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## A Woman's Ministry: Mary Collson's Search for Reform - Unitarian Minister, Hull House Social Worker, Christian Science

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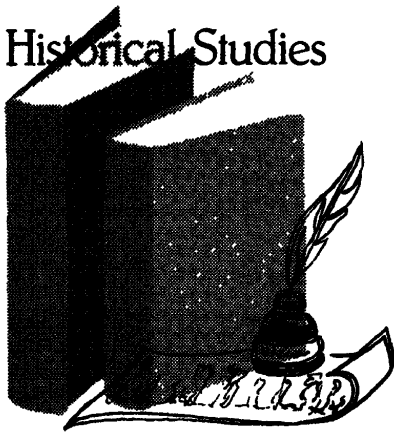
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# Book Reviews:

## Historical Studies



### Her Story:

#### **Women in Christian Tradition**

by Barbara J. MacHaffie

Fortress, 1986

183 pp., paper, \$10

Reviewed by Joann Wolski Conn

This lively survey of the history of Christianity helps redress an imbalance and recalls forgotten history. Directed to a general audience, it paints in broad strokes a picture of the status of women in the Christian tradition from biblical times to the present day, with special emphasis on North American Christianity.

The content is clearly focused on questions of fact and issues for interpretation. MacHaffie answers these factual questions: What leadership and liturgical roles did women play? What roles did they find for themselves outside of "official" structures? How were females and "the feminine" regarded in devotional and theological writings? MacHaffie draws careful yet tentative conclusions about the following matters of interpretation: What is the true source of misogyny (fear, hatred of women) with which the church is so often infused? Why do new movements frequently give wider roles to women only to retreat as

the group becomes established? Were women silently protesting against their low status when they joined groups that deviated from the mainstream? Claims are modest when the evidence is ambiguous.

In contrast to feminist scholarship that discards the Christian past as hopelessly oppressive, MacHaffie affirms a usable past for Christian women. She demonstrates, in a powerful synthesis of feminist research, that women have benefited from Christian tradition and have actively contributed to it.

MacHaffie's careful method, excellent synthesis, and stimulating questions and answers have persuaded me to choose her book as a required text in my undergraduate courses.

JOANN WOLSKI CONN *teaches at Neumann College, Aston, Pennsylvania. This review is reprinted with permission from Theology Today, January 1987.*



#### **A Woman's Ministry: Mary Collson's Search for Reform as a Unitarian Minister, a Hull House Social Worker, and a Christian Science Practitioner**

by Cynthia Grant Tucker  
Temple University Press, 1984

222 pages, hardback, \$28  
Reviewed by Reta Finger

*A Woman's Ministry* sat unread on my shelf for months. I simply could not get excited about an early feminist whose theology and experience seemed so different from my own. Ten minutes into the book I was hooked—and read nonstop to the end.

English professor Cynthia Tucker has done a masterful job of bringing to life Mary Collson (1870-1953), a younger contemporary of Jane Addams who spent her life in various arenas of social reform.

Born in poverty in Iowa, but surrounded by strong Unitarian women, Collson worked her way through college, became a Unitarian minister, and set out to save the world. Her search was a

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paradigm of American liberalism for over a century—wavering between reforming societal structures and making individual people better

From 1899-1901, Collson's stint at Addams's Hull House among the worst slums of Chicago so disillusioned her about reforming structural injustices that she found refuge for a time among Christian Scientists, who denied error and evil

Christian Science in turn deceived her, through its sexism, authoritarianism, and misrepresentation of truth. Collson's 30 year struggle with this cult was the best analysis of it I've ever read

In gifted prose, Tucker weaves together action and reflection in a book I would highly recommend for historians, theologians, social workers, and feminists (Try a library first!) Complete with extensive footnotes and bibliography, *A Woman's Ministry* is one volume in the series "American Civilization," edited by Allen F. Davis

To order, contact Temple University Press, 1601 N Broad, Room 305, Philadelphia, PA 19122 215 787 8787



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