

"Mistris Hutchinsons Double Weekly-Lecture":

Puritan Assemblies and the Antinomian Controversy of 1636-38

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## Abstract

The Antinomian Controversy of 1636-38 was a complex religious conflict concerning politics and disruption of Puritan society. It began when the Massachusetts Bay colony split into religious factions within the Church at Boston. At the height of the controversy it seemed a majority of the congregation favored a grace-only means of salvation. Most in authoritative positions believed religious works were important to the societal foundation of a holy Puritan community. With the feared breakdown of society looming over them, they would prosecute and convict Anne Hutchinson for violating the cohesion of the colony. Hutchinson was a prominent woman in the community who held weekly Bible study meetings in her home. Her opinions tended to personally insult those ministers who did not agree with her. At a deeper level, her meetings were the practical quality of an ideological conversation concerning sectionalism and individualism within the Puritan church. She was ostracized and her meetings were eventually pronounced illegal, but her ideas had only slightly deviated from the foundation her Puritan community had built. Ironically, her English Puritan background primed her for these illegal meeting practices. Though many factors contributed to this conflict—gender, theology and personal hostility being some of the most apparent—the Antinomian Controversy largely concerned an attitude of dissent, reflected in Hutchinson’s informal assemblies.

## “Mistris Hutchinsons Double Weekly-Lecture”:

## Puritan Assemblies and the Antinomian Controversy of 1636-38

The Antinomian Controversy, which occurred in the fledgling Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1636-1638, was the American fragment of a larger English debate concerning salvation and the appearance of good behavior. When familiar religious practices from England took a radical turn, the colonial leaders of New England isolated and expelled the unruly Anne Hutchinson in order to prevent political division, invalidate ideological differences, and preserve the Puritan social experiment. Most scholarship has focused on epistemology, the theology and ideology of the conflict, but has often ignored its practical counterpart—Hutchinson’s controversial house meetings. As the first point of contention in her civil trial, her meetings deserve a thoughtful examination. A gross contradiction emerges from her Puritan foundation. Radical as Hutchinson’s meetings were to the Puritan authorities, this influential experiment had its underpinning in the existing Puritan church.

**Literature Review**

Popular scholarship often regards Hutchinson and her actions as antagonistic to the Puritans around her, preferring to see her as separate from her culture. Many recent works unwittingly promote this assumption. One of these is *American Jezebel: The Uncommon Life of Anne Hutchinson the Woman Who Defied the Puritans*. To LaPlante, Hutchinson is an “Uncommon Life.” In many ways, this is a true observation. This work rightly notes the rarity of Hutchinson’s feminine boldness. Hutchinson’s gender made the situation appear to be uniquely radical, and indeed, the stakes were heightened. In fact, this conflict is important because it highlighted just how experimental Puritan society had

become. Regardless, too much emphasis can be given to a revolutionary, feminist motif. To say Hutchinson was “an American visionary, pioneer, and explorer who epitomized the religious freedom and tolerance that are essential to the [current] nation’s character” is to glorify a historical character beyond historical context.<sup>1</sup> Hutchinson’s variant ideas did not originate outside of the Puritanism she knew. David Como tends to emphasize ideological continuity, rather than revolution, when he discusses the influence of Antinomianism on Massachusetts Bay in his work *Blown by the Spirit*. He believes New England antinomianism derived its roots from the same ideology as English antinomianism.<sup>2</sup> He understands the dynamic nature of pre-civil war England, but the majority of his argument within his book depends on an assumption that puritanism “conditioned the process of sectarian fragmentation.”<sup>3</sup> David D. Hall discusses Hutchinson’s radical nature but does not discount her connection to her culture. In his book, *A Reforming People*, he highlights the already radical ideas of Hutchinson’s Puritan contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> He describes leaders such as John Winthrop as “remarkably daring” but does not ignore “elements of continuity” in their thinking.<sup>5</sup> In prominent scholarship, Puritans are presupposed to be a unified whole, lacking a variance in ideology. Hutchinson’s ideas concerning normal Puritan society point to a different picture. David Hackett Fischer, a prominent colonial historian, attributed the lack of

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<sup>1</sup> Eve LaPlante, *American Jezebel: The Uncommon Life of Anne Hutchinson, The Woman Who Defied the Puritans* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), xvi.

<sup>2</sup> David Como, *Blown by the Spirit* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

awareness of institutional variation to the brilliant work of Perry Miller.<sup>6</sup> The radicalism of Anne Hutchinson and her actions should not be ignored, but her ideological foundation in varied English Puritan movements was her proper colonial context.

### **Establishing a Puritan Context**

In 1629, the Puritan-led Massachusetts Bay Company received its charter to settle the area of modern-day Massachusetts. At the onset, two hundred emigrants eagerly made their way to the American continent.<sup>7</sup> These emigrants varied in their religious opinions, but most in leadership positions were motivated by a hopeful desire to purify the Anglican Church of England in the fresh context—the virgin American frontier. As more emigrants arrived to this harsh climate with different theologies and motives, conflict naturally followed. The English colony of Massachusetts Bay was not even ten years old at the onset of the Antinomian Controversy.<sup>8</sup>

Early on, an emigrant named Anne Hutchinson began a discussion-based religious meeting. In these meetings, she facilitated conversation regarding the weekly sermons of the local ministers. One of the more notable ministers was Reverend John Cotton, a popular Puritan preacher whom Hutchinson had literally followed across the sea from England.<sup>9</sup> His persuasive theology had a profound influence in old England,

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<sup>6</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), 197.

<sup>7</sup> Richard L. Perry & John C. Cooper, eds., “The Charter of Massachusetts Bay, 1629,” in *Sources of Our Liberties: Documentary Origins of Individual Liberties in the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights*, Rev. ed. (Buffalo, NY: William S. Hein & Co., Inc. for the American Bar Foundation, 1991), 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>9</sup> David D. Hall, ed., “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown,” in *The Antinomian Controversy 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 337.

Massachusetts Bay, and in the thought-life of Hutchinson. There would be debate over Hutchinson’s choice words, but it was clear she regarded most of the other ministers to be wrongly preaching a works-based gospel. To a Puritan, this was an offensive accusation, more fitting to a Catholic priest than a Protestant.<sup>10</sup>

Though Hutchinson’s actions were controversial, contemporary sources agree to the general characteristics of her meetings. They began as informal women’s meetings hosted in her home. The church did not sponsor them, but, in the beginning, their legality was not questioned. Like other Puritan meetings held throughout the week, these meetings were times of supplementary study meant to review and compliment the Sunday sermon. In retrospect, some claimed this divisive meeting “practise” was “winked at” by the Magistrates and Elders because of her good standing in the community.<sup>11</sup>

As women found comfort in Hutchinson’s words of grace, many brought their husbands also. This would be the first issue to raise alarm among church leadership. At the height of the meeting’s popularity, Hutchinson was hosting anywhere from fifty to eighty people in her home.<sup>12</sup> This was a sizable group, and no doubt would have been comparable to many churches in other smaller towns, as the requirement for starting a church in the area only required a congregation of seven men.<sup>13</sup> At these meetings, many people besides Hutchinson would talk, but she often expressed her opinion.

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<sup>10</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” in *The Antinomian Controversy*, 274-76.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 208. All misspellings are intentionally maintained based on primary source collections, which also retain the misspellings. This includes the omission of the apostrophe in the title.

<sup>12</sup> James Kendall Hosmer, ed., *Winthrop’s Journal, “History of New England,” 1630-1649*, Vol. 1, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908), 240.

<sup>13</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 88.

In the minds of Governor John Winthrop and her other accusers, her discussion fixated on whether the local ministers preached a salvation based on good behavior, a covenant of works, or a salvation based on faith alone, known as a covenant of grace.<sup>14</sup> Hutchinson’s Boston minister was Reverend Wilson. Much of her disagreement began with his sermons. In the heat of 1636, Hutchinson’s associates did not favor Wilson. Only six years before, in 1630, he had been popularly elected to a leadership position. In his journal, Winthrop described how Wilson was elected by show of hands to be a “teacher” in the Boston Church—along with Mr. Aspinwall, who was also elected to be a deacon.<sup>15</sup> A few years later, Wilson was ordained as their “pastor.”<sup>16</sup> Later, both Wilson and Aspinwall would be involved in the court proceedings against Hutchinson. Wilson considered himself a victim of her slander. However, Aspinwall was disenfranchised and banished for drawing up a petition sympathizing with Hutchinson and her supporters.<sup>17</sup>

By December of 1636, those associated with the theology of Hutchinson and Cotton were at the point of visible discontent. When Wilson, from the pulpit, publically blamed the “inevitable danger of separation” on “new opinions risen up amongst” them, “all the congregation” of Boston church condemned him.<sup>18</sup> In Winthrop’s account, he described the congregation’s theological complaints as an attack on Wilson’s personal character. Earlier Winthrop had described Wilson as “a very sincere, holy man” and

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<sup>14</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 240.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-05.

evidently did not think Wilson deserved the criticism of his church.<sup>19</sup> Winthrop might have been the only member of the Boston congregation who thought in this manner. Notably, in her civil trial, Hutchinson did not seem to attack Wilson’s personal character, but strictly his theological over-emphasis on good works.

In most aspects of the controversy, discord began as a theological issue but ended as opposing associations with heretical behavior. This controversy had always been practical. Hutchinson and those associated with her differed theologically from the leaders like Wilson because they believed no public display of good works was necessary for the assurance of salvation. The simplified divide rested between those who preached a “Covenant of Works”—salvation based on godly actions—and a “Covenant of Grace.”<sup>20</sup> In her meetings, Hutchinson taught the believer needed no behavioral result to guarantee salvation’s assurance. In her mind, personal experience was the most accurate indicator of salvation.

The church elders of the colony took issue with Hutchinson’s meetings as her theology deviated and her personal opinions reached colonists of every variety, from those in the Boston Church, to those sitting on the General Court, to many deemed “prophane persons.”<sup>21</sup> The leadership asked her to stop encouraging questionable theology in her meetings, as they decided it was her meetings that had polarized the small community of believers. Winthrop described this polarized state concisely when he

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>20</sup> Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 59.

<sup>21</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 264.

wrote, “It began to be as common here to distinguish between men, by being under a covenant of grace or a covenant of works, as in other countries between Protestants and papists.”<sup>22</sup> Those who sympathized with Hutchinson’s opinion, such as her brother-in-law Reverend John Wheelwright, only grew louder in public protest.<sup>23</sup> The leadership eventually responded to this unrepentant attitude by linking her supporters with radical Antinomian groups.<sup>24</sup> This association with radical theology contributed to the growing division as tensions heightened.

The title “Antinomian” implicated more than a basic variance in theology and had a political component to it. Martin Luther first used the term “Antinomian” during the time of the Reformation. In his writing, *Against the Antinomians*, he chastised his friend and former pupil Agricola for the supposed rejection of both Old Testament law and civil law. Luther accepted neither rejection as biblical, despite his earlier strong language condemning a legalistic interpretation of the Old Testament and the works-based gospel that resulted.<sup>25</sup> For most Puritans, the Old Testament Law could not save but only apologetically prepare a person for the redeeming gospel message. In contrast, Antinomians found little emphasis for the Old Testament Law in salvation or behavior correction.<sup>26</sup> As in the case of Agricola, Antinomian doctrine was often connected with those who resisted the civil law as a result of their grace only emphasis.

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<sup>22</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 209.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, “John Wheelwright, A Fast-Day Sermon,” in *The Antinomian Controversy*, 158-59.

<sup>24</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 342.

<sup>25</sup> H. G. Haile, “The Loss of a Friend,” in *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1980), 223-237.

<sup>26</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, s.v. “Antinomianism.”

Hutchinson’s immediate English context suggested her Antinomian followers were labeled as such based on their theological relationship to the civil law. In 17<sup>th</sup> century England, the term rarely indicated ideological differences alone. Many so-called Antinomians disagreed with the later policies implemented by Cromwell’s Puritan government of England in the 1640s. Most did not overtly reject Old Testament Law, but rejected the similar state laws.<sup>27</sup> As its most attractive feature, Antinomianism provided for some a “more total” joy, eternal assurance, and a sense of liberty absent in mainstream Puritanism.<sup>28</sup> Due to Puritan polemics, Antinomianism came to be associated with supposedly radical sects who used the liberty of the gospel to behave in any manner they deemed fit, suggesting drunkenness, adultery, and other behaviors contrary to Judeo-Christian values.<sup>29</sup> In actuality, freedom from Mosaic Law did not necessitate sinful behavior among these groups.<sup>30</sup> Most English Antinomian ministers still promoted good behavior, out of gratefulness for the Christian freedom they possessed.<sup>31</sup>

The Puritan fear of the Anglican Church increased the apparent division between mainstream Puritans and Antinomian fringe groups. As David Como explains, those who sympathized with William Laud, the Archbishop of Canterbury under Charles II, thought all Puritans to be “de facto” Antinomians.<sup>32</sup> To them, Puritan assurance of unmerited

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, s.v. “Antinomianism.”

<sup>30</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 407.

election into God’s kingdom naturally resulted in sinful behavior.<sup>33</sup> Puritans were those who “barke[d]” against the king and the established church like pesky dogs.<sup>34</sup> The Puritan association with highly independent Antinomians did not advance the reformation of the Anglican Church from within that the Puritans so desired. Antinomianism was damaging to any reputation, especially a reputation as lofty as the self-proclaimed “city on a hill” in Massachusetts Bay.

Despite the animosity between these two English groups, they shared the common practice of informal assembly. The English religious underground included both mainline Puritans and Antinomians. Voluntary private meetings were characteristic to Puritan religion. The same voluntary meetings practiced by Antinomian sects were “at the heart of the culture” of the Puritan community.<sup>35</sup> Patrick Collinson describes the meetings as “an accepted economy of religious practice.”<sup>36</sup> Puritans were the underground of the Anglican Church. Antinomians existed as the underground movement within Puritanism. Both Puritans and Antinomians claimed to be “an orthodox son of the Church of England,” the true Protestants in a corrupt English culture.<sup>37</sup> They had more in common in the area of church practice than mainline Puritans would care to admit.

Antinomian division struck at the heart of a highly communal faith. Perry Miller, the foremost explorer of Puritan thought, argued “preparation” was at the center of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 409.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 248.

<sup>37</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 187.

theological controversy.<sup>38</sup> Although there has been recent debate concerning Miller’s emphasis and his definition of preparation, this theological idea portrayed the communal nature of the Puritan church. “Preparation” implied good conduct, “habits of grace,” meant to prepare true Christians for both the coming of personal salvation and of Christ’s final return.<sup>39</sup> In a practical way, good behavior was a visible form of salvation’s assurance, one measurable by the rest of the community.<sup>40</sup> In the Puritan mind, faith coincided with accountability, thus making community a vital component of their religious practice.

A communal faith necessitated a public faith. The Puritan practice of public testimonials demonstrated this. When adherents wanted to become members of a local church they underwent personal interviews by the elders. If the elders found no potential fault in theology, they brought candidates to the church congregation. This was not always the case, but often candidates would be expected to publically testify concerning a salvation experience.<sup>41</sup> As Edmund S. Morgan explained, these testimonials developed a stereotypical pattern because of their regularity.<sup>42</sup> In an effort to encourage unity and model biblical principle, the Puritans required their congregations to publically work together toward holiness.

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<sup>38</sup> Miller, *The New England Mind*, 60.

<sup>39</sup> K. B. Stoever, *‘A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven’: Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978), 196. Stoever’s appendix provides a deeper theological context to the debate surrounding Perry Miller’s work.

<sup>40</sup> Emery John Battis, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and The Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 24.

<sup>41</sup> Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 88-89.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-91.

Important to the New England Puritan context is the connectivity between church and state. As in the case of Anne Hutchinson, who endured a civil trial and a church trial, banishment and then excommunication, the church conflict was a concern of the local government. Years later, in 1648, this connection between church and state would be reinforced in the Cambridge Platform. In a constitutional tone, this document outlined the offices of the church, the churches relationship with its members, excommunication, and the power of the civil magistrates to interfere in church affairs. If there was a schism within the church, this platform gave the civil magistrate the ability to “put forth his coercive power as the matter shall require...”<sup>43</sup> In addition, those deemed heretical by the church were “to be restrained and punished by civil authority.”<sup>44</sup> This was written ten years after the Antinomian Controversy, but it involved many of the same people who had been involved. To the founders of Massachusetts Bay, government was meant to compliment religion. The two political systems were intertwined.

By the end of the controversy, Anne Hutchinson was the focal point of institutional criticism. This supposedly well-loved host of the popular weekly gathering was suddenly the corrupting “American Jezebel.”<sup>45</sup> Previously, she had been endeared into the hearts of most people who encountered her, including local leadership. Eve LaPlante highlights the ironic circumstance in which Hutchinson was ostracized from the colony. Even as Hutchinson stood in the midst of her trial, she was “a stranger to no one

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<sup>43</sup> Alden T. Vaughan, ed., “The Cambridge Agreement” in *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620-1730* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 114.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 310.

present.”<sup>46</sup> Even John Winthrop, her historian, governor, and harshest courtroom critic, admitted she was “inquisitive of them about their spiritual estates” and her ministry to her neighbors was initially “imbraced [sic].”<sup>47</sup> Even as she began to cause trouble, Winthrop did not doubt her intelligence and boldness.<sup>48</sup> In his eyes, her boldness was her main fault. As Hutchinson’s meetings grew in popularity, the Antinomian-like doctrine she espoused more intensely antagonized the elders of the Puritan Church and the leaders in the civil state, regardless of her respected reputation.

Though she was considered radical and threatening in the aftermath of the conflict, she was, at least in part, a product of her Puritan influences. Hutchinson, her husband William, and their many children had emigrated from England in 1634, shortly after their beloved minister Reverend Cotton.<sup>49</sup> LaPlante, who often stresses the radical role of gender in the controversy, notes Hutchinson was a “woman of her time.”<sup>50</sup> She was completely faithful to the domestic mothering role Puritan society expected of her.<sup>51</sup> In fact, at the time of her trial, she was pregnant. She was made to stand for hours on end, though she was close to her due date.<sup>52</sup> She was a respected midwife and naturally used

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<sup>46</sup> LaPlante, *American Jezebel*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 263.

<sup>48</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 195.

<sup>49</sup> LaPlante, *American Jezebel*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-47.

<sup>52</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 214.

her opportunity in this role to spiritually guide the women in the community.<sup>53</sup> Her meetings seemed to be the natural result of a nurturing relationship with the local women. She began as a respectable example to her traditional culture, not as a threat to it.

Regardless of the controversy’s beginnings, in the opinions of the elders, magistrates, and Governor, Hutchinson’s meetings and opinions inevitably led to the Antinomian extreme: the rejection of their authority. Former neighbors and friends within the community were associated with the radical Antinomian groups in England who supposedly rejected the law and thought of sin as trivial and irrelevant.<sup>54</sup> In times of hostility, it did not matter that Governor Winthrop lived only across the dirt road from the Hutchinsons.<sup>55</sup> This theological debate led to the prosecution of Hutchinson in a church trial and also a civil trial—due to the civil implication of sedition. Most of those who adhered to her opinions were dealt with gently, and only a few prominent followers were punished. However, for Hutchinson, the consequence was excommunication from the church and banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

### **Hutchinson’s Meetings:**

#### **Political Fears Concerning Association**

The Massachusetts authorities feared the highly individualized mindset of Hutchinson’s meetings because they placed independence above institutional unity. In a complex civil trial involving lengthy discussions over sedition and libel, Hutchinson’s meetings were the first issue discussed. Before there was any talk concerning

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<sup>53</sup> LaPlante, *American Jezebel*, 87.

<sup>54</sup> Winnifred Rugg, *Unafraid: A Life of Anne Hutchinson* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930), 115.

<sup>55</sup> LaPlante, *American Jezebel*, 139.

Hutchinson’s inflammatory opinion of the ministers, the court questioned her ability to hold these meetings. The civil and ecclesiastical leadership saw their anti-authoritarian nature and considered them a political threat, regardless of how real that threat actually was. Within their context, these leaders had legitimate fears and resisted any opinion that would threaten their City on a Hill. Though it may appear strict within a modern context, their fears were not unfounded because of the importance they placed on religious and political unity for survival.

The prevalent opinion of the leadership was that Hutchinson’s meetings encouraged an anti-authoritarian mindset. Thomas Weld, a proponent of orthodoxy and the author of the preface to Winthrop’s history, described the Antinomian Controversy to his mainland English audience.<sup>56</sup> He passionately explained, more so than any theological disagreement, the “worst of all [circumstances]...was Mistris Hutchinsons double weekly-lecture.”<sup>57</sup> Speaking in eight years retrospect, Weld determined the source of the colony’s Antinomian troubles to be these meetings. As he described, Hutchinson would repeat the weekly sermon and give her “mischievous opinions as she pleased” by twisting the Scriptures.<sup>58</sup> As she spoke to the regular attendees, “the custome was for her Scholars to propound questions, and she (gravely sitting in the chaire) did make answers thereunto.”<sup>59</sup> Weld’s descriptions had a clear, negative bias. In his opinion, Hutchinson

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<sup>56</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 200.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-08.

was a foreboding matriarch who conspired to deceive all, from faithful church members to wealthy merchants.

No commentary was as personally disapproving as the opinion of John Winthrop, the governor at the time of her trial and perhaps the most influential leader of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As the historian who recorded most of the events at time of the controversy, his focus on Hutchinson’s meetings was more personal in nature. Most of his commentary centered on Hutchinson’s character. He described the details of the meetings in a similar manner to Thomas Weld (Weld’s preface no doubt took much from Winthrop’s account). He added that Hutchinson would “make it [the Scripture] serve her turn, for the confirming of her maine principles.”<sup>60</sup> In his perspective, anything said in the meetings was a deliberate distortion. Most in authority shared Winthrop’s view. During the civil trial, the General Court declared the effect of Hutchinson’s meetings to be the “offence of all the Countrey, and the detriment of many families.”<sup>61</sup>

These meetings were deeply offensive to Weld, Winthrop, and the General Court because they threatened the security of the newly established political structure. The criticisms of Hutchinson’s meetings displayed this clearly. Weld provided his reasoning for his distaste when he noted that her weekly meetings “most suddainly diffused the venome of these opinions into the very veines and vitals of the People in the Country” until they began to “stare us in the face, and to confront all that opposed them.”<sup>62</sup> The dissenting tones of Hutchinson’s followers were most likely exaggerated, but accounts do

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 207-08.

suggest they were bold and public in their opposition.<sup>63</sup> This dissemination of ideas from a source other than the pulpit was a threat, real or apparent. To haughtily boast in those anti-authoritarian meetings suggested sedition.

In the mind of John Winthrop and others, unity was the most critical goal. Winthrop's greatest alarm was division in leadership as separation displayed the tumultuous nature of authority within the context of Massachusetts Bay. Winthrop expressed frustration because important leaders “had contemptuously withdrawn themselves from the generall Assembly, with professed dislike of their proceedings,” because they supported Hutchinson and her followers.<sup>64</sup> In fact, it was only after those individuals had withdrawn from the General Court that the Magistrates deemed the situation “desperate.”<sup>65</sup> The most blatant example of this division was former governor Henry Vane. Vane was only 23 when he arrived in the Colony in 1635.<sup>66</sup> He was a Puritan convert, despite the wishes of his influential English family. Vane became a member of the Boston church shortly after his arrival.<sup>67</sup> He was elected governor in May of 1636, only a few months before the start of the controversy.<sup>68</sup> He had initially resigned his governorship because he supported Hutchinson's opinions when most of the leadership did not. He later retracted that resignation when he realized the value of his

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<sup>63</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop's Journal*, 209.

<sup>64</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 248.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>66</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop's Journal*, 162.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

political position.<sup>69</sup> Regardless, when an election was called in May of the next year, “Mr. Vane, Mr. Coddington, and Mr. Dummer, (being all of that faction,) were left quite out.”<sup>70</sup> Although persons within civil government were different from the church leaders, division within the political community was a near and present threat.

John Winthrop was a driving force behind the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Winthrop published both *General* and *Particular Considerations* in an effort to assuage any fears the potential settlers might have. As Winthrop described his personal reasons for leaving England, he mentioned how he had worked in the church as a young man. At one point he was encouraged to enter a different field and “it hath often troubled” him ever since.<sup>71</sup> Though there was a distinct difference between those in ministerial service and those in the political vocation, Winthrop desired to serve in both areas. His devotion to both may partially explain his eagerness to protect, with government force, the church unity at the time of the controversy. This sense of responsibility can be seen trailing his more-famous City on a Hill analogy, “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, *the eyes of all people* are upon us.”<sup>72</sup> No doubt John Winthrop felt this pressure to gain the approval of others. Much of the colony’s ideological success rested on his strength of personality and influence.

Winthrop’s lay sermon, *Christian Charity, A Model Hereof*, exhorted his fellow colonists to heed the gravity of their opportunity. In this speech, six years before the

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<sup>69</sup> Hall, “Introduction,” in *The Antinomian Controversy*, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 215.

<sup>71</sup> Vaughan, “Particular Considerations,” in *The Puritan Tradition in America*, 34.

<sup>72</sup> Emphasis Added, Vaughan, “Christian Charity, A Model Hereof,” in *The Puritan Tradition in America*, 146.

controversy, he explained his lasting priority: “the care of the public must oversway all private respects, by which not only conscience, but mere civil policy doth bind us; for it is a true rule that particular estates cannot subsist in the ruin of the public.”<sup>73</sup> In his opinion, and the opinion many of whose held the same responsibility, their new world situation called for putting aside personal opinions for the sake of the public good. This attitude directly opposed the independent opinions Hutchinson’s meetings appeared to encourage.

The politically decentralized nature of these meetings was recognized in ecclesiastical realm as well as the civil. Only a couple days previous to Hutchinson’s trial, in the heat of the controversy, the Assembly of Churches in that area condemned numerous Hutchinson-like opinions as religious errors.<sup>74</sup> One error of particular interest concerned disagreement and separation within the church. Error 79 assumed a church member could “depart” if not satisfied with the church.<sup>75</sup> This was deemed contrary to a biblical interpretation of the Scriptures and was therefore rejected.<sup>76</sup> Another, Error 80, dealt with a similar issue of refraining from most church practices if an individual thought they would be better edified elsewhere.<sup>77</sup> The Assembly’s codified response followed a logical trail down a slippery slope. They declared, “...for if one member upon

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>74</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 219.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 241-42.

these his imaginations may depart, why may not ten, yea twenty, yea an hundred?”<sup>78</sup>

Their statement provided strong biblical reasoning for the error’s rejection, but clearly implied communal division was an ever-present fear. Just like Winthrop’s mindset, these two refutations rejected fringe liberties and assumed cohesion before individuality.<sup>79</sup> In part, this collection of errors brought before the Assembly of Churches was the result of the Hutchinson’s meetings and their dividing effect on the community.

Interestingly, the issue of authority appeared immediately following the court’s discussion over the meetings. In the civil trial, the court accused Hutchinson’s followers, especially those who had presented a petition on Wheelwright’s behalf, of breaking the fifth commandment.<sup>80</sup> Wheelwright was a fiery, Antinomian, preacher who many believed had been unfairly banished. When the elders of the church called for a fasting day of reconciliation, he preached against both the fasting day and those ministers who held a Covenant of Works.<sup>81</sup> Hutchinson’s followers presented a petition to protect him that was considered seditious. Hutchinson was associated though her name was not on it.<sup>82</sup> In Deuteronomy, God’s legal covenant with the Israelites, the fifth commandment instructed followers of God to obey the authority of their parents.<sup>83</sup> Winthrop explained the biblical understanding of the time as it related to this particular commandment. The

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>79</sup> In his *Short Story* of the controversy, Winthrop devoted a large portion of his work to these errors and individually answered each one according to his own interpretation of Scripture.

<sup>80</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 313.

<sup>81</sup> Hall, “John Wheelwright, A Fast-Day Sermon,” 166.

<sup>82</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 313.

<sup>83</sup> Deut. 5:16 (Geneva Bible, 1599).

fifth commandment included not only parents, but “all in [government] authority.”<sup>84</sup> By previously encouraging, associating and assembling with those who had submitted a petition, Hutchinson had disobeyed “the *fathers* of the commonwealth.”<sup>85</sup>

Winthrop described the core of this decentralized threat and documented the lack of institutional control associated with Hutchinson’s meetings. Hutchinson’s “practise have been the cause of al our disturbances, & that she walked by such a rule as cannot stand with the peace of any State...they [her meetings] *are not subject to control*.”<sup>86</sup> Winthrop’s legitimate concern was the peace, security and unity of the fragile colony. He and the General Court believed Hutchinson and her followers subscribed to no authority, no Scripture, nor any rule of law—and there was nothing more dangerous.

This controversy had a highly political tone. Every contemporary opinion pointed to that fact. Admittedly, the larger amount of court discussion concerned theology, but the source of insecurity and fear was misplaced political authority. Intellectual and physical independence had grown at the expense of security. Hutchinson’s meetings, with large groups of followers each week, were an uncomfortable reflection of that fact. Hutchinson’s meetings were a practical example of an underlying attitude riddled in division and dissent—an attitude strangely familiar to the new Puritan government.

Although limits on religious thought were central to the Antinomian dialogue, Hutchinson’s meeting related to the practical political structure of church authority—

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<sup>84</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 266.

<sup>85</sup> Emphasis Added, Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 314.

<sup>86</sup> Emphasis Added, Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 274.

reflecting the modern governmental freedom to associate.<sup>87</sup> In moments of challenged authority, as with the Antinomian Controversy, freedom of conscience manifests in a practical debate over the limits of assembly or, more specifically, association. Just as Hutchinson’s meetings were the practical result of an epistemological frustration, the right to associate is often the practical counterpart of an ideological dispute. Today, association entails a freedom to believe differently from that of the established authority and organize in a congregated lawful manner.<sup>88</sup> Hutchinson’s meetings would be legally protected under the right of association specifically because of their controversial nature, its threatening reputation with leadership, and its decentralized relationship within the normal Puritan church structure. Context demonstrates the political nature of this dispute cannot be overstated.

### **A Defense Based on Precedent**

This theological controversy was a highly politicized issue by the time Anne Hutchinson faced her accusers in a civil trial. Hutchinson boldly defended her opinions and meetings when she stood before the General Court. With no codified freedom of association to stand on, she eloquently cited Scripture and church practice as her precedent.

Two sources provide detailed descriptions of the proceedings. One source depicted the perspective of Winthrop. The other was an “ancient manuscript’ now lost,”

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<sup>87</sup> The constitutional ideas of assembly and association, as we know them today, were not explicitly mentioned in contemporary sources, but these modern terms most easily reflect the Antinomian’s legal situation. Importantly, within Hutchinson’s context there was no expectation to start a church with differing views, as the modern interpretation of this right could suggest.

<sup>88</sup> David Fellman, *The Constitutional Right of Association* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 2-3.

preserved in Thomas Hutchinson’s *History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1767)—a document written over a hundred years after the event.<sup>89</sup> Thomas Hutchinson’s examination was a bit lengthier and casted Anne Hutchinson in a more intellectual light than Winthrop’s account. Since Winthrop’s perspective came from someone who was heavily involved, he provided insight into the institutional opinion. Thomas Hutchinson’s history lacks this aspect. Winthrop’s account does not contain as much objective detail concerning dialogue but is valuable nonetheless—precisely because of its partiality.

When Hutchinson appeared before the court, the first topic of discussion was the meetings she held in her home. It was not her freedom of religious conscience immediately called into question; it was her right to practically assemble as she wished with whom she wished. In fact, when she brought up the issue of conscience, the court quickly scolded her. As they described, she was brought before the court, “not for your conscience, but for your practise.”<sup>90</sup> Their immediate legal concern was an assembly that promoted slander, before any debate could take place over the more abstract concept of religious conscience.

In Winthrop’s account, Hutchinson answered with an appeal to church practice, which presumed an agreed-upon foundation. The court asked, “Can you shew warrant for them [the meetings]?” and her reply assumed the power of previous precedent.<sup>91</sup> She explained, “There were such meetings in use before I came, and because I went to none

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<sup>89</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 311.

<sup>90</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 266.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

of them, this was the special reason of my taking up this course.”<sup>92</sup> She established her ability to conduct these meetings like others the Colony had before her, and provided numerous biblical examples: elder woman teaching younger, the gift of prophecy, and that of Aquila and Priscilla teaching Apollo.<sup>93</sup>

In an examination of Thomas Hutchinson’s history, the likeness to Winthrop’s description was apparent. When asked why she would keep such a meeting, Hutchinson more thoroughly replied:

It is lawful for me so to do, as it is all your practices and can you find a warrant for yourself and condemn me for the same thing? 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 I was not the first*.<sup>94</sup>

An important detail emerges from this text previously unexplained by Winthrop’s account. Hutchinson claimed that she started her own study, not because she thought her opinion was superior to others, as Winthrop suggested. She formed the meetings based on criticism she had previously received. She saw no problem with the creation of another meeting as it had been done before.

Mr. Endicot, a member of the court, summed up the dialogue between Hutchinson and Winthrop concerning precedent when he pointed out, “You say there are some rules unto you... What rule for your practice do you bring, *only a custom in Boston*.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 267-69.

<sup>94</sup> Emphasis Added, Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 314.

Obviously, the precedent of Boston was not held in a high moral esteem when it did not suit Mr. Endicot’s needs. Mr. Endicot often took the overly simplified, extreme position.<sup>96</sup> In one earlier instance, Cotton had taken a more moderate position on church practice involving women. Mr. Endicot had the opposing view. When the question was asked, should women wear veils? “Mr. Cotton concluded, that where (by the custom of the place) they were not a sign of the women’s subjection, they were not commanded by the apostle.” Mr. Endicot argued against him until Governor Winthrop ended the discussion.<sup>97</sup> In another incident, he was barred from public office for a year because he defaced a cross he considered to be idolatrous, worried England would think ill of the colony. His act was considered to be “rash and without discretion” though Endicot himself was cleared of any “evil intent.”<sup>98</sup>

In response to the harsh rejection of her assumed foundation, Hutchinson turned to a stronger conservative argument. She replied to Mr. Endicot with the Bible, a higher authority than the precedent she had cited. She simply stated, “No Sir that was no rule to me but if you look upon the rule in Titus it is a rule to me. If you convince me that it is no rule I shall yield.”<sup>99</sup> This “rule in Titus” refers to the biblical principle that women are instructed to be “in such behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not subject to much wine, but teachers of honest things. That they may instruct the young women to be

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<sup>95</sup> Emphasis Added, *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>96</sup> Mr. Endicot is also spelled as Mr. Endecott in the primary sources.

<sup>97</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 120.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-50.

<sup>99</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 316.

sober minded...”<sup>100</sup> In the rest of her courtroom dialogue, she most frequently cited biblical principle as her justification, knowing it to have ultimate authority on all matters moral, especially with the fundamentalists of the court. However, from the beginning, she assumed her meetings had a foundation in Bostonian and English meetings.

When Hutchinson brought up the right to religious conscious, the court quickly refocused her on the nature of her meetings, preferring to begin with the more concrete issue of church practice. Hutchinson’s beliefs were indeed controversial because of her female role in society, but she assumed her meetings needed little defense, as informal meetings were perfectly foundational. Was this unpolished meeting custom in Boston of little consequence? Was her assumption completely unfounded or rooted in precedent as she claimed?

### **Hutchinson’s Assumptions:**

#### **Her Precedent and its Puritan Foundation**

As Winthrop described in his personal journal, this Assembly of Churches at Newtown provided what he deemed a direct answer to the problem of Hutchinson’s meetings. However, even as he outlined where her meetings deviated from traditional practice, he acknowledged women’s meetings such as Hutchinson’s had been held before:

The last day of the assembly other questions were debated and resolved:--1. That thought women might meet (some few together) to pray and edify one another; yet such a set assembly, (as was then in practice in Boston,) where sixty or more did meet every week, and one woman (in a prophetic way, by resolving questions of doctrine, and expounding scripture) took upon her the whole exercise, was agreed to be disorderly, and without rule.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Titus 2:3-4 (Geneva Bible, 1599).

Hutchinson’s meeting expanded beyond what Massachusetts had previously seen, and it was a legitimate issue. However, an acknowledged custom in Boston should not have been brushed aside in a civil trial based largely on intent.

Though Hutchinson had been ideologically ostracized, she defended her meetings based on the patterns she claimed she had observed in her ecclesiastical leadership. The foundation for dissent in Hutchinson’s meeting was already a part of the Puritan mindset and practice. In addition to this practice, Hutchinson was theologically connected to John Cotton, the Puritan minister who would only go on to greater prominence in New England. Her mindset mirrored his on many issues, including the relationship of authority between a congregation and its minister. If not proven in the theology of one individual, there was enough in established New England church practices to encourage Hutchinson’s meetings and even other borderline schismatic behaviors. Though non-separatists vehemently denied it, their own conventicle-like meetings in England greatly distanced them from the established Anglican Church—in a similar manner of Hutchinson’s meetings. Rather than existing in opposition to her Puritan structure, as the controversy is so often portrayed, her meetings were a more extreme continuation of the individual attitude her Puritan community had recently established.

A charismatic preacher in England, John Cotton was perhaps the greatest single influence on the thought life of Anne Hutchinson. A brilliant teacher at Emmanuel College, he had sympathized with the Puritan movement from the beginning.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 234.

<sup>102</sup> Larzer Ziff, ed., “Introduction,” in *John Cotton on the Churches of New England*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968), 6.

Interestingly, he was considered by his peers to be popular, doctrinally sound, and eloquent at the time he experienced his personal conversion in 1609.<sup>103</sup> This meant he had firsthand experience behaving in a hypocritical, works-only manner, separate from his actual spiritual estate. In 1612, at the young age of twenty-eight, he was pursued for the ministerial position in Boston, Lincolnshire. There he was protected from persecution for the following twenty years—longer than most of his contemporaries.<sup>104</sup>

When Cotton finally distanced himself from the institutionalized Anglican persecution and traveled to Massachusetts Bay, he quickly involved himself in what would later become Hutchinson’s church. The first Saturday meeting he attended, he gave a sermon concerning the nature of the church. Within that next week, he and his wife were members, and his child, born on the ship journey over, was baptized.<sup>105</sup> Later in the same year, Cotton was elected as teacher by congregational vote of raised hands. When Wilson asked him if he accepted the call, Cotton responded in an ideally Puritan manner, characterized by humble submission. He answered that “he knew himself unworthy and insufficient for that place” but because he acknowledged God calling him to it, he accepted.<sup>106</sup> Cotton presence in the colony drew much attention and admiration. Notably, Winthrop recorded this event in his journal in greater detail than he had recorded Wilson’s election to the position of pastor at that same church.

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>105</sup> Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, 105-07.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 110-11.

Hutchinson promoted grace theology further than John Cotton would, but his opinions may have encouraged the ideological foundation of her decentralized meetings. Though she later claimed theologies he could not support, his teaching may have enabled Hutchinson in a way other ministers did not.<sup>107</sup> Even as Cotton reprimanded her, he complimented her ability to promote a grace-based salvation: “You have bine helpfull to many to bringe them of from thear unsound Grounds and Principles and from buildinge thear good Estate upon thear duties and performances or upon any Righteousness of the Law.”<sup>108</sup> This grace only gospel was always the emphasis of his message; so much so that at the beginning of the conflict he was suspiciously associated with Hutchinson and the church elders questioned him intensely.<sup>109</sup> As her pastor in England, he was an example to her in her most controversial church practice. In England in 1615, Cotton had established an informal Puritan meeting separate from the normal Anglican services. It was a hundred members strong.<sup>110</sup> Cotton was the minister at the root of Hutchinson’s practical theology and spiritual attitude, regardless of how her theology might have deviated later.

Cotton seemed to support an independent ideology of governance that lent itself to decentralized practice. In *Boundaries of Church and State* (1636), John Cotton described his opinion concerning the best form of governance. He discussed state

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<sup>107</sup> LaPlante, *American Jezebel*, 86-87.

<sup>108</sup> Hall, “Report of Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” in *The Antinomian Controversy*, 371.

<sup>109</sup> For a detailed record of their correspondence and disagreements see “Letters Between Thomas Shepard and John Cotton”, “John Cotton, Sixteene Questions of Serious and Necessary Consequence”, and “Mr. Cottons Rejoynder” in Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy*.

<sup>110</sup> Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, 270-71.

government specifically, but his attitude toward the body politic was consistent within the ecclesiastical realm. Cotton believed church government would be immovable and could “be compatible to any commonwealth.”<sup>111</sup> However, if the opportunity existed to establish civil government, that government should compliment the government of the church.<sup>112</sup> His letter was a response to influential English leader, Lord Saye.<sup>113</sup> Saye had voiced his concern that their Puritan church government was too democratic because the people “choose their own officers and rulers.”<sup>114</sup> Cotton claimed their structure was not a democracy because officers and rulers were still the administrators and the people were not.<sup>115</sup> Though it appeared to be, this was not a contradiction. He explained the relationship between three ideals that “strongly maintain[ed] one another”: “authority in magistrates, liberty in people, purity in the church.”<sup>116</sup> Cotton’s terminology, democracy or aristocracy, mattered less than what he explained with his following logical argument: Purity in the church enabled the people to maintain their liberty and together they could “establish well balanced authority.”<sup>117</sup> Cotton’s ideal government was a highly independent one. His ideal government derived itself from the consent of a holy church

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<sup>111</sup> Vaughan, “Cotton Responds to Lord Saye,” in *The Puritan Tradition in America*, 148.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Lord Saye was actually an aristocratic title. Otherwise known as William Fiennes, Saye was an important investor in the colonies with a vested interest in Massachusetts’ success. He involved himself in numerous British affairs, including the eventual English Civil War. For more information, see Mark A. Kishlansky’s “Saye What?” in *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 4 (1990): 917-37.

<sup>114</sup> Vaughan, “Cotton Responds to Lord Saye,” in *The Puritan Tradition in America*, 150.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 150-51.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 151.

community, not a higher authority.<sup>118</sup> He insisted governors held people accountable through law, but the people, guided by the church, also held the governors accountable. Even if this system was not technically practiced in Hutchinson’s time, it was outlined in Cotton’s ecclesiastical teachings.

Cotton was the one who insisted the church and general public keep authority accountable. In an extreme manner, Hutchinson believed she accomplished this in her meetings, and her intention seems to have been constructive criticism. Ironically, just as Winthrop believed he must look out for the common good, Hutchinson did as well. In her last words concerning her opinions of the ministers, at the end of her church trial, she claimed an attitude of accountability. She did not back away from her original opinion but explained, “It was never in my hart to slight any man but only that man should be kept in his owne place and not set in the Roome of God.”<sup>119</sup> What she believed to be necessary correction, they viewed as insubordination.

Cotton’s exchange with Hutchinson during her church trial was very personal in nature and implied change occurred in their relationship during the heat of the controversy. At the beginning of the church trial, there was a natural tension, but Hutchinson and Cotton discussed different errors as a wayward student might discuss a concept with a teacher. Hutchinson showed humility and even amended her opinions as Cotton and others clarified theirs.<sup>120</sup> As tensions rose, Cotton was interestingly silent.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> He did not describe the modern United States democratic republic here based on representation. In this letter, it is apparent he would prefer an educated aristocracy as the administrators rather than the common people who had elected them.

<sup>119</sup> Hall, “Report of Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 377.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

When Hutchinson’s son, and son-in-law, protested, and noted the church could not proceed with excommunication because they did not have unanimous consent, her accusers ignored the validity of their claim because of their relationship to Hutchinson.<sup>122</sup> As the authorities proceeded, they called upon Cotton to give the admonition. Cotton’s admonition began as a confession of his oversight, and was almost complimentary, till he reprimanded her and described her meeting practice as “dayngerous” and “filthie.”<sup>123</sup> When Hutchinson humbly denied the charges of radicalism so many had propounded against her, Cotton admitted he wanted to believe she did not hold these extreme beliefs. However, he quickly explained she had opened a door to extremism.<sup>124</sup> In their Puritan culture that feared radical groups, this open door was just as threatening as the beliefs themselves. The respectable Cotton could not be associated with Hutchinson now, regardless of their personal connection and the theological foundation she held—the foundation she gathered from twenty years sitting under his teachings.

As Hutchinson claimed in her defense, she modeled the actions of those around her. Even her style of her courtroom defense suggested this. At one point during the civil trial, Hutchinson gave a testimony starkly similar to the public church membership testimonials previously described. Edmund Morgan summarized a recognizable pattern:

...first comes a *feeble and false awakening* to God’s commands and a pride in keeping them pretty well, but also much backsliding. Disappointments and disasters lead to other *fitful hearkenings to the word*. Sooner or later true legal fear or conviction *enables the individual to see his hopeless and helpless*

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<sup>121</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 361-65.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 372-73.

condition and to know that his own righteousness cannot save him, that Christ is his only hope.<sup>125</sup>

Hutchinson gave a testimonial following precisely this same pattern.<sup>126</sup> This testimonial was recorded in both Winthrop and Thomas Hutchinson’s account, and this parallel testimonial structure was found in each.<sup>127</sup> Formulated like a dramatic monologue, Anne Hutchinson told the General Court the story of her revelation of God’s truth—concerning not her salvation, but the Covenant of Works:

then it was revealed to me that the Ministers in *England* were these Antichrists, but I knew not how to beare this, I did in my heart rise up against it, then I begged of the Lord that this Atheisme might not be in my heart: after I had begged this light, a twelve moneth together, at last he let me see how I did oppose Christ Jesus, and he revealed to mee that place in *Esay* 46. 12, 13, and from thence showed me the Atheisme of my owne heart, and how I did turne in upon a Covenant of works, and did oppose Christ Jesus...<sup>128</sup>

Whether intentional or not, Hutchinson followed the same model so often practiced among her fellow church members. The method of revelation, which Hutchinson boldly described, angered many of the members of the Court. Winthrop went on to exclaim shortly thereafter, “See the impudent boldness of a proud dame,” venting with “so fierce speech and countenance.”<sup>129</sup> Though the real tone of her statements is not known, the structure of her narrative was not unlike the normalized practice in their churches. Strangely, the same public testimonials that encouraged community cohesiveness seemed to encourage an individual ownership of faith, the potential catalyst

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<sup>125</sup> Emphasis Added, Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 91.

<sup>126</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 270.

<sup>127</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 336-38.

<sup>128</sup> Hall, “John Winthrop, *A Short Story*,” 272.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

of an opinionated congregation. Even in her courtroom defense, Hutchinson did not formulate an exceptional idea, but borrowed from common practice.

Even before a New England context had allowed for individualized, almost democratic practices, the English Puritan context laid a seedbed for an attitude that would only encourage Hutchinson’s meeting practices. David Como noted how in England “the culture of the godly community itself contained a structural tendency toward faction, division and theological fragmentation.”<sup>130</sup> He suggested in fact, that Massachusetts’ Antinomian Controversy was “a reprise of earlier battles” already fought in London.<sup>131</sup> Seen in its English context, Hutchinson’s individualistic attitude, and her resulting meeting practices, were far from innovative. The discussion over legal and illegal Puritan meeting practice was not unique to Massachusetts.

Within English Puritan religion, “extra-legal” meetings did not tend toward dissent necessarily, but had a more disobedient counterpart.<sup>132</sup> This illegal counterpart was called the conventicle. Most underground meetings organized by Puritans were not so publically objectionable, but it was a precariously thin line between a conventicle and a legal church assembly. Just as the Anglican Church would implicate mainstream Puritans, Puritans attributed conventicles to Antinomian groups.

The definition of a conventicle has always been a matter of dispute. Even during the time of the early English Puritans, English courts had trouble with this highly

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<sup>130</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 22.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, 248-49.

ambiguous term.<sup>133</sup> Its most basic definition is any unlawful, religious assembly characterized as “openly defiant” to the Anglican Church of England in doctrine and practice.<sup>134</sup> Since this definition includes any meeting except those held by the Anglican Church, both Puritans and their reactionary Antinomian groups could be included. As John Winthrop noted in 1624, many Puritan meetings were prosecuted as illegal conventicles because of its chaotic definition.<sup>135</sup>

Similar to the proceedings against Hutchinson’s meetings, the unlawfulness of an English conventicle was determined by intent. Unlike in later constitutions, the right to lawful assembly or association was not guaranteed. In England no one had defined what a legal religious assembly was, only what it was not.<sup>136</sup> A conventicle, the illegal assembly, had been defined as any meeting intending to cause a riot.<sup>137</sup> William Lambarde, the English law theorist, wrote in his *Eirenarcha* that all conventicles had a “virtue of conspiracy.”<sup>138</sup> These definitions are notably vague and, importantly, leave discretion up to the prosecutor. In Hutchinson’s civil trial, the General Court expected her to defend her intention to host her meetings—hence the greater emphasis on religious conscious.

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<sup>133</sup> Patrick Collinson, “The English Conventicle,” In *Voluntary Religion: Papers Read at the 1985 Summer Meeting and the 1986 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, edited by W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (Oxford, UK: Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by B. Blackwell, 1986), 224.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 223-25.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>137</sup> Conventicles played a large role in continental German pietism. A useful work for further study on this subject is *An Introduction to German Pietism: Protestant Renewal at the Dawn of Modern Europe*, by Douglas H. Shantz.

<sup>138</sup> Collinson, “The English Conventicle,” 230.

Intent was the basis of any legal decision concerning religious assembly, in England or in Massachusetts Bay.

In Massachusetts, the source of Hutchinson’s incrimination was the appearance of direct revelation. Interestingly, direct revelation was often a trait characteristic to a conventicle, a characteristic absent in a legal assembly. Most legal meetings used pastoral notes to repeat the sermon from the previous week. No separatism or illegal practice was implied if there was no suggestion of direct revelation.<sup>139</sup> Legal meetings were only meant to be additions to regular services.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, in the beginning, Hutchinson’s meetings were only additions. Just like Hutchinson’s meetings in her home, informal Puritan English meetings were “wholly domestic” and informal.<sup>141</sup> Revelation was where Hutchinson deviated. At the end of her trial, after Hutchinson had answered most of the accusations, the General Court reacted to her claiming a direct revelation from God, a clearly illegal act.<sup>142</sup> Governor Winthrop noted the heresy of her statement, having at last found “the ground of all these disturbances to be by revelations...the immediate revelation of the spirit.”<sup>143</sup> Direct revelation, apart from the inerrant Word of God, was what finally incriminated Hutchinson and her meetings. Her common meeting practice had foundations within her Puritan community, but her revelation set her apart from her peers and implicated an unlawful, Antinomian conventicle.

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 240-42.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>142</sup> Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 341.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

In Protestant England, the use of conventicles could be attributed to the Puritan desire for independence in a hostile Anglican context. Within the smaller subculture of the Puritan context, the culture of a conventicle was also “one of the media through which antinomians perpetuated their ideas.”<sup>144</sup> Whether the Puritan mainstream or an Antinomian fringe group, these assemblies provided a means of more individualized teaching. A legal assembly remained within certain ecclesiastical bounds; a conventicle had crossed an ideological line and had grown too independent. As Collinson so aptly noted, “The English conventicle of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries always had the potential to become, or give birth to, a separated and gathered church”—this was often unintentional and “directly contrary to [their] intention and principle.”<sup>145</sup> Any voluntary extracurricular church practices required close supervision by Puritan ministers in order to manage the fluid nature of religious ideas.<sup>146</sup> Interestingly, Cotton took partial blame for not watching his church, as he believed was necessary.<sup>147</sup> With Hutchinson specifically, he admitted his “sleepiness and want of wachfull care.”<sup>148</sup> Conventicles seemed to correlate to deviant groups wherever they developed. These meetings were the foundation, the platform for individual expression and disjointed theologies. Whether a conventicle in England or Hutchinson’s meetings at her home in Alford near Boston, the

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<sup>144</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 57.

<sup>145</sup> Collinson, “The English Conventicle,” 227.

<sup>146</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 53.

<sup>147</sup> Hall, “Report of Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson,” 369.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

common element to both was the appearance of disorder and the lack of institutional control associated with them.

Hutchinson’s attitude, and resulting meeting practice, had legitimate precedent within her Puritan church structure and the closely-tied government of Massachusetts Bay. She may have been an anomaly but she was not foreign to her Puritan context. Her personality was the factor that made her otherwise common meeting practice unique. The experimental culture of New England’s virgin frontier allowed for the flexibility to mold English church tradition in a more individualized manner. This dissident attitude, which the Puritan establishment so feared, had a foundation within its own religious framework.

### **Conclusion**

David D. Hall, who compiled the most comprehensive collection on the controversy, noted the Antinomian Controversy was not solely theological but involved political “power and freedom of conscience.”<sup>149</sup> Though highly theological, an important aspect of this conflict was the appearance of a dissident attitude within the Boston church. Puritan policy encouraged a personal faith, but many in authority feared the individualized attitude demonstrated by church members who attended Hutchinson’s informal house meetings.

The Hutchinson meeting was the practical counterpart to an otherwise highly ideological discussion. Freedom of religious conscience was an ideal that the Massachusetts Puritans would discuss, but another less-studied church practice was at the center of the civil debate—the freedom to associate, which today implies the ability to

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<sup>149</sup> Hall, “Introduction,” 11.

informally meet in a non-violent manner.<sup>150</sup> Before this American political principle was outlined in state constitutions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it had been practiced and challenged throughout the colonial history of church denominations. A small microcosm in a complex history of church fragmentation, Hutchinson’s informal meeting was an important part of a “radical experiment” concerning church government.<sup>151</sup>

Ultimately, research suggests Hutchinson’s appeal to precedent at the start of her trial was legitimate, even if it gave her meetings no legal protection. Whether her practices were founded in the ideology of influential ministers or by the structural differences the English Puritans had created between themselves and the Anglican Church, Hutchinson’s background encouraged an attitude of individualism that manifested in her meetings. The decentralized structure of her religious meetings cannot be separated from her foundation in the Puritan church. Although Hutchinson’s marginalization might suggest revolutionary change, investigation into her meeting practice suggests continuity, a deviation in the larger context of established church practice.

When Martin Luther criticized his antinomian friend Agricola, he made an interesting observation concerning natural trends toward dissent within the church. As one of the most notable dissenters in religious history, he lamented, “I have a foreboding that the best is past now, and the sects will follow after.”<sup>152</sup> Sectionalism held as true in

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<sup>150</sup> Obviously, this terminology would be branded much later. The Antinomians and the Puritans would not have known of the freedom to associate. This is simply a concise way to describe the political aspect of their meetings.

<sup>151</sup> Hall, “Introduction,” 20.

<sup>152</sup> Quoted within Haile, “The Loss of a Friend,” in *Luther*, 233.

Luther’s time as it did when the Puritans separated themselves from the Anglican Church, when Antinomians deviated from the Puritan mainstream, when the New England Puritans established a congregational church structure, or when Hutchinson tested the limits of her ecclesiastical foundation.

Puritans lamented this sectionalist trend within their own churches but, by sending fellow Puritans away through banishment and excommunication, they fortified division. Though Hutchinson met a violent end as a result of Indian wars, many Puritan dissenters like her went on to influence other English colonies.<sup>153</sup> In many areas of colonial America, church government developed independently of higher church organizations. Though Jeremiad sermons of the next generation would mourn the waning influence of Puritan ideals, the individualism of Puritan thought had a profound influence on later denominations, church structures, and the organization of colonial and eventual state governments.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Roger Williams of Rhode Island is an example of this.

<sup>154</sup> See *Wellspring of Liberty* by John A. Ragosta for an example of this outside of Massachusetts, specifically concerning the influence of dissenting groups in the important colony of Virginia.

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