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**“Universalist Response to Women in Ministry:
The Example of the First Ordained Woman, Lydia Jenkins (1824-1874)”**

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Notes from discussion after paper presentation 11/21/14:

- Dave Johnson: when settled ministers did supply preaching, it was often their wives who covered the pulpit and the church, without necessarily getting credit; when ministers went to meeting, their wives often went along; some may have gone as delegates: can check presence of women delegates at conventions
- Dave Johnson: in Univ, lay women always important; Thomas whittemore: really nasty to them
- Dan McKanan: Pursue her use of ‘feminist theology’: check cross denominational use
- Jay Atkinson and others: it may be that fellowship was the more important ritual than ordination; look in incidents of fellowshipping, esp among women; what matters is service to a church: not ordination
- Look into preaching women, esp in other denomination: ex AME: Jemima Lee: what influence of these preachers on LAJ?
- Colin Bossen: abby price was preaching during Hopedale time: influence on LAJ?
- Dan Mckanan: perhaps what Whittemore meant by questioning ordination what that the process overall among Universalists in 1858 was so undefined, that it was hard to say that the entire denomination was ordaining anyone: BUT why would he also not say that in commenting on ordinations of male ministers?
- DM: BC comment that can’t prove spiritualism in Jenkins: no comment, perhaps they weren’t: not every Universalist was
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Introduction¹

Unitarian Universalists rightly celebrate their heritage of women in ministry. In the history of women’s ordination, liberal ancestors of Unitarian Universalists were in the vanguard. The generally accepted report is that in 1863 Universalists were the first denomination to ordain a woman, Olympia Brown, and in 1871 Celia Burleigh became the first ordained Unitarian woman. Through roughly 1920, when American women secured suffrage, both denominations continued a fairly robust women’s ministry: possibly as many as two hundred were ordained. The decline of women in ministry after 1920 until Second Wave Feminism brought a new wave of women to Unitarian Universalist ministry, is a different story best left for another Collegium paper.

¹ I am grateful to Rosemary McAtee for her partnership in recovering the life of Lydia Jenkins. Without Rosemary’s superb skills in searching online historical newspapers, Lydia’s story would continue to lie hidden in the archives of mid-nineteenth-century women reform activity. Gratitude also to Cliff Wunderlich of Andover Harvard Theological Library for long-distance research assistance.

Many members of this Collegium seminar have heard previous reports about my research and book-in-progress on Lydia Ann Jenkins (1824-1874). In addition to her contributions to mid-nineteenth-century Universalism, Lydia was also an effective leader in social and health reform, yet she has been dropped from most historical records except for spare and sometimes incorrect tidbits about her life. My book will claim her as the first woman ordained to Universalist ministry with full denominational authority, in 1860, three years before Olympia Brown, and thus the first American woman ordained with full denominational authority.²

Yet more important than the single act of ordination was the effect Lydia had on expanding gender boundaries in liberal faith. Her entry into ministry illustrates much more clearly than does Olympia's the challenges women experienced instigating denominational change. There is much more documentation --- from her own voice and from many other observers--- about Lydia's boundary-breaking ministry than was generated in response to any other early woman minister, including Olympia Brown: Lydia caused much more ruckus among Universalists and in the wider reform community. My work will also bring into clearer light her accomplishments in women's rights and health reform. It is indeed curious that history has so forgotten Lydia Jenkins.

This paper does not focus *per se* on the events in Lydia's ministry. Instead, it examines reception of that ministry by Universalists, women's rights reformers, and the public at large. I draw information and quote many passages from newspaper accounts, journal articles, and denominational reports: an underlined abbreviated notation of the source follows each quote, a full list of citations appearing at the end of this paper, listed by publication and then chronologically within each publication. In one short paper I can examine only one woman's ministry, yet I suggest that reactions to Lydia may be applied more broadly to the reception of other pioneer Unitarian and Universalist women ministers.

A brief summary of Lydia's life, focused in particular on her five years of active full-time ministry, will be useful to my discussion of reception.³ Lydia Moulton grew up central up-state New York, 'Burned-over' by Charles Finney's Second Great Awakening. Family influences left her with a curious combination of radical access to education for women and conservative religious grounding in Calvinist theology and scriptural authority. Probably through connections in reform work, Lydia met Universalist Edmund Jenkins and they married between 1843 and 1846. In the first half of the 1850s, they were actively engaged in most of the prevailing social reforms in central New York: temperance, abolition, women's health, and women's rights. For five of these years, they lived in Waterloo, where they participated in Congregational Friends, a radical Quaker meeting. During this social reform period, Lydia published nearly twenty articles, most of these in the temperance / women's rights monthly *The Lily*. She attended at least fifteen

² I have described Olympia's ordination in Barbara Coeyman, "Celebrating the Ordination of Olympia Brown: Context and Implications," *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* (XXXVII: 2013-2014), 126-152. Charles Howe repeats an error about Olympia Brown's ordination begun in her autobiography, that she was ordained by the Northern Association in New York: it was the St. Lawrence Association. Charles Howe, "Under Orders from No Man: Universalist Women Preachers Before the Civil War," *The John Murray Distinguished Lecture for 1989* (Murray Grove Association, 1991), 47-48.

³ For more biographical detail, see Handout One attached to this paper.

regional, state, or national conventions and meetings before her shift to ministry, where she networked with prominent antebellum social reformers. Historian Sylvia Hoffert names Lydia among the fourteen women core to antebellum women's right.⁴ Lydia was cited frequently in reform and public (penny) press: to date I have found several hundred citations of her name and activities during her reform period.

Lydia was called to the pulpit while on a social reform speaking tour 'far from home' (probably in the Midwest) in fall 1856. From 1857 to 1862 she turned her reform focus to Universalist ministry. On stepping into the pulpit, she immediately became the subject of a flurry of reports in Universalist and penny press, the articles especially frequent and opinionated from 1857 through early 1859. With it Edmund, also a Universalist minister, she maintained an intense schedule of itinerant preaching and short settlements through 1862. She reported serving five societies, usually two or more at the same time, and preached in all New England and Middle Atlantic states but two. Of her own report, in these five years she presented 638 "discourses," which I take to mean both sermons and lectures, averaging 130 a year. Of these discourses, I have identified just under one hundred of the worship services which she led as an itinerant preacher, primarily in Universalist pulpits in New York City, New York State, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania. She was fellowshipped by the Ontario Association of Universalists (Rochester area) in June 1858 and she and Edmund together were ordained by this Association sometime in the first half of 1860, probably before they assumed the ministry of the Universalist Church in Clinton in March, 1860 for one year. They also served Clinton Liberal Institute for that year. Lydia was also invited to other prominent speaking engagements, such as to Theodore Parker's church and Lombard University's commencement in 1859, but neither invitation came to fruition. She also preached at the New York State Universalist Convention in September 1858 and apparently spoke at the Universalist National General Convention that month. William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *The Liberator* reported in August 1860 that at that point, in co-ministry with Edmund, she had charge of three different societies. She also said she usually preached three times a day, and she was a leader of the young ladies' school in Clinton, New York.⁵

She stopped preaching in 1862, worn out not from demands of public speaking but because 'the minister is expected, as she said, to *'conform to the habits of the families'* she stayed with (Autobiography 2). Concern about conditions for hosting itinerant preachers may have been in the air among Universalists, as reflect in the comments from a writer identified as 'E.M.F.G.':

Let her be treated with regard to comfort, and not by vain culinaries, unwholesome for food, and displaying more regard for the customs of the times than for the promotion or preservation of health. Let her have airy apartments, particularly to sleep in, and well ventilated houses to speak in; for her usefulness will much depend on these attentions to her wishes in obedience to the laws of health, and these have been overlooked in some instances when illness was the result.... She ate as we did, preferring vegetarian food, simply cooked, and over the table we sat hours, feasting our social and intellectual as well as physical natures. (CA Aug 21, 1858)

⁴ Sylvia Hoffert, *When Hens Crow: The Women's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995)

⁵ "A Woman in the Clerical," *Liberator* (Aug. 31, 1860).

During the 1863-64 academic year Lydia and Edmund attended Dr. Russell Trall's Hygienic Institute in New York City to become doctors of watercure. After one year in Hammonton, New Jersey, for reasons which I have not yet clearly determined, they returned to central New York for one year and in 1866 settled in Binghamton, New York, to operate their own watercure establishment and to serve Universalist ministry on an occasional schedule. In Binghamton, Lydia wrote many essays for Universalist newspapers and alternative medicine magazines. She died in 1874 at the age of fifty as a result of a fire in their home. She did not receive an obituary in the *Universalist Register*, only in the Universalist paper *Christian Leader*.⁶ The first report about Lydia published after her death seems to be in E.R. Hanson's *Our Woman Workers*, of 1882. It seems to be Hansen who was the source of the report that Lydia was physically infirm her entire life, a report which I have not been able to confirm. Hanson's article is also incorrect in reporting that Lydia was never ordained. Subsequent reporters and historians may have learned about Lydia through Hanson's book: for example, in 1901 an article in the *New York Tribune* described Lydia as a preacher without ordination.⁷

The lens of reception of Lydia Jenkins' ministry which I offer in this paper supports several of my broader conclusions about Lydia's influence on breaking gender boundaries in liberal ministry:⁸

-First, I suggest that Lydia and other women entered Universalist ministry not primarily because they were welcomed with open arms by Universalists but rather because there were no rules specifically preventing women from ordination, as there were limitations on women's ordination in many other denominations. My interpretation of this viewpoint is based on theories about ordaining women developed by Marc Chavez.⁹

-It is clear that Lydia and many other early women in ministry were significantly aided in their capacity to break ministry's boundaries because of their prior experiences in women's rights advocacy. They used tools acquired as social reformers for their entry into religion, the last and toughest area of life to be influenced by the sweeping reform climate of the mid-nineteenth century. Other early women ministers with experience in women's rights included Antoinette Brown, Olympia Brown, Phebe Hanaford, Anna Shaw, and Caroline Dall.

-To that, I interpret Lydia's ministry and the ministries of other nineteenth-century women as statements about women's rights as much as responses to religious callings. Lydia was deeply

⁶ "Obituary: Rev. Lydia Ann Jenkins," *Christian Leader* (May 30, 1874), 346.

⁷ E.R. Hanson, *Our Woman Workers* (Boston, 1881), 426: "An early injury to the spine made her a life-long invalid and impaired her strength for public labor." Possibly Hanson used sources written after Lydia's withdrawal from active ministry in 1862 and concluded that illness kept her from the pulpit. Hanson also errs in reporting that Lydia was never ordained and thus not deserving the title of 'Rev.:' "Miss Padgham Ordained," *New York Tribune* (Sept. 18, 1901).

⁸ I offer here a footnote as a disclaimer of sorts, to say that while there is much evidence that spiritualism was commonly practiced by Universalists and was also a means by which women could assert their own 'voice' in antebellum reform culture, I see no evidence that the Jenkins engaged in spiritualist practice.

⁹ Barbara Coeyman, "19th-Century Women in Liberal Ministry: Symbols of Progress, or Marks of Institutional Conflict?" UU Collegium 2013; Marc Chavez, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997); Howe, "Under Orders," surveys Universalist women preachers before Lydia. He does not claim ordination for Lydia.

religious her whole life --- I have no doubt of the sincerity of her allegiance to Universalism. Yet, I also see her call to the pulpit as her way to address one more important subject area of concern to feminist reformers --- after women's health, temperance, abolition, women's education, and dress reform --- that of religion. She typified many other equity-seeking women of the mid-nineteenth century: white, well-educated, comfortable in the public sphere, and adept at handling a life of tension as she explored her own personal conflict between scientific studies and Calvinist theology. Certainly, she could have been content merely to convert to Universalism without joining the ranks of its preachers, but preaching was a way to spread the good news about this life-giving theology to women.

-Finally, I borrow a lens from Mark Morrison Reed's recent work on Selma, to note that the early reception of women in ministry illustrates what Reed describes as a discrepancy between espoused and practiced values.¹⁰ In Lydia's case, the openness of a theology which she saw Universalists like her husband espousing and which she came to love was frequently in conflict with actual practice of many Universalists reluctant to accept women ministers. Certainly, Lydia also experienced many supportive male colleagues who both espoused and practiced her right to preach, but still she encountered frequent gender discrimination among mid-nineteenth-century Universalists.

Let me then describe and illustrate four aspects of reception of Lydia Jenkins' five years of full-time Universalist ministry: 1) her own prediction of challenges; 2) varieties of reactions from others to the 'woman question'; 3) confusion in the press over ministerial credentialing; and 4) her claim to a feminist theology.

I: Lydia Jenkins Realized the Challenges

In fall 1856 Lydia reported a deep calling to spread to others the Universalist theology which meant so much to her, as she came to find in Universalism:

...the saving power of the grace of God through Christ; ... a realization of salvation in the true Gospel sense.' (Autobiography 2).

Hundreds of miles from home, away upon a lecturing tour, the waters of life flowed in upon my soul, satisfied the thirst of many year, and baptized me anew.... (She heard) Go proclaim this glad tidings to the world. ... I was to add to all these (reform pursuits) that which was of overshadowing importance, that which should comprehend them all and vastly more. (Autobiography 1).

She entered preaching with no expectation of personal fame or gain through denominational endorsement. Instead her motivations were purely prophetic, to seize an opportunity to spread this good news and the Finneyite goal of usefulness:

I said that no desire for notoriety influence me to enter upon the work of the Christian ministry. When I resolved upon this course there was no reason for me to think that any Association would fellowship me. I expected to labor alone and was willing to go up among

¹⁰ Mark Morrison-Reed, *Selma* (Boston: Skinner House, 2013).

the hills of some rural district or in the sturdy forest, wherever a people could be found free enough to hear the truth for its own sake. (CA Oct. 23, 1858).

It seemed to be the work of the minister to quicken in others the desire for usefulness and excellence as well as for happiness. (Autobiography 2)

In March, 1857, at age thirty-three, she began preaching. She was aware of the many challenges which lay ahead. She had no theological training, but in that she matched the preparation --- or lack thereof --- of many of her contemporary male Universalist ministers, including Edmund, who was called to preach in 1853. (He preached on a very part-time basis.)

I knew it would be wrong to shrink from my duty (to this call). With a very imperfect preparation, I entered upon the work and thus far my Father has made it easier than I dared to hope it would ever be. (CA Oct. 23, 1858)

She had no convenient opportunities for ministerial education. In the first half of the nineteenth century, some (male) ministers in New York trained at the Clinton Liberal Institute, whose female department did not offer theology courses.¹¹ The Universalist seminary at St. Lawrence University would open only in 1858 and did not accept women until Olympia Brown's arrival in 1861. In many ways, Lydia's best preparation for ministry was her successful career for a dozen years as a respected, recognized public lecturer and teacher.

She was also not at all sanguine about her reception. It wasn't only that she was stepping into a male public space: she was also preaching a theology out of the mainstream:

I was certainly a great innovation upon time honored custom. (CA Oct 23, 1858)

Still, almost every denomination opened their doors and thousands flocked to hear her. she reported that she preached :

... almost uniformly to eager congregations. (Autobiography 2).

Lydia recognized the challenges of entering the arena of religion. Perhaps of greatest interest for this study of Universalists' reception of a woman preacher, Lydia fully expected resistance from fellow Universalists, and especially from Universalist ministers. Perhaps she experienced gender discrimination if she attended Universalist Association meetings with her fellowshipped husband:

Of the Universalist denomination I knew but little, and I had almost no acquaintance with their peculiarities. My public labors had been considerable but they were amongst those of other faiths, who, strange to say, were more interested in reforms than those of my new faith, which I found so inspiring to my own soul to co-work with God for the reformation of mankind. (Autobiography 2)

I hesitated long, I knew the obstacles to be overcome; I could foresee the prejudices which would rise up at every step. ... But I had been before the public long enough to comprehend that the great obstacle which lay in my way was the fact of my being a woman and

¹¹ There is no comprehensive history of the Clinton Liberal Institute to date, a serious lack in our denominational history. The school filled an important educational role for Universalists, both before and after the denomination opened its own seminaries. A history of the school would shed light on Universalists' positive attitudes toward the education of women. An article in *Christian Ambassador* (May 2, 1857) reported that Tufts College was open to women.

*undertaking to preach, especially to preach an unpopular doctrine. But more than all, I apprehended that **the greatest hindrance to my success would be found in the covert opposition and prejudice on the part of many of my own brethren.** (bold mine) (Autobiography 1).*

Edmund was her principle source of encouragement and support to fulfill her calling. Many other male ministers also offered important moral and practical support. Still Lydia also experienced significant pushback from many Universalists. Further I have found no evidence that she received to pursue ministry from her associates in women's rights and other social reforms.

II: Layers of Reaction to “The Woman Question”

It is an understatement to say that when Lydia began preaching, the presence of a woman in the pulpit generated attention not only in Universalist congregational life but also in the media. The many printed reports and strong opinions about a woman's right to preach indicate the significance of this act of a woman claiming a public religious presence. It seems that everyone had an opinion about Lydia's bridging separate spheres. Newspapers disseminated news about Lydia's ministry far and wide. Religious press --- Universalist and other --- usually included strong opinions about her right to preach and the *Trumpet*, the most influence Universalist paper in the 1850s, overtly acknowledged that a woman in the pulpit was generating camps of opinions:

The Universalist brethren are expressing diverse opinions about women's preaching... Some take one side, and some the other. The majority are for encouraging the sister to proceed. (Trpt, May 20, 1857).

Secular press --- penny press and reform publications --- usually offered less opinion about her right to preach and more celebration of the significance of this event for women's rights.¹²

Lydia was the subject of nearly nonstop public reaction in Universalist press from the start of her preaching in 1857. The tirade of communication began to ease up only toward through the end of 1859. Curiously, by the time Olympia Brown entered seminary in 1861 at St. Lawrence University, just four years after Lydia began preaching, there was virtually no press about the 'Woman Question,' and there was only one published announcement of Olympia's ordination in 1863. Olympia went on to serve three congregations over the next fifteen years, followed by service to women's rights. In contrast, wear and tear which Lydia certainly experienced from being the public spotlight makes her relatively short tenure of five years of active ministry understandable. Her ministry was actually long-lived in comparison with that of Antoinette Brown, ordained by a local congregation in South Butler, New York, in September 1853. She remained in South Burtler only until summer 1854, when she relinquished parish service for the next two decades. Olympia's ministry to congregations was longer: she served until 1878. That is to say, even when women did gain ministerial credentialing, it was a tough field for them to

¹² Lydia received much more press than did Antionette Brown when Antoinette started preaching in South Butler in 1852, probably because Antoinette's church was independent, not part of a recognized American denomination.

survive in. Perhaps Lydia was lost to modern history because she served full-time ministry only five years.¹³

It is also significant that most published reports of Lydia's preaching were written by men and most of these male critics --- William Lloyd Garrison and Horace Greeley, who were not ministers, excepted --- had not been particularly proactive in promoting women's rights prior to Lydia's ministry. We must ask, 'Where were the Universalist women in support of a woman minister? During Lydia's five years of active ministry, to date I have located only six published articles by Universalist women other than Lydia speaking up on the question of women in ministry.'¹⁴ The most vocal of these was Augusta Chapin in 1859, when she called on readers not to position the success or failure of other women ministers on Lydia's ministry.

*Mrs. Jenkins has thus far met with success. This fact is no evidence that any one else will succeed any more than her failure would have predicted that another would fail. And if 'other women' who may enter the ministry, do so because she has been encouraged, or because they aspire to notoriety, or 'to become occupants of the pulpit, they will undoubtedly fail; but I venture to suggest that you **may be mistaken** in your supposition that others will ever undertake so sacred a work, actuated by so unhallowed a motive. (Trpt Jan 23, 1859).*

We can only wonder about Lydia's reaction to this passive reception from Universalist women in comparison with the much more proactive, supportive networking of women she knew from women's rights advocacy, as typified by one Mrs. H. M. L. Brown in the abolition paper *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (more about Rev. Whittemore below):

Must woman die in ignorance, and be damned, because she has no husband to teach her 'the way to heaven?' If Rev. Whittemore was my husband I should consult him about roasting beef, turkeys, making soups, piece, etc., etc., but to ask him or any other many who goes back two thousand years to ask the dead Past what the strong earnest working woman of today may do, would be the veriest folly, God's blessing on you, Mrs. Jenkins. May you live to preach freedom to the women bound by Old Theology's iron chains; and to teach men that we women have a mission of our own to perform. (Bugle May 23, 1857)

It is also surprising that Universalist press offered virtually no acknowledgement of Lydia's prior success as a lecturer in health and social reform. To date I have found only one note, somewhat as an afterthought, and this in the public press, Greeley's *New York Tribune*, to comment that:

.... She has during the last half dozen years lectured upon temperance and kindred reforms in New York City and State, and in the West. (NYT Oct 18, 1858).

¹³ There are modern biographies of Antoinette and Olympia. Both women, however, are in serious need of new historical study and analysis of their contributions to the question of women in ministry.

¹⁴ Articles include two by Augusta Chapin, three by Eliza Magoon and one by Harriet Livermore. Lydia's first article in *Christian Ambassador* reflected her long-held interest in women's education: LAJ, "Female Education in Colleges," *Christian Ambassador* (Aug. 22, 1857). The paper's editor called readers to pay attention to Lydia's article, and offered hope that as the opening of the seminary at St. Lawrence was anticipated, that the school would be to accept both men and women.

Should we not expect that a person of Lydia's reputation as a public speaker and reformer would have been welcomed for the professional experience she brought to the pulpit?¹⁵ By the same token, there seems to be little note of Lydia's ministerial accomplishments in women's rights correspondence and publications. It is hard to imagine that religiously-grounded women activists such as Antoinette Brown and Lucretia Mott were not aware of Lydia's venture into ministry, but to date I have found no documentation this.¹⁶

Among these mostly male critics, then, I note three degrees of support for women in ministry: a) unconditional support; b) conditional support, manifest in approving of Lydia but not all women, and in supporting her preaching but not her credentialing to Universalist ministry; and c) categorical denial of women's rights to preach.

Ia. Support for Women in Ministry

Many Universalists offered unconditional support for Lydia and more generally for the right of women to preach and enter ministry. Ministers in addition to Edmund Jenkins who offered her uncategory support included : 1) W. Bailey of Fulton. Bailey came to know her public speaking skills when she resided in his home for six weeks in early 1857 while leading a phrenological lecture series. It was in Bailey's pulpit that she first preached, three times, by March 1857.¹⁷ 2) Br. Samuel Goff of Saco Maine never wavered in support from the beginning of her ministry.¹⁸ 3) She had a warm and mutually supportive relationship with H. Boughton, minister of the Unviersalist congregation in Farmer, and succeeded him as minister of that congregation in 1861.¹⁹ 4) Br. Lombard invited her to supply preach for him in Mount Vernon, NY, as early as May 1858.²⁰ 5) A. B. Grosh was an ardent defender of women in ministry.²¹ 6) Daniel Livermore and Mary Livermore were equally supportive of the principle of woman's

¹⁵ Neither was Harriet Hunt particularly acknowledged by Universalists for her professional accomplishments in medicine when she stepped in Universalist pulpits in April 1859 (in Athol, Westminister, and Stoneham, MA). The *Trumpet* did acknowledge Hunt's 'beautiful biography,' *Glances and Glimpses, or Fifty Years Social, Including Twenty Years of professional Life.*, published in 1856 and *Christina Ambassador* noted that she has practiced medicine a long time. "Miss Harriot K. Hunt," *Trumpet* (Apr 9, 1859; Apr. 16, 1859); "Another Female Preacher," *Christian Ambassador* (Apr. 16, 1859); "Miss H.K. Hunt in Maine," *Trumpet* (Sept. 17, 1859). *Christian Ambassador* noted that Charlotte Porter began preaching by July 1859, but nothing more is said about her credentials. Hanson, *Woman Workers*, 426-427 includes a biography of Porter. Eliza Magoon of Bombay, NY submitted several articles to the *Trumpet* in 1859 promoting women's right to preach, which surprisingly ran on the front pages. "Letter from a Lady Preacher," *Trumpet* (July 2, 1859); "Ought a Woman Ever Preach," *Trumpet* (Aug 6, Sept 17, 1859).

¹⁶ It is curious that there seemed to be little influence of women in liberal ministry on improving the relationship between women's rights activists and the religious establishment. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lydia Jenkins knew one another, yet there is no indication that Stanton acknowledged Lydia's ministry. If she had, might Stanton have moderated her anger toward religion and so headed off her compulsion to publish her very controversial *Woman's Bible* in 1895?

¹⁷ "Mrs. Lydia A. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (Mar. 14, 1857).

¹⁸ "Shall Woman Preach?," *Christian Ambassador* (Apr. 25, 1857).

¹⁹ "Letter from Mrs. Lydia A. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (July 10, 1858).

²⁰ "Mrs. Lydia A. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (May 8, 1858).

²¹ "From A.B. Grosh," "Full or Partial Fellowship?," *Trumpet* (Sept. 4, 1858).

right to preach, as well as supportive of Lydia specifically.²² 7) Bernard Peters invited her to preach many times at his church in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.²³

Prominent lay leader Judge John Galbraith of the Lake Erie Universalist Association (Pennsylvania) and a leader recognized nationally, was among her most faithful proponents. Galbraith acknowledged the high capacity of women as teachers of moral values for Universalist children:

I am glad that Mrs. Jenkins is in the field, and have given her an invitation to visit this part of the country."(CF July 30, 1858; *Liberator* Aug 27, 1858; CF Aug 27, 1858)

The Lake Erie Association also amended its constitution about attendance at Universalist conferences to read:

The different societies and churches of this Association shall hereafter be entitled to send one female delegate in addition to the two lay delegates now provided by article second.(CF July 30, 1858)

Additionally, several Universalist papers often published editorial support about Lydia's ministry, although opinions across the months and years as her ministry progressed were not always consistent. The *Christian Ambassador*, based in Auburn, not far from Lydia's preaching circuits, was probably her staunchest support. The paper frequently offered blanket endorsement, as in May 1858 following her supply preaching for Br. Lombard in Mount Vernon, Westchester Co:

We will freely vouch for the entire satisfaction which her ministrations will give. (CA May 8, 1858)

The *Christian Freeman* described her ministry as:

....This worthy sister, who has devoted herself to the work of Christian teaching, is filling an important mission. She appears to be strong in the distinctive faith of Universalism and labors to build up the understanding of the people in it and their hearts in its religious spirit. (CF July 20 1858)

After hearing Lydia preach in Thomas Sawyers pulpit at the Orchard street Church, New York, in May 1858, Universalist Horace Greeley, venerable editor of the *New York Tribune* who knew Lydia from social reform activities, noted that:²⁴

The attendance was unusually large, aided, no doubt, in a measure, by the novelty of a woman occupying the sacred desk. (CA May 22, 1858)

Contributors to the *Gospel Banner* said :

²² "Female Preachers," *Gospel Banner* (July 25, 1857); "Letter from D.P. Livermore," *Gospel Banner* (July 4, 1858); Mary Livermore, "The Editor's Table," *Ladies Repository* (Oct. 1858), 158-159.

²³ "Mrs. Jenkins Sermon in Williamsburg," *Christian Ambassador* (Oct. 30, 1858) and several reprinting. We should add the influential Thomas Sawyer, who initially offered her several preaching opportunities at Orchard Street Church in New York City in 1858, but as reported below, took a surprising turn in not supporting all women. "Mrs. Jenkins in New York," *Christian Ambassador* (Oct. 30, 1858).

²⁴ Let us remember Greeley's support of Margaret Fuller as a correspondent for *New York Tribune* in the mid-1840s.

We can see no reason why a woman should not preach provide 1, she wants to and 2, others desire to hear her. (GB Jul 10, 1858). . . . *I left the church, saying --- Woman should preach.* (GB July 17 1858)

The *Christian Freeman* also took this position on women:

We would have all Christian minds, male and female, free and active, in the best and most efficient manner, in the great work of truly and religiously educating the public mind and heart... The Universalist denomination have a great mission to fulfill in the work of Christianizing the world, in spite of the Endless Miserian perversions on the one hand and the Transcendental and Atheistic philosophies on the other... The mothers are the educators of the children and if they feel that they have a part to take in the business of religious education in general, they will qualify themselves the better and make the better educators in the domestic nursery. Let us encourage them to work with us, in all proper and judicious ways, for the mutual good. (CF July 30, 1858).

Also, her preaching at the Cayuga Association meeting in Speedsville in June 1857 commanded endorsement:

Any prejudice against the preaching of a woman will melt away from the most conservative heart, after listening for a few moments to her rich voice as it enunciates noble and valuable truths. (CA June 6, 1857)

The Ontario Association was equally supportive of a fine preacher, who happened to be a woman:

Very little, if anything, was said about the impropriety of her position --- her evident ability to fill the sphere she had assumed seemed to answer all arguments against her right to do so. Universalists who profess toleration and the largest liberty of conscience, should lay no obstacles in the way of such a mind as Mrs. Jenkins. She is destined, if life and health are spared her, to accomplish much good for the cause of Christianity. (CA June 26 1858)

Iib. Categorical Support for Lydia

Some reviewers were not as generous toward women and Lydia specifically. Some supported her because they came to know her skills but they would not accept women's categorical right to enter ministry. Some supported her because she did not have children (her only child, a daughter, Grace, was born in 1869 when Lydia was forty-five): that is, being childless she did not have a higher priority of care which would keep her bound to her home. Some supported her because she somehow conveyed an impression of not being one of 'those women's rights reformers.'

Even the *Christian Ambassador* carried comments from time to time like this in their report of Lydia's preaching at the Cayuga Association meeting:

As to the question whether a woman should preach in public, we are free to say that when one can preach as ably and profitably and acceptably as Mrs. Jenkins, we see not why she should not exercise her talent and give the world the benefit of it. We can perceive no more impropriety in a woman speaking in public than in her singing in public. What objection can be raised to the former practice, that will not bear equally against the latter? It does not

follow, because occasionally a woman is sufficiently gifted to preach acceptably, that ALL WOMEN are to become preachers, any more than that because now and then a man has the talent to preach, therefore all men must be preachers.

We are not particularly the advocates of the practice of women speaking in public, not are we committed to any positions or theory on the subject. We have no idea that a class of female preachers will ever grow up. The domestic duties of women will generally prevent their entering upon this public occupation. We only say that when a woman has the gifts of Mrs. Jenkins and when her peculiar position and opportunities (as in the case of Mrs. J.) will permit her to address her fellow-beings in behalf of the claims of Christianity, we can conceive of no valid reason why she should not make herself useful in this department as well as in any other. (CA June 6, 1857)

Some allowed that a brilliant speaker like Lydia should be credentialed in Universalist ministry. Yet they also cautioned that she should not set her sights on a pastorate. Even one of Lydia's early supporters, Brother Gamaliel Collins of Philadelphia, who had endorsed her preaching as early as April 1857, urged her to remain in ministry but to aim for missionary work, not a pastorate. Collins's opinions seem clouded by what he considered to be a temporary aura of novelty that a woman minister represented:

She will be followed by curious crowds until weary of wandering, she seeks local habitation, then the difficulties of her position will be apparent. And in all proper deference to her judgment, we advise her to abandon this pleasing thought of settling and however painful, take up the cross of Missionary duty.²⁵ (CA Oct 23, 1858)

Brother J. Whitney, minister from Hornellsville, New York, responded to Collins in defense of Lydia:

I was not a little astonished to hear Br. Collins throw out upon the public mind a predictive insinuation against the professional success of Mrs. Jenkins as a pastor....her labors are as eagerly sought for by those who have heard her, as by those who have not. (CA Nov 6, 1858)

Curiously Brother Collins also reminded readers of the need to pay her adequately:

We have not many words of encouragement to utter, and we would caution her against cherishing hopes of great personal success. We hope she will succeed.... But we fear when the 'novelty of the matter is worn off,' she will come unto her own and her own will not receive her. As an itinerant, crowds will attend on her preaching, but when, weary of travel, she seeks a Society with which to rest, the more serious difficulties of her position will being to make themselves apparent..... Yet we hope we err. If there must be one martyr before woman can be permitted to enter the pulpit, we pray that Mrs Jenkins may have strength in her hour of sorrowful disappointment.... even a woman needs something more than pleasant compliments and votes of thanks. The laborer is worthy of wages. (CA Aug 7, 1858)

²⁵ 'Missionary' ministry for mid-nineteenth-century Universalists usually met 'outreach,' preaching Universalist in areas without established congregations, as an itinerant minister would do.

The *Christian Ambassador*, generally a steadfast supporter of Lydia, sometimes took a moderating approach to the topic of opening ministry to all women with a reminder that not all have skills to preach because:

... public speaking is not the natural field for woman's occupancy.... Because the offices of wife and mothers have the first and highest claims upon every female. (CA, Jan 1, 1859).

The paper accepted woman's ministry as a component of woman's rights, but not as a component of a practical life trajectory for most women. Lydia was one in a hundred: she had a supportive husband and no children. Brother Bailey countered a few weeks later to argue that he advocated female preaching from PRINCIPLE, not for the exceptionalism of one woman:

The establishing of a precedence the consequences of which must be fearful, and disastrous to the cause of truth, seems to be unwise. I think I know too well the mind of Mrs. Jenkins to believe that she will be pleased with encouragement for herself, while all others of her sex are held back and not permitted to enter the field, side by side of their brothers, to labor for the good of the race. (CA Jan 22 1859).

Another habit by which male reviewers offered oblique praise of Lydia's ministry or deflected attention away from her skill in exegetical discernment was to comment on her physical appearance, a common response to women preachers still evident today. A woman can preach, as long as she remains a woman. It is not surprising that many of the early women in ministry were wives of ministers, not only for the practicalities of having an immediate advocate to negotiate entry into ministry but also for the tangible embodiment of the real-life role as helpmate. I am hard-pressed to find any news reports assessing the appearance of male ministers. For women preachers, the listener's gaze on the female body was as much a part of the experience as was the hearing of her theological discernment:

I should presume that her appearance as she arose to address the throne of grace, was critically scanned, that her words were specially noted, and the intentions of her voice made subjects of thought on the part of the congregation. If such were the case, and all were like the writer hereof, a very favorable impression must have been made. There was the manifestation of just enough embarrassment to make her appear modest, unassuming and dependent upon the Being whom she was addressing; and not enough to indicate a weak, puerile spirit, which would shrink from responsibility and cower at oppositions.... (As for her preaching) her manner of delivery is good, though it would be improved I think by a little more energy. Her sermon was well arranged, systematic, and presented a useful subject, viz: the importance of sowing good seed that we may reap a harvest of joy.... It was thought that if even the editor of the Trumpet had been present, his soul would have been moved and all opposition to female preaching would have departed. (CF, June 12, 1857)

Mrs. Jenkins is a woman of pleasant presence. She speaks with a quiet earnestness that is often singularly impressive and very little gesture. (NYT, Oct. 18, 1858)

Even the supportive newspaper the *Liberator* included this:

Mrs. Jenkins was tastefully dressed in white, and is a modest, unpretending woman. We felt some fear lest her words should blur rather than aid the effect of the occasion, but were happily disappointed. Her quiet manner, clear articulation, and purity, even holiness of look and word, were in unison with the scene and hour. Mrs. Jenkins is about thirty years of age,

with features regular as if chiseled from marble, and blue eyes, and great sweetness of voice... Her intonation and articulation were almost faultless. (Liberator Aug 31, 1860)

An observer (E.M.F.G.), presumably male, from Canandaigua, New York, wrote to the *Christian Ambassador*:

She surprised us as much with her ease and home-born feeling as with her youthful and delicate appearance. She is much more delicate in frame work than we supposed and for the kind curiosity of those who have not seen and may not see her in some time, we will venture a brief sketch of this personification of female energy.....

Mrs. Jenkins is some inches above medium height, of rather slender proportions and a pale face. She is blonde in complexion, with eyes of intellectual grey, brown hair parted smoothly on a finely formed forehead and confined with the back hair. She has regular features --- their chief attraction is expression. There is a native goodness sin every look and in her manner truth seems uppermost. She is remarkably social, yet command quiet and is not exciting or excitably to any degree above health. (CA, Aug. 21, 1858)

That writer continued that Lydia could discuss agriculture, theology and literature equally well. She also lived well as a vegetarian and proponent of fresh air.

In these many contemporary accounts of Lydia's appearance in the pulpit, none refer to any physical infirmity such as the spinal trouble which E. R. Hanson suggested.

Ic. Third, there were negative critics, fewer in number but louder in authority, who believed categorically that women should not preach, that to do so would clearly violate both separate spheres and scriptural authority. Women belonged in the home. Perhaps the staunchest, the most vocal, and the most influential of these critics was Thomas Whittemore, editor of the Universalist weekly, *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, the leading newspaper of Universalism for over thirty years.²⁶ Quick on the heels of Lydia's preaching debut, Whittemore took advantage of access to his own paper to discredit her without ever having heard her preach. He invoked authority of scripture from the well-known passage by St. Paul in I Corinthians XIV, 34, 35 about women remaining silent in church, and also cited experiences in the life of Jesus:

We have no occasion to have any disrespect personally to this woman preacher; but we regard her resolution to preach as unwise. It were better for her to remain at home, and attend to her domestic duties. From our study of the Bible, we have not learned that Jesus ever appointed a female preacher. No female was ever ordained by the apostles. ... St. Paul very pointedly condemned the uprising of preaching women: "Let your women keep silence in the churches." (Trumpet, Apr 18, 1857)

Whittemore responded to one Duell Dow's support of women by again citing scripture:

It seems there is a Mrs. Jenkins out in New York who aspires to be a preacher. We have no objection to the woman's doing so, if it be according to Scripture. When the whole

²⁶ For a biography of Thomas Whittemore, see <http://uudb.org/articles/thomaswhittemore.html>. His negative influence on Lydia's reputation diminished after his reversal of opinion. He died on March 21, 1861 while she was in the height of her ministry.

denomination is called on to justify the practice of making women pastors, we feel it is our duty to insure what saith the Bible on this topic? (Trpt June 27, 1857)

Daniel Livermore responded emphatically to Whittemore:

*Brother Whittemore, I have been seeking a favorable opportunity for some time past to write you.... Does not the Bible show that women labored in the Gospel with the apostles as **co-workers in the Lord?**... Were not **females** the chosen and sent of the Lord to teach the people? (Trpt July 4, 1857)*

Under pressure from Livermore and others, Whittemore seemed to change his argument for why women did not belong in the pulpit, depending on the nature of the challenge from his male colleagues.

Even the *Christian Ambassador* seemed influenced by Whittemore's opposition and began to promote a 'separate spheres' position as Lydia's ministry continued, perhaps as some realized that she would not be going away any time soon:

We are free to confess our belief, that public speaking is not the natural field for woman's occupancy. It is rare that a female has there peculiar endowments which are indispensable to an accomplished orator. We do not refer especially to intellect or felicity of utterance (gifts which the mass of women may be naturally quitted equally with men) but to firmness, self-possession, muscular strength, and a well-knit nervous organization, a material lack in either of which would be fatal to success in a public speaker. ... We deem the offices of wife and mother to have the first and highest claims upon every female and duty well and faithfully discharged in these capacities, confers the greatest honors within the reach of woman. It is only when the obligations growing out of these relations will consistently permit, that a female bearing them can honorably enter upon any field of public employment. (CA Jan 1, 1859)

The paper also dared to title an article "What Woman Ought to Be":

Next to God's love, the Christian woman's live stands pre-eminent. She is an angel of mercy. In the hour of trial, it she is a mother, how diligent, how untiring in her efforts to protect her darling child, watching over her little cherub like a guardian angel, careful to keep it out of harm's way.... A mother! The most sacred of all names! (CA Nov 17, 1860)

The good news is that even Whittemore eventually came around, to acknowledge that Lydia should preach. But it took him a good eighteen months to do so. Once he agreed to hear her in person while she was on a preaching tour of Massachusetts in December 1858, he let go of his resistance to her ministry.²⁷ In December 1858, the *Trumpet* published a report of her preaching in Lawrence, MA, which included this commendation:

The cadence was well preserved; the interrogations exceedingly well given, and the dialogistic parts were recited almost as if two persons were talking to each other..... This sermon was one of the most effective, tender, instructive, truthful discourses on the paternal character of God, that we had ever heard.

Following the conclusion of her tour of Massachusetts, the *Trumpet* declared:

²⁷ "Br. Whittemore and Mrs. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (Dec. 11, 1858).

We are now sure that a woman can speak, can preach, can pray, in the pulpit, without throwing off her womanly dignity and modesty. There is probably as much difference in the talents of women as of men. (Trumpet, Feb 12, 1859)

Still, we can only wonder how the opposition and resistance which Lydia endured from an important publication such as *The Trumpet* for these many months wore on her drive to build an effective and productive ministry.

III: Credentialing

Women in Universalist ministry across the nineteenth century reflected different reasons for entering ministry and different goals regarding denominational credentialing.²⁸ We have heard in Lydia's own words that she was motivated to preach by the opportunity to share this life-giving theology with others, without expectation of placement within the denominational system. During the first year of her preaching, the press included no talk of credentialing. As we have seen, in preaching 'to good acceptance,' she attracted notice primarily because she was stepping into the public sphere as a public speaker.²⁹ Women had been well established on the reform lecture circuit in the Northeast for a good decade by the time Lydia started preaching in 1857. Still, the pulpit in any tradition except Quakers remained a longer hold-out for women's voices, carrying with it not only layers of habits and traditions but centuries of scriptural authority directing women to keep silent in church.³⁰

In Lydia's case, some reviewers of her ministry who supported her as a preacher shifted gears once she entered the ministerial credentialing process, which admitted her into the guild of Universalist ministers. She was fellowshipped in June 1858 at the annual meeting of the Ontario Association of Universalists, meeting in Fairport, Monroe County. The *Christian Ambassador*, first to report this ceremony, recognized its significance:

... Mrs. Lydia A. Jenkins, the celebrated female preacher, received the fellowship of that Association as a preacher of the gospel..... her title is now Rev. Lydia A. Jenkins. This is the first instance in our denomination and we think in the world, where a woman has received a formal license or Letter of Fellowship as a minister of Christ. It may strike many as a novel proceedings, as indeed it is. We have not a doubt, however, as to its wisdom or propriety. Mrs. Jenkins is a very talented and acceptable preacher. Her situation being such that she can devote her time to the instruction of the people on the important topic of religion, why

²⁸ Howe, "Under Orders," 32-35, tells the story of the ministry of Maria Cook, who preached before the Western Association in June 1811. Cook declined a letter of fellowship because she did not consider it sincere. She continued to preach without denominational credentials. In contrast, in the wake of Lydia's influence in the 1850s, by the 1860s, Olympia Brown held ordination as her goal from the very beginning of her seminary career.

²⁹ How, "Under Orders," 37 reports that George Rogers, Universalist missionary in the south and midwest, sometimes offered his pulpit to women who alleged they heard a call to preach, but Rogers believed that, while the novelty of a woman preacher might attract crowds, most women were misinterpreting this as a genuine call to ministry.

³⁰ There were traditions of women itinerant preachers in America as early as the eighteenth century. See Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998); Elizabeth Elkin Grammer, *Autobiographies by Female Itinerant Evangelists in 19th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

should she not be authorized to do so in the name of that denomination whose doctrines she most ably and successfully advocates. We have sanguine hopes of great good growing from her efforts in the ministry. (CA July 3, July 10, 1858)

This act of credentialing generated more opinionated responses in both religious and secular press. Universalists fell into more clearly articulated camps, as articles about the credentialing of a woman passed on from paper to paper throughout the summer and fall 1858. It may have been one thing, to accept a woman setting a new standard for the public sphere by speaking in public. It represented a different level of change, to accept her into a process by which she could occupy the sacred role of pastoring congregations and leading rites of passage. News articles were frequent and opinions strong through the beginning of 1860.

Curiously, by the time Lydia and Edmund were ordained by the Ontario Association on an unspecified date probably before March 1860, the conversation about her entry into denominational hierarchy had calmed down considerably. Their advancement to ordained ministry went almost unnoticed, acknowledged only in a report in the *Christian Ambassador* in June 1860. Perhaps it was to Lydia's advantage, at least in staving off yet another round of reactivity, to share ordination with her husband --- they were the first clergy couple. Still, it is curious to note that just two years after the Jenkins' ordination, Olympia Brown's fellowshipping by the Saint Lawrence Association also came off without controversy. Then Brown's ordination in June 1863 occurred nearly as smoothly: Olympia received only minimal resistance from Ebenezer Fisher, President of St. Lawrence Seminary, before she received a positive vote from the committee on fellowship. The actual scope of Brown's ordination counters an impression often presented in modern histories of how Universalists embraced Olympia with gala celebration: she and one Herman Bisbee were ordained together in the same ceremony the day after the vote in a relatively simply ceremony acknowledged only in one note in the minutes of the Association's annual meeting published in *Christian Ambassador*.³¹ In entering ministry, Olympia experienced neither the pushback nor the affirmations Lydia had known and clearly much, much less attention in the press.

Alas, there was confusion among Lydia's contemporaries about the nature of her 1858 credentialing. This confusion may have influenced how history came to document her ministerial status. The chain of events causing the confusion started with a note on August 14, 1858 in *Christian Inquirer*, a Unitarian journal, that Lydia had been ordained.³² The *Christian Ambassador* felt an obligation to correct the error, to verify at that point she'd been fellowshipped but not ordained, but with every expectation that she would be ordained one day:

*Mrs. Jenkins has not been **ordained**. She has received a Letter of Fellowship, or License to preach in fellowship with the Universalist denomination. She will undoubtedly, in due time, receive the rite of ordination, which will endow her in full with the authority, the rights and privileges belonging to the clerical office. (CA Aug 21 1858)*

Perhaps some historians such as Hanson reading only this report but not later records verifying her ordination explain why they reported that Lydia never achieved ordination.

³¹ Coeyman, "Olympia Brown's Ordination."

³² "From Massachusetts," *Christian Inquirer* (Aug. 14, 1858).

Then Thomas Whittemore, as we have seen a man unfriendly to women's rights, jumped into the fray and generated a paper trail of reports which may have complicated historians accounting of Lydia's credentialing all the more. Following Lydia's fellowshiping, the *Trumpet* reported that the *Inquirer* was in error, not for reporting an ordination but for incorrectly reporting the nature of the ordination. Whittemore argued that the *Inquirer* had suggested that the entire denomination had ordained Lydia, when in fact it was 'merely a very small part' of the denomination which did so.

The whole denomination would not like to be held accountable for it. ... We feel it our duty to say, to prevent subsequent misunderstanding, that we doubt whether the denomination will approve the act of ordaining a woman as a preacher of the gospel and pastor of a society. (Trpt Aug 21, 1858)

It is hard to believe that a minister of Whittemore's stature was confused about the nature of ordination: there was no such thing as local ordination among Universalists. Was this some sort of move on his part to discredit the act of fellowshiping to which Lydia had legitimate claim, or perhaps a serious subverting tactic to discredit her ministry more generally? Or perhaps he just reacted quickly to the news of fellowship without taking time to verify the event.

Whittemore's opposition to women's rights as far back as 1850 makes his confrontation of Lydia's ministry predictable. As Charles Howe reports, the opinionated editor responded 'in highly sarcastic terms' to news of the First National Woman's Rights Convention held in Worcester in 1850:³³

Some distinguished female talkers were there, whose husbands, at home, must have had a time of heavenly stillness during their absence. This is the only good, as far as we can see, that will ever grow out of the Convention. Judge not the women of Massachusetts by this mostly assembly. (Trpt Nov 9, 1850)

Whittemore expanded his position on women five months later:

... it seems that her position is more exalted than that of man He then who would remove woman from her present sphere, would degrade, and not exalt, her. She would, if seduced by the modern cry about woman's rights, fall from her first estate and wander about in darkness we know not how long before she might be restored. (Trpt Mar 20, 1851)

Even the secular press offered what seems as a better understanding of ministerial credentialing than did Whittemore. For example, the careful reporting in Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* explained that Lydia's credentialing was of a different sort from Antoinette Brown's, in that Lydia's fellowship allowed her access into a nationally recognized system, while Antoinette's ordination carried authority only for the local congregation which ordained her. (NYT Oct 18, 1858)

Whittemore's gaff set off yet more sparring among Universalist (male) ministers, already stirred up and taking sides when Whittemore first opposed Lydia's preaching. The *Christian Ambassador* continued support of her ministry by encouraging her to preach in Boston so that Br. Whittemore could hear her first hand. (CA Aug. 28, 1858). Then Rev. A. B. Grosh, minister in Marietta, PA, not far from Lydia's coverage of itinerant ministry, and editor of the *Universalist Register*, generated yet more verbal sparring with Whittemore. Grosh's position of

³³ Howe, "Under Orders," 37-38.

authority in the denomination seems to have pushed Whittemore to examine the underlying motivations for his opposition to her ministry. I reproduce Grosh's words at some length as they provide a helpful review of mid-nineteenth-century Universalist polity regarding ordination:

*Was not Mrs. Jenkins fellowshipped by the denomination previously, and as fully, as the great majority of our preachers were fellowship and ordained by it? She was fellowshipped by an association in full fellowship with a State Convention, which again is in full fellowship with the United States Convention ... thus making her fellowship the usual, legal, and full fellowship of the denomination. I was fellowshipped by a much smaller association than the Cayuga Association, when there was no State Convention in this State, and no United States Convention to be in fellowship with, and yet I never doubted, nor did anyone ever deny, that I was fellowshipped **by the Universalist denomination**. Individual Universalists --- even a majority of individual preachers and members in other States, **may or may not** have approved the action of the then "New York and Philadelphia Association" in that case; but, most certainly, so far as **usage** and **ecclesiastical law** among u went, I received the full and entire fellowship of the Universalist denomination, **as a denomination**, in the only mode in which it could than have been bestowed on me....*

*If, therefore, as you declare Mrs. Jenkins has been fellowshipped by "merely a **very small part** of the Universalist denomination" --- meaning the Cayuga Association of New York --- will you please inform me how **any** preacher in New York (or Pennsylvania) can now receive the fellowship of 'the denomination,' **as such?** The United States Convention cannot grant letters of fellowship, or the rite of Ordination --- and if it **could**, some one might say that it was the **Council, only**, that did so! The New York State Convention cannot grant such letters --- and if it **could**, a similiar objection could be made. The **only** fellowship, than, that **any** can receive, must be like that of Mrs. Jenkins. Do you, therefore, mean to deny the fellowship of "the denomination" unto **all in like** fellowship? Is "individualism" to rule over and put down the organized bodies, rules, and usages of the denomination? (Trpt Sept 4, 1858)*

Grosh continued his defense of 'Female Preachers' in two lengthy front-page articles published in the *Trumpet* on September 25 and October 9, 1858. In the first, he offered an exegetical interpretation of the actions of Jesus and the Apostles regarding the positive engagement of women in their ministries. In the second he reviewed the large number of women who had already made welcomed contributions to ministry and to Universalism.

Persuasive comments from other ministers may have begun to change Whittemore's attitudes toward leadership from Universalist women. Changing his tune somewhat, he questioned why women did not speak during a Universalist Conference he attended in Hillsdate, NH, in October 1858. The *Christian Ambassador* reported Whittemore's comments about the meeting:

We wished that Mrs. Jenkins or Mrs. Brace, or some other sister had been there to set them the example.... Br. Whittemore was yearning to have the ladies address the congregation.... This is capital, considering the position Br. W. has heretofore held on the subject. We shall soon expect to hear him call for females to enter upon the work of the gospel ministry, not withstanding the Saviour did not ordain and send them forth among this Apostles. (CA Oct. 23 1858)

Whittemore's new supportive attitude toward Lydia may have been encouraged all the more by her successful preaching at the New York State Universalist Convention in early September in Branchport, where she shared the preaching with Ebenezer Fisher, president of the new seminary at St. Lawrence University, and Thomas Sawyer, minister at Orchard Street Church. This public event was followed by the National General Convention in Providence later that month when she also spoke or preached.³⁴

As noted above, Whittemore finally came around after he heard her preach in Lawrence, Massachusetts in early December 1858, and then again in Lowell in a service in which he shared leadership in offering the prayer. Finally he agreed that women, especially Lydia, can preach:³⁵

She did not fail to show that Universalism, i.e. the theory of the final recovery of all souls, is a clearly revealed doctrine of the New Testament. (Trpt Dec 11, 1858; Trpt Jan 1, 1859)

One coincidental note about Whittemore's involvement in the 'Woman Question.' One month after he published his support of Lydia's preaching, he carried a long front-page article in the *Trumpet* to spotlighting another important Universalist woman, Mary C. Grannis.³⁶ At that point Mary was not a minister --- it would take her a good thirty years more to seek ordination, which occurred in Texas in 1892. Yet she was a devoted Universalist lay leader whose denominational reports, poetry, and short stories Whittemore published with regularity. His showcasing of Mary offers yet more substantiation that he was not categorically against creative women active in Universalism, as long as they stayed within appropriate gender boundaries.

In the throes of that eighteen-month period when Lydia remained out of Thomas Whittemore's good graces, she also experienced a disappointing event at the National Universalist Convention in Providence. She recorded some of her experiences at the Convention in a letter sent to Edmund back home and also published in *Christian Ambassador*.³⁷ She was one of thirteen Convention delegates (all others male) from New York State. There she interacted with and heard the speaking and preaching of the denomination's influential leaders. She estimated as many as two thousand were assembled to hear Brother Edwin Chapin's sermon on Thursday evening of the Convention. How might Lydia have felt, if she attended the business session in which a resolution recognizing women's equity proposed by Hon. John Galbraith was tabled by her fellow Universalists? Galbraith could vouch for her skills because he had recently invited her to preach at his own congregation in Pennsylvania: (CA Nov. 13 1858, General Convention 1858).

Resolved: that we hail with great gratitude and satisfaction, the fact that within the past year letters of fellowship have been received by a lady; and that we recognize the right of

³⁴ "New York State Convention," *Christian Freeman* (Sept 10, 1858); "Mrs. L. A. Jenkins," *Trumpet* (Oct. 23, 1858). See also Howe, "Under Orders," 42.

³⁵ Howe, "Under Orders," 44 suggests that Whittemore's change of attitude must have greatly shifted the denomination's perception of women in ministry. Perhaps the sermon he heard was the one published in his paper a year later: LAJ, "The Authenticity of the New Testament," *Trumpet* (March 21, 1861).

³⁶ "Biographical Sketch," *Trumpet*, Mar. 12, 1859. I have published several articles about Mary Ward Grannis Webster Billings, such as <http://uudb.org/articles/marybillings.html>.

³⁷ "Letter from Mrs. L. A. Jenkins, *Christian Ambassador* (Oct. 2, 1858). She included there the following revealing outsider's observation of Universalists: "I said the Convention was an entire success. It deeply impressed many not of our faith, and must leave behind an influence for great good, not only upon ourselves, but upon many others who have not given us credit for profound scholarship, serious deliberations in our Councils, or fervid piety."

women possessing high moral and religious attainments and prompted to aid in the work of preaching the doctrine of Christian universalism, to receive letters of fellowship and engaging in the work of the ministry; and that it be recommended that our public schools and colleges be opened for females on equal terms with males.

Galbraith regretted that his motion on women came up too late in the session in which it was proposed, when only thirty-four of the over one hundred delegates were present. One delegate, Rev. Mr. Chambre from New Jersey, moved indefinite postponement of the resolution but his motion lost a majority vote. Still, Galbraith voiced his certainty that in the 1859 Convention, when sufficient time would be allotted for discussion of the merits of his resolution, it would easily pass. Galbraith returned his resolution to the 1859 Rochester National Convention, when both Jenkins were among New York's sixty-four ministers in attendance. Unfortunately, again the resolution met resistance and was postponed indefinitely:

On motion to take up the resolution of Hon. J. Galbraith, laid over last year, Rev. O. J. Skinner moved it be indefinitely postponed. Carried. (General Convention 1859)

As Charles Howe observed, “**As a denomination, the Universalists were still not convinced that women belonged in the pulpit.**”³⁸ In fact, things got even worse for women at that Convention. Quite by surprise, Thomas Sawyer complained that women spoke too much. There was conversation about whether women should be allowed to speak at all: echoes of confrontations which Lydia's earlier cohorts in temperance reform, such as Antoinette Brown, experienced when they tried to occupy the podium during temperance meetings in the early 1850s. Sawyer's opposition came out of the blue. He had been a staunch supporter of Lydia as a preacher the previous year when he invited her to Orchard Street Church. Ironically, by this point in the gender controversy, Whittemore had begun to come around and Sawyer challenged Whittemore as well. Sawyer's views reflect Universalists orientation in separate spheres in denominational activities and help explain why Galbraith's resolution was completely tabled. Universalists were willing to support a talented individual woman but not yet ready to recognize women's rights more broadly.

*I allude to the prominence given in our Conference meetings to **female** labors --- It seems to me that this matter needs a more serious consideration than we have yet given it. Please with the apparent success of a few public efforts made by one or two women among us, we are ready, I fear, to fall into the indiscretion of supposing that female exhortation and female preaching are to work wonders in our cause. Dr. Whittemore, from being opposed to female preachers, has become a flaming convert to their rights and duties, and now calls upon 'the sisters' to stand forward on all occasions. I would be cautious not to interfere with any one's sense of duty or Christian privilege. If any woman wishes to preach, let her preach. If people wish to hear her, let them hear her. The world is large and will suffer nothing by admitting a large freedom. **But he who imagines that God intended women to be preachers of the Gospel and to take a prominent part in the work of the ministry, must form a different estimate both of the work and the workmen from what I entertain. Upon a more careful observation, or a larger experience, we shall find that St. Paul was right in his views upon this subject. Many women followed and ministered to Christ, but we do not read that he ever sent any out to preach the Gospel.** (final bold mine). (CA Oct 15, 1859)*

³⁸ Howe, “Under Orders,” 45.

Thus, the formation of ‘camps’ continued, as Sylvanus Cobb, editor of *Christian Freeman*, then rebutted Sawyer in arguing that educated women should be allowed to demonstrate their knowledge by participation in meetings. Nevermind that Sawyer was also put out with Cobb himself for speaking too much. Still, there was reservation even in Cobb’s defense of women:³⁹

There were but four or five (women) who spoke at all, two of three of whom spoke but once each, and with extreme brevity; another spoke twice in the three days, and very briefly; and another, if we mistake not, three times with modesty and brevity, and marked ability..... we have no apprehension that there will be any rush of young women who shall desire to assume any such labor (of ministry) and responsibility. (CF Nov. 18, 1859)

Lydia lost a great ally when Galbraith died in June 1860.⁴⁰ Without Galbraith’s, there was no one to revive the woman’s resolution at the 1860 National Convention. The next resolution about gender before the national meeting was presented in 1863, at the Convention in Portland, Maine, on September 15, three months after Olympia Brown’s ordination. Rev. H. Blanchard of Brooklyn introduced a resolution, which was also tabled:⁴¹

Whereas, woman has ever given the power of her sympathy, the eloquence of her advocacy, and her untiring efforts in accomplishing each step of progress in civilization in this country; as she has contributed so generously to the successful prosecution of the war of resistance against the encroachments of the barbarism of Slavery, by her invaluable services in connection with the Sanitary Commission, by her maternal tenderness and care for the soldiers in camp, and field and hospital; as the true dignity of man is in entire harmony with the broadest Christian personal freedom, independently of the limitations of sex,

Therefore be it resolved, by the Universalist of the United States of American, in Convention assembled, that we hail the dawning day of social, intellectual and political rights, so that shall be dispelled that relic of a crumbling social state; which regards woman as the helpless dependency of man’s will, instead of being the counterpart and complement of his highest and noblest nature.(General Convention 1863)

To date, I have not found evidence that the Universalist National General Convention ever passed a resolution promoting the acceptance of women in leadership as a class. Without taking this paper in yet another direction, let me briefly suggest here that it is my impression that by 1865, Lydia (probably Edmund too) had pretty much experienced as much pushback to women from fellow ministers as she was willing to put up, especially following an incident where it seems that the New York State Convention lost track of Lydia’s membership, so making her ineligible for a pocket of financial ‘relief.’⁴² The Jenkins’ move to Binghamton in 1866 to establish their own watercure clinic suggests their reorientation toward alternative health rather than Universalist ministry. Still, Lydia’s reform efforts in Universalist ministry were reaping benefits for women. In that same year of 1865, several other women --- Olympia Brown, August

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ LAJ offered an obituary of her colleague: “Hon. John Galbraith,” *Christian Ambassador* (July 4, 1860). See also “Death of Hon. John Galbraith,” *Christian Freeman*, June 29, 1860. It is hard to say whether Whittemore’s death on March 21, 1861 helped or hindered the Woman Question. See “Sketch of the Life of Rev. Thomas Whittemore,” *Christian Ambassador* (Apr. 6, 1861).

⁴¹ Was it Blanchard who Lydia substituted for in Brooklyn?

⁴² “New York State Convention,” *Christian Ambassador* (Sept. 23, 1865).

Chapin, R. A. Damon --- met far fewer challenges as they pursued their call because of the work Lydia had done before them.⁴³ At some point, according to his obituary in the *Universalist Register* in 1909, Edmund converted to Unitarianism because it was a more progressive denomination.

IV: Feminist Theology

Lydia Jenkins was among the first to advance what she herself identified as ‘feminine theology,’ a viewpoint for religious interpretation which her prior work with women’s rights reformers may have generated in her. She called for feminist perspective in several passages:

The prevalent Theology of Christendom convinces me that there is need of an infusion of the feminist element into theology. If failure, if martyrdom is mine, this demand will still be met. ‘Want is earnest of its own supply.’ (CA Oct. 23, 1858)

Among the reasons why she entered ministry explained in her sermon in Williamsburg in October 1858, a sermon widely distributed in religious and secular press, was her call to herself and to others to interpret Universalist theology through gender lenses.

The theology of Christendom was cold and intellectual; it needed a new infusion of the feminine element to bring it back to its original humanity; when she felt this need, she could not refuse this labor. (NYT Oct. 18, 1858)

What did she mean by a ‘feminine’ element? We may interpret this in several ways. Here I suggest that she was advocating both a theology as we would categorize it today and the presence of women into the work of ministry. That is, she advocated both theoretical ideas and practical implementation of woman’s influence in Universalist ministry. Said more specifically, she promoted: 1) the compatibility of Universalism to aspects of human interaction more generally attributed to women, and 2) the presence of woman’s bodies in the pulpit as a statement of women’s rights to occupy the public sphere through public speaking as preachers.

1) Lydia’s ‘feminine’ lens on Universalism highlighted Universalism’s capacity to support virtues of compassion and patience typically attributed to women in a way that other theological systems were not as able to support. That is, women were particularly gifted to embrace universal belief in God’s unconditional caring and goodness. Women by nature held attributes of character conducive to ministry, and Lydia aimed to raise other Universalists’ awareness of this compatibility, so to enhance growth in numbers in those who heard Universalism’s saving gospel. Other ministers agreed with her. One of Lydia’s earliest supporters, Rev. J.W. Bailey, went so far as to assert that women make better ministers than men because a feminist theology is more compatible with Universalist theology than is men’s ministry:

There is no doubt that woman is better fitted, naturally, for a religious teacher than man. She will greatly excel him in visiting the sick, and administering consolation to the afflicted. She possesses more of an adaptability to the preaching of the real gospel. There is a greater congeniality between her nature and Christianity than between it and man’s nature. And especially there is a natural affinity between the heart of woman and Universalism. I believe that if today a majority of the preachers in Christendom were females, the doctrine of endless misery would soon become extinct. (CA Mar. 14, 1857)

⁴³ “Women in the Ministry,” *Ladies Repository* (vol. 34, 1865), 307-308.

The *Trumpet* continued reflection on her Williamsburg sermon by saying:

...she preaches a truly practical Christianity... her sympathies are with all practical reforms that look to the breaking of chains, whether on body or mind. Without stopping to inquire whether her doctrinal views are evangelical or liberal, safe or unsafe, her ministrations will be attended with good,,, The conclusion is inevitable that the feminine soul, subdued by suffering, purified by love, and softened by the graces of the spirit, is peculiarly well fitted to present to a sin sick world a Gospel of Love and loving kindness. (Trpt Nov. 27 1858)

Simply by her presence in the pulpit, Lydia advanced feminist ministry. She suggested the advantages which she as a woman brought to Universalist ministry:

.... thousands of persons who would never listen to the sermons of men advocating our doctrines. (Autobiography 2).

Indeed, numerous press reports of her preaching like this from May 1858 in New York City noted that:

...the attendance was unusually large, aided, no doubt, in a measure by the novelty of a woman occupying the sacred desk. (CA May 22, 1858)

A woman in the pulpit helped remind everyone, especially women, how Universalist doctrine could enhance their care of children:

...that many a mother's heart had been torn by the fear that her child might be doomed to everlasting punishment. (CA Oct 26, 1858).

2) Additionally, Lydia's place in the pulpit represented a statement about women's rights. It wasn't only an assertion that women's ways are especially compatible with Universalist theology, but that women as a group have a right to advance that assertion through their presence in the pulpit. Further, in supporting one woman, they supported the right of access to all women should they be able and willing to preach. Lydia considered her own ministry a means for other women to assert their right to be ministers:

I was resolved that so far as other women were concerned, opposition to their preaching and prejudice against it, should receive an effectual blow; that the way should be made, not only possible but easy, for other women to give expression to their soul's longings in like manner, and so make their work in the ministry easier for themselves than it had been for me, who had preceded any other women in our fellowship by several years, and more apparent in its results. (Autobiography 2)

It was this facet of Lydia's ministry --- that she was one of those 'woman's rights reformers,' --- that most rankled the naysayers of her ministry and defeated the passage of gender reform at the General Convention.

During her active ministry, 1857-1862, it seems clear that Lydia's ministry helped open up the pulpit for other women to assert women's rights. By summer 1859 Universalists had settled down considerably in opinionated discussion about Lydia's place in the pulpit, thus opening up ministry for others. We have already noted Augusta Chapin's contribution to the 'woman question' in her article in the *Christian Ambassador* in January 1859. According to E. R. Hanson, Chapin began preaching in the Midwest sometime around May 1859. We cannot know if she and Lydia ever had personal interactions, but certainly Chapin knew of Lydia's ministry.

Hanson reports that Chapin was fellowshipped in May 1862 and ordained in December 1863.⁴⁴ Harriet Hunt, as we have seen, began preaching in April 1859 but did not seek ordination. She and Lydia had been together in social reform activities as early as 1852. By July 1859 there were reports of Charlotte Porter's preaching. Charlotte, like Lydia, had the advantage of being the wife of a Universalist minister, Rev. L. F. Porter, minister in Webster, New York and, by the report of the Ontario Association annual meeting in 1859, took advantage of the growth of Universalism in central New York to find opportunities to preach.⁴⁵ We have also already noted Eliza Magoon's contribution to the 'woman question' through her essays submitted to the *Trumpet*, when she reported that she had preached several times starting in winter 1858.⁴⁶

Lydia's ministry may also have been an influence on the religious life, if not the actual ministry, of Antoinette Brown. As noted above, Brown left her parish in South Butler in summer 1854 less than a year after her congregation ordained her. Antoinette and Lydia shared the leadership of temperance and women's rights meetings since the early 1850s: they had to have known one another. While ministering in South Butler, Antoinette defined herself theologically as 'orthodox.' On leaving her parish, she went through a period of discernment about her call to ministry. After her marriage to Samuel Blackwell in January 1856, she turned her attention to their growing family, just at the time that Lydia was 'converting' to Universalism from Calvinism. Perhaps Lydia inspired Antoinette. While Antoinette did not return to active ministry for many more years, by the end of 1859, the press began to report to her conversion to 'a more rational faith.' One paper incorrectly reported that she converted from Presbyterianism to Universalism.⁴⁷ When she returned to ministry in 1878, Antoinette secured fellowship in the Unitarian denomination.

Women in the pulpit represented a crossing of boundaries and a new look for ministry. It was not only entry into the public sphere but also into a style of compassion more attuned to personal needs of women and children that marked the reform Lydia hoped to bring to Universalism. A report in *Gospel Banner* about her preaching in Thomas Sawyer's church summarizes the impact of her call to ministry:

I left the church saying, Woman should preach. The pulpit needs her to vitalize its energies, which have, for years, hibernated in the frost of theological conventionalism. While man works alone, endeavoring to restrain vice and lead to virtue, human beings are not fully developed and the philanthropist is dissatisfied with the results. Not till woman is associated with him, in all his efforts, and her influence exercised without anticipated jeers, will the truth simply spoken find willing ears and individuals be so educated that their instinct will lead to virtue and their hearts yearn for righteousness. (Gos Ban July 17 1858)

Conclusions

⁴⁴ Hanson, *Woman Workers*, 435-436.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 426-427; "Ontario Association," *Christian Ambassador* (July ??, 1859).

⁴⁶ "Letter from a Lady Preacher," *Trumpet* (July 2, 1859).

⁴⁷ "Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell," *Christian Ambassador* (Nov 5, 1859); "Rev. Antoinette L. Brown," *CA* (Dec 10, 1859).

What does this study of the reception of Lydia Jenkins' ministry suggest about her place in the historical record? If her ministry had not been catapulted into this public limelight and scrutiny, would she have stayed in active ministry longer than five years? Perhaps if she had, would she have been able to secure longer settled pastorates, as did Olympia Brown and other women ministers who came after Lydia? Perhaps more years serving congregations would have earned her more acknowledgment in the historical record. What was the effect of a powerful denominational leader such as Whittemore on her effectiveness as a reformer? Would more Universalist women have been actively engaged in speaking out, had they felt that the denomination were more open to their viewpoints? Would more women and men have dared Universalists to take a proactive stand for women's rights in general and for women in the pulpit more specifically? Lydia's boundary breaking ministry was hard enough to understand, especially for writers in the secular press. If Whittemore and others had not added to the confusion through their own sparring within denominational circles, would the public at large have better understood the significance of her ministry, and thus might she have been given a more accurate place in the historical record?

Lydia urged Universalists to practice the values they espoused when she reported comments she heard from a Baptist minister at the 1858 National Convention in Providence. She reported that the Baptist said to her:

... *'if the Universalists would but live up to their divinely inspired sentiments, they might exercise a power that would shake the world.'* (CA Oct. 2, 1858)

Lydia added her own benediction, 'May our Father give us wisdom as well as zeal, and that love coming down from heaven which will make us labor gladly for the highest good of man, and the upbuilding of the kingdom of Christ on earth.'

The story of the reception of Lydia Jenkins' ministry demonstrates the tensions which existed in mid-nineteenth-century Universalism between the espoused value of universal acceptance of all and the practiced value of filtering women's ministry through particular lenses and established paradigms. Today women hold a more established place in religious leadership. May we trust that in the early twentieth-first century, Unitarian Universalism can continue to merge what we espouse and what we practice, in women's ministry and in other facets of congregational life and denominational organization.

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