ONE TASK IN the ongoing struggle for human liberation is the critical historical analysis of various moments in that struggle for the purposes of understanding the origin and development of present social relations, identifying resources and strategies for current struggles, and, perhaps, avoiding some of the pitfalls of previous efforts. This task can be neither simply the glorification nor solely the debunking of the efforts of those who came to the struggle before us. Rather, it must be a clear-eyed rendering of the strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures of the women and men who sought, within the limits of the material, intellectual, and moral resources available to them, to establish a more just social order. Since part of the struggle for human liberation is the establishment of just relations among women and men, this task of critical historical analysis must include investigation of the ways in which such relations have been ordered, the alternative orders that have been proposed, and the strategies for achieving them that have been recommended. And as the North American social Christianity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remains significant as a source both for the present construction and for some alternative visions of relations among women and men, critical historical analysis of that moment in the struggle for human liberation remains a fruitful part of the larger task.¹

While the male leadership of society and church debated what women’s proper role should be, women played a central role in American social and ecclesiastical reform movements of the nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, women were active in the antislavery, peace, and temperance movements, and after emancipation continued to work in these latter two reform crusades. Women also comprised a major part of the work force for the postwar "Protestant religio-social system." Lay women, sisters, and deaconesses staffed the day nurseries and industrial schools of the institutional churches; formed and operated domestic and foreign mission societies; founded and administered settlement houses and women's and girls' clubs; and staffed rescue missions, hospitals, and orphanages. As Eleanor Flexner has noted, the reform ferment of the nineteenth century thus "produced new forms of organization through which women could achieve greater participation in social action." Contemporaneously, the movement for improving women's legal and political status grew and became focussed on women's suffrage. The relation between this movement and the white Protestant churches was ambivalent. On the one hand white feminist leaders such as Frances Willard and Anna Howard Shaw were deeply religious, and the churches depended upon women for much of their labor and regarded women as a preeminent force for the moral regeneration of society. On the other hand the churches generally regarded public leadership in church and state as inappropriate for women and some women recognized that prevailing clerical practice and the use of the Bible and doctrine were means of discrimination against women. Despite their differences, however, many white Protestant reformers and women's advocates united in the temperance movement, a prominent item on the agendas of both evangelicals working for a Christian America and women working to improve the conditions of their own lives and of the larger social order. These constituencies combined in the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which was both a vital instrument of mission and reform work and a means for women to exert their influence in public life. Both the temperance and women's movements achieved significant victories with the passage of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Amendments in 1920. Also by 1920, significant gains had been made in securing women's roles in the churches and in improving the conditions under which women worked.2

These gains were not attributable exclusively to the churches, but some church people did make significant contributions toward them. Among them was Henry Codman Potter, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New York from 1883 until his death in 1908. Born in 1835 and ordained in 1857, Potter was strongly influenced both by William Augustus Muhlenberg, an Episcopal priest whose "Memorial" at the 1853 General Convention and the movement it generated helped adapt the Episcopal Church's "present canonical means and appliances" to the requirements of doing "the work of the Lord in this land and in this age," and by his own father, Alonzo Potter, an evangelical Episcopalian who became Bishop of Pennsylvania in 1845 and who was a supporter of the Memorial Movement. Henry Potter therefore typifies the generation of white American church leaders who translated and transformed ante-bellum reform initiatives in the context of the social, economic, and ecclesiastical challenges of the postwar period and who thereby laid the foundations for what came to be known as the Social Gospel. Shortly after the war, Potter advocated increased roles for women in church work and initiated and supported measures to secure such roles. Due both to his concern with the rights of working people and his recognition of the realities of working women's lives, he also advocated women's right to work to support themselves, supported measures to improve their working conditions, and argued for expanding the roles and occupations available to women. Potter's writings and later treatments of his life and views, however, provide little evidence of his view of women's suffrage, but he was concerned throughout his life with temperance reform. The temperance movement directly influenced women's well-being, both in terms of the effect of alcohol on women's lives and of women's participation in temperance reform work. Women's prominence in the temperance movement, before and after the war, arose both from the movement's function as one of the only means for women's participation in political life and from women's identification of themselves as the primary victims of alcohol abuse. The temperance crusade thus became the most important aspect of women's religious and reform work in the postwar period. Potter's approach to "the liquor problem," however, was significantly different from that of most women temperance workers, and by the late

nineteenth century it seems to have been framed primarily by his concern for working men’s legitimate needs for recreation rather than "home protection" and women’s suffering as a result of men’s abuse of alcohol.³

For all of these issues related to women’s work and well-being, by the mid-nineteenth century what has been described as the "Victorian family ideal" or the "urban-industrial cult of genteel womanhood" set the terms of public debate.⁴ Although elements of this ideology were present in earlier North American and European social thought, its later dominance was a product of the nineteenth-century shift from a rural, agricultural economic order to an urban, industrial one. Where women’s participation in both production and consumption had been prevalent in earlier rural European and North American societies, by the late nineteenth century white women’s role in production became increasingly restricted as industrial capitalism took hold. Thus the "myth of women’s special nature," while having precedents in earlier Euro-American thought and practice, became normative with the advent of industrial capitalism. As Beverly Harrison observes: "What the rising bourgeois class did was to lock the myth into western consciousness so deeply that the conceptions of women’s experience as unchanging, as totally child-centered and domiciled became axiomatic." As employed by white social Christians, the urban-industrial cult of genteel womanhood had three central characteristics. First, it sharply differentiated between men’s and women’s labor, with the former relegated to the public, industrial sphere and the latter to the private, domestic sphere. Second, and as a consequence of the first, it construed the social ideal of the "good woman" on the basis of the model of the middle-class wife and mother, the happy practitioner of the "domestic arts"; those who did not conform to this ideal they regarded as "failed women." Third, reinforced late in the century by social Darwinist thought, it regarded the family unit as the most Christianized of social institutions and thus the foundation and model for the Christianization of the rest of the social order.⁵


The realities of most women's lives, however, were markedly different from the image portrayed by the Victorian family ideal. Many urban women, both married and unmarried, depended on their own waged labor for their survival and that of their families. Indeed, before the great increase in immigration late in the century provided larger numbers of male workers, factories were decidedly dependent upon women's labor. While decreasing somewhat in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this dependence was by no means completely discontinued, as is demonstrated by legislation in the early 1900s regulating the labor of women and children. Further, women without either work or men who would marry or support them were frequently compelled to support themselves by one of the few means available to them, namely, prostitution. It is no coincidence, then, that the "vice trade" was a major concern for civic reformers and social Christians, although few made the connection between the ideology of domesticity and realities of women's lives.\textsuperscript{6}

In his treatment of issues affecting the work and well-being of women, Henry Potter generally took for granted this urban-industrial cult of genteel womanhood. Nevertheless, drawing on and adapting ante-bellum reform initiatives to the postwar context, he qualified and criticized the ideology of women's domesticity on some important points. Where he challenged its assumptions, he did so because of the needs of the churches and the people they sought to serve. These needs were such that in some cases he advocated roles for women, and supported and cooperated with women performing such roles, that were not always consistent with the domestic functions to which the urban-industrial ideology limited them. The need for expanding opportunities for women's church work provided Potter with both a point of continuity with earlier religious reform initiatives and a starting point for his critical evaluation of the cult of domesticity. Once Potter developed a rationale for women undertaking such work outside the home, he employed it to justify other forms of women's nondomestic labor. Nevertheless, like the work of many of his social gospel contemporaries, Potter's approach to establishing more just relations between women and men was inadequate in other respects.

The Unemployed Agency of Christian Women

One factor that limited the hegemony of the cult of genteel womanhood in the mid-nineteenth century was the churches' need for laborers to undertake their growing mission and service work. The expanding role of women in the churches during this period was consistent with the urban-industrial ideology because that ideology conceived religion as an element of the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, women's participation and leadership in church and reform organizations provided them with opportunities for labor outside the home and helped to limit the ideology's complete hegemony. Women's role in the evangelical churches had been somewhat enhanced early in the nineteenth century by the "new measures" revivalism of Charles Finney, but in the wake of the 1848 women's rights convention held at Seneca Falls, New York the churches generally, and vehemently, opposed calls for women's rights. Disagreement among reform forces on the priority to be given women's rights and the onset of the Civil War further undermined mid-century efforts to secure women's rights and expand the range of their social roles.7

During the war, however, both church and society were compelled to rely on, in the words of Alonzo Potter, "the unemployed agency of Christian women" for service in both hospitals and congregations. Like other evangelical Episcopalians, Alonzo Potter's interest in women's work in the church was directly related to his support of the Memorial Movement. As Bishop of Pennsylvania, he explored and encouraged several ways to enlist lay people in this work. His concern for increasing the "laborers in the vineyard" and his view of women's special gifts for certain types of church work led him in 1862, in an address to the diocesan convention, to propose the revival of the order of deaconesses and the establishment of sisterhoods. By this time, both in England and the United States, the role of women in church work had significantly increased. William Muhlenberg had founded the Sisterhood of the Holy Communion in New York in 1845, and in 1858 it assumed operation of St. Luke's Hospital. The Sisterhood of St. John the Baptist founded its House of Mercy at Clewer, England in 1849, and in subsequent years initiated other institutions including an orphanage, a convalescent hospital, and a

penitentiary and house of refuge for women. An order of deaconesses was established in the Diocese of Maryland in 1855, and what was to become the Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd was begun in Baltimore in the following year. In 1860, the Mildmay Deaconesses Home was established in London, providing training for women for various types of domestic and foreign missions. Alonzo Potter aided the acceptance and eventual institutionalization of such women's roles in the Episcopal Church, despite widespread suspicions about the introduction of "Romish" practices and questions about the suitability of women for such work. Pleased with the success of women's participation in various forms of church work, in May 1864, a little over a year before his death, he wrote to a lay colleague in the Diocese of Pennsylvania:

Properly trained, this agency of Woman would be most benign in all our public institutions—in our prisons, almshouses, reformatories, and asylums for the sick and afflicted of every name. God bless the noble women who have given themselves to the work! The Lord make his face to shine upon efforts to extend and systematize it; and the Good Spirit rouse our sex—too slow to engage in such works—to emulate the example.8

Other evangelical Protestants, women and men, were realizing the potential for women's church work at the same time. Women became increasingly involved in oversight and support of domestic and foreign mission work, and somewhat more directly involved in the churches' mission and reform activities. At the war's end, however, this involvement was still limited. The 1866 report on urban mission work prepared by the newly formed American Christian Commission suggested "that the poor missionary showing of Protestant churches issued from ignorance and lack of organization as well as from social indifference." In addition, "as an example of the mischievous effect of this condition," it cited "the low esteem in which the churches held women missionaries. Despite the usefulness of female assistants, all the cities visited except New York and Boston could muster only twenty-eight women in actual service—a fact due not merely to prejudice but to the absence of information and training." The prominence given to the potential of women church workers in this report and in subsequent Commission conferences helped to advance efforts in the churches, both to combat the prejudice

and to provide the required training. At the Commission's 1868 convention in New York, for example, nearly all speakers strongly favored free churches and women church workers. In the course of an eloquent plea for sisterhoods and deaconess institutions on the German Protestant model, the Episcopalian George W. Washburn stated that the "theory that woman has no place in the Church deprives America of two-thirds of its Christian force."9

Thus, when Henry Codman Potter became rector of Grace Church, New York in 1868, women were already responsible for important work in some Protestant churches, including the Episcopal Church. Such work, however, was neither universally accepted nor officially sanctioned. Potter labored to achieve both of those ends in his work at Grace Church, in the Episcopal Church through its Board of Missions, and later as Bishop of New York. In 1868, lay women of Grace Church were already operating the parish's Industrial School, which taught sewing and provided clothing for poor children. Within a year, enrollment in the school more than tripled, and two new women's organizations were added: the Ladies' Benevolent Society and the Ladies' Domestic Missionary Relief Association. Over the next several years, the work of these organizations expanded and other organizations were added to Grace's institutional church program. Women comprised the major component of the unpaid labor force of the institutional church programs established at Grace Church. Among them were Potter's wife, Eliza Jacobs Potter, whose mother, Clara Boyd Jacobs, had been a lay leader in the parish at Spring Grove, Pennsylvania and, by his own account, responsible for Henry Potter's conversion experience at the age of nineteen. In addition, several wealthy women provided substantial financial support for those programs. One such supporter was Lucy Kimball Morton: after her death and to honor her commitment to Potter's plans for expanding the parish's work, her husband, Levi P. Morton (financier and later Vice President of the United States under Benjamin Harrison), purchased for Grace Church in 1872 the building that came to be known as Grace Memorial House. From this building the church operated many of its outreach programs, including, temporarily, Grace Chapel. Another woman who generously supported Potter's plans was Catherine Lorillard Wolfe, who

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donated the funding for the construction of Grace House, the parish hall completed in 1880 from which the church operated its greatly expanded programs.\textsuperscript{10}

During his early years at Grace, Potter also participated in the effort to secure official recognition and general acceptance of various modes of women's church work. In 1869, the Episcopal Church's Board of Missions established a Committee on Organized Services of Women. The following year the committee made its first report to the Board of Missions, which in turn authorized the formation of a larger committee, the Women's Work Committee of the Board of Missions, to consider the "best means of associating the organized or individual efforts of women with the missionary and educational work of the church." Henry Potter was among those appointed to this larger committee, and he prepared and presented its report at the October 1871 meeting of the Board of Missions. That report recommended, and the Board of Missions adopted, three resolutions, one of which urged that "measures be immediately taken for engrafting such associations as may hereafter be organized under the constitutional provisions of this Board, upon the already existing missionary organizations of this Church, whether by the formation of 'Sisterhoods auxiliary,' or otherwise." The committee envisioned not only parochial and diocesan sisterhoods, but also orders of deaconesses and associations of lay women for support of foreign, domestic, and parochial missions. Shortly after the Board of Missions accepted this report the 1871 General Convention, while characterized by continuing conflict between High and Low Church partisans, nevertheless also accepted it. In addition, that year's Pastoral Letter of the House of Bishops, a body for which Henry Potter was then serving as secretary, cautiously endorsed "the revival of the Scriptural diaconate of women."\textsuperscript{11}

In Potter's somewhat exaggerated view, these actions "committed the Church both to the recognition and adoption of associations of women for work in the Church, in Sisterhoods or otherwise, and also placed its stamp of approval upon the commissioning of godly women for service, in parishes or elsewhere, as Deaconesses." One result of these actions was the 1871 formation of the Woman's Auxiliary to the Board of Missions, which provided a churchwide structure for existing parochial

\textsuperscript{10} Hodges, \textit{Henry Codman Potter}, 32, 69-111; and \textit{Annual Report of the Various Departments of Parish Work of Grace Parish, New York, 1869}, 8, 10-17 (hereafter cited as \textit{ARGP} with the appropriate year); cf. reports on these and other parish organizations in \textit{ARGP} 1870, 40-43; \textit{ARGP} 1872, 45-55.

\textsuperscript{11} Potter, \textit{Sisterhoods and Deaconesses}, 7-8, 33; Hodges, \textit{Henry Codman Potter}, 75-78.
women's missionary associations (such as those Potter had helped to establish at Grace) and for the expansion of such associations among other churches. It would be another eighteen years, however, before the Episcopal Church took further action on official support for women church workers. Following the 1871 General Convention, Potter attempted to build on these modest gains. In December 1871, he preached at Grace Church on "Woman's Place and Work in the Church," a sermon in which he addressed objections to and offered arguments for increasing women's role in the church's work. Potter responded to objections not to the fitness of women, but rather to the fitness of religious orders for such work. Given Grace's Low Church orientation, this reasoning is not surprising. His emphasis here on the biblical foundation for formal associations of women is similarly intelligible. Potter also offered two practical arguments in favor of women's church work: first, women already were doing such work, and with notable success; and second, women were especially suited to such work.12

Like most of his contemporaries, including many women, Potter assumed that women possessed a "special nature," one mark of the "cult of genteel womanhood." While Potter and others ascribed unique traits to women's nature that suited them particularly to domestic work, they did not necessarily restrict women to work in the home and for the family. Indeed, Potter and others held that Christian women who were "free of domestic obligations" could best use their womanly skills in service of the church and their less fortunate neighbors. Potter believed that the church needed especially to employ "those winning, persuasive, and sympathetic gifts with which the Creator has supremely endowed woman." In this context, he acknowledged a recently published letter by one whom he identified only as "the eloquent, if somewhat erratic preacher who speaks from the platform of what is known as Plymouth Church," probably Henry Ward Beecher. The author of this letter had made women's special nature "the ground of an argument for admitting

12. Potter, Sisterhoods and Deaconesses, 8; cf. 10, where he claims that "such organizations as are described in this volume are placed within the lines of the Church's unequivocal countenance and approval"; and "Woman's Place and Work in the Church," in Waymarks, 1870-1891, Being Discourses with Some Account of Their Occasions (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1892), 212-23, where Potter notes "it is gratifying to remember that the late General Convention of our Church, and especially the House of Bishops in its Pastoral Letter, have recognized not only the general expediency but also the Biblical authority for woman's work, and for the definite place in the organization of the Church which to-day it is proposed that woman should officially hold."
woman to the pulpit" and suggested that "no one can inculcate and illustrate that spirit of love which breathes through the New Testament as can a woman." In response, Potter maintained that the New Testament clearly opposed "any usurpation of the office of teaching in the congregation by woman," but also that "it is as clearly a fact that hers is a delicacy and tenderness of approach, and an intuitive wisdom of utterance that oftenest fit her most of all to deal with those whose ignorance, or vice, or prejudice make them hardest to reach and win." When this sermon was published in a collection of his addresses twenty years later, Potter, in an introductory note, repeated his defense of religious orders. He added to his case only the point that "modern society, with its unique and unprecedented exigencies would seem to be creating a situation and with it a demand for which religious orders furnish the only appropriate supply."  

In 1873, Potter published *Sisterhoods and Deaconesses at Home and Abroad*, an historical and practical description of Protestant associations of women in the United States and Europe. Potter intended the book to further the acceptance of women's church work, particularly among those still apprehensive about religious orders. More importantly, however, he offered it "to afford models of organization and to furnish more particular information as to details of work and rules of government for such persons in our own Church as may desire to labor in and through such organizations themselves, or to set them in operation for others." Potter hoped to make direct use of such information at Grace Church: his 1870 outline of plans for Grace House 1870 included "apartments for the two or three godly women" who would be trained in parish work; in 1871 he expressed the hope that a deaconess association might shortly be formed at Grace; and in 1873 he raised the idea of establishing at Grace a "Home and Training House for Nurses." Due in part to the Panic of 1873, and in part to continuing official ambivalence over sisterhoods and deaconesses in the Episcopal Church, these plans were not realized while Potter was rector. After he became bishop in 1883, however, his successor, William Reed Huntington, established a Deaconess Home and Training School at Grace Church in 1890. In the previous year, Huntington had played a key role at the General Convention in securing official sanction for orders of deaconesses. Also during Potter's episcopate, plans for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine included a separate building for a train-

ing school for deaconesses. This building, however, was not completed until 1912, four years after Potter's death.\textsuperscript{14}

During his episcopate, Potter visibly supported various women church workers. After his consecration in October 1883, his first official action was to visit the Midnight Mission operated by the Sisters of St. John the Baptist. He continued to support various sisterhoods by officiating at the reception of new members and the opening of new buildings, and by speaking publicly in their behalf. In late 1883 and early 1884, Potter also preached at services for women church workers at several New York congregations. Speaking of these services in his address to the 1884 diocesan convention, he expressed gratitude for the women undertaking this service. He also noted that for them "some more definite and explicit instruction has long been needed, and in initiating the services which I have this day reported to you, it is my hope that we have but begun a series of such instructions, to be continued from year to year, and in which I trust that I may have the help of my reverend brethren of the clergy and others." Potter continued to preach at such services annually for many years, and five of these sermons were published in 1887 as \textit{Addresses to Women Engaged in Church Work}. Primarily instructional and inspirational in content, these addresses add little to our understanding of Potter's view of women's church work and could, indeed, have been addressed to any group engaged in mission work at that time.\textsuperscript{15}

One address, however, suggests a major concern of many at the time, namely, that women engaged in church work be under the supervision of men. Potter's 1871 report to the Board of Missions had noted that both parochial and diocesan sisterhoods "should not only be subject ... to the general supervision and unreserved inspection of the bishop, but also in a sense peculiar and exclusive, to his need and call." In this context, his emphasis was primarily on having available to the bishop's direction an effective force capable of timely mobilization. In an 1886 address, however, Potter appealed directly to the need for subordination to authority. Discussing the conditions of the "realm of order," Potter exhorted women church workers to adopt a proper subordination, for "there must be some

\textsuperscript{14} Potter, \textit{Sisterhoods and Deaconesses}, 7-15; Hodges, \textit{Henry Codman Potter}, 78; \textit{ARGP} 1870, 41; \textit{ARGP} 1871, 52; \textit{ARGP} 1872, 47-55; Potter, "The Cathedral Idea" and "Religious Orders" in \textit{Waymarks}, 155 and 211; and Abell, \textit{The Urban Impact on American Protestantism}, 203.

\textsuperscript{15} Journal of the Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of New York, 1884 (New York: John C. Rankin, 1884), 119, 126, 143, 148-52 (hereafter cited as \textit{NYDJ} with the appropriate year); \textit{NYDJ} 1886, 89, 97-108; and Hodges, \textit{Henry Codman Potter}, 131-33, 146.
ultimate dispenser of authority, some ultimate voice that shall give the word of command, in matters of duty and service, in every company, little or great." His argument was not that women must always be subject to men. It was, rather, that those engaged in service must submit loyally to those in authority over them, and must do so not because some are by nature inferior to others, but because an organization needs such subordination to operate effectively. Thus, while urging women church workers to respect the authority of their male superiors, Potter made no appeal to any supposed inherent superiority of men.16

Methodist churches ultimately outdistanced all other Protestant churches in employment of women church workers. The Episcopal Church’s General Convention did not formally approve orders of deaconesses until 1889 and sisterhoods until 1913. This latter action thus came over forty years after Henry Potter had expressed his belief that the Episcopal Church was committed to the recognition and adoption of various associations of women for work in parishes, missions, and elsewhere. While the response of the Episcopal Church to women church workers was surely not what Henry Potter would have hoped, his efforts just as surely helped bring about what measure of their recognition and adoption was achieved by 1913.17

Women, Domesticity, and Labor

As noted above, the "urban-industrial cult of genteel womanhood" set the terms for public debate on the work and well-being of women. Its effect on social Christians was most evident in their discussion of women and labor and their defense of the family, both of which concerns were closely related. The ideology of domesticity maintained that the only sphere of women's labor was the home and, therefore, that those engaged in other forms of labor were less than ideal women. As the foregoing discussion of women's church work demonstrates, however, many women were engaged nevertheless in nondomestic labor. While he affirmed that women were by nature and divine design endowed with abilities different from those of men, Henry Potter supported the expansion of women's field of endeavor. In his treatment of domesticity and women's waged labor, Potter further expanded women's field of endeavor.

Potter first articulated his position on women, domesticity, and labor in an 1877 address delivered at the Packer Institute in Brooklyn. This address is notable both as an example of Potter's rhetoric and reasoning and as a critique of the ideology of domesticity. In it, while supporting the ideology of domesticity in principle, he nevertheless criticized its application under contemporary conditions, argued for women's right to labor in spheres other than the home, and urged women to support those of their sisters who sought both to exercise and defend that right. Such support for women's right to work outside the home was consistent with his advocacy of expanding women's roles in church work. This address, moreover, demonstrates that after nine years at Grace Church, and perhaps because of his involvement with its various service programs, Potter had developed an understanding of the realities of working women's lives.  

Taking as his text the story of the prophetess Deborah in Judges 4, Potter suggested that perhaps Deborah would not be of interest to most women because "a woman's idea of a happy and useful life is not usually a life of active effort on the platform or in public." Rather, he claimed,

A woman's idea of happiness and usefulness ordinarily centres (and who shall say that it does not rightly centre?) in a home. First of all to have a home, and then to make it fair and bright, and then, if it may be, to share it with another to whom it shall be a welcome haven of rest and sunshine,—such a longing, which is simply the outcome of that divine instinct in accordance with which God long ago set the solitary in families, is surely as right as it is natural.

In addition, he commended the tendency of "the vast majority" of women to register their disapproval "when any woman or set of women, undertakes to break out of the restraints of home, to proclaim a larger liberty for her sex, or demand what are called 'Woman's rights.'—Further still, he observed that "[s]uch persons are called 'unwomanly,'—and sometimes they are, and women are wisely reminded that their proper sphere and their worthiest throne is in the home." With a telling rhetoric-

18. Potter, "The Duty of Woman to Women," in *Sermons of the City* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1881), 125-41; cf. Harriette A. Keyser, *Bishop Potter, the People's Friend* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1910), 5-10, who observes: "At the early date when the sermons from which we are quoting were preached, there were few who realized that industrial emancipation depends upon political equality, and, that, the disenfranchisement of woman acts as a two-edged sword wounding both man and woman. . . . It will be refreshing to note what Bishop Potter had to say ... about women in the political and industrial world."
cal question, however, Potter signaled his intent to qualify this stand: "But is there not something to be said on the other side, and is it not time that it was said?" To this question he responded:

We have been accustomed to hear the constantly reiterated assertion that "woman's sphere is the home." I confess for one that in view of the actual facts of society, as they exist around us, there is often in such words a sound of cruel irony. Do not you and I know, that there are thousands of women to whom a home is as impossible a thing as a castle in Spain? Do we not know that there are thousands of young girls in these two sister cities of ours [Brooklyn and New York] who have no human being but themselves to depend upon, and who must somehow make their way and earn their own bread in life? Will you tell me how a home or any thing else than a room and a hard, stern struggle for life is possible to these?

From this recognition that the actual conditions of many women's lives was sharply at variance with the ideology of domesticity, Potter proceeded to cast doubt on the benefits of marriage for women and to cite a recent study to demonstrate that there were many more women than men in the population of the northeastern states. He also criticized an unqualified ideology of domesticity and defended women's right to labor and to the support of men and women when they exercise that right.

Doubtless some of them will marry and preside over households of their own, but even if the marriage relation were the one invariable, inevitable, infallibly blessed relation for women which some people account it, what do you propose to do when already on the eastern coast of this new country of ours we have reached that condition which Mr. Greg, in his social judgments, refers to under the interrogative title, "Why are women redundant?" In other words, what shall we do with our superfluous women? There are eighty thousand more women than men in the state of Massachusetts alone. Now then, unless these eighty thousand are all women of fortune, it is a solemn trifling with a very grave and very urgent problem to tell them that "woman's sphere is in the home."... It is Pharaoh commanding the captive Israelites to make brick without straw to bid the great army of solitary and dependent women back to the home, and when to this sort of exhortation there is added the sneer of ridicule or contempt for strong-minded women and women's rights and the like, it is adding mockery to heartlessness. Surely a woman has some rights as well as a man. Surely, too, among these is the right to earn her own living, and to maintain her virtuous independence if there be none other to maintain her in virtuous dependence. And most surely of all, in every such endeavor women deserve the most cordial sympathy of the more favored of their own sex, and not less the generous approval of men.
Potter acknowledged that he had "no sympathy with any radicalism of female reform more than with any other extravagance" but did not offer any specific examples of such "radicalism." Nevertheless, contradicting his earlier commendation of women who criticized their more radical sisters, he quoted with approval an unidentified Englishwoman:

"I wish it were felt that women who are laboring for women are not necessarily one-sided or selfish or self-asserting.... When men nobly born and possessing advantages of wealth and education have fought the battles of poor men, and have claimed and wrung from parliaments an extension of privileges enjoyed by a few to classes of their fellowmen who were toiling and suffering, I do not remember ever to have heard them charged with self-seeking; on the contrary, the regard that such men have had for the rights of their fellowmen has been praised, and deservedly so, as noble and unselfish." And the same writer goes on to ask, in substance, why it is that the endeavors of men for men cease to become praiseworthy when they become the endeavors of women for women?

This view Potter justified by his interpretation of the contemporary socioeconomic situation as "a transition-period from the old state of labor for men and domesticity for women, to a period in which there must be found labor for women as well as for men." While he seems not to have realized that the division of "labor for men and domesticity for women" was a recent historical phenomenon, he nevertheless denied its legitimacy in the contemporary context and affirmed that what women ask is "that we shall so widen the sphere of woman that whatever work she can do modestly and well she shall be permitted and encouraged to attempt." By this qualification of "modestly" Potter meant not humbly, but decorously. Believing that "womanliness" entailed some limitation on women's labor, he affirmed that there were "some callings from which, as it seems to me, women must forever remain shut out." Such callings would be those that required "conspicuous publicity, masculine activities, and out-door leadership," examples of which were "hanging from a yard-arm, driving a steam-engine, digging in a coal mine, or vociferating in congress." These and like cases he regarded as exceptions, however, maintaining that "when we have eliminated from the question those occupations from which healthy self-respect would restrain any really womanly woman, there remain a vast range of employments on which women have not yet entered, but for which, nevertheless, they have singular and supreme qualifications." Potter's appeal to women's "singular and supreme qualifications" clearly indicates his assumption of women's "special nature," an assumption further indicated by his example of
women's facility in "the science of telegraphy." Women were, according to him, "more expert in it than men can possibly be" because they are superior to "almost any man" in their possession of "a quick ear, and a sensitive touch, and the art of rapid and exact manipulation."

In this context, Potter used the appeal to women's special nature to argue not for restricting their labor to the home, but rather for increasing women's opportunities for nondomestic labor. Indicating that he was aware that the urban-industrial gender division of labor was not timeless, he also noted: "It is a curious and scarcely known fact that in the Middle Ages, the daughters as well as the sons in a family often inherited and carried on the family art or handicraft." He therefore concluded his argument:

Why should we deny any modest calling or handicraft, whether behind the counter or in the work-shop, to those whose maintenance and happiness would both alike be found in its pursuit? To this question there is really no answer. Unless we claim that men are a superior caste whose vocations must not be profaned by the entrance upon them of women, there is really no option for us but to proclaim the freedom of labor, and to contend for that freedom until it shall become complete and universal.

Potter then urged women to "awaken to the needs of her own sex" and, as Deborah roused Barak, "waken us men to the cruelties . . . in which too often and too widely the weak of your sex are to-day oppressed. Do not, then, be afraid to lift your voice in any good cause that aims to elevate women to equal chance and equal respect and equal emolument with men in the great struggle for life." Here again, Potter appealed to women's special nature, and again used it to expand women's sphere beyond, rather than restrict it to, the home.

It is our province who are men to reach a consciousness of wrongs to be righted and evils to be remedied by the slower process of reasoning. It is yours to see those wrongs with the more penetrating vision of an often unerring insight, and, not unfrequently, long before men have been awakened to them to burn with a sense of their oppression and their injustice.

Potter warned women that if they attempted to so raise their voices, many would call them rather "to be the 'angel of the house,'" limiting their concern for the care of those within their homes. Further, suggesting that he grasped some of the negative implications for women of the cult of genteel womanhood, he also warned that the woman who heeded such a call would "inevitably become a drudge, an idler, or a toy." Rather than urge women to abandon their domestic responsibilities, however, he
urged that they not be limited by them. To justify both this "widening [of] the range of our vision" and the empowering of women to do so, Potter appealed to the example and work of Jesus Christ, "that Master whose footsteps, whatever human allegiance may come to be ours, we are supremely called to follow." Potter maintained that the work of Jesus Christ was especially characterized by

the breadth of His sympathies for all, and their especial courageousness and explicitness in the interest of woman. He emancipates her, in one instance, from legal thraldom, in another from hereditary disabilities, in another from social exile, in another from masculine contempt. His words to one who came to Him merely for the healing of the body, "Woman, thou art loosed," are the key to every one of His acts and utterances toward the whole sex. Those acts and utterances are best described by the one word 'liberation,' and freedom,—freedom from the servitude of a despised inferiority, and the degrading relation of a chattel or a toy is the whole spirit of His Gospel.

Thus liberated by Jesus Christ from an inferior status, women, in Potter's view, were free to exercise their "special" gifts to further Jesus' work, specifically the realization for all women of the liberation he promised.

If you see that there are wrongs, injustices, social tyrannies ... in the punishments that are meted out to womanly, as distinguished from manly, errors, in the meagre opportunities that are afforded for a woman's virtuous and self-respecting independence, in the indifference that will not bestir itself to cheer and brighten and encourage a working woman's weakness, despondency, and loneliness—then resolve, I beseech you, that it shall be your high privilege to speak for these and to rouse others to speak and strive for them as well. Be, each one of you, a Deborah to cry to some slumberous Barak, "Up and do the Master's work, in the spirit of the Master's example!"

This closing exhortation suggests another element of the ideology of domesticity as employed by social Christians, namely, the conviction that the moral influence of women was essential for the Christianization of the social order. While Potter did not explicitly appeal to that conviction in this address, he did make use of it in his later writings and addresses on domesticity and the family.19

During his remaining six years at Grace Church, a primary means of Potter's continuing support for women beyond the limits of the ideology of domesticity were the church's outreach programs. By the time Potter became Assistant Bishop in 1883, programs that provided concrete aid to women, and largely administered and supported by women, included: a

chapter of the Girls' Friendly Association, providing "mutual help and assistance" for working girls and young women; a Diet Kitchen, providing "appropriate and nourishing" meals to poor people when sick; the Industrial School, teaching sewing to girls so that they might support themselves; the Ladies' Benevolent Society, which employed poor women as seamstresses producing garments donated to charitable institutions; the St. Luke's Association, providing "temporal and spiritual ministrations" to the sick; the Day Nursery, providing day care for children of women working outside their homes; and the Fresh Air Fund, providing women and children with summer holidays in rural areas. With the exception of the Industrial School, all of these programs were established during Potter's term as rector.\(^20\)

In this period and later, Potter also worked in organizations with women in leadership positions. Such organizations included the State Charities Aid Association, under the presidency of Louisa Lee Schuyler; the Charity Organization Society and the New York Consumers League, both under the leadership of Josephine Shaw Lowell; the New York Committee on Mediation and Conciliation, of which Josephine Shaw Lowell was a member; and the Church Association for the Advancement of the Interests of Labor (C.A.I.L.), of which Harriette Keyser was secretary and organizer. As Bishop, he supported working women through his participation in the work of C.A.I.L. In 1890, two years before Potter was named one of its honorary vice presidents, C.A.I.L. cooperated with the Working Women's Society of New York in convening a public meeting. At this meeting, the "oppressive conditions in retail stores entailing much suffering on women and children passed under scathing review by the clerical speakers," with William Reed Huntington representing the Episcopal Church. The meeting led to the establishment of a "white list" of fair employers with whom consumers were encouraged to trade, and to the formation of the New York Consumers' League, which expanded the effort to mobilize the buying public's power to compel fair employment practices.\(^{21}\)


According to Keyser, Potter "was always interested in the efforts of the Society [C.A.I.L.] to minimize, and finally destroy, the sweating system," the practice of hiring workers, largely women and children, to produce goods out of their own homes for meager wages. In addition to undercutting the labor and wages of those regularly employed in shops, this practice was a primary means of exploiting women's and children's labor. When the Cloakmakers Union struck against the sweating system in 1895, Dr. Annie Bryan, a reform-minded Episcopalian, requested that the St. Michael's Church chapter of C.A.I.L. convene a meeting on the matter. Potter not only endorsed the meeting but presided at it, remarking on, in Keyser's words, "the unchristian character of underpaid labor." As a result of this meeting, the St. Michael's chapter formed a Committee on Sweating. This committee investigated employment practices among garment manufacturers in Manhattan and Brooklyn, issued a report of its findings, and circulated a list of manufacturers using fair employment practices. In 1899, Potter spoke at the annual C.A.I.L. supper and addressed, among other issues of labor reform, the inadequate staffing of sweatshop inspection by the State of New York.22

Potter's published work from 1878 until the turn of the century contains few references to women, labor, and domesticity. In an article in The Century magazine in November 1884, for example, he discussed the relation of Christian ethics to the social science that had arisen, by his account, only in the previous quarter century. Among the elements of this social science he included "the devotion of women of wealth, leisure, and social refinement to the reform and improvement of our jails and hospitals and almshouses" as well as "the whole subject of the rights of women and their emancipation from restrictive and oppressive prejudices." Like many of his contemporaries, Potter returned to these issues when, in the 1890s, socialists, feminists, and the increasing immigration of non-Anglo-Saxon peoples challenged the middle-class family ideal. Many social Christians, including Potter, responded to these challenges with a defense of the family ideal that emphasized its importance for the stability and, ultimately, Christianization of the nation. In 1898, Potter was among a group of six clergy who addressed these issues in a series of lectures on Christianity and social issues delivered at the Divinity School of New

Haven and published the following year. In his "The Message of Christ to the Family," Potter appealed both to nature and history to demonstrate that the family was "an institution which is divine, and which, in the mind of God, is bound up forever with the progress and well-being of the race." Further, he maintained that Jesus had "consecrate[d] it forever by His own most intimate relation with it," as seen especially in the way in which he "turned to it more and more frequently, as the great crisis of His life and work drew on, to gather strength for that crisis."23

Potter also attended to the ways the influences of the times "combined to make the family more and more an institution to be indifferently regarded in itself, and distinctly disparaged as to its obligations and its authority." Explicitly following Horace Bushnell, he attributed this state of affairs to the rise of individualism and the consequent loss of "the idea of organic powers and relations" among "the three great forces which God appointed for the race"—the state, the church, and the family. Against these trends, Potter commended "the preciousness and the sanctity of the family" and, specifically, the "sanctity of the marriage tie." He cited in this context Jesus' teaching on divorce and quoted at some length from Shailer Mathews's "admirable volume," The Social Teachings of Jesus. Following Mathews, Potter argued that the foundation for Jesus' explicitness on divorce was the status of marriage as the basis of the family, and of the family as the basis of society. Thus, in Mathews's words: "To disclaim this first of human relations is to loosen the bonds of society; to lower present social ideals; to do injury to the essential nature both of the man and the woman. . . ." Indeed, as Potter observed, "no questions touch more closely or deeply the fundamental interests of human society" than those which bear on the family.

Again citing Bushnell, Potter justified the importance of the family for society by maintaining that "there is no school like it in all the world for educating high ideals, and developing a lofty type of character." Such, he maintained, was the example provided by the "American forefathers" whose "mutuality of love and service" produced "that fine race of mothers whose sons and daughters were the joy and glory of our earlier his-

tory." Potter also noted the confluence, recognized by those "American forefathers," of the images of the Family and the Kingdom of God.

God was a King, indeed, but He was most of all a Father. Christ was a Saviour and a Redeemer, verily, but He was to be no less our Elder Brother. The Church was His Kingdom, supreme and preeminent among all the kingdoms of the world, but it was equally and always His peerless and precious Bride. And the law which ruled within that Kingdom was to be forever the law of filial love and loyalty.

Taking this image to be a "vision of the life that is to be," he maintained that "whatever else of earthly and human institutions vanishes out of the realm and the life that are to be, the family in its highest and most absolutely perfect type will still endure." With this view of the family, Potter concluded with a call to "[h]onor its authority, reverence its sanctity, prize and cultivate its intercourse."

Part of the social background of this address and contemporary social gospel literature was the perception among middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestants that many of their contemporaries were shirking their social and familial obligations by having few or no children or by leaving the care of their children in the hands of others. In this address, delivered to an audience primarily of men, Potter emphasized the responsibilities of women and mothers. In other articles and addresses of this period, he repeated this emphasis but also attended to the responsibilities of men and fathers and qualified his uncritical glorification of the family ideal in his 1898 "The Message of Christ to the Family."24

From 1901 through 1907, Potter published five articles on domesticity and the family in popular magazines. In the earlier two, he variously encouraged mothers to motherliness; decried the neglect of children by their fathers; and maintained that, for both men and women, "the only possibility of happiness in the last half of any life lies in children." He also warned of the social and economic pressures that were undermining home and family, and repeated that the home was "the actual foundation of the nation; the bedrock upon which the national structure rests; the only basis from which the national strength can be calculated. It is the only school of purity and of patriotism."25 In the latter three articles, pub-

lished in *Harper's Bazar* the year before his death, Potter displayed a more critical view of the ideology of domesticity. In the second of these, in the context of a discussion of the pace of modern life for women, he noted that "no more tremendous change has come to pass in the last half-century than that which has occurred in the realm of woman." This change Potter regarded specifically as the shift from a society where the ideal of domesticity for women prevailed, to one where women were able to make significant contributions in various spheres.

In other words, it is undeniable that half a century ago the ideal of woman was domesticity; and the virtues which find their fittest sphere in the retirement of the home were accounted of preeminent value. But all that is changed, and it can never be forgotten (and I pray Heaven that it never may be!) that such services as Dorothea Dix and Florence Nightingale and Sister Dora and their kind have illustrated were not rendered by staying at home.

Indeed, history is full of memorable figures that, whatever the age and whatever the land, all the way from Deborah to Joan of Arc, have told men that the loftiest service and the highest heroisms, whether on battle-fields or in hospitals, might be achieved by women as truly as men. In a word, the race is coming, late and slowly, it is true, to learn that neither sex has a monopoly of those greater qualities upon which are built the triumph of nations and the victory of the truth.

Potter observed that although "there have never been wanting illustrations of women in every race and age and clime who have risen above their kind and have revealed the most splendid gifts in most splendid deeds," such illustrations, due to the restrictions imposed on women, have largely been exceptions. He suggested, however, that such exceptions would increasingly become the rule, for "the whole situation is changed, and is destined to be still more extensively changed during this twentieth century."

In this context, Potter related an anecdote about an encounter with "a masterful lady who, with imperious mien and strident voice, demanded, 'Sir! What is your opinion of woman's suffrage?' On the one hand, his depiction of this encounter betrays a condescending attitude toward both the issue of women's suffrage and at least some of the women advocating it. On the other, upon referring to a prediction by a "learned American professor" that "in thirty-five years the reins of government in these United States will be in the hands of women," Potter did not repeat his 1877 opposition to women "vociferating in congress." His comment on this prospect, rather, was to observe that "whether in so short a time we
are destined to see any such prophecy fulfilled, or not, this, I think, will be freely admitted—that our generation has seen a tremendous change in the relation of women to modern life." Potter took it as unnecessary to demonstrate this change, but repeated here his earlier defense of women's right to labor for self-support, particularly against the charges that women had "unfairly forced themselves" into some occupations and that they are hired because they work "not better, but more cheaply" than men. As this reference to women's suffrage is the only one found in Potter's published writings, it is clear that it was not an issue of major concern for him. It is equally clear, nevertheless, that Potter did not on this matter follow the views of Bushnell, whose *Women's Suffrage: The Reform Against Nature* had been published in 1869.26

Near the end of this article, Potter praised "that magnificent advance which, in regard to women's service, our age has witnessed." He maintained that such service was rendered "not merely in those departments of service which are especially feminine, such as nursing and the care and ministration of the sick," but also in "those various relations which women have assumed to public education, to the sanitary improvement of towns and villages, and to social and moral reform in many of their most difficult and delicate aspects." Potter not only defended this advance, but criticized as "unintelligent" and "ill-natured" the ridicule of women's nondomestic work.

For when all the deductions which are demanded by women's overzealous enthusiasms have been made, there still remain the indisputable facts of her often mental and temperamental superiority. She has quicker intuitions than I have. She has a nicer touch than I. She has a larger patience than is mine. Shall not these gifts make her better fitted for certain tasks than I? To insist otherwise is not to be acute, but pig-headed and stupid. And, alas! that is what men have been for a great many centuries.

Potter thus continued to rely on the ideology of women's special nature while upholding the value of women's work outside the home. He also maintained, then, that women's special gifts of "[s]ympathy, delicacy, quickness of perception, and an undiscouraged faith in human nature" needed to be balanced by men's gifts of "a sane judgment and a wise reserve," in the same way that men's gifts needed to be balanced by women's. In the third of his 1907 articles for *Harper's Bazar*, Potter

returned to an evaluation of "the modern home" and defense of the home and family as the source of "all nobility and character that the world has ever known." His argument here was substantially the same as that in his 1898 "The Message of Christ to the Family," and again reflects the concerns that both men and women must fulfill their social and familial obligations to avoid weakening the social and political order.  

In the same month that this article appeared, the *American Journal of Sociology* published a discussion, to which Potter contributed, of the effects of the reduced birth-rate in the United States. The author of the paper initiating the discussion, Edward A. Ross, acknowledged that there were some "disquieting effects" of this trend, including the "selfish evasion of all duties to the race" of men and women motivated by an "exaggerated individualism." He maintained, however, that the reduced birth-rate was "at bottom salutary" because of its potential for reducing "famine, war, saber-tooth competition, class antagonism, the degradation of the masses, the wasting of children, the dwarfing of women, and the cheapening of men." In his response, Potter defended the importance of family and home but condemned the glorification of large numbers of children. As in his earlier treatments of the family, he again referred to the ideals of the "founders of the Republic" and, especially, their "clear and profound conviction as to the august office, authority, and origin of the family." From this conviction, he noted, there proceeded the sense of the "sacred calling" of a large family which, by the turn of the century, had "widely ceased to prevail." Potter did not, however, call for a return to this view of the family. He regarded as more important than the question of how many children were being born the question of "[u]nder what conditions are they being born and reared, and what is the promise of their maturity to the well-being of the state?" He noted the supposed threat of rapid population growth among "immigrants from all parts of the world," but doubted that it would overcome the "higher ideals of the family" then prevailing in the country. As to the broader question of relation of the family size to the welfare of the state, and perhaps recalling that his own mother had died shortly after she bore her seventh child, Potter criticized the unqualified ideology of domesticity for women on the grounds of its mortal consequences for women's lives.

It may be that we shall strive in vain to re-erect upon its throne that august sovereignty of the family which deified fatherhood, and which slaughtered

women in the interest of bearing sixteen children! I am not prepared, at any rate, to say that some of those earlier theories of huge families were anything better than the selfish incarnation of unconsciously hypocritical ideas (for there is such a thing as "unconscious hypocrisy") disguising itself as religious duty.

Nevertheless, he decried "what somebody has aptly called 'shirking the penalties of marriage'" because it had "begotten among us a group of nameless vices, of which prenatal infanticide is only one, and which deserve alike our indignant reprobation and our hostility." Potter thus upheld the ideal of domesticity, but in a form which enabled women to avoid some of its burdens and embrace some nondomestic opportunities.28

**Conclusion**

Like that of most of his ecclesiastical contemporaries, Henry Potter's treatment of issues pertinent to the work and well-being of women presents an ambiguous legacy. On the one hand, he substantially upheld the tenets of the urban-industrial cult of genteel womanhood, with its ideal of domesticity for women and its ideology of women's special nature; on the other hand, he at times explicitly criticized key aspects of the ideal of domesticity, and regularly supported activities for women at variance with that ideal. On the one hand he glorified the family as divinely ordained, eternally valuable, and the source of personal and social character; on the other, he recognized some of the negative consequences for women of a child- and home-centered life. On the one hand, he ardently worked for temperance reform, a concern central to women's well-being and on which many women labored; on the other hand, his temperance writings and activities reflect no consciousness of why temperance reform was particularly important to women or of the ways in which the consumption of alcohol adversely affected women and children differently than it did men.

Potter vigorously defended women's right to work outside the home, both in reform and mission work and in industrial labor. Further, appealing to the ideology of women's special nature, he argued not only for their right to but also for their competence in nondomestic labor. Also

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on the basis of women's supposed special nature, he wished to keep them out of certain types of work, but by the end of his life may have dropped his earlier opposition to women in politics. Potter's view of the role of women in society implied the standard social gospel understanding of the potential for women's moral influence in Christianizing the social order, but nowhere in his work did he make this explicit. In addition, nowhere did he clearly indicate either his support for or opposition to women's suffrage.

Consciously emulating ante-bellum and war-time initiatives to expand women's church work, Potter's support for women's involvement in mission and reform endeavors helped to expand the limits of women's work and enhance their well-being. Building on that tradition, he went beyond some of his contemporaries (but not as far as others) in his support for women's right to and competence in industrial labor. In this respect, then, he helped expand the limits of women's work further still. Potter was not unique in this regard. That he and others sometimes took positions at variance with the urban-industrial cult of genteel womanhood, particularly in the early postwar decades, suggests in part that its hegemony was achieved only gradually over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Conversely, that such hegemony was achieved suggests that the critique of the ideology of domesticity by Potter and others was insufficient to achieve genuine equality and justice for women. Nevertheless, Potter and others certainly sought, within the limits of their assumptions and convictions, to achieve such justice and equality.