believed was necessary for spreading the Gospel. This
dialectical vision of religious instruction allowed Hopkins to negotiate between the radical
individualism of mystical religion and the inherent power differential between the spiritually
enlightened and the callow student.
Professional Authority vs. Individual Expression: Learning from the Other

At the beginning of her famous self-treatment, “The Radiant I AM,” Hopkins proclaimed, “The listening disciple becomes the preaching apostle…. He always seems to be a learner and a seeker till at the center of his consciousness the fact is suddenly proclaimed that he himself produced the world as it appears” (ST 93). As this poetic pronouncement reflects, Hopkins discovered in her mystical theology a profound sense of freedom and power. She assumes authority as creator, an effort to manifest her own inner “I AM” by speaking it. Yet the opening sentence also implicitly suggests the necessity of adopting the stance of “listener” and “seeker” as well. As the first two sections have suggested, Hopkins described spiritual becoming in dialectical terms; she often adopted antithetical concepts that presented spirituality not as a state but a process. This investment in dialectical process shaped her understanding of religious leadership, just as it did her understanding of faith and desire.

Hopkins accepted the possibility of personal revelation in accordance with her mystical theology, but she also recognized her importance as a voice of spiritual authority. While she often spoke of ministry as an important facet of religious life, she did not perceive this role to be filled by the traditional preacher. Such an authoritative and masculine figure was, for Hopkins, antithetical to her understanding of the equality of each human being under God. If humankind’s spiritual faculty was inherent and universal, each man and women possessed the potential for revelation and the creation of Truth. Consequently, Hopkins not only practiced tolerance for religions outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, but she also promoted the study of their seminal texts, as they might express the divine Truth latent in all people. The teacher did temper somewhat this democratic view of religious authority, as she recognized the importance of spiritual leaders who would not regurgitate illusory race laws to their followers. Nevertheless, the radical equality of the theology
distinguishes it from most institutionalized religions, including Christian Science. The first part of this section addresses the implications of Hopkins’s mysticism for religious authority, focusing on her particular expression of the liberal values of tolerance and individualism. Extending this discussion, the second part outlines Hopkins’s vision of the teacher, who through a dialectical process can both guide spiritually immature minds and develop their potential to “produce the world.”

Following the Tao

Given the hegemony of Christianity in nineteenth-century America, Hopkins’s frequent use of the concepts of Eastern religion is striking (even if not novel in liberal religious circles). “The exaltation or lifting up of this [divine] sense toward that vast, vast Countenance… is our way of return to the Source whence we sprang forth,” Hopkins preached to her students, “It is the Path of Light. It is the Tao” (HM 3). Hopkins drew often from the texts of Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism, and Islam, amongst many others, coupling them with traditional Christian sources. Such tolerance for alternative religions reflects Hopkins’s faith that all human beings could create Truth through their divine nature – and her subsequent willingness to listen and learn from them. As this section will argue, this generous spirit stemmed both from the radical individualism inherent in mysticism and Hopkins’s liberal assumption that human beings shared a universal spiritual faculty, and it significantly limited the authority of the professional clergy, male or female.

Most importantly, Hopkins stressed the spiritual equality of all men and women, as the “radiant I AM” was inherent in each. She declared herself to be the “strong son of God, with dominion in all my vital sap,” despite the “loss of friends, pain, [and] humiliation” (HM 84). At the most basic level, all human beings were divine, even those rooted to the illusion
of pain and loss and not yet able to understand the Truths of mystical science. Hopkins assured her followers that “God is no respecter of persons” and that their “brains” or “money” did not make “[their] inborn Self greater than the Self of… [their] serf” (HM 88). Like most liberals, Hopkins did not embrace cultural difference as a spiritual resource, per se, but instead encouraged her followers to see their divine similarity to others:

So we must recognize every one unto whom we have given the words of Truth as perfect, without blemish; children indeed of One Common Father.

There is no rich or poor, bond or free, high or low in Truth. ALL IS ONE.

THERE IS ONLY ONE. WE ARE ONE. (CL 208)

Such a stance, compatible with both mysticism and liberalism, challenged any conception of the clergy as a separate order of men and authorized the religious expression of a wide range of people.

Hopkins further suggested that education, whether secular or theological, did not render a person more fit to speak on religious subjects – despite describing her theology as a science. In fact, she claimed that “[s]cience to the pure should be so simple that a child can enter into the understanding of it, and so broad and deep high that the plummet line of the greatest intellect could never sound its depths, nor the proudest scale its heights” (CL 34).

As believers achieve enlightenment not by extensive reading but through divine reason, all have the potential to not only understand but also spread the Gospel of Truth. In fact, Hopkins scorned the “creeds and cramping theological beliefs” perpetuated by the mainstream clergy, unscientific statements that only “dwarfed mental growth and spiritual unfolding ‘til life was a perpetual siege and battle of resentment against the dealings of the Great Invisible Being who had decreed such merciless laws of life” (CL 4). As an alternative to “unsuccessful plodders along the prescribed lines of Theology, Law, Political Economy,
[and] *Materia Medica,*” Hopkins simply presented the active healer and simple seeker after Truth (*CL* 178). She assured her students:

> People who could not preach a sermon on the nature of the soul, who had no theories of the effect of social life and morals on individual life, or of individual life on social currents at large, have been found accomplishing works of healing and moral changes far outstripping the performance of the learned in medical sciences and surgery, the temperance workers, “White Cross” legions, moral education promoters and missionary societies’ endeavors. (*CL* 5)

Such an explicit rejection of mainstream religious and secular institutions is relatively unusual in Hopkins’s writing, but this challenge echoes throughout her work in her staunch and frequent affirmations of spiritual equality.

There are two major implications of Hopkins’s vision of spiritual parity, made compatible by her distinctly liberal standpoint. Foremost, the assumption that each person possesses a divine faculty promoted a highly individualistic approach to religious practice. As her critique of the “unsuccessful plodders” of mainstream institutions suggests, Hopkins was highly suspicious of influence by bewitching proselytizers. She warned her students that “no one can claim understanding of Science who yields himself to obey the control of another being, less than God himself” (*CL* 85). From Hopkins’s perspective, individuals who submitted to the authority of another were repressing their own inner light, their own divine Self, and thus risked being lost to sin and sickness. Hopkins described the misleading preacher or teacher as a sophist, luring people away from the Truth with seemingly convincing statements about the reality of the material world. For Hopkins, this success was the result of the “influence exerted by one personality over another” and thus merely the
effect of “mortal mind – pure nothingness” (CL 124). The faithful, confident in their “radiant I AM,” could resist such influence:

Often the seemingly boldest and bravest characters are swerved from rectitude by the subtle influence of people who could hardly believe would have the slightest hold on them. Whoever shows such yield discloses how carnal are his thoughts and how little Science he can command. The truly scientific mind is never affected by any personality. (CL 163)

In the context of Hopkins’s thought, this almost defiant individualism suited both the mystic quest for transcendence and the liberal tenet of spiritual equality.

Yet individualism, as Hopkins advanced it, did not imply religious relativity or anarchy. This tenet, like all those in Hopkins’s thought, came with its counterpart: universalism, manifested in each person’s natural spiritual faculty. Hopkins understood God’s law as absolute and knowable, as a “scientific” doctrine. Consequently, she believed that true reasoning would lead all people to the same endpoint, an understanding of the Allness of God. Hopkins explained to her students that all religious practices throughout history sought the same end, despite their superficial differences: “Every religion has for its purpose, expressed or unexpressed, the union of God at our center with the universal God free from delusions, free from temporals” (ST 33). In other words, “all real students of life and its laws in all times” expressed in their writing the same “sacred truth” that “in the beginning God created,” regardless of any particularities (CL 9). Hopkins promised her students that a “clearly unified instruction runs in almost verbatim language through all of the sacred or charmed books of the world.” The goal of the student was to separate this “live wire” (the “mirific science”) from the “absurd dogmas and ungodly imaginations” that insulated it (HM 1). Provided that both reader and writer approached a text with faith,
universal Truth, the divine nature of the Self, could be gleaned from a wide variety of sources, from the Bible to the Torah to the work of Swedenborg. Universal reason and its endpoint, absolute divine law, make the individual quest for Truth not arbitrary but purposeful.

To Hopkins’s credit, she took the liberal principle of universal spiritual equality to its logical end and approached philosophies outside the Judeo-Christian tradition as enriching rather than corrupting. In just the first chapter of *High Mysticism*, she cites a stunning array of texts and teachers throughout history from all parts of the world: the Upanishads, Lactantius, the Psalms, St. Augustine, Plato, Socrates, Gautama Buddha, Krishna, and the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, amongst others. Believing fully in humankind’s universal faculty for Good, Hopkins made the shocking pronouncement that “there does not seem to be any striking difference between the experience of the Archon of Athens attending to his two gods, and the Christians later on attending to their one God” (*HM* 43). Archon and the Christian, both on a genuine quest for divine Truth, would find their paths naturally overlapping. Like many western mystics, Hopkins was particularly enamored by the religions of the Far East and their relationship to Christianity, declaring, “The East negates even the God-emanating. The West would legislate to the very heavens. Both systems are hints of the true. All religions have good in the germ. They swing around some central truth which is the deathless quality that has kept them from annihilation” (*CL* 37). From Hopkins’s perspective, a merger between these contrasting Truths would advance humankind’s spiritual understanding. Through her mystical science, she proposed to “touch the still harp strings of Oriental mysticism with the trained winds of Occidental positivism,” a marriage that would “ring forth a harmony to which the whole world can sing” (*CL* 37)!
Certainly, Hopkins painted a picture of the East awash in nineteenth-century Orientalism. Perhaps more importantly in a discussion of liberal religion, Hopkins limited the possibility for difference, washing it away under the guise of universal law and reason. However, it is equally important to point out that Hopkins did portray the relationship between varying texts as truly dialectical. She expected both Western and Eastern spiritualities to be not only changed but also improved by careful and open-minded contact. For the sake of growth, Hopkins asked her followers to “set... [any] prejudice [against the disciples of a system] aside” in order to “study the system fairly” (CL 9). This tolerant stance allowed for a dialectical balance between individual (or cultural) expression and universal law, a state that defined religious instruction more narrowly as well.

Teaching the Truth
While she privileged the internal, reflective dialectic as the most fundamental, Hopkins nevertheless believed that such a process often needed to be catalyzed by more explicit and direct guidance. Like other mystics, Hopkins found the traditional preacher to be a figure unsuited to the development of the divine nature of the individual. The preacher inevitably comes coupled with its antithesis, the listening audience. As Hopkins recognized, both preacher and audience represent largely static states, one expressive and authoritative and the other receptive and passive. Such a representation of religious instruction was unsuited to Hopkins’s emphasis on both change and the divine authority of the individual Christian. Instead, Hopkins found a more suitable figure to propel spiritual development in the teacher, both knowing and self-reflexive. This ideal teacher continued to improve and reshape his or her own understanding of Truth through a careful combination of speaking
and listening, even while serving as a necessary guide for others. Consequently, such an external dialectical process reinforced the internal one, for not only student but also teacher.

Hopkins’s vision of religious instruction was influenced primarily by her belief in thought transference. Because matter is an illusion, thoughts (scientific or misguided) can be passed without resistance from one human being to another. “We always become like those with whom we associate,” cautioned Hopkins (HM 50). If a person has achieved understanding, he or she can resist absorbing illusory race laws from others. But the unenlightened are at risk of being led father astray by those with whom they come in contact, as “mortal mind” overwhelms divine Mind and generates “beliefs in conditions” such as illness or poverty. “Whoever gets the belief that health belongs to him, will appropriate health,” Hopkins explained, “Whoever catches from another mind the belief of sickness, is sick” (CL 91). She warned in particular about being drawn in by a “dearly beloved pastor [who] is thrilled with indignation at the pernicious conduct of certain people, or condones with unscientific lenience their ‘evil actions’.” Agreement on the part of the listener, Hopkins suggests, will “[help] to fix the tendency into the character of the man… [he has] been talking about, and are yourself a companion of his quality” (CL 142). Because of these dangers, individuals must be cautious in heeding the speech of others and instead follow the Tao outlined by their own divine nature.

The implications of thought transference for religious instruction are clear: the good teacher will catalyze her students’ divine nature, while the poor teacher will stymie it. Individuals confident in their inner “I AM” and the principles of science spread their knowledge to those around them. “Nobody is poor or old or sick who comes near the man of right speech,” Hopkins claims, “for his tongue is health whether he speaks silently or audibly” (R 42). In other words, the righteous teach others the power of the Truth through
their speech and actions. The teacher assured her students that, as they grow spiritually, “people… [would] turn from the error of their ways just by association with… [them], even though we say but little” (HM ?). By contrast, weak teachers were likely to absorb the errors of their students. Hopkins chided clergymen who “admit catching their thoughts from the thoughts of their congregations” and called for “fresh news from Universal Wisdom” to be heard from the pulpit (HM 71). In short, the interrelationship between speaker and listener, student and teacher, would cause either good or bad thoughts to be replicated and perpetuated.

Although she believed thoughts could be transferred silently, Hopkins’s warnings imply the importance of explicit spiritual instruction in propelling growth toward rather than away from Truth. The unenlightened and malleable are not so intrinsically—but merely callow in a spiritual sense. Hopkins does not blame those uninformed in the ways of mystical science, as divine nature needs to be cultivated in order to grow: “In order that you may desire understanding above rubies and all riches, you must be told about it – you must be shown the necessity for it in Mental Science” (CL 85). Even as the depraved teacher might lead the student astray, the enlightened teacher could provide the student with the best possible protection against illusory race laws. Hopkins compared a person unschooled in mystical science with a young child still struggling with arithmetic:

It is as if a teacher should sit down in despair upon seeing on a blackboard where a class had been working, that every child had called five and five nine. Foolish action; The only way to do is to reject the false conclusion by first saying, “it is not true, and the whole work is error”; Then erase it and put down the true conclusion instead (CL 30).
Both child and spiritual seeker possessed the potential to prove the Truth – but did not yet understand the appropriate process for getting there. Once such a process is made explicit, the novice will begin to exercise it in their life.

In describing Hopkins’s dialectic, it is important to point out that the teacher reaped the benefits of religious instruction as fully as did the student. “The more we minister, the brighter our understanding,” Hopkins claimed (CL 198). As just speech creates Truth, ministration (including preaching or teaching) helps to strengthen the conviction and understanding of those ostensibly in authority. Hopkins promised that, by “preach[ing] the truth” in the classroom or from the pulpit, the preacher herself is “led into understanding, whether they to whom we have striven to bring the great message will hear it or not” (CL 94). Such a process of growth on the part of the teacher required them to learn as well as preach – to release their grasp on their material identity. Undoubtedly preparing novice instructors in Science, Hopkins taught:

Self-consciousness is a poor stuff to present before men or nature if we want to command them even for their good. Is it not self-consciousness that makes a person appear poorly before his neighbors? It is the wiping out of this tough integument that lowliness before The King of Kings accomplishes. Self-consciousness is sometimes called self-will because it is a perversity of the whole constitution, and because the divine authority that rises out of its demolition is a new will (R 22).

In order to teach to others effectively, the individual must release their attachment to “personal emotions or affairs” and “[trust] to their inward eye (HM 10). Ever preaching a process of give and take, Hopkins suggested that a person could only achieve authority through submission.
Without question, Hopkins abandoned the unilateral concept of religious instruction, that of the preacher, for one more flexible. She understood herself not only as a teacher – but as a “teacher of teachers,” helping to create those who would share her work as equals. Consequently, Hopkins’s call to action is clear:

There are many ways of speaking the Truth, but they all lead the mind up toward its desired goal — Understanding. They must all have for their end or purpose, the making of others to know the Good. We must help on the millennial day – that one day when “all shall know Me from the least unto the greatest.” (CL 94)

Each student must accept responsibility for guiding others to Truth, an end predicated not upon certain tenets but a willingness learn and teach. Hopkins did not preach a static doctrine – but a process by which humankind’s spiritual understanding could grow. She understood both herself and her students as crucial elements in this dialectical process, as catalysts for a New Age of spiritual possibilities.

**Conclusion**

The radical individualism of New Thought challenged the authority of the formal clergy, privileging instead the “divine within.” In *Class Lessons of 1888*, Hopkins insisted in her twelfth and final lesson that her followers “demonstrate” the truth of New Thought principles. This process of demonstration demanded, as she put it, “the faithful declaration of law at all times and under all circumstances” (CL 197). Hopkins developed an extensive ministry of teachers, who like herself, could guide the sick and struggling in their spiritual development. In some ways, New Thought theology did not promote a sense of public self for its female followers, as such a public identity was not intrinsic to its process of spiritual
enlightenment. But the practical result of Hopkins’s writing was to provide hundreds of women with the justification for serving in public roles as ministers, teachers, and writers. Hopkins ordained 111 of her advanced students as ministers and educated more than 350 others for missionary work – the majority of whom were women (Harley 6). In her biography, Gail Harley emphasizes the feminist consciousness of Hopkins and her extensive interaction with women active in the suffrage movement, including Alice Stockham, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Helen Wilmans, and Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, who were attracted to the theology (52).

However, the implications of Hopkins’s theology were not all positive for the women who followed her. Given its suspicion of religious authority, the movement never crystallized into a full-fledged denomination, developing institutional structures that were extremely loose. Its individualism, loose administrative structures, and rejection of external church authority simultaneously allowed women to thrive in the New Thought movement as leaders and undermined their theoretical authority. Consequently, it might be argued that the theology, while it provided women with active public positions, did little to challenge the structures that had denied women the right to preach in mainstream Christian churches. Moreover, Hopkins’s articulation of New Thought cannot be seen to intrinsically justify women’s equality in secular life. Nevertheless, in affirming desire, both male and female, she did empower individual women to move beyond their traditional roles in the church and challenge masculine authority. Throughout this project, I have highlighted three themes in my discussion of liberal religious rhetoric. But perhaps the existence of such contradictions is the most meaningful thread binding the various element of this project together.
Conclusion

The Possibilities and Limits of Liberal Religious Discourse

This project has attempted to integrate two important conversations on spiritual rhetoric: the first on the character of liberal religious discourse by nineteenth-century women; and the second on the resources and constraints provided by a liberal religious discourse in the public sphere. On one hand, my focus on religious liberalism improves our understanding of women’s spiritual rhetoric by opening inquiry to include women who do not fit evangelical models; on the other hand, it provides new models for religious discourse in the public sphere by loosening the stranglehold of fundamentalist rhetoric on current scholarship on the subject. By addressing Eddy and Hopkins as religious liberals, I have attempted to provide a framework for considering the impact of liberalism on religious rhetoric in America generally and on the religious rhetoric of women specifically. I have argued that we can better understand the nature of religious rhetoric by analyzing the ways in which women negotiated the rhetorical resources and constraints placed on them as they merged liberal and Christian discourses. As a rhetorician and historian, I have always believed that the voices of my subjects (not secondary scholarship) should drive my scholarly narrative. Therefore, I want to reflect on these two threads of my project by turning to a few rhetorically rich texts that extend them into the twentieth century.

Perhaps it is fitting (or perhaps merely gratifying) that I end this project in the place that I began it: the pages of a fascinating and frustrating old book. While doing research on women’s medical rhetoric, I stumbled fortuitously across a dusty self-help book with the peculiar title, *Diet and Health with Key to the Calories*. The book, published in 1918 by Dr. Lulu Peters, contained fictional testimonials and cracked jokes about the battle between
spirituality and materiality that, admittedly, escaped me. Eventually, my research led me to
Peters’s inspiration, the substantial textbook of the Christian Science church, and the initially
perplexing undercurrent of the doctor’s work became clear. As well as making the
sacrilegious substitution of calories for Scriptures, Peters imitated the marginal notes that ran
throughout Eddy’s text. Instead of highlighting for the reader “The struggle and the
victory” or “Mystery of godliness,” the doctor’s marginalia announced “Mrs. Ima Gobbler”
and “Vampires” (Eddy, SH 145; Peters 16-17). Describing the lure that a fatty peanut had
for her, Peters noted in the margin, “Malicious Animal Magnetism?” Eddy spent an entire
chapter in Science and Health “unmasking” Mesmer’s theory of animal magnetism; Peters
dismissed this controversy with three derisive words, relying on her status as a doctor.

As I dug through old books and newspapers, I came to understand that Peters’s
marvelous parody of Eddy’s textbook was a strategy not only to liven up its advice on
dieting but also to join in the much larger debate between Christian Science and the medical
profession. Peters carefully distanced herself from Eddy as a physician and an expert by
parodying her “unscientific” religious rhetoric. She imitated typical religious rhetorical
appeals and evidence, specifically Eddy’s allusions to her childhood health problems as the
foundation for her revelation. Playing the preacher of public health, the doctor joked that
her manual would reveal the path to salvation:

You are in despair about being anything but fat, and —! how you hate it. But
cheer up. I will save you; yea, even as I have saved myself and many …
others, so will I save you.

It is not in vain that all my life I have had to fight the too, too solid.
Why I can remember when I was a child I was always being consoled by
being told I would grow out of it…. (13)
Then Peters turned to the margin, adding, “Materiality vs. Spirituality.” Without a doubt, Peters expected her reader to get the joke. Her strategy highlighted for her audience the insufficiency of such evidence and appeals in the context of her argument about health, writing nutrition out of the discourse community of Christian Science and into that of medicine. The comment implied that talk of the spiritual should be separated from that of the body, one the realm of the preacher and the other the realm of the scientist. In adopting a satirical strategy, Peters refused to take Eddy’s argument on its own terms and disallowed the opportunity for rational argumentation or debate between the two camps.

Peters’s book saddens me in many respects (as well as making me laugh): it powerfully reflects the tenuous status of the metaphysical philosophies that had granted the women of this project an opportunity to speak and lead. As suggested in Chapter 2, the medical profession by Peters’s time had begun to solidify its professional authority over questions of health and wellbeing and gradually stymied alternative medical practices such as metaphysical healing. Of course, Peters’s stake in the conversation was colored not only by her status as a doctor but also as a woman; she was forced to choose between a medical rhetoric gendered masculine and a religious rhetoric gendered feminine. In Out of the Dead House, Susan Wells describes the heavily gendered constructions of medical rhetoric in the nineteenth century and closely connects them to concerns of professional authority. Wells suggests that many female physicians during the period “wrote as if they were men of the received order” (5). Considering such medical writing to be a gendered performance, Wells concludes that “the woman physician who wrote ‘normal medicine’ was in some sense cross-dressing as male” (6). This rhetorical “cross-dressing” distanced women doctors from their female clients, helped to establish their authority as experts, and presented them as members of the professional community. Peters’s work suggests that the medical profession played a
significant role in dichotomizing science and religion for much of the twentieth century—and that gender played a significant role in this crystallization. In order to be taken seriously as rhetors, women like Peters seized on a scientific discourse gendered masculine at the expense of a metaphysical tradition gendered feminine.

Certainly, Peters’s little parody suggests that Eddy’s rhetorical appeals would have been ineffective for most Americans by the time of the First World War. Yet it is also important to note that the narrative of metaphysical theology by women is not entirely degenerative. I would suggest that the tradition of “scientific Christianity” shifts rather than disappears entirely: Diet and Health represents neither the demise of metaphorical discourses nor an end to explorations of the relationship between liberalism and Christianity. Instead, it represents a diverging of two paths, one towards the scientist and the other toward the self-help expert. “Mind over matter” remains a persuasive if clichéd adage even today. The women with whom I opened my introduction, Shirley MacLaine and Susanna Cocroft, share in the tradition of Eddy and Hopkins. The Church of Scientology, founded by L. Ron Hubbard in the 1950s, continues to draw thousands of followers with its claims to spiritually rehabilitate followers through a scientific process. Christian self-help writer Gwen Shamblin introduced her “Weigh Down Diet” in 1997, one of many systems linking Christianity and weight loss.

In fact, what is most striking about current self-help literature linking the spiritual and material is how much it shares with the work of its nineteenth-century New Thought ancestors. The New Age genre remains heavily marketed to the female population and a genuinely empowering philosophy for many women. Louise Hay’s 1984 best-seller, You Can Heal Your Life, is an ideal example of contemporary “Mind over Matter” literature precisely because it is virtually indistinguishable from so many others. In her manual, Hay describes
to her audience her attempts to use her “Magic Lady,” her name for her new computer. “When I learned the computer’s laws,” she explains, “then she did indeed perform ‘magic’ for me” (88). For Hay, the process of learning this new skill is part surrender, part control: she seizes the power of the computer by submitting to the “laws” that define its existence. In the context of Hay’s New Age philosophy, this lesson illustrates for the reader the potential to gain control over one’s material life by surrendering to the “Spiritual Laws” that define human existence. “You cannot bend [Spiritual Laws] to your old way of thinking,” Hay encourages her students. “You must learn and follow the new language, and when you do, then ‘magic’ will be demonstrated in your life” (88). The moral of Hay’s story, then, is simple, if not exactly obvious: “Each one of us creates our experiences by our thoughts and our feelings. The thoughts we think and the words we speak create our experiences” (1). For many readers, this advice is empowering rather than limiting because it suggests that they possess an intrinsic connection to the spiritual world and thus can manipulate the corporeal world to their ends. As with Eddy and Hopkins, the “scientific” characterization of the philosophy offers followers a sense of control over elusive psychological and spiritual aspects of life.

However, Hay’s work also reflects what I have suggested is most problematic about the metaphysical philosophies under discussion: it offers little theoretical framework for addressing the individual’s relationship to broader society or even a religious community. Hay presents herself as “spiritual” without being “religious,” avoiding discussions of orthodox doctrine except to refer to the “Universal Power.” She provides chapters for her readers on relationships, work, success, prosperity, and the body, those issues of most practical concern in the everyday lives of her readers. Hay encourages her audience to “[take] responsibility for … [their] own healing” as a means of supporting individual
happiness and wellbeing. This approach supports Catherine Tumber’s claim that New Thought theology erodes civic virtue by identifying individual moral character as the basis for ethical life. Hay’s emphasis on self-empowerment limits a theoretical or practical vision of the place of community in supporting health and wellbeing. Religious experience, as Hay presents it, is fundamentally individualistic, absent of the associations provided by institutional church networks or religiously-minded reform organizations. Metaphysical religion, with its affirmation of the individual and tolerant stance, undoubtedly has granted women from Eddy to Hay a powerful voice – one reliant on its fundamentally liberal standpoint. But it is equally fair to acknowledge that this liberal religious stance limits opportunities to view religious discourse as an avenue for social justice as opposed to individual empowerment. The rhetorical models offered by the women of this study, then, likely should be viewed as authorizing female discourse – without being considered “feminist.”

If this claim for the limits of liberal religious discourse for women is discouraging, it can be understood as a qualification rather than an absolute rejection of their usefulness. The rhetoric of liberal Christians still serves as an alternative rhetorical model that challenges a fundamentalist stance, and it is crucial in helping us to reimagine the possibilities of religious rhetoric in the public sphere. Liberal discourses, religious or secular, will always be limited in some ways by their individualism and corresponding inability to provide a sufficient framework for addressing issues at the social level. But these discourses also value tolerance and encourage genuine discussion and compromise when differences arise. Even more importantly, a liberal stance allows for a more fully developed understanding of the place of language in religious life. Liberal Christians have always debated on spiritual topics in newspapers and other periodicals, understanding this debate as a process by which the
Truth would be uncovered; they have retained a sense that religious rhetoric represents not God’s word but God’s word as manifested in the world of men and women. In other words, liberal Christians most often understand vigorous and open debate as a crucial element in the process of creating a more Christian world. For this reason, these liberal religious discourses are perhaps most useful for engaging questions regarding the place of faith in civic discourse.

Above all, I want the reader to take away from this project a sense of the continuing appeal of liberal religion’s conciliatory project – and its benefits and detriments to a healthy civic discourse on religion. The Reverend Michael Dowd attracted significant attention for his 2007 book, *Thank God for Evolution*, which attempted just the sort of reconciliation between science and religion that has become a staple of liberal religious rhetoric.² In opening, Dowd offers a series of promises to a range of potential readers, from those who reject evolution, to humanists and agnostics, to “those who aren’t really sure what they believe” (xxvi). These promises oppose Dowd’s approach to others that demand the triumph of science over religion, reject evolution as groundless speculation, or attempt to “make [evolution] palatable” with orthodox religious views. Instead, Dowd explains that his aim is to “help [the reader] see what [he] see[s] – science and religion can be mutually enriching” (12). The book offers a vision for an evolutionary Christianity, in which doctrine is interpreted through the lens of an evolutionary worldview. Dowd opposes this “evolutionary faith” to a “flat-earth faith,” one developed when the earth was flat and “there was no reliable way for humans to comprehend the world around them by means of science-based public revelation” (73). From Dowd’s perspective, religion and science are not inherently contradictory but only perceived to be so by people with an incomplete understanding of a universe that is continually transforming and growing. He exclaims, “It is
this fact, this undeniable fact, of an emergently complex Universe that makes me want to shout from the mountaintops: “The war is over! The war is over!”” (8).

Most significantly, Dowd places human language at the center of his argument, both as a potential source of conflict between science and religion and a crucial opportunity for progress beyond this dichotomy. He emphasizes that human beings construct stories to explain their world and make meaning of it. For Dowd, human beings process events and experiences at three levels: “(A) what happened, (B) the story about what happened, and (C) the meaning we make out of the story of what happened” (114). In other words, humans understand the world by experiencing facts, constructing a narrative to relate those facts, and granting subjective meaning to the narrative. People use a different form of language to express each level of meaning: “day language” is used to express facts and is defined by reason and wide agreement; “twilight language” is used to tell a story and is defined by moderate subjectivity and some agreement; and “night language” is used to express reverence and is defined by metaphors and strong disagreement (114). Dowd explains that the source of much human conflict, including that between scientists and religionists, is the “consistent and near universal tendency to confuse B and C [subjective meaning] with A [facts]” (115). For Dowd, people assume that the subjective meaning they give to events is “true,” while only objective and measurable facts are actually “true.” He stresses that human life requires both day and night language but further asserts that the two should be distinguished. Dowd concludes, “If we first seek clarity on the measurable facts – which is the mission of science – the twilight language and night language stories and expressions of meaning that derive from those facts can enrich our lives and support cooperation across ethnic and religious differences” (115). If people differentiate their day from their night language, they can both recognize facts as a foundation for agreement and embrace the rich
variety of stories used to explain them without fear: they can begin to talk to each other openly and ethically.

For Dowd, open public discourse – which he calls “conversation” – will allow for the accurate assessment of ideas and the growth of human knowledge (267). Dowd calls the space in which this discourse occurs the “Core Commons” and the process by which it advances human life the “Wisdom of Life’s Collective Intelligence” (270, 261). The ultimate goal of the core commons is to seek out “the human universals – those innate experiences, concerns and drives that all of us share simply because we are human” (270). According to Dowd, this emerging sense of our shared place in “God’s evolving cosmos” will open “an expanded sense of kinship and expanded sense of self that can embrace the entire Universe” (271). The open and vigorous examination of ideas will ultimately lead to tolerance, creative solutions to conflict, and evolutionary progress; it will reinforce rather than challenge our belief in God’s greatness.

I want to leave this project with Dowd’s work not because I accept it as “right” or “true” or even intrinsically better than other approaches to speaking about religion. Instead, I believe his work – like that of the women of this study – is risky. The model that Dowd provides reflects the courage to reimagine the possibilities of religious discourse – possibilities that can be tested against their outcomes and their ability to ethically open discourse on emotionally invested subjects. Scholarship on religion in public life will continue to be limited if it remains fixated on the rhetoric of fundamentalists and the Religious Right at the expense of the alternative models history provides. A liberal religious discourse is necessarily confined by the premises its liberal and Christian worldviews, both of which raise challenges for genuine acknowledgment of difference. But I would also insist that these discourses offer hope in their very willingness to explore and challenge the
boundaries between competing worldviews, an effort that is imaginative and fundamentally rhetorical.
NOTES

Notes to Introduction

1 A few articles have analyzed the rhetoric of self-consciously liberal Christians. See, for example, Lattin and Underhill, Medhurst, and Liu.

2 See, for example, Maddux’s *The Faithful Citizen*, which analyzes popular mass-media texts as models of Christian civic engagement. See also Steiner, “Reconceptualizing Christian Political Engagement.” These texts do not deny the possibility for or even the existence of liberal religious discourses but instead, consciously or unconsciously, adopt evangelical texts as representative of Christian civic engagement.

3 See also DePalma, Ringer, and Webber, which critiques Crowley’s text and Barack Obama’s “Pentecost 2006 Keynote Address.” DePalma, Ringer, and Webber suggest that Crowley and Obama fail to “open” discourse between political liberals and religious conservatives, despite their efforts to do so, and they offer an alternative theoretical model for doing so.

4 In their recent study, social scientists Putnam and Campbell confirm a growing polarization between the religious Right and secular Left that offers little space for religious moderates. However, they also suggest that interfaith relationships and more flexible religious identities have made younger generations more tolerant of different ideological perspectives on faith.

5 Baym does offer Eddy as a sustained example of women’s engagement with science.

Notes to Chapter 1

1 It should be noted that the ideas Miss Bowyer voices are largely inaccurate renditions of Mary Baker Eddy’s ideas, despite Eggleston’s description of her as a “Christian Scientist.”
Liberals are often contrasted with conservatives due to their investment in modernity and progress. However, the contemporary definition of liberal as “leftist” is inappropriate when considering the nineteenth century.

Sharon Crowley premises her Toward a Civil Discourse on the incompatibility of liberal “common-sense” and faith as the foundation for social discourse. In doing so, Crowley not only fails to take into account the tradition of liberal Christianity in America (which she acknowledges does exist) but also the complicated relationship that conservative Christians in America have with liberal values. As this project suggests, these two worldviews are not seen by many Americans (whether living in the nineteenth-century or today) as mutually exclusive. While some expressions of Christianity are in competition with liberalism, this project provides a small representation of those that are not. Rather than as an accurate representation of their religious beliefs, this false dichotomy between reason and religion is often used to attack sects by claiming that their believers “blindly” obey authority. Christian Science and Catholicism, for example, received such accusations in the nineteenth century, as do various “cults” today.

Contrary to postmillennialists, premillennialists believe that Judgment Day will begin Christ’s reign, so they attempt to shield themselves from a degenerative, sinful American society. Post-millennials believe the best is yet to come, while pre-millennials believe the worst is yet to be. Consequently, the deliberate actions of pre-millennialists are evangelical—and focus on the saving of souls through conversion. For these Christians, social reform or charity is secondary— or even counter-productive, if it turns people’s attention away from repentance and salvation. This particular reading of Revelations relied heavily on dispensationalism, a theology that argues that time is divided into various dispensations or ages. Premillennialists assumed that late nineteenth-century represented the last dispensation
preceding the Second Coming – and that society would therefore grow continually worse in preparation for the end of days (Szasz 73).

5 The best-known manifestation of this stance was what has been called the Social Gospel movement, which challenged individualism and stressed social salvation as a fundamental component of individual salvation. The Social Gospel movement of the late nineteenth century is best understood as one expression of the liberal theological tradition rather than as synonymous to liberal Protestantism; it stressed social salvation and concrete social reforms in terms that distinguished it from other liberal theologies. Highly appealing to the middle-class, white evangelical, the movement worked to cure the ills of industrial society through the application of Biblical principles, such as justice, charity, and compassion (Engs 104). Paul T. Phillips questions an overreliance on social action as the defining characteristic of the Social Gospel, even though reform work became an important expression of such beliefs; he encourages instead a definition of the Social Gospel that recognizes the “parity” given to social and individual salvation in the movement (xix). Social Gospelers believed that the alleviation of social ills was the foundation for individual salvation; liberal Protestants more broadly adopted a modernist stance without necessarily emphasizing social reform.

6 This argument for historical conflict is so standard (if also generally dismissed by scholars) that has been variously referred to as the conflict thesis, warfare thesis, warfare model, or the Draper-White thesis. Andrew White’s slightly later version of the argument is discussed below in the section. Although initially less popular with the public than Draper’s book, White’s work ultimately proved more influential.

7 In this section, I have used the term liberal religion to describe theologies invested in the Enlightenment ideals of modernity and individualism. In this case and most often in historical scholarship, the term, “Common-sense Theology” (or the Scottish philosophy)
refers to a more specific branch of theology that developed primarily in Scotland, England and America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, led by Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart in Scotland and John Witherspoon in America. While the theologies I am discussing in this section share the same liberal influences as “Common-sense Theology,” they are later manifestations of liberal religion; they are offspring of these earlier forms, rather than synonymous with them. I use “liberal religion” as a broader blanket term for all theologies heavily influenced by Enlightenment philosophy.

Catherine Albanese addresses from a different perspective the intimate relationship between the natural and spiritual in the minds of many nineteenth-century Americans. Albanese links a variety of mid-century alternative healing movements under the banner of “nature religions”; she suggests that a “theology of nature” drove not only religious movements like Christian Science but also medical practices such as the water-cure movement (“Physic and Metaphysic in Nineteenth-Century America” 492). For proponents of these movements, she explains, “[N]ature and God (the divine mind that was the source of law and truth) were congruent principles, mutual and intertwined in the living of life because they were very close to being identical. … [T]he experiential test of virtue was the healthy body, the body … in harmony with all nature’s laws” (491). Despite the “conceptual inconsistency” and frequent ambiguity of the therapeutic practices of nature religions, they demonstrate the “points of connection and overlap” that existed between nineteenth-century physic and metaphysic (490; 502). The metaphysical religions discussed in this project (later attempts by Americans to articulate these connections) more often than these earlier versions adopted idealistic stances that united mind and matter by disappearing the body entirely.
See Curtis and Badarracco. Curtis addresses the religious context, while Badarracco more fully addresses the medical context.

Heroic cures, which generally consisted of harsh medications, were aimed at restoring the body’s natural balance. The pain involved in this process demonstrated both that the physician was taking action to combat the disease and that the patient’s problem was not imaginary.

Medicine did not fully professionalize until the publication of the Flexner Report in 1910, and the state of the field in the late nineteenth-century can only be described as pluralistic. The major branches of medicine in the mid- to late-nineteenth century included regular medicine, homeopathy, and eclecticism, although they received substantial competition from movements such as water cure, mesmerism, and systems of self-treatment. These different therapeutic philosophies produced their own medical colleges and substantial competition within the field of medicine. The Flexner Report largely signaled the end of this period in medicine; it encouraged more a stringent scientific education for doctors, of which Johns Hopkins became the exemplar. For more on alternative medicine during the period, see Haller and Fuller.

These categories are mine, as these definitions are often assumed as obvious or their distinctions blurred. Curtis, in her excellent study of divine healing, seems to use divine healing and faith healing synonymously, although she rightly distinguishes Christian Science from these theories of metaphysical healing. I believe that it is more useful to use divine healing as an umbrella term that encompasses the range of spiritual explanations for healing, including Christian Science and faith healing.

Dexter cites the scriptural passage most often used as evidence for the continued relevance of divine healing: “Is there any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church;
and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: / And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:14-15).

14 The most complete and useful study of faith healing in the late nineteenth century is Curtis. For useful work on Pentecostalism, see Wacker and Blumhofer, et. al. See also Butler for work addressing both gender and race in the Pentecostal church.

15 Chapter 3, which discusses Eddy’s rhetoric, provides a more complete picture of Christian Science theology and its implications for discourse.

16 For early seminal work on New Thought, see Braden and Meyer. More recently, Satter has provided an excellent analysis of the role of gender in nineteenth-century New Thought. For further work addressing gender in New Thought, see Tumber and Griffith.

17 Nineteenth-century Americans often conflated mesmerism (or hypnotism) and mind-cure. Indeed, the two techniques share many of the same assumptions, such as the ability of one mind to control another. However, mind-cure did not necessarily rely on “magnetic” explanations, and mesmerism was not intrinsically a form of healing.

18 See also Numbers and Amundsen for an introduction to a wide variety of healing beliefs in western religions.

Notes to Chapter 2

1 As the example of Eddy will demonstrate in the following chapter, this assessment of Christian Science was not in line with Christian Scientists perception of themselves. For this reason, I follow James in arguing that the metaphysical healing movements of the late nineteenth-century expressed a fundamentally liberal worldview.
This view, called cessationism, suggests that these charismatic gifts were only appropriate during the foundation of the Christian church and in its infancy, ceasing with the formation of the Scriptural canon and the spread of the Gospel. While some cessationists believe that miracles are possible in certain cases, they do not believe that special individuals are chosen by God as prophets or healers. Because the group is so diverse, metaphysical healers exist in both the cessationist and the continuationist camp that believes that charismatic gifts occur today. While Pentacostals are continuationists, Christian Scientists are not, as they do not relegate the gift of healing to certain individuals but believe it to be a demonstration of an unvarying, “scientific” spiritual law.

Common-sense theology attempted to align biblical revelation and so-called common-sense. Liberal religion of the late nineteenth-century was far less attached to biblical literalism and defined “common sense” in broader, moralistic terms more compatible with romantic views. The remainder of the chapter is in large part an effort to articulate this later conception of common sense in religion, through an analysis of the metaphysical healing debate.

Hopkins uses the term Christian Science to reflect her understanding that her practice of healing both abides by the teachings of Scripture and the rigors of scientific demonstration. However, it should not be conflated with Eddy’s Christian Science, as Hopkins makes no claim to be a member of this denomination. The term gradually became associated almost exclusively with Eddy as her denomination expanded, but Hopkin’s article was published relatively early in this process.

Albanese deems practices based on these assumptions, like water cure, to be “nature religion[s]” (“Physic and Metaphysic” 490). She explains that, for those who adopted these theological premises, “nature and God (the divine mind that was source of law and truth)
were congruent principles, mutual and intertwined in the living of life because they were very close to being identical.” She explains that the “experiential text of virtue was the healthy body” (491). “Natural” rituals like water cure expressed the harmony of the patient (or Christian) with God or truth. Albanese highlights in her article the contradiction implicit in theologies that simultaneously privilege both sides of the dichotomy, nature and mind.

6 For more on clean-living movements in the United States, see Engs and Rosenberg, ed. It is important to note that this merging of physical and moral law was not always the product of a liberal worldview. The writer of this Outlook article shares similar assumptions to those of Drummond, as described in the previous chapter, assumptions that must be deemed liberal. However, some clean-living advocates, such as Seventh-Day Adventists, adopted clean-living principles as a consequence of premillennial views; these views do not exhibit the faith in progress and individual authority so central to liberal thought and cannot be grouped with that of the writers highlighted in this chapter.

7 The most useful work on the historical practices of nineteenth-century Christian Science healers is Schoepflin.

8 See, for example, Marback.

9 The biography, The Life of Mary Baker Eddy, was originally serialized in McClure’s Magazine between 1907 and 1908. Milmine accumulated the documents on which the biography is based and supplied them to McClure’s. As Milmine was not a writer, Cather, an editor at the magazine, was charged with verifying the information and rewriting the text. Cather never publically associated herself with either the serialized articles or revised book manuscript (although she did tell a few friends in confidence that she had written the initial articles almost in their entirety). Recently, scholars have found archival evidence that warrants listing Cather as the lead author of the work, including the book version of the biography (Stouck).
Eddy’s Christian Science has often been traced to the work of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, an ostensibly secular mind-cureist. In poor health, Eddy sought relief under the care of Quimby, a largely uneducated healer from Maine whose practice was heavily influenced by mesmerism. Critics of Eddy have often accused her of plagiarizing Quimby’s ideas, most famously the Dressers (Julius, Annetta, and their son, Horatio), early influential New Thought practitioners. Until relatively recently, scholars such as Julius Silberger have followed nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century critics in representing Eddy’s work as derivative.

While the shared lineage of mind-cure and Christian Science is worth noting, Eddy radically revised Quimby’s ideas, which did not rely on a Christian belief system. I follow Gillian Gill in suggesting that these accusations were intrinsically sexist and often exhibited “willful bias” (120). The (until recently) heavily restricted access to the archives of the Christian Science church undoubtedly encouraged later biographers and scholars to too readily accept the accounts of early critics and New Thought leaders, despite their clear agendas. Christian Science and mind-cure are significantly different, even if sprung from the same cultural milieu. All major Eddy biographers (whether early or current, believer or non-believer) address her relationship to Quimby at some level (Gill, Peel, Nenneman, Gottschalk, Cather and Milmine).

Notes to Chapter 3

1 In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that rhetoricians and historians have not recognized these limitations, both theoretically and historically. Nevertheless, descriptions of liberal rhetoric are generally focused on discourse that is ostensibly secular and invested in
the masculine discourses of the Enlightenment. As such, they are insufficient for situating Eddy’s rhetoric.

2 Porterfield emphasizes the connection between sin and sickness (and healing and repentance) apparent in most versions of Christian healing. For some Christians, an individual’s illness was a literal indication of their sinful nature; for others, it represented external forces of sin at work on the individual. Healing therefore represented repentance and God’s mercy and forgiveness of sin (Healing in the History of Christianity 5). Eddy draws upon but rather substantially revises this explanation by linking sin and sickness but claiming that both are illusions.

3 This is not to say that religious services are unnecessary or unimportant to Christian Scientists but to say that they are somewhat less central than in other mainstream religions. While a believer could reach an understanding of Christian Science principles through a service, the emphasis in Eddy’s thought remained on close textual study of the Bible and Science and Health. Eddy, in fact, gradually minimized the service to remove the “human” or material element from its administration. Most importantly, Christian Science services contain no sermon but consist of readings from the Bible and Science and Health – a differently structured, oral version of material one could consume in written form. Further discussion of the particularities of church service will occur throughout the chapter.

4 During an absent cure, a healer would reach out mentally to the patient and attempt to reform his or her thinking through non-verbal persuasion. Scientists believe these cures are possible because distance is material and therefore erroneous, making physical or verbal contact unnecessary. Nevertheless, cures generally occurred through face-to-face interaction between the healer and patient.
The text is labeled with Eddy’s name, although only the first two lines and corrections are in her hand. Labeled “Mr. MacLauthlin’s Mss.,” the document may have been dictated or copied from an earlier version. In any case, Eddy clearly reviewed the manuscript to ensure its accuracy and consistency with her theology.

See Porterfield (Healing, Cpt. 6) for a fuller explanation of missionary medicine and the complicated relationship between modern medicine and Christianity.

According to the legend, Eddy slipped and fell on ice on a cold February day in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1866. In some accounts paralyzed and in all close to death, the injured woman called for her Bible and dismissed everyone from the room. In only a handful of days, Eddy fully recovered from the accident – a miracle she contributed to spiritual healing. Eddy never claimed that God spoke to her in her distress, but she explained that she achieved a state of spiritual enlightenment that placed her closer to Truth than other human beings. Nine years later, the healer completed and published Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, beginning her long journey from impoverished widow to prophet.

Further information on Eddy’s life can be found in any number of well-written biographies by believers and non-believers. Believer Robert Peel’s three volume Mary Baker Eddy remains the standard, but a handful of major biographies have been published recently. For biographies by Christian Scientists, see Nenneman and Gottschalk (Rolling). Biographies by non-believers are by Gill and Thomas. For interesting, popular work on Eddy by her contemporaries, see Willa Cather and Georgine Milmine’s The Life of Mary G. Baker Eddy and the History of Christian Science and the four-volume series of recollections, We Knew Mary Baker Eddy, published by the Christian Science Publishing Society. Finally, Eddy composed an autobiography, Retrospection and Introspection, rich less for its biographical detail than for its rhetorical and theological content.
Considered the most spiritual of all Scientists, Eddy herself claimed to have “held the weather” by mentally dissipating a storm (MBEL, Letter to the Christian Science Board of Directors, L02747).

Eddy’s lack of a public stance on these issues should not be confused with indifference. The Mary Baker Eddy Library contains a collection of scrapbooks compiled by Eddy and her secretaries. These scrapbooks contain clippings on a wide range of topics, including articles on public issues as well as ones on Christian Science. Moreover, Eddy began the *Christian Science Monitor* with the explicit intention of providing an accurate and Christian representation of current events. When she was asked for her opinion on issues such as women’s rights, Eddy’s indirect responses should likely be interpreted more as her effort to redirect the discussion from secondary issues to the primary one – the Principle of Christian Science. In other words, Eddy believed that one’s stance on these various issues should always be read through the lens of this Principle.

The most notable exceptions to this general approach were the Peace Movement and abolition. Eddy, who had experienced the Civil War as an adult, firmly supported abolition and spoke proudly of her father’s involvement with this cause (*FCC* 309; *MW* 237). She also willingly accepted the position of *Fondateur* of the Association for International Conciliation, an international peace organization (*FCC* 283). For Eddy, peace and liberty were necessary features of a spiritual and godly society, and these movements were unquestionably directed towards those goals.

Christian Science healers collected fees for their work in many cases, causing critics to claim their efforts were at worst deliberate scams or at best driven by greed. Eddy countered this accusation by comparing these fees to the salaries of ministers or doctors. From her
perspective, the money was just compensation for a service and necessary if healers were to continue their work.

11 Hegeman originally published this article anonymously, but he revealed his identity in a subsequent article several months later.

12 Because of the sheer number of articles published about Christian Science, Eddy felt it necessary to appoint people to correct misrepresentations of the church’s viewpoints in popular periodicals. The Leader appointed one-person committees, called Committees on Publication, in each state and foreign country to oversee this work. These committees worked under the direction of a manager in Boston. Alfred Farlow held the managerial position beginning in 1900; William McCrackan sat on the important New York committee.

13 The First Church of Christ, Scientist has undergone three major changes since its original construction, and its Complex now covers fourteen acres in the heart of Boston’s Back Bay. The Christian Science Board of Directors erected the first, small Romanesque edifice in 1895, followed closely by the much larger Extension in 1906. The Complex remained relatively unchanged until 1973, when the architectural firm of I.M. Pei redesigned the area surrounding the churches to its current proportions and physically connected the two central edifices.

14 To call this building an Extension is somewhat of a misnomer. The Extension dwarfs the original building, although the two are connected. It is the neo-classical Extension that most associate with the name of the Mother Church and that is recognizable by many as a Boston landmark.

15 Chapel and Jensen make a similar point, describing Eddy’s writing as a “rhetorical synthesis” of Jamesian pragmatism and American philosophical idealism; they suggest that
the synthesis of these two cultural themes is what made Eddy’s rhetoric so popular to middle- and upper-class Americans.

16 The Christian Science community produced several exceptionally powerful women. For example, Annie Knott, between 1898 and 1934, served as a member of the Board of Lectureship, an associate editor of the Christian Science periodicals, and a member of the Bible Lesson Committee, and she eventually became the first woman to sit on the Board of Directors of the Mother Church. Moreover, the figures who proved able to mount a challenge to Eddy’s status in her church were women: Augusta Stetson, who headed of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, New York until her excommunication in 1909; Josephine Woodbury, who claimed to have immaculately conceived a child through Spirit in 1890, was excommunicated in 1896, and brought a suit against Eddy for libel in 1899; and Emma Curtis Hopkins, who founded the highly influential Hopkins Metaphysical Association in Chicago in 1886, after being dismissed from her post as editor of the Christian Science Journal.

17 Eddy undoubtedly appreciated the importance of financial protection for women based on her own experience. Eddy struggled with financial hardship and ill health after her first husband, George Glover, died in 1844, leaving her alone and pregnant. Her mental and physical state eventually forced her to leave her young son with relatives. By 1852, Eddy was living with her sister and brother-in-law and desperate for security and reunion with her son (Gill 100-102). Consequently, she married Daniel Patterson, a good-natured but unsuccessful dentist. Gill supports Eddy’s claim in her autobiography that her main priority in remarrying was to regain custody of her son (Gill 101-2; RI 21). By all accounts, the marriage was an unmitigated disaster, full of further financial struggles and debilitating mental and physical illness. Mary Patterson finally received a divorce in 1873 after years of
separation, an act that allowed her to regain some of the respectability her prodigal husband and tempestuous marriage had cost her (Gill 211).

18 These numbers (which reflect the status of women in the church in 1900) have varied throughout the history of the denomination to include more women, a state that Eddy would have anticipated. Currently (June 2009-2010), the Christian Science Board of Directors includes 3 men and 2 women. Moreover, the President of the Mother Church, the Editor-in-Chief of the Christian Science Publication Society, and the Second Reader of the Mother Church (who reads from the Bible during services) are all women. The earlier gender discrepancy reflects Eddy’s attempt to balance Christian Science Truth with the expectations of a society not yet fully enlightened to understand woman’s place in the divine.

19 Eddy’s contemporaries often compared Christian Science to theologies such as theosophy, spiritualism, and Swedenborgianism, and to philosophies such as that of Kant, Hegel, and Berkley. Critics usually made these comparisons in an effort to discredit the theology, with little sustained interrogation of the ideas involved. While they can offer a means of characterization, they are of limited use in terms of tracing Eddy’s intellectual and theological influences. Scholars such as Gottschalk have observed that Eddy had little background in philosophy and was not well-educated (Emergence 76). Thus, any similarity to well-known idealistic philosophers is indirect, drawn from popular understandings of these ideas.

20 Eddy, like most liberal Christians, placed primary authority in the Scriptures. However, she did not promote a literal interpretation of the Bible, such as is common in fundamentalist Christianity. In fact, she argued that revelation was necessary to properly interpret the Bible and recognize its “spiritual significance.” Science and Health, the interpretation of the Scriptures accepted by Christian Scientists, is obviously not a literal reading.
Badaracco further addresses the publication history of *Science and Health*. She outlines some of the most significant differences between the various editions, as well as addressing the criticisms of Mark Twain. Twain, stunned by the enormous profits the book generated, claimed that Eddy released new editions for the further income they would generate.

The association between Christian Science and idealistic philosophy should not be pushed too far, although it is useful for explaining certain aspects of Eddy’s theology. Idealistic philosophers did not deny common sense perception entirely, as Eddy did, or believe that one’s interpretation of reality could affect experience (Gottschalk, *Emergence* 78-79). The similarities between transcendentalism and Christian Science should be even further qualified. Most importantly, Eddy rejected the spiritualized concept of Nature so prevalent in Romantic philosophies, which she viewed as pantheistic and an affirmation of matter. Interested in Eddy’s anti-materialistic ideas, transcendentalist Bronson Alcott, as well as his daughter, Louisa May, corresponded with Eddy (Gill 636n). However, both (along with Ralph Waldo Emerson) ultimately rejected the theology as ineffective and somewhat fanatical (Gottschalk, *Emergence* 78). For further discussion, see Gottschalk, *Emergence*, 75-79.

Eddy experienced what is generally referred to as the Second Great Awakening as a child, and growing up in a devoutly Congregationalist household, she undoubtedly felt its effects. She offers no mention of attending meetings in her autobiography but speaks more generally of her conflicts with Calvinist Congregational doctrine as a child. However, Gill suggests that Eddy may have declared her faith publically at significant revival meeting near her childhood home of Bow, New Hampshire, around the age of twelve (11).

The woman with the crown of twelve stars appears in Revelations:
And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

...And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. (12:1-5)

The woman of Revelations holds a special place in Christian Science, and she appears with her crown of stars as “Woman-God Crowned” in a stained-glass window of the Mother Church. However, Eddy never claimed to be this woman: this prophecy represented the idea of Christian Science and the triumph of Mind over matter, not a material person. Gwalter explains that the prophecy of Christian Science “comes to glorious fulfillment in the advent of Mary Baker Eddy, who, in her fulfillment of prophecy, typifies the spiritual idea symbolized by the woman in the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse” (109-110). Ignoring these distinctions, Twain either dismissed or did not believe Eddy’s consistent reprimands to followers that she believed deified her.

Eddy took several titles throughout her span as church leader. Initially, followers referred to her as “Mother,” and she often signed her letters to familiar students in this way. Eddy later curtailed this practice in public, after Mark Twain ridiculed her and her followers for it. Instead, she chose the more descriptive moniker, Leader, and reserved the title for herself alone in the Manual of the Mother Church (Gottschalk, Emergence 166-168).

Yet the most consistent title Eddy donned was likely that of Discoverer – one she chose with an unquestionably rhetorical purpose. In a letter to her adopted son, Ebenezer J. Foster Eddy, Eddy explained:

[E]ach time I recognize that “Discoverer” is the true word and the only word. ...I saw distinctly that “Rediscoverer” would be worse than not having anything named
but founder. Because the old howl could be kept “Quimby was the first discoverer,” and the next said “she virtually owns this in the word rediscoverer.”

*(MBEL, L01806)*

In this letter, Eddy refers to the accusation that she plagiarized her ideas from Phineas Quimby, a mental healer who treated her briefly during the years before her fall on the ice (accusations made most famously by Horatio Dresser). In considering the title, Rediscoverer, Eddy likely wanted to reflect that Christian Science was eternal Principle, not a novelty – and perhaps to recognize Jesus as the first practitioner of true Christian Science. Eddy ultimately decided that Discoverer was appropriate because “[n]o one can be found who every taught or wrote what I have on this subject and if it is a Science then I discovered it” *(MBEL, L01806)*. This term, then reflected her sense that Christian Science was a law-governed Science and that (because it was the Principle governing the spiritual world) her discovery and personal revelation was absolute.

26 For more on the concept of revelation in Christian Science from a scholarly perspective, see Gottschalk *(Emerging, chapter 3)*. Gwalter also offers a useful, popular description of Eddy’s role as a prophet in Christian Science from the perspective of a believer.

27 The following descriptions of the Christian Science sermon are taken from a series of five articles published in the *Christian Science Sentinel* in March 1899 (“The Christian Science Sermon” I-IV and “The Lesson Sermons”). These educational articles were written by an unnamed member of the Bible Lesson Committee of the Christian Science church. In the final article, the writer explains that members of the committee, “next to our Leader, are better able than others to point out these elements of the lessons” because they speak with “a knowledge born of experience in the preparation of lessons, a careful study of their purpose, their method, their construction, and their spirit” (“The Lesson Sermons” 4).
Eddy herself never drafted so complete and thorough a primer on the Christian Science sermon. Nevertheless, the articles can be taken as a largely accurate representation of Eddy’s views, given her substantial control over what was published in the denomination’s periodicals. Eddy would not have let any article appear in a sanctioned work if she did not believe it was in entire accordance with Science. She herself read, amended, corrected, and revised thousands of her follower’s texts (as reflected in her correspondence), and she often harshly reprimanded those whose views did not represent Truth accurately and exactly. Annie Knott, who was then one of the editors of the *Christian Science Journal* and *Sentinel*, reflects on being called to Pleasant View, Eddy’s estate, to meet with her. There, Eddy showed Knott, the other editors, and the Board of Directors a reference in a publication that she believed was “unscientific.” According to Knott, the Leader chastised them, “I do not want to see any more of those namby pamby concepts of Jesus go out through our periodicals to mislead people as to what he actually taught” (Knott 89). In short, the presence of these articles in the denomination’s primary periodical authorized their content as Christian Science truth as Eddy understood it.

Christian Scientists still uphold this standard rigorously. A decade ago, the Christian Science Publishing Society printed a biography of Eddy by Bliss Knapp, the son of one of the original Board of Directors. The presence of this work in Christian Science Reading Rooms was a condition for the Board to receive a $100 million endowment from the Knapp estate (money it needed desperately). However, many of the independent Reading Rooms refused to carry the book, as the community as a whole believed it inappropriately deified Eddy. The trustees of the Knapp estate sued the Board, claiming it had failed to live up to the conditions set down by the will. The suit has since been settled, but it reflects the
continuing importance and maintenance of a Christian Science canon. What is printed by the central organization represents (or ought to represent) a view authorized as Scientific.

28 The writer explains that the purpose of the sermon determines its composition and offers three examples: to describe “the true thought of God as revealed by the Scriptures”, to explain “how the Heavenly Father is to be understood,” and to articulate “what is meant by God as Principle” (“The Christian Science Sermon. II. The Make Up of the Sermon” 4).

29 This vision of the rhetor/audience relationship shares striking similarities to that articulated by Plato in the Phaedrus: the enlightened rhetor guiding the audience to a transcendent truth.

30 I only mean to highlight the significant attention to sentimentalism in Eddy scholarship. Piepmeier, Schrager, and Parker all adopt sentimentalism as their primary historical and theoretical context, and while her purpose is significantly different, Badaracco also considers Eddy in the context of her earlier chapter on sentimental invalidism and heroic medicine. This assessment is not to devalue such scholarship. The heavy attention to the influence of sentimentalism in Eddy’s writing is not unjustified – and likely reflects the importance of sentimentalism in nineteenth-century gender studies. My more significant point is to suggest relatively minimal attention to Eddy’s explicit claim to be a Scientist – and the effect of that identity on her writing. Outside of believers, Byam and Satter have most effectively addressed this aspect of Christian Science theology.

31 As explained in the Christian Science textbook, the “Father” principle is “[e]ternal life; the one Mind; the divine Principle, commonly called God,” while the “Mother” principle is “God; divine and eternal Principle; Life, Truth, and Love” (SH 586: 6-10; SH 592: 16-17).

32 See for example Ann Douglas’s important work, The Feminization of American Culture. Douglas argues that during this period ministerial authority came to be defined not by
external authority but by “character” and behavior. The adult (masculine) authority of the
pulpit succumbed to childlike (feminine) piety of the domestic space (Cpt. 1). Thus, scholars
typically associate the abandonment of strict Calvinistic doctrine with feminization of
American religion in the nineteenth-century. Gill discusses Eddy’s childhood emotional
struggles with her father’s Calvinism in this context (8-13).

Knott’s story echoes a standard argument Eddy used to promote women’s spiritual
authority. In her “Key to the Scriptures” at the end of *Science and Health*, Eddy offers
detailed exegeses of the books of Genesis and Revelations (which she titles “The
Apocalypse”). Eddy interprets Genesis III: 11-12 (in which God questions Adam and Eve
after they have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge) in language nearly identical to Knott’s
parable:

Truth, cross-questioning man as to his knowledge of error, finds woman the
first to confess her fault. She says, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat;”
as much as to say in meek penitence, “Neither man nor God shall father my
fault.” She has already learned that corporeal sense is the serpent. Hence
she is the first to abandon belief in the material origin of man and to discern
spiritual creation. This hereafter enabled woman to be the mother of Jesus
and to behold at the sepulchre the risen Savior, who was soon to manifest
the deathless man of God’s creating. This enabled woman to be first to
interpret the Scriptures in their true sense, which reveals the spiritual origin
of man. (*SH* 533: 26 - 534:7)

As well as Eddy’s theological affirmation of female authority, the anecdote reflects the
genuine sense of empowerment women like Knott experienced in the practice of Christian
Science. Knott tells her reader that, after Eddy’s lesson, she suddenly found herself called upon often to lecture.

Notes to Chapter 4

1 Hopkins delivered the lessons from Résumé to her advanced students first in 1892. She continued to revise the text until 1918. So although the texts are presented as companion volumes, Hopkins likely produced the original text for Résumé significantly before the publication of the first parts of High Mysticism in 1907 (Terranova i).

2 Little is known of Hopkins’ early life. Her husband, George Irving Hopkins, was an English teacher. Although George did travel with Emma to Chicago after her dismissal from the Christian Science Journal, they spent the remainder of their lives apart and divorced in 1900. Their son, John, died in 1905 as a young adult (Harley 9-10).

3 The term, “New Thought,” refers to a diverse, loosely-structured coalition of metaphysical religions, for which Hopkins (along with Warren Felt Evans and Horatio Dresser) was one of the most prominent voices. Early in the movement, teachers and lecturers on the principles of metaphysical healing referred to their belief system variously as Divine Science, Spiritual Science, Unity, Mind Cure, Science of Being, Home of Truth, and most often Christian Science. After Eddy copyrighted the term Christian Science in the 1890s, the national leaders of the movement chose the term “New Thought” as a means of distinguishing themselves from Eddy’s sect and expressing a sense of communal identity (however loose). Hopkins, like other New Thought leaders, refused to coalesce her followers into a concrete denomination.

4 Because she presented spirituality as an inherent human faculty, Hopkins could not distinguish Jesus from other human beings with respect to his divinity. Instead, she
compared him to a great mathematician, one able to reveal divine laws by consequence of his exceptional spiritual faculty:

As in mathematics the time came in with Pythagoras for knowing that the root of sum of the squares of base and perpendicular was forever the diagonal, so in with Jesus came the time for showing the root of divine authority bone of bone in men forever, in their relation to the Supreme Good Will…. (HM 78)

These men, possessing the gifts to uncover eternal law, were then able to demonstrate the Truth to those unable to discern it on their own.

The sequence and content of these twelve lessons varies some from text to text and is often not stated explicitly. The most succinct articulation of them appears in one of Hopkins’ self-treatments; paraphrased, they are:

1. The first principle is God is All.
2. Deny all but God.
3. Affirm that all is God.
4. Faith is the evidence that all is God.
5. Works are the rest [peace] of mind in the presence of God.
6. Understanding of God is the only understanding worthwhile.
7. Birth is the sight of God in all things.
8. Sight or the spiritual mind is never deceived.
9. Holiness is the state of all things.
10. Forgiveness is releasing secret misapprehension of self for the apprehension of divine self.
12. Praise. (ST 4-6)

6 See, for example, Schmidt, particularly Cpts. 2-4, for a discussion of Eastern influence on liberal religion in America during the late nineteenth-century.

Notes to Conclusion

1 See Griffith for a full discussion of this phenomenon.

2 The front cover of the Penguin paper edition offers endorsements from two Nobel Prize winning scientists, Craig Mello and John Mather. The front matter for the text contains six more pages of endorsements from scientists, religious leaders, and writers.
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