A Woman Not Fit for Our Society: Social Order, Gender and Authority in Late 17th-Century Boston

By Adam Brechner

In November of 1637 a pious, forty-six year old mother of twelve was the most dangerous criminal in the Puritan stronghold of Boston. Anne Hutchinson is infamously known as one of America’s most recognizable martyr and heretical figures. The most basic details of her story are common knowledge: Her religious views challenged the rigid orthodox hierarchy who brought her to trial, leading to her banishment and ultimately her death. The complexity of Anne Hutchinson’s ordeal, however, calls for a far greater inspection of her nine years of life in the colonies, as well as the history of the Puritan faith.

The Boston Court officially charged Anne Hutchinson with heresy and “traducing the ministers and their ministry”.[1] These two charges alone, however, do not appropriately explain the reason for her conviction. After Mrs. Hutchinson’s arrival to the colonies in 1634, her presence was a constant source of worry for the mayor of Boston and the lead prosecutor in her trial, John Winthrop. A large number of angry ministers acted as witnesses who were fervently intent on obtaining her banishment. The elected court conducted a fraudulent trial that was rife with inconsistencies and trite speculations because of the lack of creditable proof. What had made these pious men so spiteful and vindictive to go to such great lengths to persecute a mother from their community?

The answer to this question is a multifaceted undertaking, covering a span of over one hundred years. This paper intends to prove that Anne Marbury Hutchinson was persecuted overzealously because of the threat that her actions and views presented to the harmony and stability of the colonial Puritan settlement. The polity was specifically concerned with three central tenets of the Massachusetts Bay Colony which Hutchinson’s ideas endangered; namely social order, traditional gender roles, and the established ministerial authority. First, in a foreign and uninhabited land, the need for social order was imperative to ensure survival where numerous dangers lurked. More importantly, however, was the holy mission to establish a perfect religious community, harmoniously joined to praise the glory of God. Second, the Puritan hierarchy wanted a continuation of the established gender roles that had existed in England for centuries. They defended their position by reciting biblical passages which stated that men were the superior sex, therefore God had ordained the subjection of women. To allow women any equality would have been an affront to the will of God. Third, the foundation for the
Puritan society rested in the authority of the ministers. Puritan theology stated that the ministers were the only qualified people who could disseminate God’s word to their congregation. Ultimately, the clergy were God’s messengers, which elevated their social status above the rest of the population. It was unholy and punishable for members to outwardly criticize the sermons of a minister.

SOCIAL ORDER
The chaotic and often violent nature of England’s religious history molded the Puritanical hierarchy’s need for societal concordance. After years of Reformations, Counter Reformations, Puritan bifurcation, political struggles, and ultimately a Civil War, the colonial Puritans were striving for a societal stability that had previously eluded them. The New World afforded them the opportunity to live in a community with a single vision, without opposition.

Their New Zion was to become the antithesis of old England. The extravagances of the popish “high” Church of England with its greed driven hierarchy of bishops were intolerable to the Puritans. New England was to become the model for all other Christian people of the world, a place where everyone was joined by a covenant with God, to celebrate His infinite wisdom and glory. This entire vision depended on the absence of radical ideas or the slightest of opposition.

Anne Hutchinson’s actions and beliefs stemmed from what she believed to be God’s will. Her concerns paralleled those of the magistrates and ministers in that she wanted the community to live and learn in a perfectly devout manner. Hutchinson was concerned with her perception of a specific doctrinal impropriety in the sermons of the ministers. Her conviction, assertion, and defiance became troubling to the Puritan hierarchy. Their will to cast her out of the colony was an attempt to maintain their destiny as a city upon a hill.

England’s well-documented turbulent religious history undoubtedly had a profound effect on the colonial Puritan’s societal ideology. In brief, the German monk Martin Luther’s criticism of papal abuses and “extra merit payments” for salvation sparked the Reformation, which reached England’s shores in 1533.[2] King Henry VIII, partially influenced by political, as well as theological reasons, instituted a series of reforms that distanced the Church of England from Rome and replaced the pope with the British monarch as the head of the church. It was during this time period that an ardent group of Protestant reformers, who reluctantly accepted the label “Puritans”, became an important presence in England.
They believed that Henry VIII had not extirpated enough of the Catholic evils from the Church of England and were committed to “purify” their nation’s religious institution.[3]

After Henry VIII died in 1547, Edward VI, with the aid of the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, established a new set of Protestant policies that stripped many Catholic symbols and rites from England’s religious structures and theology.[4] After Edward VI’s death in 1553 from tuberculosis prevented him from firmly ingraining his reforms into policy, Henry VIII’s daughter Mary Tudor ascended the throne.[5] Mary’s five-year reign produced paradoxical results for the Protestant movement as she reintroduced Catholicism to the country. From one perspective, many Protestant protesters were killed and hundreds of others were exiled throughout Europe. From another angle, the Protestants’ resolve grew stronger as they persevered throughout the continent and waited for the end of “Bloody Mary’s” rule.[6]

Mary’s reign ended in 1558 when Elizabeth was crowned as the queen after her sister’s death. Elizabeth attempted to appease both religious factions by establishing the state Protestant Church of England, which was a conglomeration of the two faiths. The Puritans, however, were never fully satisfied with Elizabeth’s conciliatory Catholic stance, as she failed to incorporate all of the reforms that they had demanded. During this time period Puritans gained an increasing amount of power in the Parliament, which Elizabeth attempted to limit, by taking away their power to introduce religious bills.[7] Although the Puritans did not achieve the complete elimination of Catholic practices from the Church of England under Elizabeth, her longevity assured their power in Anglican politics, religion, and society.

Elizabeth’s successor, James VI of Scotland (in turn, becoming James I of England), raised the hopes of the Puritans for further reform because of his Presbyterian background.[8] He met with Puritan leaders to discuss reform, but adopted only minor changes. In 1603 James I ordered the Anglican bishops to dismiss all Puritan clerics who refused to perform the Anglican rites as ordered. Tensions within the Parliament, clergy, and populous rose during James I reign, but he was able to maintain order through diplomacy and leniency towards dissenters.[9]

Numerous problems plagued the reign of Charles I who ascended the throne after his father’s death in 1625. England’s economy was in the midst of a five-year slump as cloth prices plummeted. A number of bad harvests depleted food stores, creating a shortage throughout the
nation. Most importantly to Puritans, however, were the enforced policies of Archbishop William Laud who initiated a return to Catholic traditions. He called for the elimination of predestinarian teaching as a method of salvation, which was a tenet of Calvinist theology. Ministers were silenced, congregation members were fined for their refusal to attend services, and many influential and wealthy Puritans were fined and arrested, while others had their property confiscated. In 1629, Charles I dissolved Parliament, which eliminated the Puritans ability to affect religious reforms.

All of these factors influenced many Puritans to consider emigration as a viable alternative. In March of 1629 a group of businessmen with Puritanical ties received a charter as the Massachusetts Bay Company. They looked to establish Puritan communities along the eastern seaboard in New England. Their idea caught the interest of an estate owner and attorney named John Winthrop. Winthrop had pondered the idea of becoming a minister in his younger years and carried that devotion with him throughout his life. The Massachusetts Bay Company leaders were impressed by his business talents and knowledge of the law and persuaded him to join their venture. The declining British economy combined with a large family created fiscal difficulties for the once wealthy Winthrop. The Company assured him that he would hold a lofty position in their prosperous venture and was later named the first governor. In search of economic security and the opportunity to perform his Godly duty, he prepared to leave for the New World on April 7, 1630.

The blueprint for the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s societal ideology was John Winthrop’s speech “A Modell of Christian Charity”. Winthrop delivered this speech to the future citizens of the colony just before they were about to board the ship Arbella for the New World in 1630. He had two main goals in delivering the speech on the day of their departure. First, Winthrop wanted to impress upon his constituency the absolute magnitude of their holy mission. Second, he established the importance of a harmonious society in a hegemonic, economically unequal system.

Winthrop began his speech with the idea that political and economic inequalities within the members of any society were a divine plan. He began, “God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the Condicion of mankind, as in all times some must be rich some poore, some highe and eminent in power and dignitie; others meane and in subieccion.” Greed and jealousy were unnecessary in Massachusetts because God’s will stated that people needed to occupy all levels of society.
Winthrop viewed his constituents as one cohesive unit, sacrificing the wants of the individual to the needs of the community. He stated that, “...all true Christians are of one body in Christ...the ligaments of this body which knit together are love...if one member suffers all suffer with it, if one be in honour, all reioyce with it.”[14] While the Puritans were going to the New World to enjoy the freedom to practice their religion, personal freedoms would have to be sacrificed. He warned his constituency that this ideal would be incorporated into the law and the church when he stated that the colony would be, “…a place of Cohabitation and Consorteshipp under a due forme of Government both civill and ecclesiasticall. In such cases as this the care of the publique must oversway all private respects, by which not onely conscience, but meare Civill pollicy doth binde us; for it is a true rule that perticuler estates cannott substist in the ruine of the publique.”[15]

Winthrop began to close the speech with the intention of instilling the grave importance of their mission. He impressed that their mission would be filled with difficult work where everyone would need to bear each other’s burdens because, “wee are entered into Covenant with [God] for this worke...”[16] They were contractually obligated with God on this mission, which elevated the importance of their holy endeavor. The consequences of breaking the Covenant, hence failing in their mission was great as Winthrop warned

...but if wee shall neglect the obsevacion of these Articles which are the ends wee have propounded, and dissembling with our God, shall fall to embrace this present world and prosecute our carnall intencions, seekeing greate things for our selves and our posterity, the Lord will surely breake out in wrathe against us be revenged of such a periured people and make us knowe the price of the breache of such a Covenant.[17]

These words undoubtedly had a powerful impact on the people who were embarking on a journey filled with constant dangers and uncertainties. The fear of retribution was an influential tool that certainly would have garnered their compliance with the demands that Winthrop had given them.

Ultimately, Winthrop then contrasted the fear of failure with the joys of success. If the colony succeeded in its mission for the perfect holy community, not only would God rejoice in the colonist’s piety, but the rest of humanity would see their perfection, providing a shining example for
the rest of the world. Winthrop stated,

...wee shall find the God of Israell is among us, when tenn of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when hee shall make us prayse and glory, that men shall say of succeeding plantacions: the lord make it like that of New England: for we must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us...[18]

Their prize for success would be God’s spiritual presence as well as their eternal legacy throughout the history of mankind.

Anne Hutchinson was not on the Arbella, and so did not hear that speech. She arrived four years later, in September of 1634, with her husband and eleven children. The primary impetus that influenced Hutchinson to immigrate to the colony was the lure of the Puritan minister, John Cotton. Cotton had journeyed to the colony the previous year, after the bishops had taken away his authority to preach.[19] In England, Hutchinson discovered that many of her interpretations of the Puritan doctrines were aligned with Cotton’s. Her spirituality and the ability to witness sermons that validated her beliefs were the significant factors which influenced her to transport her family thousands of miles away.

Anne Hutchinson’s father played an important role in building her strong will and assertiveness. Francis Marbury was a reverend in the Church of England who was silenced and imprisoned after criticizing the bishops and ministers as unholy sinners. He was a moralistic man who governed his family in a strict manner, making theological education the most important facet of Hutchinson’s upbringing. Rather than succumbing to her father’s domineering personality, she modeled her demeanor in his image. Her husband, a wealthy businessman named William Hutchinson, provided a stark contrast to her overbearing father. Hutchinson was an affable gentleman who was comfortable with her domineering personality. His acquiescent manner placed her in the unconventional role as the vocal head of the family.[20] This domestic autonomy played an important role in the freedom she enjoyed which enabled her to become one of the most influential and problematic women in colonial Puritan history.

Hutchinson’s behavior caused problems before she even stepped foot onto Massachusetts’s shore. Aboard the British ship, the Griffin, Reverend Zechariah Symmes would occasionally preach to the voyagers over the two month trip. After one of his sermons, she questioned the
validity of his doctrinal interpretations, which he attempted to quell through a biblical citation. She outwardly rejected his view which led him to think that, "[i]ndeed, Mrs. Hutchinson herself was reputed to possess redeeming qualities, but nonetheless heterodoxy was not to be endured, and besides, her impudent air of superiority was most unseemly in a woman."[21] Hutchinson had made a terrible first impression to the first colonial minister with whom she had communicated. This interaction with Reverend Symmes initiated the pattern of discordance that would dominate Anne Hutchinson’s view of the ministerial hierarchy for the next three years.

In an ironic twist of fate, the Hutchinsons were given a lot to build a house, directly across the street from John Winthrop’s residence. Winthrop had a keen sense of character and was quick to judge, noting that she was “…a woman of a ready wit and bold spirit…”[22] This description, which the modern day female could interpret as a compliment, was worrisome to a society that valued demure and complacent qualities in the personalities of its women.

It was important and necessary for the Hutchinsons to establish connections when they arrived in Boston. The community relied on its members for various goods and services that were easily attainable in England, but scarce in the isolated city. Mr. Hutchinson had achieved a high level of success in commerce, which the Boston leaders valued for his business acumen. They rewarded him by appointing him deputy of the General Court, beginning his long career of public service. Mrs. Hutchinson also had skills that made her valuable to the community as well. Throughout her life she had acquired a keen knowledge of healing remedies, illnesses, and childbirth. Her compassion combined with her confidence and knowledge made her a proficient nurse and mid-wife’s aid. These skills made her invaluable throughout the community in an era where mortal illnesses were a constant threat and the demand for an increase in the colonial population produced a high childbirth rate.[23] Labor was a dangerous proposition in colonial New England, which often resulted in the death of the baby and/or mother.

Two important factors resulted from Hutchinson’s superior nursing skills. First, her duty placed her in a position to meet a significant number of people. Hutchinson’s warmth and general concern for those who were ill ingratiated her to a large portion of the population. Her vast knowledge of the medical realm fostered a cohesive trust with her patient, which became instrumental regarding her religious influence on them. Second, Hutchinson perceived that a large percentage of women whom she
became acquainted with were infected by doctrinal misconceptions. These misdirected souls had believed that the Covenant of Works was a direct path to their salvation, instead of a preparation to receive the Covenant of Grace.

Central to Calvinist theology was the theory of predestination- the belief that God foreordained certain souls to eternal salvation. In this scenario, people could not earn salvation through their own pious behavior. The Covenant of Grace was God’s offer of salvation to the chosen saints, which would become apparent to them by the presence of the indwellingspirit. Saints entered the conversion process where they would defend their belief that they had received the Covenant of Grace to a church panel comprised of ministers and elder congregants.[24] The Covenant of Works stated that everyone was obligated to behave piously, whether saved or not, because their actions were a reflection of their respect for God. Good works could prepare the saint to receive grace, but could not aid in its attainment. Cotton Mather, John Cotton’s grandson and a Puritan minister, stated in his essay Bonifacius, “It is an invaluable honor, to do good; it is an incomparable pleasure. A man must look upon himself as dignified and gratified by God, when an opportunity to do good is put into his hands.”[25] While Mather was very adamant about the need to do good works, he stressed that their only intention was to praise God and create a peaceful community. Hutchinson’s views were in accordance with Mather’s future distinction between a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace. Her neighbors’ confusion on this critical distinction would lead her to challenge the ministerial hierarchy, thus shaking the very foundations of the Citty on a Hill.

Anne and William Hutchinson were both admitted to the Church of Boston shortly after their arrival. It was a habit of the members of the congregation to meet outside of the church at certain times to discuss religious matters between them. Hutchinson acquired her spiritual strength from her own will, as well as the sermons of Reverend Cotton, and believed the meetings would do her little good. Hutchinson’s congregation believed that her pride kept her from attending the talks. In order to dispel those rumors she began holding the meetings at her house.[26] Out of respect for the wishes of the congregation, she started performing the rituals that would eventually lead to her banishment.

The meetings at her house started as small gatherings of a few women (the sexes were separated for religious matters). Her initial meetings were merely innocuous recitations of Reverend Cotton’s sermons.
Gradually, Hutchinson’s annoyance over the women’s blatant ignorance of the Puritan orthodox theology forced her to correct their inconsistencies. Her fiery spirit and contrasting views attracted many Bostonians’ attention as the size of her audience grew. She was eventually forced to add a second meeting every week to accommodate interested men who wanted to attend. Prominent figures, like the wealthy William Coddington, were swept into the wave of excitement that she had initiated.[27]

In the winter of 1635, Reverend John Wilson resumed his position as the main minister of the Church of Boston, relieving John Cotton of his temporary duties. Wilson’s insistence on the importance of public morality, led Hutchinson to believe that he was preaching that good works would lead to salvation. She began comparing the sermons of Cotton’s to the sermons of Wilson’s, pointing out all of the fallacies of the latter’s doctrine. In her travels to local towns, it shocked her to discover that almost all of the ministers of the region were preaching the Covenant of Works. In Hutchinson’s view, Reverend Cotton was the only able minister who could steer them towards the righteous intentions of God.[28]

In the summer of 1636, a clear dividing line was evident between those who supported Hutchinson and those who favored Reverend Wilson. This ideological factionalism was a great source of worry for John Winthrop who six years earlier had preached to the future Bostonians of the necessity of a singular social ideology. Anne Hutchinson and her following presented the greatest threat towards the continuity of the Godly community. Winthrop was completely shocked when members of her following demanded the replacement of Reverend Wilson with Hutchinson’s relative, Reverend John Wheelwright. Winthrop strongly rejected their demands as the church ministry tried to restore order. Both Wilson and Cotton attempted to write their sermons in the most uncontroversial manner to stem the tide of dissension. These attempts failed, however, as female congregation members began walking out of Wilson’s orations the moment he began.

By the early months of 1637, Winthrop endeavored to take decisive action against the Antinomian –a derogatory name given to the Hutchinson supporters by the Bostonian conservative elders, meaning “opposed to or against law” - faction to save his holy city from the fate of destruction. In May, Winthrop was successfully re-elected as the governor, replacing Henry Vane who had been a staunch supporter of Hutchinson. He succeeded in obtaining a guilty verdict against Reverend Wheelwright, Hutchinson’s brother-in-law, for criticizing his fellow
ministers in one of his sermons, which led to his censure and ultimately, his banishment. In September of 1637, Winthrop dissolved the General Court, which was comprised of numerous members of the Antinomian faction. He succeeded in electing a court that had the same Puritan ideals that he possessed. The only two members of the existing court who were known to have ties to Hutchinson were William Aspinwall and John Coggeshall. Winthrop ordered an examination of their worthiness as court members and the court unanimously decided to expel them.[29] The attack on the Antinomians had left Anne Hutchinson’s supporters banished, excommunicated, or silenced in fear. There was only one course of action for Winthrop to take to complete his mission. “All these...were but young branches, sprung out of an old root[..] The Court had now to do with the...breeder and nourisher of all these distempers.”[30] Anne was literally, in John Winthrop’s eyes, the root of all evil.

The two-day trial of Anne Hutchinson began on November 7, 1637. The court, led by Winthrop, was very concerned about the legitimacy of the private meetings held at her house. One of his goals was to prove that Hutchinson was spreading licentious notions about the Puritan doctrine as well as the ministers, in a forum that was forbidden for a woman to conduct. Winthrop had a very difficult time with his interrogation of Anne who defended herself with wit and perseverance. The historian Edmund S. Morgan stated that, “Anne Hutchinson was his intellectual superior in everything except political judgment...In nearly every exchange of words she defeated him, and the other members of the General Court with him.”[31] The court had very little evidence against Hutchinson and resorted to conjecture and hearsay.

Winthrop stated that, “[a]bout three years ago we were all in peace. Mrs. Hutchinson from that time she came hath made a disturbance, and some that came over with her in the ship did inform me what she was as soon as she landed.”[32] He believed that before Hutchinson had arrived, Boston had been on the holy path to perfection. He continued by expressing the damage that she inflicted upon the singular ideology of his citizens by stating that she, “hath so forestalled the minds of many by their resort to her meeting that now she hath a potent party in the country.”[33] Numerous members of her following refused to serve in the state militia, while others frequently walked out on the ministers’ sermons. Over time, Hutchinson’s meetings increased in popularity. Eventually, her home became so overcrowded that people were forced to listen from outside the doors and windows. Winthrop also faulted Hutchinson on her assertion that Cotton was the only legitimate minister
in the colony because the others preached a covenant of works. Finally, Winthrop ended his closing arguments with the analogy of Hutchinson’s Antinomian faction as a building and that the court, “…must take away the foundation and the building will fall.”[34]

The Court later attempted to attack the theological legality of Hutchinson’s meetings. She recounted a tale from the doctrine in the second of Titus, where it was proper for the youthful girls to be taught by older women. “But,” said the governor, “the apostle there means privately; and gives no warrant for such set meetings as yours. Besides you take it upon yourself to teach many that are elder than yourself. Neither do you teach them that which the apostle commands, ‘to keep at home.’”[35] Hutchinson argued that the meetings did take place at her home and she was merely following the tradition that existed before her arrival to Boston. Her meetings, however, were not the humble, small gatherings between a few women who discussed the ministers’ propriety.

The ultimate problem that the meetings created was the factionalism between congregation members of the Church of Boston. Only seven years earlier, Winthrop and a large percentage of the population had escaped the moral decrepitude found in England. A church with heretical customs, an unscrupulous hierarchy of Bishops, and a bloody, antagonistic social history was left behind across the Atlantic Ocean. Anne Hutchinson’s persuasive and fiery personality created a group who firmly rejected the social ideology that John Winthrop had presented in his lay sermon “A Modell of Christian Charity”. The Antinomians did not want to be subjected to the false message that the ministers were delivering in their praise of the Covenant of Works. The evils of England were great, but false prophesizing on the part of their Bostonian ministers was not any better. Winthrop believed that his ministers were preaching the doctrine correctly and proceeded to save the colony in the only manner that seemed possible. He rid the city of all those who would not adhere to conformity. His holy experiment, which was still in the early stages of development, was too frail to permit multiple ideologies within his community. In October of 1636, Winthrop noticed that the, “weekly meetings at her house were steadily swelling, and the people who attended them walked the streets of Boston wearing the expression of devotees. Those rapt faces, Winthrop knew, carried a threat to the colony’s commission.”[36] The citizen’s expressions should have been affected by the words of the church’s qualified ministers, not those of a simple lay woman. Anne Hutchinson, who had overstepped her boundaries and reeked havoc upon Boston’s social order, had to be
eliminated to save John Winthrop’s vision.

GENDER
The issue of gender in Puritanical Boston was invariably complex because it involved numerous theological, social, and political ramifications. The domestic structure was rigidly fixed and followed many of the principals of patriarchy that had existed in Europe for centuries. The sanctity of the family unit, which was held together by the bond of love, was a crucial tenet of Puritan society. The woman’s role as mother, homemaker, spouse, and moral guidepost was highly respected throughout the community. The patriarch, however, was the master of the house who legally and theologically, possessed all authority over his family. The basis for female subordination was found in the scriptures, which stated that women were intellectually and spiritually, the inferior sex. Paradoxically, however, Puritan theology was also empowering to women because of their ability to witness the presence of the in-dwelling spirit and achieve saintly status through their own conversion. The Puritan woman’s social sphere was rigidly fixed and well-defined, but the infusion of Anne Hutchinson into Boston’s society would threaten the domestic order that had prevailed for centuries.

Just as the Puritan hierarchy demanded order throughout society, order was also a crucial component to a devout and decorous family. A harmonious unit found order through their love of each other and their God. Reverend Benjamin Wadsworth of Boston stated

Every Christian (every Gospel minister especially) should do all he can to promote the glory of God and the welfare of those about him, and the well ordering [of] matters in particular families tends to promote these things. I believe the ignorance, wickedness (and consequent judgments) that have prevailed, and still are prevailing among us, are not more plainly owing to any one thing than to the neglect of family religion, instruction, and government; and the reviving of these things would yield as comfortable a prospect of our future good as almost any one thing I can think of...[37]

Wadsworth viewed the family as the basis for social control where moral behavior was learned through the actions and teachings of the parents. Many fathers in Boston spent numerous hours involved with their occupations as well as various town and church meetings. The mother, who spent many more hours with her children at home, played a vital role in the moral development of the children. The Puritans believed that humans were invariably depraved creatures, innately drawn to sin and
were only saved by the grace of God.\[38\] The mother taught her children to behave piously by adhering to God’s will in order to suppress their instinctual tendencies.

One of the most famous 17th century colonial American poets, Anne Bradstreet, provides an example of the model Puritan housewife. Anne Dudley married Simon Bradstreet at the age of 16 in 1628 and two years later the couple sailed on the aforementioned Arbella in search of a better life. Bradstreet gave birth to eight children in her lifetime and relished her role as housewife. The large majority of her poetry, which she never intended to publish, offers an intriguing insight into the psyche and emotions of the Puritan mother and wife. One of her most anthologized pieces, “To My Dear and Loving Husband”, expresses the intense devotion that the couple shared:

If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man were lov’d by wife, then thee;
My love is such that Rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee, give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold I pray.
Then while we live, in love lets so persever,
That when we live no more, we may live ever. \[39\]

The Bradstreets longed for eternal grace in order to continue their loving relationship in heaven. Another work which exhibits her devotion to her family, titled "Before the Birth of One of Her Children," depicts the emotions that many colonial Puritan women experienced before labor. Bradstreet’s selflessness is evident, for she does not worry about the possibility of her own mortality. She is only concerned for the safety of her expected child and her husband, who must care for the baby alone, if she were to die. Childbirth during this era was a dangerous undertaking for both mother and child, where the threat of death was always present. Anne Bradstreet’s literary works exhibit how thoroughly the domestic sphere encompassed her life. Any pain and suffering that she suffered through (for she was quite often sick) was bearable because of the joy that she experienced in caring for her family, as well as her future salvation.\[40\]

Puritan theology created a confounding paradox for colonial women: it was a source of both empowerment and enervation. On the one hand, each member of the church received an awesome power in his or her
ability to acknowledge the presence of the in-dwelling spirit, which would confirm that he or she was a chosen saint. This fact was a source of strength for Puritan women because the path to salvation was an egalitarian endeavor. Certain scriptural passages seemed to have offered women a theological equality. Paul stated in Galatians 3:28 that, “there is nether male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”[41] This passage was interpreted to state that Jesus loved all humans equally and that the path to heaven was evenly open to both sexes. Paul’s proclamation, however, was not applied to the everyday lives of the Puritans, where the political, social, and theological power was invested in the men.

On the other hand, while providing a rough spiritual equality, Puritan theology also highlighted women’s weaknesses, which supported their subordination in the society. Many ministers preached that women were spiritually and emotionally, the weaker sex. They often used the biblical example of Eve and cited her corruption of Adam to exhibit women’s evil tendencies. They were more susceptible to the temptations of sin and the Devil and therefore needed to be monitored like children. Their spiritual weakness was used to explain the long list of female heretics throughout history.[42]

Women were permitted to become members of the Puritan churches, but this fact did not imply equality amongst the congregation. Females did not have the right to vote on church affairs. Only the male members were permitted to speak at church functions. This fact was most importantly witnessed during the membership process. A council of church elders, congregants, and pastors would listen to the applicant’s testimony that he or she was a chosen saint. Men would verbally detail their own spiritual conversion, but women had their accounts read to the council by a male representative, while the woman remained silent. Church enrollment figures show that equal numbers of males and females were permitted into the church, but this equality was not represented in the rights of the congregation. Women did not have a public voice in the Puritan church.[43]

Anne Hutchinson became a passionate leader of the women of Boston with an empowering message of religious autonomy. In their homes, churches, and society they were the subordinated sex, yielding to the will of men in most matters. Hutchinson’s insistent message of the Covenant of Grace as the sole means and evidence of salvation, however, brought the Puritan women equality to the most important aspect of their lives: their afterlife where they would be reunited with God.
The issue of gender played an important role in Anne Hutchinson’s trial. The court was very concerned with the fact that it was a woman who had created the disharmonious factionalism throughout the city. The first portion of the trial focused on the meetings at her house, which the court believed were unlawful. Winthrop stated that Hutchinson had “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...”[44] He believed that her actions were not in accordance with the bible’s interpretation of the ideal, pious woman.

Later, Hutchinson questioned Winthrop of the law that she breached which he replied, “[t]he law of God and of the state...whereas the Lord doth say honour thy father and thy mother.”[45] Winthrop viewed God, the church, and the state as paternal figures for women. Hutchinson had dishonored all of them by holding her meetings which were biblically unlawful. She responded by stating, “[b]ut put the case Sir that I do fear the Lord and my parents, may not I entertain them that fear the Lord because my parents will not give me leave?” Winthrop replied, “[i]f they be the fathers of the commonwealth, and they of another religion, if you entertain them then you dishonour your parents and are justly punishable.”[46] Hutchinson believed that her meetings were conducted with virtuous and holy members of her congregation, which absolved her of any wrongdoing, but Winthrop felt that the meetings violated the wishes of God and the Puritan hierarchy. Winthrop believed that Hutchinson coveted her audience in an unbecoming manner to which she replied, “I may put honor upon them as the children of God and as they do honor the Lord.”[47] Hutchinson bested Winthrop in this exchange as he could only reply, “[w]e do not mean to discourse with those of your sex but only this; you do adhere unto them and do endeavour to set forward this faction and so do dishonour us.”[48] It was beneath him as a man, to engage in an intellectual argument over the scriptures with a woman.

The trial continued with the legitimacy of the meetings and Hutchinson’s aforementioned defense that there was scriptural evidence in Titus that the elder women instructed the younger. Winthrop then asked Hutchinson if she would instruct a man if he asked for her guidance and she replied that she would. She then asked for Winthrop to, “set me down a rule by which I may put them away that come unto me and so have peace in doing” to which Winthrop replied, “[y]ou must shew your rule to receive them”. Hutchinson answered that she had given him a
rule to which Winthrop replied, “I deny it because I have brought more arguments than you have.”[49] Winthrop’s childish retort again displayed his growing frustration in trying to discredit Hutchinson’s actions. She later revealed that there were two separate meetings each week at her residence, where the first was attended by women and the second was comprised of both sexes. By that time, however, Winthrop grew tired of debating the legitimacy of the meetings and moved onto the more serious accusation of her attacks of the ministers.

MINISTERIAL AUTHORITY
In a city that was established to become the global example of a holy utopia, one of the most important pillars was the absolute control over the religious realm by the ministerial elite. According to Puritan thinking, England’s greatest problem was the presence of clashing theological ideologies that begot significant turmoil. The Puritans believed that the Massachusetts Bay Colony would achieve peace because of the singular theological vision held by all of the citizens. The spiritual leaders of the experiment were highly trained ministers, who most assuredly were the best individuals to disseminate God’s message.

Puritan theology placed a great deal of responsibility and power in each individual in the congregation. Each person was thought to have a spiritual, albeit indirect, relationship with God. The presence of the indwelling spirit would confirm that he or she was a chosen saint, receiving God’s gift of salvation. Humans, however, were depraved creatures since the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, and it was only out of God’s mercy that he had not sentenced all of humanity to Hell. All members of the congregation were tempted to sin and only through the constant study of the scriptures and the understanding of God’s mercy, did they have a chance to resist temptation. They could not achieve salvation through their religious studies and pious behavior, but God would bestow his grace upon a people that lived by the Covenant of Works. The visible saints acted morally to glorify God and exhibit that they were worthy to receive salvation.

As God’s human representatives, the Puritan ministers believed that they were on an elevated spiritual level from their congregants. The clergy devoted their lives to spreading God’s message and had trained vigorously to gain a complete grasp of the Bible. The ministers encouraged discussion of their sermons amongst the congregation because of the complexity of many of the theological issues. They would not tolerate, however, any criticisms of their scriptural interpretations from a lay person, especially if voiced by a woman.
John Cotton was the only Massachusetts minister that received Hutchinson’s approval. She uprooted her family and embarked on a dangerous journey across the Atlantic in order to hear his sermons. His solid stance on the Covenant of Grace as the only means to salvation, while minimalizing the importance of the Covenant of Works, ingratiated him to Hutchinson. That the Massachusetts ministers would have emphasized good works in order to maintain social order in a new and fragile setting was understandable. Hutchinson, however, believed that their sermons, which frequently stressed the Covenant of Works, were leading the members of the congregation to believe that their works could earn their salvation, whether it was the ministers’ intentions or not.

Most of the trial focused on Hutchinson’s alleged accusations that Reverend Cotton was the only able minister of the New Testament and that the others preached a Covenant of Works. Winthrop constantly badgered Hutchinson to admit that she made these claims, but she skillfully rebuked him

Mrs. H. I pray Sir prove it that I said they preached nothing but a covenant of works.
Dep. Gov. Nothing but a covenant of works, why a Jesuit may preach truth sometimes.
Mrs. H. Did I ever say they preached a covenant of works then?
D. Gov. If they do not preach a covenant of grace clearly, then they preach a covenant of works.
Mrs. H. No Sir, one may preach a covenant of grace more clearly than another, so I said.
D. Gov. We are not upon that now but upon position.
Mrs. H. Prove this then Sir that you say I said.
D. Gov. When they do preach a covenant of works do they preach truth?
Mrs. H. Yes Sir, but when they preach a covenant of works for salvation, that is not truth.
D. Gov. I do but ask you this, when the ministers do preach a covenant of works do they preach a way of salvation?
Mrs. H. I did not come hither to answer to questions of that sort.
D. Gov. Because you will deny the thing.
Mrs. H. Ey, but that is to be proved first.
D. Gov. I will make it plain that you did say that the ministers did preach a covenant of works.
Mrs. H. I deny that.[50]
Winthrop constantly attempted to incite Hutchinson into stating her guilt but she adroitly parried his questions with questions of her own or an evasive reply. As the trial continued, it became apparent that the court lacked any physical evidence that Hutchinson had denounced the ministers. Several clergymen claimed that Hutchinson had told them of her opinions, but she was insistent that they take an oath. Eventually, after a long debate, three ministers swore under oath that Hutchinson had criticized all of the ministers except Cotton.

The clergymen might have been influenced to take the oath because of a remarkable admission on Hutchinson’s part that proved to solidify the court’s assurance of her guilt. She claimed that she was informed that those who did not preach the Covenant of Grace possessed the spirit of the antichrist and that she was clearly able to distinguish the holy ministers from the wicked. The court questioned Hutchinson about how she knew this and she stated that the Lord had informed her through a direct revelation. Hutchinson then told the story of her revelation and finished by stating, “[y]ou have power over my body but the Lord Jesus hath power over my body and soul, and assure yourselves thus much, you do as much as in you lies to put the Lord Jesus from you, and if you go on this course you begin you will bring a curse upon you and your posterity, and the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”[51] She was assured that God would destroy the colony if the court proceeded to convict her, because of these direct revelations. An annoyed magistrate named Israel Stoughton proclaimed, “I turn away from you”, to which Hutchinson replied, “But now having seen him which is invisible I fear not what man can do unto me.”[52]

The court argued over Hutchinson’s daring statement that she had received a direct revelation from God. While Cotton refused to denounce her, others pointed to the mortal danger of her assertion. History had given many examples of the danger of revelations to the social order of societies. Winthrop stated that, “[t]hese disturbances that have come among the Germans have been all grounded upon revelations, and so they that have vented them have stirred up their hearers to take up arms against their prince and to cut the throats one of another...I am fully persuaded that Mrs. Hutchinson is deluded by the devil, because the spirit of God speaks truth in all his servants.”[53] Most importantly to the colony, her revelation was a direct threat to the authority of the ministers. If a simple lay woman were able to communicate with God, what need was there for a church and the clergy? The ministers were undoubtedly worried that Hutchinson, who had already exhibited her
influence and popularity throughout the colony, would spread the tale of her revelation, spurring on others to communicate with God. Her revelation was probably the essential incentive that encouraged the ministers to testify under oath that Hutchinson had criticized the ministers.

The court ordered Hutchinson’s imprisonment through the winter until she could be banished in the spring. On March 22, 1638, Hutchinson’s Church trial ended with her excommunication. The judges hoped to ecclesiastically discredit the legitimacy of her speeches, which would in turn, crush her supporters. The Hutchinson family departed Massachusetts and purchased an island in Rhode Island that would eventually become Portsmouth. After William died in 1642, Hutchinson moved with all of her children, except the five eldest, to the Dutch colony of New York, just north of New York City in East Chester. In 1643, Hutchinson and five of her youngest children were killed by Native Americans who were involved in a war.

There is a common misconception that Anne Hutchinson was an extremist or a rebel who possessed radical ideas. This notion is flawed, however, because her views were extremely conservative. Her philosophy was based on the orthodox Calvinist belief of predestination, which was a key tenet of the Puritan faith. Hutchinson was troubled by what she perceived to be a laxity among the ministers regarding the most important facet of Puritan theology, the path to salvation.

Numerous factors were involved that increased the tension in Boston in the 1630’s during the Antinomian crisis. Wood shortages caused by excess logging in the expanding colony were a constant fear during the long, cold winters when wood was a necessary fuel to provide warmth. The Pequot War of 1636-1637 was a constant concern for John Winthrop and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The spread of fatal diseases was also a serious threat in the New World, where the sick often went untreated. All of these factors, however, paled in comparison to the perceived threat that Anne Hutchinson posed to the continuity of the colony. Her meetings created a large following that held a greater respect for her talks than the sermons of the ministers. This created an alternative vision to that of the Puritanical hierarchy, threatening the social order of the colony. Hutchinson’s assertive and persuasive personality also threatened the established gender roles that created an orderly society. The patriarchal elite wanted to keep women in a subordinate position, to ensure their monopolistic control. The Puritan ministers were the sole authority in theological matters. Hutchinson’s
criticism of their sermons, combined with her reported revelation from God, were a direct challenge to their position in the Puritan hierarchy.

At the end of the civil trial, Winthrop finished the court’s judgement by stating, “Mrs. Hutchinson, the sentence of the court is that you are banished from out of our jurisdiction as being a woman not fit for our society...”[54] She undoubtedly believed, however, that a city that was established as a Puritan sanctuary, ruled by ministers who did not accurately preach the Puritanscriptures, was a society not fit for a woman.

End Notes

[12] Ibid, 3-53
[16] Ibid, 14.
[18] Ibid, 15.
[28] Ibid, 104-106.
[30] Ibid, 188.
[33] Ibid, 29.
[34] Ibid, 29.
[41] Ibid, 20.
[45] Ibid, 313.
[47] Ibid, 314.
[48] Ibid, 314.
[49] Ibid, 315.
[51] Ibid. 338.
[52] Ibid, 338.
[53] Ibid, 343.
[54] Ibid, 348.

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