

ANNE HUTCHINSON: A LIFE IN PRIVATE

Jessica Leight

Anne Hutchinson, a member of the pantheon of American heroes for more than three hundred and fifty years, has always been the stuff of legend. According to Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*, she is a holy martyr who caused rose bushes to spring up at her feet; she is a phenomenon, an American Joan of Arc who heroically stood her ground alone against Puritan tyranny. Although such descriptions are not completely inaccurate, they overlook a basic fact about Anne Hutchinson. She was not alone. Her enemies deliberately construed her as isolated and abandoned in an effort to contain the threat she posed, but that was most emphatically not the case. Though she is perhaps the most famous leader of what we now know as the Antinomian movement, there was another—her fiery brother-in-law Reverend John Wheelwright, an admirably effective incendiary who also gave the movement a religious authority and validity that Hutchinson, as a woman, could not provide.

There is, however, a crucial difference between Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright that made and still makes the former more radical, more hated, and ultimately, more important, a difference revealed in the punishments each received for

Jessica Leight will be in the class of 2006 at Yale. She graduated early from Cambridge Rindge and Latin School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she wrote this paper as a Junior for an independent study supervised by Mr. Michael Desimone in 2001.

their seditious and blasphemous rebellion. Both were banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and those who overtly supported them faced penalties. However, only Hutchinson was excommunicated, and Wheelwright's banishment was eventually revoked, though he never returned to Massachusetts. And never was John Wheelwright, who became a respected minister in New Hampshire following his banishment, subject to the same revulsion, vitriol and contempt that was heaped on the head of his female counterpart.

Quite simply, the difference between them lay in the threat each posed. Wheelwright's rebellion was primarily in the political and the politicoreligious spheres—ministerial appointments, gubernatorial elections, and public sermons. Throughout his life, he remained within this recognizable framework of sanctioned political engagement. Hutchinson, while she participated as fully in such engagements as was possible for a woman at that time, went even further: she radically politicized the private sphere. Rather than attempt to gain an appointment or win an election, she denied the necessity of either; she spoke at home, she spoke directly to her ministerial opponents in private and personal conversation, and she spoke of direct revelations and communions with God that could only be private experiences. Moreover, she was a midwife, presiding over one of the most private and mysterious experiences of daily life, and one from which men, who more or less constituted the public at this point, were entirely excluded. Everything she did went against the grain of Puritan New England religion and society, which was entirely public—publicly displayed, publicly regulated. By affirming and exalting the primacy of privacy, Anne Hutchinson struck to the heart of a society in which making the private public was a virtual mania. And thus she earned more bitter hatred and retrospective praise than John Wheelwright ever garnered, or deserved.

The two people around whom the Antinomian controversy would one day swirl had similar experiences with the tyranny of state-imposed religion in the old country before taking refuge in the Puritan wilderness—a wilderness that later proved to be

inhospitable for them. John Wheelwright is thought to have been born at Saleby, England, a tiny town twenty-four miles from Boston in Lincolnshire, sometime during the year 1592. He attended Cambridge as a classmate of Oliver Cromwell and then became a zealous Puritan minister; as “he was of too frank and independent a spirit to leave his position in doubt,”¹ he was eventually silenced for non-conformity. Following the loss of his parish, he lived privately for three years until the departures of his friends and colleagues for New England convinced him to follow them. He, his wife, originally Mary Hutchinson, and their five children landed at Boston, Massachusetts on May 25, 1636, where they joined Mary’s brother William, his wife Anne, and their family.

Anne Hutchinson was raised by a rebellious clergyman not unlike the brother-in-law she eagerly welcomed that May day, and she inherited from him a healthy sense of religious radicalism. Born in 1591, she grew up under the tutelage of her father, Francis Marbury, who never identified himself as a Puritan but waged an endless struggle for ecclesiastical reform, most notably more rigorous training for ministers and the providing of a minister for every parish.² He was silenced for these views during Hutchinson’s childhood (which was what enabled him to take charge of his precocious daughter’s education); within a few years, however, he had settled down sufficiently to obtain a comfortable and prestigious post in a prominent London parish. There, Hutchinson spent her adolescence in one of the great political and intellectual centers of Europe, with an insider’s view of the ecclesiastical hierarchy as well as close ties to her mother’s ardently Puritan relatives.³ As a young woman she also gained her first practical training in midwifery, an occupation in which she would become highly skilled.

Following her father’s death, Anne Marbury took the conventional step and married William Hutchinson, a wealthy merchant from her home town. The couple lived in Alford and immediately began having children, while Hutchinson, just as she would do later in New England, quickly gained the admiration and respect of the women around her because of her gifts as a midwife.

She and her husband were also lucky enough to find a religious mentor in keeping with their Puritan tastes—John Cotton, the extraordinarily popular and defiantly rebellious preacher in Boston, twenty-four miles away.⁴ Thus through the first years of her marriage, life for Hutchinson seemed stable and happy. Sometime in the mid-1620s, however, the death of her son William, the couple's eighth child and the first to die, triggered a wrenching personal crisis. She later described it as lasting "a twelvemonth altogether":

When I was in old England, I was much troubled at the constitution of the churches there, so far as I was ready to have joined to the Separation, whereupon I set apart a day for humiliation by myself, to seek direction from God.⁵

Contributing to Hutchinson's personal distress was the alarming state of political and politicoreligious affairs in England at that time. Continuing official harassment from quasi-Catholic Archbishop William Laud was making it more and more likely that John Cotton would be silenced, leaving the Hutchinsons with no sanctioned alternative to the established church. England was ravaged by drought, flooding and plague, while the new, clearly Catholic, and even more clearly incompetent King Charles provided little or no help. Though Hutchinson would probably have been ready to leave England right then and there, she and her husband were determined to follow the example Cotton set, and in a 1629 tract he rejected Separatism and pledged to remain in England and purify the Church.

In the early 1630s, however, illness forced John Cotton into retirement and took the lives of two of the young Hutchinson daughters, a triple tragedy for the family. Though they found themselves a new ally in the fiery John Wheelwright, the Hutchinsons, infuriated by Laud's papist tendencies and the economic pressures Charles's government was placing on middle-class merchants such as William, decided they could not remain any longer in England. At the same time, Cotton, upon recovering, found himself in serious danger because of his unacceptable religious sympathies; bowing to necessity, he made his way in disguise to south England and departed for Massachusetts from

there. The Hutchinsons had planned to go on the same ship, but were forced to postpone their plans because of yet another pregnancy. They departed from London at last on June 4, 1634.

The first hints of the tumultuous life Hutchinson would find in Boston appeared during this voyage, or rather, immediately before it. The departure of the ship the family traveled on was delayed significantly, and during the interval they stayed with fellow traveler William Bartholomew in London. Hutchinson, thinking that she was at last surrounded by sympathetic Puritans, eagerly poured her heart out and told him, as he later repeated, “that she had never had any great thing done about her but it was revealed to her beforehand...And also that she was to come to New England but for Mr. Cotton’s sake.” Once on the ship, she repeated this alarming assertion of personal communion with God to the orthodox misogynist Reverend Zechariah Symmes, challenging him in front of the entire ship to disprove the truthfulness of her revelations. “What would you say if we should be at New England within three weeks?”⁶

She soon found out what he would say. Following the *Griffin’s* arrival in Boston on September 8, William Hutchinson was immediately admitted into the Boston church, indicating his acceptance as one of God’s elect. Anne’s declarations on board, however, were considered significantly alarming to bar her immediate accession to that honored title. A special hearing was assembled at which she was expected to recant and apologize for her outrageous statements; presiding were the governor Thomas Dudley, pastor of the Boston church John Wilson, Reverend Symmes and her old friend John Cotton, who had since become teacher of the Boston church. Though Hutchinson seems to have passed the test and Dudley stated he was “satisfied that she held nothing different from us,” former governor and Puritan founding father *par excellence* John Winthrop later argued in his account of the entire Antinomian scandal that she had “cunningly dissembled and colored her opinions,” and that those present had simply failed to see through her deception.⁷ Having barely accustomed herself to walking on New World land, Hutchinson was already a cause for controversy.

Once she was admitted into the church, however, Hutchinson and her husband seemed to settle into a respectable life as prominent members of the community. Their house stood in the “fashionable quarter of the town,”⁸ close to that of John Winthrop—later one of Hutchinson’s most prominent adversaries—and to the church. Her husband became a well-known businessman, and she gained tremendous renown as a sympathetic and effective healer capable of helping women to survive the ten to twenty pregnancies and births they might undergo in a lifetime. Even beyond the sphere of her professional duties, her charisma soon made its presence felt, as Adams, an early historian of the controversy, remarked:

...above all Anne Hutchinson, though devoid of attractiveness of person, was wonderfully endowed with the indescribable quality known as magnetism—that subtle power by which certain human beings—themselves not knowing how they do it—irresistibly attract others, and infuse them with their own individuality.⁹

Thus when Hutchinson began to hold weekly women’s meetings to discuss the sermon of the previous Sunday, she found a ready audience. It is difficult to know exactly what impelled her to begin these meetings. Perhaps experience had taught her the difficulty of weekly church attendance for mothers with small children; perhaps her natural religious fervor and acute intelligence craved an outlet. In the transcript of her political trial, she stated that the reason was a desire to dispel accusations of impiety and pride.

The ground of my taking it up was, when I first came to this land because I did not go to such meetings as those were, it was presently reported that I did not allow of such meetings but held them unlawful and therefore in that regard they said I was proud and did despise all ordinances, upon that a friend came unto me and told me of it and I to prevent such aspersions took it up, but it was in practice before I came therefore was I not the first.¹⁰

Though Hutchinson was quite right in pointing out she was not the first to preside over such gatherings, her popularity caused her meetings to take on unheard-of proportions. Forty, sixty, or even eighty women would come several times a week, and they hung upon Hutchinson’s every word. Adams attributes her

success merely to the sort of temporary fashionableness bestowed by a fickle public and compares her meetings to the events of the “season;”¹¹ however, this unsympathetic statement reveals no understanding of the tremendous importance Hutchinson, as a skilled and sympathetic midwife, had for the women of Boston. In the move to New England, these women had lost the ties to mothers, sisters and friends that had sustained them through a life of continuous childbearing and childrearing. The loneliness they experienced raising families in hostile and isolated environments drove some nearly to insanity. Then Anne arrived, a woman who could heal them, who would talk to them, who would lead them. And so of course they came to the meetings, scores of them.¹²

At first, the church hierarchy was pleased at this outburst of religious enthusiasm and female piety; it was almost a revival.¹³ Hutchinson, after all, was a prominent and devout member of the Boston church, and only the most suspicious churchmen found immediate fault in the meetings. But soon, Hutchinson’s soirées became less innocuous. In response to her audience’s interest—in fact, their near-adulation—and in keeping with her own brilliance and constant theological introspection, she moved from repeating sermons to commenting on them, and from commenting to formulating her own distinct doctrine. As Winthrop sardonically remarked, “the pretense was to repeat sermons, but when that was done, she would comment...and she would be sure to make it serve her turn.”¹⁴ What was actually happening, however, was far more radical and far more significant than Hutchinson making the words of others “serve her turn.” She was not using anyone else’s words; she was preaching a new brand of Puritanism, and this is what is now known as Antinomianism.

As nearly all students of the Antinomian controversy have discovered to their chagrin, the differences between the Antinomian beliefs and those of their adversaries are frequently so subtle as to be indistinguishable. However, boiled down to its simplest principles, Antinomianism¹⁵ is relatively basic, and it is described succinctly and lucidly by John Winthrop in what is also the first mention of Anne in his diary.

One Mrs. Hutchinson, a member of the church of Boston, a woman of a ready wit and bold spirit, brought over with her two dangerous errors: 1. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person. 2 That no sanctification can help to evidence to us our justification.¹⁶

Consider the second statement first. According to Catholic doctrine, good works on earth are necessary to personal salvation after death. John Calvin rejected this idea but stated that the performance of good works, i.e. the living of a moral life in accordance with the dictates of the church, is evidence that a person has been chosen for salvation. This, however, is a slippery idea, and could easily lead to piety and morality being construed as the cause of one's salvation, rather than simply the outward signs of it.

Hutchinson fully grasped the ambiguity in the Puritan position on this point, and to eliminate it she took Protestant doctrine a step farther, stating that outward forms of godliness—known in New England parlance as sanctification—bear no relation, either causal or evidential, to personal salvation. In other words, she rejected the notion of man's ability to change his ultimate fate even more thoroughly than Calvin did. One could live by the laws of the Bible and the Church, one could be moral and sober and godly, but that did not necessarily mean that one was chosen as one of God's elect, and similarly, one could sin nonstop and still find ultimate salvation. When asked how then one could know if one was saved, the Antinomians replied that such knowledge could only be obtained through a revelation, an assurance of salvation sent directly by God. A person who received such assurance would be serene enough in his faith that he would never doubt the state of his soul again. To the prudish and authoritarian Puritan elders, this doctrine was viewed as nothing more than an open door to sin; after all, if one did not have to behave oneself to go to heaven, who would bother?

The other "dangerous error" Winthrop alluded to relates essentially to the question of Church authority—or rather, challenges to that authority. The Antinomians believed that a justified person (one who has been chosen for eternal salvation) experi-

ences a personal union with the Holy Ghost. As theological doctrine, this is simply blasphemous, since it amounts, more or less, to stating that every justified person is another Christ. More importantly, what it implies is a degree of personal communication between the Divine and the chosen on earth that supersedes the Bible, the church, the ministers, or any other go-betweens. And that, of course, is rebellion.

Despite the radical nature of these two doctrines, the most important and explosive aspect of Antinomianism actually lies not in either one, but in the way Hutchinson used them to anathematize the Puritan hierarchy, by exploiting the concept of a covenant of works versus a covenant of grace. The covenant of works is the original Christian idea, now held by the Catholic church, which states that God has made a covenant with mankind granting man the ability to earn salvation through the performance of good works on earth. (Good works here should be taken in the broader sense of living a moral life, rather than simply giving to charity.) On the other hand, the covenant of grace as conceived by Luther states that one cannot “earn” salvation. Men are saved only through the free gift of God’s grace, which was granted to a certain number of people, known as the elect, at the beginning of time.

The Puritans, however, were unwilling to assert that one’s behavior in life bore no relation to one’s fate after death, and so they developed the principle that “sanctification” does not earn but evidences membership in the covenant of grace. It is this belief that being good doesn’t cause you to go to heaven but proves to everyone else that you’re going to heaven that the Antinomians rejected as a new covenant of works. According to Hutchinson and her followers, the “legalist” ministers in Boston who preached that all saved persons would and should lead holy lives were under a covenant of works. In other words, they were indistinguishable from their greatest enemies, the Papists. Those who agreed with her that salvation comes through a personal revelation and is completely unrelated to moral behavior (or lack thereof) were under a covenant of grace. Needless to say, the difference between these two definitions in Puritan New England was vast.

The wheels of the Antinomian controversy, greased by this new brand of blasphemy, began turning in earnest in early October 1635, when two notable persons arrived in Boston. One was John Wilson, the pastor of the Boston church, who was returning from a trip to England to fetch his wife. A pillar of the Puritan establishment, Wilson was “hard, matter-of-fact, unimaginative”¹⁷ and noted for unrelenting adherence to the tenets of orthodoxy, however bigoted they might be. In other words, he was exactly the kind of man Hutchinson detested.

The second newcomer was as yet unknown to the people of Boston and no less to Hutchinson, though his reputation preceded him. This was Henry Vane—young and aristocratic, the son of one of the King’s closest advisors, sent to New England so he would not pester the court with his Puritan sympathies. Boston was, quite understandably, smitten with the young Vane; it was widely hoped that his presence would help the colony’s standing with King Charles at a time when the King was perpetually threatening to rescind its charter. Nothing was too good for this rising star, and so within two months of his arrival it was agreed that prior to the institution of a lawsuit in Boston the case would be submitted to Vane and two other elders of the Boston church for review. This was heady praise for an arrival so new and inexperienced, and it could not help but rub the more established members of the community the wrong way.¹⁸

Matters were not improved when the upstart Vane called a meeting on January 18, 1636 with the intention of reconciling Thomas Dudley and John Winthrop, who were widely perceived not only as rivals for the position of governor, which both had previously held, but as ideological opponents. Winthrop had been the first governor of Massachusetts and was still the most powerful man in the colony at this time; he had been briefly ousted by the stiff-necked Dudley who condemned him as too lenient. At the time, neither was actually in power. The panel assembled included leading ministers as well as the current governor John Haynes, and intending to usher in “a more firm and friendly uniting of minds, especially of the said Mr. Dudley and Mr. Winthrop,” it declared

the need for “strict discipline...tending to the honor and safety of the Gospel.” This was a bitter blow to Winthrop, who had effectively been chastised for lax discipline by a group led by a man young enough to be his son. In the coming controversy, he would not forget this.¹⁹

During these events, our fiery heroine was absent for quite a simple reason: she was pregnant. At forty-four, Hutchinson underwent her fifteenth pregnancy, and she gave birth to her twelfth living child in March. Due to a difficult pregnancy at her relatively advanced age, she seems to have more or less retired from society before the birth, but she was soon back in full vigor, at which point she encountered her pastor John Wilson preaching for the first time. (Though he had been present at her hearing held the previous fall, he had evidently departed soon after for England, and so Hutchinson had never seen him in his ministerial capacity.) Especially in comparison to her beloved Cotton, Wilson’s bluntness must have been more than unappealing. Hutchinson soon began to boycott the Boston church, once leading a group of women out of services when Wilson began to preach and resuming her former practice of meetings in her home now, bigger and better than ever.

By the spring of 1636, Hutchinson’s renewed efforts had paid off, and she had a new and crucially important convert, Henry Vane. Whether Vane joined to gratify his propensity for making trouble, (he had, after all, been sent from the royal court because his ardent Puritanism was too great an irritation to be borne) or because of religious convictions, is both unknowable and irrelevant, but his election as governor in May of that year, with Winthrop his deputy, was indisputably an Antinomian victory. The very next day, John Wheelwright and his family arrived in Boston. Now things really began to move for Hutchinson. She had Wheelwright and she had the governor; her husband was active in local politics; and “to [her] living room every Monday and Thursday now paraded the highest concentration of wealth in the colony.”²⁰ The Antinomian movement was coming into its own, well-known and well-established, the enthusiasm of its members testified to by the colonial observer Edward Johnson.

Come along with you, says one of them, I'll bring you to a woman that preaches better gospel than any of your black-coats who have been at the university, a woman of another kind of spirit, who has had many Revelations of things to come, and for my part, says he, I had rather hear such a one that speaks from the mere motion of the spirit, without any study at all, than any of your learned scholars, although they may be fuller of Scripture and admit they may speak by the help of the spirit, yet the other goes beyond them.²¹

Nevertheless, there was one thing lacking—the overt support of a member of the appointed clergy. Cotton was making a determined effort to be neutral, either out of concern for his social position or simple preoccupation, and so naturally Hutchinson and her supporters turned to Wheelwright. Soon after his arrival, it was proposed that he be made an assistant teacher in the Boston church, and as was the custom, a date was set for formal debate of the idea by the congregation. Five days before this occurred, however, a number of ministers from outside Boston met with Cotton, Wheelwright and members of the General Court in an attempt to resolve theological differences. Though there was no direct reference to the proposal to appoint Wheelwright, it was clear that the purpose of the assembly was to ascertain whether or not he was in fact a suitable candidate. The assembled ministers ostensibly came to an agreement that sanctification does evidence justification but could not decide on the possibility of a personal union of the Holy Ghost; this agreement or lack thereof had no bearing on the debate on the Boston church.²²

In fact, only one thing truly had bearing on that debate, held on Sunday, October 30, 1636: John Winthrop's opposition to Wheelwright's appointment. Despite the huge majority of the congregation in support of Wheelwright, Winthrop's moral and political authority in the community gave him the deciding vote, and so he emerged victorious from this passage of arms. Wheelwright did not become assistant teacher. Instead, he was appointed leader of a new, small, daughter congregation developing at Mount Woolystone, on the outskirts of Boston where, it was hoped, he would be too far away to make trouble.

The month of December following these events was one primarily of talking, and these conversations would later be exam-

ined in excruciating detail in the various trials dealing with the Antinomian controversy. First, Vane announced he was returning to England because his personal affairs demanded his attention, presumably with the intent of reminding his opponents, most notably Winthrop, that his august presence could be removed from them if offended. The Boston church came in on cue and refused to give their permission, and so things remained as they were. Meanwhile, a number of ministers got together with the members of the General Court to bemoan the present state of affairs especially in reference to Vane's participation, and Wilson made a bitter speech—a “veritable jeremiad”²³—on the present condition of the churches in which he blamed the Antinomians for their downfall. During this time, virtually everyone was engaged in long and barely intelligible correspondence about fine points of theological doctrine with John Cotton, who was being pressed to take a definitive stand. Cotton, on the other hand, was playing compromiser as always; he held a meeting at his house between Hutchinson and a number of ministers, among them the die-hard conservatives Wilson, Hugh Peter and Thomas Weld, in the hope that a face-to-face conference would lessen the tension. Unfortunately things didn't work out quite as planned—Hutchinson simply told the ministers outright they were under a covenant of works. Later, this conference would play a key part in her trial.

Seeing that their attempts to smooth things over had not been particularly successful, the ministers of the colony called for a general fast day of repentance and prayer to attempt to heal and/or atone for the division in the churches, to be held on January 20, 1637. On that day in the Boston church, following Watson's sermon, John Wheelwright was invited to “exercise as a private brother.” In other words, he was allowed to make a speech but reminded that the privilege did not elevate him to the status of minister. Perhaps stung by this subtle barb, Wheelwright delivered the infamous Fast-Day Sermon, a veritable battle-cry for the Antinomians. Though it seems to the modern reader much like the other sermons of its day, i.e. long, boring, and virtually unintelligible, Wheelwright's address was considered to be tanta-

mount to an open declaration of war between those under a covenant of works and those under a covenant of grace—and that was a radical development in a controversy that specialized in ambiguities, obfuscation and general beating-around-the-bush.

Though the fast-day sermon would later loom large in the accounting of the Antinomian controversy it did not produce an immediate reaction; rather the next significant event revolved around Wilson's "jeremiad" of December. Perhaps fired up by Wheelwright's rousing address, the Boston congregation attempted on January 31 to censor their pastor for those imprudent remarks, described as "nothing less than an angry arraignment of almost the whole body of his people, including both Cotton and Vane."²⁴ Winthrop described this attack on his close friend and ally, which ended not in formal censure, but in an "exhortation" to Wilson by Cotton as follows:

...they called him to answer publicly, and there the governor pressed it violently against him, and all the congregation except the deputy and one or two more, and many of them with much bitterness and reproaches...It was strange to see, how the common people were led by example to condemn in that, which (it was very probably) divers of them did not understand, nor the rule which he was supposed to have broken; and that such as had known him [Wilson] so long, and what good he had done for that church should fall upon him with such bitterness for justifying himself in a good cause.²⁵

Perhaps having this humiliation of one of the most respected conservative clergymen in the colony in mind, the General Court when it met early in March decided to strike back, and it did so by using the most convenient tool available, the Fast-Day sermon. It was, in a way, poetic justice. Wilson had been reprimanded in church for a sermon in court; now Wheelwright would be reprimanded in court for a sermon in church. Before this could get underway, however, the Boston congregation stepped in and sent the court a petition asking that "proceedings in judicial cases should be conducted publicly, and that matters of conscience might be left for the church to deal with."²⁶ The court ignored the petition, returned it and continued its proceedings behind closed doors. Those proceedings, though protracted, were quite simple.

Wheelwright confirmed he had denounced all those who walked in a covenant of works; the ministers, in an odd but effective self-condemnatory gesture, said that they walked in such a covenant; Wheelwright was declared guilty of sedition and contempt.

This straightforward account masks what was truly going on behind the closed door: a bitter struggle for domination between Winthrop and Vane. After the decision was reached, Vane protested and was ignored, and another petition was presented, which was also ignored. There had been a decisive swing of power towards the conservatives, partially because the late political developments had excluded completely the driving force behind the Antinomians, Anne Hutchinson. Aware, however, that their victory had been slight, Winthrop & Co. postponed sentencing of Wheelwright until after the upcoming annual election, hoping that at that point they would have a more sympathetic court that would pronounce a harsh sentence without any fuss. Their last action was to take steps to ensure that they would indeed win the election that could pack the court with their supporters: they moved it from Boston, the bastion of Antinomian power, where a large turnout of Vane/Wheelwright supporters was inevitable, to Newtown, now Cambridge, where it was hoped residents of the more conservative outlying towns would carry the day.

The long-awaited election was held on May 17, 1637 on the Cambridge common, presided over by Henry Vane. As expected, he opened the meeting by attempting to resubmit the petition on behalf of John Wheelwright that had previously been dismissed by the court. Winthrop, as deputy governor, said it was out of order, and eventually those who desired an immediate election won out over those hoping to postpone it via debate over the petition. Winthrop was restored to his position as governor, with Thomas Dudley as deputy. Again, it was a straightforward result but one arrived at only after a bitter struggle, as Winthrop described. "There was a great danger of a tumult that day for those of that side [Vane supporters] grew into fierce speeches, and some laid hands on others; but seeing themselves too weak, they grew quiet."²⁷ In fact, according to a perhaps apocryphal source quoted by Thomas

Hutchinson in his work, the events of the day roused such passions that the rather elderly and stiff-necked Wilson had to climb up in a tree and call loudly for election in order to be heard over the clamor.

Following the election, both sides engaged in petty re-cremations, with Vane's honor guard refusing to attend Winthrop, and the General Court rejecting Vane and two colleagues as Boston representatives on the ground that not all freemen had been informed of the election. (A new election returned the same representatives who were then accepted.) Raising the stakes a little, the General Court passed an alien exclusion act barring any newcomers from remaining in the colony for more than three weeks without the permission of the magistrates, a move clearly intended to prevent the importation of more blasphemers. Then Hutchinson and her followers refused to support the Pequot War (May 26–July 28, 1637) because Wilson had been chosen as military chaplain. They rejected all requests for money, supplies or soldiers, enraging those in power, who believed they were waging a holy war, and given that the progress and success of the war were unaffected, this sudden spurt of pacifism harmed the Antinomians more than it did anything else.

This tit-for-tat sparring would no doubt have continued had it not been abruptly terminated by a matter of much greater import to both sides. Twice in June 1637, ships arrived in Boston bearing orders from the King that substituted appointed commissioners for the locally elected government and insisted that "there was no lawful authority in force" in the colony.²⁸ Massachusetts, the first house divided in North America, was dangerously close to being taken over by powers in London who valued stability more than salvation or sanctification. Determined to save the colony he had helped to build, Winthrop called for a religious synod at Newtown, beginning on August 30, to obliterate all differences and prove that Massachusetts was in fact harmonious and well-governed.

At this point, it was clear that the Antinomians were on their way down. The election had been the beginning of the end.

Vane, disgruntled by his defeat and evidently unwilling to stick it out when he was no longer being treated as the honorable young sir, had quietly returned to England on August 3. Wheelwright was awaiting sentence. Cotton, always vacillating, appeared to be moving closer to Winthrop. And the synod, after engaging in nine days of singularly meaningless obfuscation, took on a decidedly conservative tone, coming up with eighty-two opinions supposedly held by the dissenters and declaring them all blasphemous. Moreover, it took aim at Hutchinson herself, recently deprived of both her political and her clerical allies, by declaring²⁹

That though women might meet (some few together) to pray and edify one another, yet such a set assembly (as was then in practice at Boston) where sixty or more did meet every week, and one woman (in a prophetical way, by resolving questions of doctrine, and expounding scripture) took upon her the whole exercise, was agreed to be disorderly, and without rule.³⁰

With this denunciation as a sort of mission statement, the religious and political conservatives moved the controversy from the theological into the political spheres. Anne Hutchinson was called to appear before the November session of the General Court.

Before this occurred, however, the court elected the previous May was suddenly dissolved by the governor, and a new one was elected that included only twelve of the original deputies. The justification Winthrop offered for this action is completely obscure; in fact, it is quite possible that he offered no justification whatsoever. Recently reprimanded for softness and with the ambitious Dudley shadowing him at every step, Winthrop too had his back against the wall. He could not afford to let either Antinomianism or his unpleasantly persistent reputation for leniency survive, and if a new court was needed to achieve these ends, so be it.

Prior to the first sitting of this court, a more private affair in the life of Anne Hutchinson transpired which would eventually throw a great deal of light on its behavior. On October 17, 1637, the principal midwife of Boston hurried to the home of Mary Dyer (later turned Quaker and hanged as an old woman on Boston

common), who had borne three children in the last four years and was in the midst of an excruciating and difficult labor two months before term. Eventually, Hutchinson and another midwife, Jane Hawkins, managed to deliver the stillborn, deformed baby girl while the mother lay close to death. Then, uncertain what to do, Hutchinson went to John Cotton for advice. This is perhaps the most inexplicable part of the whole affair. Cotton certainly could not have given her medical guidance; perhaps she wondered whether the baby should be baptized or given similar rites before being buried, but she had not previously shown herself to be particularly mindful of such conventions. She had not been closely associated with Cotton for years, and it seems that her brother-in-law (who was still in Boston awaiting sentence) would have been the more logical choice for a dispenser of clerical advice.

But for whatever reason, to Cotton she went, and he told her, as he later repeated to Winthrop, “that, if it had been his own case, he should have desired to have had it concealed. He had known other monstrous births, which had been concealed, and that he thought God might intend only the instruction of the parents.”³¹ Hutchinson and Hawkins then buried the baby together to protect the weak and ill mother from the shock of seeing it when she regained consciousness. Cotton’s action suggests that he still retained at least some personal ties to Hutchinson, since he could easily have construed the failure of a birth she supervised as evidence of her corruption, as others would later do; it also testifies to his personal experience of barrenness and stillbirth. His first wife had not born a living child in their eighteen years of marriage, and so he was doubtless more sympathetic to Mary Dyer’s case than most others would have been. (It is also interesting to note that Hutchinson almost certainly was the midwife at the birth of Cotton’s own daughter to his second wife in September 1635, and so in a way he owed her for the fulfillment of a hope he had cherished through nearly two decades of marital infertility.)³²

Though Cotton’s refusal to publicize Dyer’s tragedy or use it as evidence to incriminate Hutchinson afforded her and her followers some hope, it soon became clear that the court was not prepared to be so tolerant. The first thing it did when it convened

on November 2 in Newtown was to reject the deputies Boston had sent by dredging up the petition, or rather petitions, that had been submitted on behalf of John Wheelwright to the previous court earlier that year. William Aspinwall, who had signed and helped to draft the offending document, was not only rejected as deputy but also disfranchised and banished for “seditious libel.” John Coggeshall, who had not signed, was dismissed and disfranchised simply for verbally stating “he would pray that our eyes might be opened to see what we did...for he did believe the Master Wheelwright did hold forth the truth.”³³ William Coddington retained his position, partly because he had not signed the petition and partly because he was the wealthiest man in the colony. To replace its dismissed deputies, Boston elected William Colburn and John Oliver. The latter had signed the petition and was also rejected. Colburn and Coddington were left, and no attempt was made to elect a third deputy.³⁴

Following these ominous proceedings, the court began the work at hand—the punishment of the Antinomians. First, Wheelwright was sentenced to banishment. He asserted that he would appeal to the King for commutation of his sentence, but the court replied that under the Massachusetts charter there could be no such appeal; he then agreed to leave the colony within fourteen days and eventually went north to New Hampshire. Next, Edward Hutchinson, Anne’s brother-in-law, and William Baulston were accused of disloyalty because they had refused to attend as sergeants on Winthrop as they had on Vane. Hutchinson made an irate reply to this charge and spent the night in jail. Following his apology the next day, he was disenfranchised and fined along with Baulston.

Having disposed of these secondary troublemakers, the court at last turned to Anne Hutchinson herself. In a strange way, she had thus far been protected by her sex; she had not signed the petition, and she could not be disenfranchised. But her opponents had not forgotten that all those previously mentioned were “but young branches, sprung out of an old root, the Court had now to do with the head of all this faction...a woman had been the

breeder and nourisher of all these distempers, one Mistress Hutchinson...a woman of a haughty and fierce carriage, of a nimble wit and active spirit, and a very voluble tongue, more bold than a man."³⁵ The time had come for this woman to be subdued once and for all.

The ensuing trial was transcribed both by Winthrop and by an anonymous observer who appears to have been more sympathetic to Hutchinson, as he turned over his notes to her for her perusal between the first and second days of the trial. Winthrop also began the trial, as governor and principal moral authority in the community, in the following words.

Mrs. Hutchinson, you are called here as one of those that have troubled the peace of the commonwealth and the churches here; you are known to be a woman that hath had a great share in the promoting and divulging of those opinions that are causes of this trouble, and to be nearly joined not only in affinity and affections with some of those the court had taken notice of and passed censure upon, but you have spoken divers things as we have been informed very prejudicial to the honour of the churches and the ministers thereof, and you have maintained a meeting and an assembly in your house that hath been condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for your sex, and notwithstanding that was cried down you have continued the same...³⁶

This bitter speech, made by a man who had seen his entire career threatened by the woman now standing before him, opened a trial marked by extraordinary vindictiveness on the part of the men presiding. Why? Because their regulatory power had been, up to this point, thwarted. Hutchinson had done nothing in public, nothing that could be clearly seen and defined, nothing that could be clearly punished. The principal accusation leveled against her was failure to show proper respect to the ministers, but again, she had made no public speeches or declarations, and the court would soon find that producing evidence of her insolence was very difficult.

The assembly did not immediately strike to the heart of the matter: Hutchinson's disparagement of the ministers of the colony as under a covenant of works. Instead, the presiding ministers first

accused her of disobeying the commandment to obey one's father and one's mother by not submitting to the "fathers of the commonwealth," as Winthrop termed it. Next, Hutchinson's meetings were condemned, despite her citation of a rule in *Titus* exhorting the elder women to teach the younger. In the debate of these points, Hutchinson's scintillating wit showed itself to best advantage; eventually, Dudley jumped in to rescue Winthrop, who was undoubtedly getting the worst of the argument, and quite simply accused Hutchinson of fomenting all discontent in the colony by deprecating the ministers as under a covenant of works. It was stated that she had aired these unacceptable views at the conference held at Cotton's house the previous December.

Hutchinson immediately bridled at this use of private remarks as evidence and argued that she had spoken in good faith, believing the ministers were genuinely interested in her opinion and her guidance. The governor responded brusquely, "This speech was not spoken in a corner but in a public assembly, and though things were spoken in private yet now coming to us, we are to deal with them as public."³⁷ Hutchinson then argued that she had not said the things alleged, appealing to Wilson to provide his notes of the occasion, which would vindicate her. He replied that he did not have them, and so the question was still unresolved at the conclusion of the first day's proceedings.³⁸

The following day, the notes made an appearance, and Hutchinson made skillful use of them. (Exactly who provided the document is unclear. Wilson stated in the trial he had his personal copy with him on the second day and it seems likely that was the one used by the court, but Hutchinson appears to have had access to another copy overnight.) She began by saying that "I have since I went home perused some notes out of what Mr. Wilson did then write and find things not to be as hath been alleged,"³⁹ and then requested that all those accusing her of speaking inappropriately at the conference speak under oath. Exactly what course the trial took in its next stages is difficult to discern from conflicting accounts and interpretations. Hutchinson was allowed to call her own witnesses, apparently because it was considered necessary for

her to substantiate her assertion that her accusers were not telling the truth. The disfranchised deputy Coggeshall attempted to speak on her behalf but gave up when reprimanded by Hugh Peters, minister of Salem and a bitter opponent of Hutchinson; Thomas Leverett, an elder from the church of Boston, was similarly ineffective. Several ministers who volunteered then took oaths and repeated their previous statements, asserting that Hutchinson had told them they were under a covenant of works.

At this point, the proceedings became hopelessly tangled. Though several ministers had taken oaths, Wilson was not among them, and so the accuracy of his notes was still in question. Meanwhile, Hutchinson steadfastly denied that the various reports of the occasion presented by her opponents were correct. Winthrop thus appealed to John Cotton to “declare what you do remember of the conference which was at that time and is now in question.”⁴⁰ Cotton had initiated and presided over the meeting; it had been in his home; naturally, all present turned to him as the final authority on what had or had not been said.

According to his custom, he made a long and conciliatory speech, the sum of which was that he did not remember that Hutchinson had said the other ministers walked in a covenant of works. Cotton had now decisively come down on Hutchinson’s side, and he came and sat by her as well in a symbolic show of support. Despite a blunt statement from Dudley that “They affirm Mrs. Hutchinson did say they were not able ministers of the New Testament,” Cotton still asserted he did not remember it. At this point, the prosecution was more or less at a standstill. Cotton would not back up his colleague to confirm that Hutchinson had indeed uttered that offensive statement eleven months before. Though the court did not consider itself bound to prove guilt within reasonable doubt or any similar notion, there was little it could do, and had Hutchinson not spoken, she might well have gone free.⁴¹

But speak she did, in a long monologue detailing the manner in which God had revealed to her the true ministry, through an “immediate revelation” she considered parallel to the

divine command to Abraham to sacrifice his son. Unchecked, she continued even a step farther and claimed that powers of divine retribution were on her side.

...therefore I desire you that as you tender the Lord and the church and commonwealth to consider and look what you do. You have power over my body but the Lord Jesus hath power over my body and soul, and assure yourselves this much, you do as much as in you lies to put the Lord Jesus Christ from you, and if you go on in this course you begin you will bring a curse upon you and your posterity, and the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.⁴²

This speech is perhaps the most fascinating development in the entire controversy. It seems utterly incongruous that this brilliant woman should, after defending herself so deftly, play as completely into the hands of her enemies as she did when she spoke these words, and one can only wonder why she did it. Up to this point, the saving grace for Hutchinson had been the private nature of all she did; in this speech, she publicly laid claim to the one blasphemous act—receiving a direct revelation from God—that could not be proved against her because by its very nature it was private. One can imagine the stuffy magistrates first staring in astonishment and then rubbing their hands with glee. After all, revelations were the instruments of the Devil, and so there was now no evidence lacking to convict this troublesome woman. As Adams put it, “Mrs. Hutchinson accordingly had opened the vials of puritanic wrath, and they were freely emptied on her head.”⁴³

From then on, the court, led by Winthrop, who declared it “a marvelous providence of God to bring things to this pass that they are,”⁴⁴ rivaled each other in condemning her. Cotton’s opinion was called on, and though he attempted to equivocate in Hutchinson’s defense, Dudley’s harsh reply—“Sir, you weary me and do not satisfy me”⁴⁵—made it clear that the entire affair was beyond his control, and that he might well face personal danger from continuing in her aid. From this point on, Cotton gave up. The risk to his reputation and standing in the community was too great for him to stand by Hutchinson any longer. Besides, there was nothing stopping the court now, as she herself seems to have realized; she said nothing else until the very end of the trial.

Impatient to be finished and home to dinner (Dudley asserted that “We shall be sick with fasting”),⁴⁶ the court hurtled toward a vote, in which only Coddington and Colburn from Boston voted against Hutchinson’s banishment, with one deputy from Ipswich abstaining. Defiant to the last, Hutchinson spoke again. “I desire to know wherefore I am banished.” The triumphant Winthrop retorted, “The court knows wherefore and is satisfied.”⁴⁷

Following Hutchinson’s sentencing, an all-out assault on the remaining Antinomians began. On Monday, November 20, the General Court ordered those men known to be sympathetic with Hutchinson to surrender their guns, powder and ammunition at the house of Captain Robert Keayne, a wealthy merchant and John Wilson’s brother-in-law. Included in the seventy-five men disarmed, (fifty-eight from Boston), were John Underhill, Thomas Oliver, and Anne’s husband, son, brother-in-law, and sons-in-law. Thirty of these men recanted and had their privileges restored; others, either more loyal or more foolhardy, attempted retaliation against Winthrop in the Boston church, a challenge the governor defeated by claiming that he had been in partnership with God. (Unfortunately, the same argument had not worked for Hutchinson a week before.) And in one of the controversy’s quirkiest ramifications, Harvard University was then founded at Cambridge rather than Boston because that location had not yet been contaminated by Antinomian blasphemy.⁴⁸

Though banished, Hutchinson was not actually required to depart from the colony until the spring. She was granted time to return to Boston to provide for the care of her eight children still at home—ages seventeen, thirteen, ten, nine, seven, six, four and one; she was then placed in detainment at the Roxbury home of Joseph Weld, brother of the archconservative Reverend Thomas Weld.⁴⁹ During the winter in which she stayed in Roxbury, the vituperative Reverend Weld, along with his equally fanatical colleagues Hugh Peter and Thomas Shepard, made a point of regularly visiting their lost sheep to attempt to coax her back into the fold. Seeing that Hutchinson would not be swayed, and in fact was proceeding further down her blasphemous path by asserting

that human souls were not immortal but “died like beasts,”⁵⁰ these ministers and their colleagues decided that banishment had not been enough. They called Hutchinson to an excommunication hearing in the Boston church on March 16, 1638.

In composition, the body presiding over this hearing differed little from that of the first trial. Theoretically, the magistrates had been in control before while the ministers now ran the show; however, the ministers had certainly not been passive at the judicial hearing, and Governor Winthrop and Deputy Governor Dudley, the principal political figures, were present at the excommunication hearing as members of the Boston church. This hearing—at which Hutchinson arrived late, asserting that her imprisonment had made her too weak to sit through the entire proceedings—was entirely occupied with abstruse ramblings that probably had no meaning even then to most of those present and are certainly devoid of any significance today. It seems that Puritan Boston never tired of arguing theology, especially when there was the possibility of vanquishing such a fountain of blasphemy as Hutchinson.

But something other than theological hair-splitting can be found in the account of this occasion, something more important—a picture of an energetic, brilliant and courageous woman who was at last losing strength, exhausted and ill almost beyond the point of endurance. Having been separated for months from her husband, from her children, from anyone who might look upon her with kindness, Hutchinson once again faced interrogation at the hands of an unsympathetic and bigoted board of questioners. And at the conclusion of the first day of the proceedings, the presiding ministers having decided to their satisfaction that she was not in line with the doctrines and dictates of the church, John Cotton was given the job of admonishing her. At that moment, the man Hutchinson had once looked to as her greatest source of support became the instrument for her punishment. This, more than anything, broke her spirit.

Nearly a week later, on March 22, 1638, Anne Hutchinson made her final public appearance in the Massachusetts Bay colony, and she made it in a seeming show of abject submission. She began by stating “For the first, I do acknowledge I was deeply deceived, the opinion was very dangerous,” and then enumerated in detail the opinions she had wrongly held. And she finally concluded, “I spoke rashly and unadvisedly. I do not allow the slighting of ministers nor of the scriptures nor any thing that is set up by God...It was never in my heart to slight any man but only that man should be kept in his own place and not be set in the room of God.”⁵¹ For the moment at least, the ministers had won.

Yet for some reason, perhaps from sheer exuberance at the sight of this long-defiant woman at last brought to her knees, Hutchinson’s opponents overreached themselves. A number of the ministers present cast doubt on the honesty of her repentance, and some suggested that she sinned simply by denying that she had ever consciously held incorrect opinions. Having abased herself, Hutchinson now found her humble appeal rejected, and so gathering her last shred of pride, she defied the men in front of her one final time. Abrogating the recantation she had just made, she proudly declared, “My judgment is not altered though my expression alters.” At that moment, the outcome of the trial was decided. Dudley voiced the opinion of many when he said, “her repentance is in a paper, whether it was drawn up by herself or whether she had any help in it I know not, and will not now inquire to, but sure her repentance is not in her countenance, none can see it there I think.”⁵²

Now there was no hope for Hutchinson. Not only had she blasphemed, she had mocked the church by pretending a repentance she did not feel. She was from that point on the perpetrator of a new crime, lying. Cotton must have breathed a sigh of relief, since a question of doctrine was not involved, the burden of punishing the woman who had once trusted him fell not on him, the teacher, but on the pastor. When the hearing was completed, John Wilson, to his infinite satisfaction, was given the task of pronouncing the excommunication sentence against the woman who had so often scorned him.

Therefore in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of the Church I do not only pronounce you worthy to be cast out, but I do cast you out...and I do account you from this time forth to be a heathen and a publican...Therefore I command you in the name of Christ Jesus and of this Church as a leper to withdraw yourself out of the Congregation.⁵³

As Hutchinson walked out of the church, “one standing at the door said, The Lord sanctify this unto you, to whom she made answer, the Lord judgeth not as man judgeth, better to be cast out of the Church than to deny Christ.”⁵⁴ And then, escorted by her good friend Mary Dyer, Anne Hutchinson departed from the Boston church for the last time. Ordered to leave the colony by the end of the month, Hutchinson (who was pregnant yet again) collected her children and her possessions and made the long journey to Rhode Island to join her husband in their new home there. Five years after that, having relocated a second time in the hope of finally escaping the grasping arm of Massachusetts authority, she along with six of her children died in New York, caught in the crossfire of a Dutch-Indian war.

When the entire history of the Antinomian rebellion is considered, an extraordinary and shocking difference in the treatment of its two leaders is immediately apparent. Wheelwright was banished. Hutchinson was banished, excommunicated, and bitterly condemned, her most personal tragedies dragged into the open (as will be later discussed) and she and her family persecuted even in Rhode Island to the point where they fled to the barely-civilized New York frontier. In attempting to somehow understand this difference, to explain why Hutchinson was continuously reviled while Wheelwright founded a respectable career as a minister in New Hampshire, it is extremely tempting to declare most, if not all, of the disparity to be the result of sexism. To a certain extent, such an analysis is valid. Undeniably, the fact that Hutchinson was a woman who had overstepped the boundaries of the kitchen and the nursery played a pivotal part in the way the public viewed her. Unlike Wheelwright, she broke a sacred rule merely in participating in any sort of political or religious controversy, and she was dealt with accordingly.

Yet to explain away the huge gulf between Hutchinson's punishment and that of Wheelwright as solely the result of sexism glosses over the deeper significance of the scandal she embodied. Above all, Anne Hutchinson was threatening not because she was a woman or a feminist, though she deserves both titles. She was threatening because she sought to topple Puritanism in private. This behavior constituted an utter rejection of the founding principle of New England society—that morality is only morality if it is in public view—and as such, it was both horrifying and terrifying. Hutchinson struck fear into the hearts of the Puritan elders by suggesting the possibility of a rebellion against the laws of God and country that could not be stopped by the mechanisms of public regulation—a rebellion that did not lie within the scope of those mechanisms. It is this unique aspect of her life, one not at all shared by that of John Wheelwright, that makes her deserving of our attention. And it was this that made her deserving of the Puritan forefathers' enmity.

There are four important aspects of Anne Hutchinson's rebellion, and they all illustrate the extent of that rebellion's private nature and the reasons why that privacy was so threatening. First, consider the meetings, the gatherings that Hutchinson held throughout her residence in Boston at which she recapitulated and commented on the sermon of the previous Sunday for the benefit of those attending. Here, any use of the word private begins to seem a little paradoxical; the whole point was that fifty women showed up. But in Puritan society, the word private did not imply a numerical limit on persons present. It simply meant that there was no designated order-keeping, morality-enforcing authority there. It is also important to note that the meetings, though not restricted to females, originated as women's meetings and usually fewer men than women attended. Men were the public in Puritan New England. An event at which women were the majority, held in a home and not in a meeting-house, courthouse or other building regulated by politicoreligious authority, was private.

Given that the meetings can be considered as falling within the category of revolution in the private sphere, the question is now why this private aspect made them so threatening. Quite

simply, the meetings undermined the preeminent role of the appointed clergy. At first, offering such an explanation appears to be making excuses for misogyny; it seems obvious that the meetings were considered dangerous because a woman ran them. That is true. But the meetings did not just exalt women to positions of authority. More than set a woman up as a clergyperson, Hutchinson's gatherings essentially denied that the clergy was even needed; more than attacking male authority, they attacked the very principle of a religious hierarchy. Here was lay preaching long before the Baptists arrived—an assertion that a private desire to preach was just as good as public confirmation that one could, should and had the right to do so. Not only did such an idea cast aspersions on the authority of the ministers, it raised doubts as to their very necessity. Quite understandably, the men being attacked responded by attempting to quell the events that had engendered such a horrifying concept.

The second notable aspect of Hutchinson's rebellion was the importance of her conversation. Private conversation played a pivotal role in her life and in her trials to an unusual extent; the same cannot be said about John Wheelwright, or in fact about most other historical figures. Wheelwright's principal means of communicating his views to his opponents appears to have been his sermons. Not once is he recorded as directly engaging in conversation with Winthrop, Wilson, Dudley or any of the other authorities except in the context of highly formalized and public occasions such as the debate by the Boston church over his appointment and his trial and sentencing.

Hutchinson, by contrast, spoke directly to her ministerial opponents in private and face-to-face conversations twice: at the December 1636 conference in Cotton's home, and in the various discussions held over the winter of 1637-38 during her enforced stay in Roxbury. (Unfortunately, no comparable exchanges with the political figures Winthrop or Dudley were ever referred to, although since Winthrop and Hutchinson were neighbors, more private conversation between the two of them almost certainly occurred.) It is neither easy nor necessary to make a definitive statement about exactly what was said by whom during these

conversations, especially given that the content of all of them was hotly debated when they were referred to in court. Suffice it to say that Hutchinson spoke clearly, even bluntly, about what she believed to the men who most believed she was wrong on both occasions.

The most important aspect of these conversations, however, is not what was said but the fact that it was said privately. In speaking in private Hutchinson was protected, an advantage she fully realized and capitalized on. When the court discussed the Fast-Day sermon, it was by no means clear if it was seditious, but Wheelwright had undeniably preached it. On the other hand, both Hutchinson and her opponents knew that it would be very difficult to prove exactly what anyone had said at these unrecorded meetings. And more importantly, by speaking in private Hutchinson highlighted the one great weakness of Puritan New England—that it could not control the unfathomable depths of the human heart, or even the unfathomable depths of the human parlor. Quite simply, she showed the ministers where their weak side was. Thus both for more technical and legal reasons and for more abstract and deeply felt ones, Hutchinson's private conversations were a much greater threat to the Puritan establishment than any comparable public declaration could have been—and the magnitude of her punishment reflected the perception of this threat.

The third way in which Hutchinson employed the concept of privacy, the doctrine of personal revelations, incorporated aspects previously seen in both the meetings and the conversations. In this case, it is clear that John Wheelwright shared in Hutchinson's philosophy at least to some extent. The doctrine that one could only know one was saved through a direct revelation from God was an important Antinomian belief, and one that Wheelwright almost certainly accepted. Hutchinson, on the other hand, was the one who really liked to talk about it; it was she who proclaimed in front of a whole ship of people that she could predict when they would land in New England, and then launched into a detailed description of similar revelations in her trial. Thus

regardless of who believed in the idea of personal, private and intimate intercourse with the Divine, she bore the responsibility in the eyes of the authorities for promulgating the doctrine.

And why was her role in this case so threatening? Because the idea of revelations was yet another way in which Hutchinson challenged the public nature of Puritan society. Like the meetings, revelations denied the mediating role of the public clergy and set up a direct and private link between believers and God. And like private conversations, they defied official regulation. The content of private unrecorded conversations could not be proven. Similarly, if a believer claimed to have been told via a personal revelation that he was saved, or that his neighbor was not, who could say otherwise? Revelations and personal conversations were by nature ephemeral, unprovable, and private—and in Puritan society, those words had unspeakably negative connotations.

Finally, there is the fourth, perhaps most important and certainly most overlooked way that Hutchinson threatened the rigidly extroverted Puritan society: midwifery. This issue has rarely been discussed, primarily because it is impossible to argue that Hutchinson was a midwife in order to promote Antinomianism—her occupation preceded her radical religious sympathies by decades. Nonetheless, in the eyes of the men judging her, Hutchinson's midwifery was regarded as a weapon, another manifestation of her attempts to overturn governmental and ministerial power. Thus analysis of the Antinomian controversy that excludes midwifery ignores one of the principal reasons that Hutchinson was considered so dangerous.

Evidence that midwifery was indeed viewed as a serious threat to the Puritan hierarchy by the members of that hierarchy cannot be found in the transcripts of Hutchinson's trials, as the topic was presumably considered too indelicate for public discussion. Instead, there are two important incidents relating to her role as a midwife that prove that the authorities found that role intimidating: the birth of Mary Dyer's premature child and a severe miscarriage Hutchinson herself experienced following her move to Rhode Island. In both of these cases, the personal tragedy

of an unsuccessful pregnancy was used by Hutchinson's opponents as evidence of her corruption. More than that, however, men such as Winthrop, Wilson and Dudley took an extraordinarily grotesque and voyeuristic interest in the details of the incidents, attempting to outdo each other in lurid detail and gloating all the while that God had provided them with such decisive evidence of their opponent's evil. The following quote is actually from Cotton Mather, who wrote his history of New England much later but can rightly be considered the ideological heir of Hutchinson's opponents.

...there happened some very surprizing prodigies, which were looked upon as testimonies from Heaven...The erroneous gentlewoman herself, convicted of holding about thirty monstrous opinions, growing big with child, and at length coming to her time of travail, was delivered of about thirty monstrous births at once, whereof some were bigger, some were lesser; of several figures; few of any perfect, none of any humane shape...Moreover, one very nearly related unto this gentlewoman, and infected with her heresies, was on October 17, 1637 delivered of as hideous a monster as perhaps the sun ever looked upon.⁵⁴

Mather then continued in an appalling description of what Mary Dyer's baby supposedly looked like when the baby was exhumed under Winthrop's supervision and on his orders five days after Hutchinson left Massachusetts, in March 1638. (Remember that Dyer had accompanied Hutchinson out of the church following her excommunication and thus had publicly drawn attention to herself as a supporter of the outcast.)

The public discussion of these two miscarriages highlights a crucial point about Hutchinson that is too often ignored. Her opponents knew and frequently referred to the fact that her popularity was partially due to her skill in midwifery, and that was reason enough for them to consider her occupation a threat. But equally potent was their basic fear of her control over a sphere from which they, both as men and as authorities, were completely excluded. Throughout her career in Boston, Hutchinson was prominent as a midwife and as a mother (she had an extremely large family and was pregnant several times during her residence

there.) The birth of children, both her own and those of the women she attended, was a testimony to her power, and the realm of childbearing and motherhood was one in which she held unquestioned sway. And that realm was also one that was utterly private, distinctly feminine, extraordinarily mysterious—and above all, impervious to control by the political and religious hierarchy. As a midwife ministering to the wives of the most powerful men in the colony, Hutchinson made those men depend on her skill and feel helpless in the face of her power, and they feared her for that.

This visceral distrust of someone who presided over and in fact was the principal manager of an incomprehensible process that carried disquieting connotations of female sexuality was certainly important in shaping the authorities' response to her midwifery. There are also more objective aspects of Hutchinson's occupation that played a part. Remember that two other facets of her rebellion, the revelations and the conversations, possessed an inherent imperviousness to official regulation in that they were private, undocumented and unprovable. The fact that Hutchinson was somewhat protected in acting in those two spheres only led the authorities to treat her activities as correspondingly more dangerous, since in their eyes what could not be controlled was automatically suspect. In the case of midwifery, two similar defenses existed, and they resulted from the ministers' own actions. The frustration of Hutchinson's opponents when they realized that they had in fact set in place mechanisms to protect what they now sought to condemn only made Hutchinson's practice of midwifery seem more threatening. Clearly, if she had managed to so cleverly circumvent their regulating abilities to the point they actually worked against themselves, there must be something wrong with her.

The first of these defenses unwittingly set up by the authorities stems from the fact that the very exclusiveness and secrecy of midwifery, which the church decried as a cloak for unspeakable sin, had in fact been imposed by the same authority figures that now found it highly inconvenient. Squeamish and straitlaced through and through, our forefathers were hardly

willing to have childbirth be anything but the most private and hushed of affairs. Thus it was difficult for them to accuse Hutchinson of deliberately working privately through midwifery to spread her evil doctrines when they had mandated that her occupation should be so private.

In the second case of embarrassing self-defeat, the politicoreligious hierarchy found itself in a position comparable to attempting to fire one's star employee. By its nature, midwifery was not only an important position, but also a responsible one. Great trust had been placed in Hutchinson's hands, and through a long series of successful births she had proven herself to be worthy of that trust, at least in the strictly medical sense. For the authorities to then accuse her of wildly irresponsible, sinful, and seditious behavior in the context of Antinomianism contradicted Hutchinson's character as a responsible and trusted member of society—a character with which they had endowed her. Thus in two separate cases, the Puritan authorities found themselves in awkward positions of self-contradiction when they attempted to attack Hutchinson's midwifery. And their embarrassment and anger at this fact can only be supposed to have made their attacks more virulent.

As radical as Anne Hutchinson's revolutionary ideas might have been, it is nearly impossible to understand them, as well as why the authorities reacted to them with such horror, without comparing Hutchinson to John Wheelwright. By seeing what Wheelwright did—and he was by no means considered a conservative—the extent to which she broke every possible societal rule becomes clear. Wheelwright lies at the opposite end of the spectrum of incendiaries; insofar as one can lead a rebellion in the prescribed manner, he did it, directing his challenge to Puritan authority through the existing channels and shaping it within the framework of social norms. Essentially, he did or was involved in three things: he sought an appointment, he gave a sermon, he was the subject of a petition. In the first case, he accepted the religious principle that being a minister was a necessary prerequisite to formulating or even commenting on theological doctrine, and he

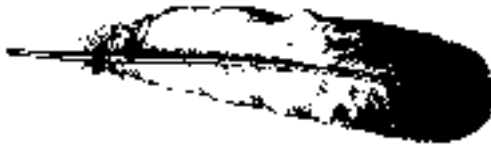
followed the accepted path towards the fulfillment of that prerequisite—a formal proposal and debate by the church in question.

Similarly, once Wheelwright received the position he did, he presented his message, however seditious, in exactly the accepted format: a sermon. Sermons during this period served as everything from homilies to political exhortations, and his was neither unduly militant nor unduly secular. It was merely supportive of the Antinomians. In the same way, the petition later presented on his behalf—in which it can reasonably be assumed he had a hand, since he was not actually imprisoned at the time—was respectful and respectable. It asked simply for public proceedings to be held and for the church to be allowed to govern its own concerns. And finally, when convicted, Wheelwright's response was predictable and not particularly radical; he requested a formal political appeal, and his request was, as we have seen, immediately quashed.

Contrast this polite and cautious behavior with Hutchinson's actions. While Wheelwright asked for appointments, she essentially denied the very principle of ordained clergy. While he gave sermons and framed respectful petitions, she used the subversive medium of private conversation to confront her enemies directly. While he asked for an appeal, she made a long speech calling the wrath of heaven down on her opponents' heads and defiantly demanded to know wherefore she was banished. And most importantly, while he played a pivotal role in events that occurred in full view of all of Boston, she acted behind the scenes, beyond the reach of the mechanisms of public regulation that were the pillars of Puritan society.

Therein lies the singularity and the value of Anne Hutchinson's legacy. There have been many religious controversies, many excommunications, and many who have fallen into the displeasure of theocracies such as the one that began the United States of America. But few people have challenged such regimes with rebellion as far-reaching and as fundamentally radical as Anne Hutchinson, who rejected the entire principle of publicity on which Puritanism had been founded, both by embracing

doctrines that exalted privacy and by working in the private sphere to disseminate those doctrines. It was this rejection that earned her the virulent hatred of her opponents, and that should garner her the respect of history. More than being considered a religious or political radical who was forward-thinking enough to rebel against the oppressive Puritan system, Anne Hutchinson can be rightfully deemed the first person in American history to affirm the value of the private sphere.



Endnotes

- ¹ Charles H. Bell, John Wheelwright (Boston: The Prince Society, 1876) p. 4
- ² Selma R. Williams, Divine Rebel: The Life of Anne Marbury Hutchinson (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) pp. 12-13
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51
- ⁵ Thomas Hutchinson, The History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, Vol. II (New York: Research Library of Colonial America, Arno Press, 1972) p. 507
- ⁶ Williams, pp. 73-74
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 81
- ⁸ Charles Francis Adams, Three Episodes in the History of Massachusetts Bay (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1892) p. 397
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 393
- ¹⁰ Hutchinson, p. 484
- ¹¹ Adams, p. 400
- ¹² Williams, p. 96
- ¹³ Adams, p. 398
- ¹⁴ David D. Hall, The Antinomian Controversy (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968) p. 207
- ¹⁵ The name means literally against laws, which makes reference to the belief that obeying the Old Testament's laws governing personal behavior cannot guarantee one's salvation.
- ¹⁵ John Winthrop, The History of New England, Vol. 1, ed. John Savage (Boston: Phelps and Farnham, 1825) p. 200
- ¹⁶ Adams, p. 407
- ¹⁷ Williams, p. 111
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117
- ²⁰ Edward Johnson, Wonder-Working Providence ed. William Towne (Andover, Massachusetts: Warren F. Draper, 1867) p. 96
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 413
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 425
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 428
- ²⁴ Winthrop/Savage, p. 211
- ²⁵ Adams, p. 444
- ²⁶ Winthrop/Savage, p. 220

- ²⁷ Williams, p. 132
²⁸ Ibid. pp. 132-133
²⁹ Winthrop/Savage, p. 240
³⁰ Ibid., p. 262
³¹ Williams, pp. 136-137
³² Hall, p. 259
³³ Williams, p. 141-142
³⁴ Hall, p. 263
³⁵ Hutchinson, p. 432
³⁶ Hall, p. 319
³⁷ Williams, pp. 153-155
³⁸ Hall, p. 317
³⁹ Ibid., p. 333
⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 333
⁴¹ Hutchinson, p. 509
⁴² Adams, p. 503
⁴³ Hutchinson, p. 513
⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 514
⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 517
⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 520
⁴⁷ Williams, pp. 168-170
⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 171
⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 175
⁵⁰ Hall, pp. 374-376
⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 378-379
⁵² Ibid., p. 388
⁵³ Ibid., p. 310
⁵⁴ Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana or The Ecclesiastical History of New England, Vol. II (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1835) p. 519

Bibliography

1. Adams, Charles Francis, Three Episodes in the History of Massachusetts Bay Cambridge, Massachusetts: Riverside Press, 1892

Adams devotes one of the sections of his book to the events of the Antinomian controversy, and I found his analysis to be almost uniformly illuminating. This book was a great help to me as I sought to piece together the various events of the controversy into a coherent whole.

2. Bell, Charles, John Wheelwright Boston: The Prince Society, 1876

Bell's brief biography provided some useful insights into the life of the second leader of the Antinomians, who is frequently ignored in other accounts. A transcript of the Fast-Day Sermon is also included.

3. Hall, David D., The Antinomian Controversy Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1968

This book is the ultimate source for information regarding the Antinomian controversy; it is essentially a compendium of all relevant documents and transcripts, including numerous writings by John Cotton not included or quoted in the other sources. Hall's brief notes are also helpful.

4. Hutchinson, Thomas, The History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, Vol. II New York: Research Library of Colonial America, Arno Press; 1972

Though the perspective of Anne's great-great-grandson (a notorious Tory during the Revolutionary War) on the events of her time is interesting, I made use of this book principally because its appendices include the first published transcript of Anne's trial.

5. Johnson, Edward, Wonder-Working Providence (ed. Towne, William) Andover, Massachusetts: Warren F. Draper, 1867

This is simply a reprinting with an index of Johnson's 1654 treatise on the history of New England. It includes a small section dealing with the events of the Antinomian controversy, which is difficult to follow but valuable in that, unlike Winthrop's diaries, it presents the view of a relatively impartial observer.

6. Mather, Cotton, Magnalia Christi Americana or The Ecclesiastical History of New England, Vol. II Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1835

The section of Mather's writings dealing with the Antinomians is entitled "Hydra Decapitato," which gives a sense of his perspective on the controversy. Essentially, he presents the viewpoint of the most conservative ministers of Hutchinson's time in more modern and certainly more colorful language.

7. Rugg, Winifred, Unafraid: A Life of Anne Hutchinson Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1930

This book is the most unusual source I found; it is a fictionalized biography dealing with Hutchinson's life that attempts to fill in the gaps, speculating about her private and family life and exactly what she was thinking as she made history. Though it is hardly a rigorous historical study, this book enabled me to begin conceiving of Anne Hutchinson as a person who was more than the quick-witted woman revealed in the transcripts of the trials.

8. Williams, Selma R., Divine Rebel: The Life of Anne Marbury Hutchinson New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1981

This book was by far the most valuable to me. It is a comprehensive biography of Anne Hutchinson that includes a great deal of background information about the period as well as sympathetic analyses of why she did what she did and why it is important. It was the starting point for my research as well as my interest in this topic.

9. Winthrop, John, The History of New England, Vol. I (ed. Savage, John) Boston: Phelps and Farnham, 1825

Winthrop's grandly named History is in fact simply his diary; this edition contains occasional notes. Though it clearly presents a biased viewpoint and its information is scattered throughout numerous entries on other less important topics, this book is the one surviving comprehensive account of the Antinomian controversy by a witness—in fact, a direct participant. As such, its value cannot be denied.