Anne Hutchinson Reconsidered

"[S]he being dead, yet speaketh." Hebrews 4:11

So many new and controversial books and articles have appeared about Anne Hutchinson in recent years that it is time to reconsider her place in American religious history. The Antinomian crisis of 1635-37 in Boston, formerly dismissed by most historians as a curious but ephemeral episode of the early history of American Puritanism—a tempest in Boston's teapot—now looms up as a critical turning point in the story of the Christian churches in our culture. At least six books and numerous scholarly articles were published about Hutchinson in the 1980s. Every history of early Massachusetts now devotes many pages to her. Although she lived in New England for only eight years, she left an indelible mark upon its cultural development. It is time to reexamine and reevaluate this remarkable woman.

In its broadest aspects Anne Hutchinson's career illuminates three fundamental paradoxes in American civilization: first, our admiration for vigorous individualism and our respect for duly constituted authority; second, our striving for moral perfection and our commitment to pragmatic accommodation; and third, our belief in human equality and our assumption that women are yet somehow not fully equal. Beyond that, Anne Hutchinson has become a major figure in the history of American feminism as a forceful symbol of women's role and women's theology in the churches of America.

In order to understand Anne Hutchinson's place in religious history, it is necessary to consider her life in the context of the English Reformation. Fifteen years after Martin Luther posted his ninety-five theses on the church door in Wittenberg, Henry VIII broke with Rome and established the Church of England, placing himself at its head. But Henry's theological reforms did not go so far as many wanted, and Queen Elizabeth did not go much farther when she came to the throne. By 1603, when Elizabeth died, England was seething with religious unrest. Radical Christians had now separated from the Church of England in an effort to restore the ideals and practices of the primitive churches and to move closer to Calvinist theology. These radicals included the Scrooby Pilgrims (called Separatists) who settled in Plymouth in 1620. Among the more conservative reformers were those called Puritans, who hoped to reform the Church of England from within. This was the group that Anne Hutchinson joined.

The Puritan movement opposed the Separatists on the left and the more conservative Presbyterians of the Church of Scotland on the right. Those Puritans who came to New England have been described as Nonseparating Congregationalists because they hoped to abolish the episcopal structure of the English church and substitute a congregational polity to which only those who underwent a critical religious experience (salvation by faith through grace) would be admitted as members. The king and his bishops forced the Separatists out of the country after 1608, and it looked as though the Nonseparating Puritans would also be suppressed. Yet, although thousands of these Puritans emigrated to New England between 1629 and 1640, the movement continued to grow in Old England until it
was able to launch a successful revolution in the 1640s under Oliver Cromwell. By that time Anne Hutchinson had come to New England, and she had already started her own revolution in Boston.

In his book *Wayward Puritans*, the sociologist Kai T. Erikson describes Anne Hutchinson as a woman who lived at the crossroads of early American history. One way to look at this crossroad is to say that the settlers of Massachusetts Bay were facing critical choices about the kind of Christian community they were about to establish in the New World. They wanted it to be a Bible commonwealth, and they wanted it to be "a city set upon a hill," a model for all the world of a perfect Christian state. That vision has cast a long shadow in the nation's history. Today most Americans still believe that the United States is a model for the world, though not quite in Anne Hutchinson's terms or those of the Puritans. In many ways the choices made by the people of Massachusetts in the 1630s shaped our country and brought it to what it is today. We consider ourselves the model of freedom, of idealism, of equal opportunity, and of a stable, orderly, and progressive social system. If the United States is not a Christian nation, it is one clearly formed upon Judeo-Christian principles. In this respect, for better or worse, we owe a major debt to the Puritans. John Winthrop, the leading figure in the Bay Colony, is still cited by presidents and politicians who consider us today a city upon a hill, in special covenant with God, leading the world to the millennium. We like to think of ourselves as a chosen people with a manifest destiny to save the world from error and to make it over in our image.

Yet the New England legacy is ambivalent. We all know that the Puritans were not a very tolerant people and that they had a very rigid view of religious conformity. They expelled Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson, they whipped and jailed the Baptists, they hanged Quakers, and they put to death people they considered witches. Anne Hutchinson was aware of this double image; she was there when critical decisions were being made, and she spoke in favor of a church-state order different from the one that emerged victorious under Winthrop's leadership.

To Anne Hutchinson, a truly Christian society had to be based upon the ideal of the priesthood of all believers, and the state had to permit the existence of a united church of Christ rooted in a mystical fellowship of those who shared the presence of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. Christian fellowship for her did not distinguish between males and females, rich and poor, and it knew no narrow sectarian or nationalistic covenant with God. Hutchinson also considered John Winthrop and such ministers of the Bay Colony as John Wilson, Zechariah Symmes, and Thomas Welde mistaken in believing that membership in God's church could be discerned by fallible human eyes and measured by the appearances of piety, honesty, and morality, or what were called "good works." Hutchinson was convinced that God worked in many ways not knowable by man or measurable by outward behavior or professions. Furthermore, she believed that in forming churches based upon what she called "the covenant of works" rather than "the covenant of grace," the ministers and lay leaders of the Bay Colony were moving away from the true spirit of the Puritan movement, which had given it strength to stand against persecution in Old England. They were mistaking outward moral behavior for inward grace or salvation. Winthrop's Bible commonwealth seemed to her a retrograde movement that would lead toward a church of hypocrites—people who professed and displayed outward conformity to local norms but who inwardly were not truly one with
God. It proved, in fact, to be a movement that foretold the cultural captivity of the churches in America.

Like all Calvinists, Hutchinson believed that men have been so depraved since Adam's fall that they act essentially out of self-interest, and that self-interest leads them to behave according to the standards of the world and not from love of God. Thus most men behave well only out of fear of damnation. In addition, she believed that by insisting that God had made a covenant with the settlers of New England to establish a special community because they were a chosen people, the founders of the colony were creating the same kind of formal, spiritually dead established church that they had fled England to escape. Ultimately this would breed only smugness, complacency, and self-righteousness, with outward forms substituted for inward faith.

Billy Graham preached such Christian nationalism in the 1950s when he said, "If you would be a true patriot, then become a Christian. If you would be a loyal American, then become a loyal Christian." Graham has grown older and wiser and now preaches that God does not make covenants with chosen nations, defining their national enemies as his enemies and their national security as basic to the survival of Christianity.

To many other Americans, however, Billy Graham's earlier view seems perfectly reasonable, and for that we have John Winthrop and John Wilson to thank. For what they established in their city upon a hill, after banishing heretics, was a community in which "grace flowed through the loins of the saints," a New Israel in the New World. It was a community with a hierarchical and patriarchal social structure led by elect males and organized in parish churches. This, they firmly believed, was God's way. It was, in fact, the purified church and state for which England was to undergo a drastic revolution under Cromwell.

When we come to examine closely what was labeled Antinomialism (against law) by Winthrop and the Bay Colony ministers, we recognize today that it is a far more radical definition of church and state than most of us can easily embrace, however much we may admire Anne Hutchinson's courage and audacity. By labeling her an Antinomian, the Puritan leaders branded her as a lawless fanatic who would govern by direct revelation. Her mystical reliance upon the spirit of God within her would undermine all law and order; it would prevent the enforcement of the word of God by civil authorities. Denying that they had any intention of returning to false ecclesiastical or political principles, the leaders of the Bay Colony believed that they were creating a "middle way" between the Anglican Reformation and the radical Separatists, Anabaptists, Familists, and other extremists. Considering themselves practical, realistic, level-headed reformers, they branded Hutchinson as visionary and dangerous. That division between the pragmatist and the perfectionist has been at the basis of American cultural conflict ever since. It poses the binary tension within which the people of this country have oscillated for more than three centuries—a tension between noble idealism and hard-headed expediency. The measure of respect that one accords to Anne Hutchinson or to John Winthrop in evaluating the Antinomian movement in our history is a pretty good index of where one stands within that fundamental polarity.

Anne Hutchinson was a woman who would have left a mark upon any age, but in 1636 she found herself involved in a controversy particularly suited to her talents and temperament. Born in Alford, England, a town north of the old city...
of Boston, Anne Marbury was one of fifteen children of a crusty, disputatious, strong-willed minister of the Church of England, the Reverend Francis Marbury. Marbury was no Puritan, but like the Puritans he was highly critical of the clergy of the established church. He was imprisoned more than once for publicly denouncing the ignorance, corruption, and incompetence of the Anglican clergy. Anne grew up in Alford, but after her father was reinstated to good standing in the church in 1605, the family moved to London, where Marbury became a pastor. The Marburys may well have rubbed shoulders with William Shakespeare in the streets of that metropolis.

Living in an era of political and religious turmoil, Anne Marbury appears to have mastered all of the fine points of Anglican and Calvinist theology. She read her father's books of theology and sharpened her native intellectual ability through regular discussions with her father and siblings. We know little of her physical appearance, but all accounts agree that she was remarkable for her nimble wit, her strong assertiveness in debate, her bold presentation of her own position, and her genuine compassion in helping other women both by medical care and by psychological and spiritual counseling. Hutchinson was not so mystical that she thought babies dropped from heaven into the cabbage patch. She had good reason to learn all she could about health care, for the body, she believed, was the temple of the soul, and for the reborn it became the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Physical birth and spiritual rebirth were logically connected in her thinking.

Her father died in 1611 when she was twenty. A year later she married William Hutchinson, a prosperous cloth merchant. They lived in Alford, her childhood home. It is not clear just when she made the decision to join the Puritan movement, but from her later account her religious conversion appears to have occurred during the 1620s. This was after she and her husband had discovered the Reverend John Cotton preaching in the town of Boston twenty-four miles south of Alford. They traveled there regularly to hear him, and he had a profound effect upon their own religious transition from the Anglican to the Puritan persuasion. That Anne was no radical at this time seems indicated by her refusal to be swept into the Separatist movement.

Tensions within the Anglican Church reached a critical point in the 1630s. John Cotton was expelled from his position by the archbishop for his Puritan leanings, and in 1633 he left for New England to join John Winthrop and the founders of the Bay Colony. Anne Hutchinson persuaded her husband to follow Cotton, and in 1634 they reached Boston with their children. During her lifetime Anne was to bear fifteen children, like her mother, and this was part of her incentive to become a midwife.

Life in the primitive village of Boston was extremely difficult. Although there were several towns in the colony, the total population in the Massachusetts Bay area at that time was only about four thousand. Boston itself held just one-quarter of these, or roughly two hundred families. Most of them lived at first in small log houses with thatched roofs and one or two rooms. Shortly after the Hutchinsons arrived, they were admitted to the Boston church in which John Cotton and John Wilson were preaching. The colony was already becoming involved in quarrels fomented by Roger Williams. Williams had become a Separatist, and he urged the Bay Colony to follow the example of the Pilgrims at Plymouth and announce its own separation from the unredeemable Anglican Church. He went even farther and denied the right of the civil authorities to enforce religious conformity and church attendance, and for this he was banished.
There is no record that Anne Hutchinson or her husband ever lifted a finger to defend Williams or to oppose his banishment. Separation of church and state was apparently not part of her teaching; she was content to work for reform within the existing church structure.

Anne Hutchinson was teaching theology at this time to some of the women of Boston. They met weekly in her home to discuss the sermons preached by John Cotton and John Wilson. Her exposition of theological fine points and her lively leadership in the discussions later attracted male visitors to her meetings, among them Governor Harry Vane. While her husband rose to important positions in the church and in the state, Anne quickly established herself as a significant religious and social force in that small community. Her role as a religious leader became evident when her brother-in-law, the Reverend John Wheelwright, came to Boston from England in 1636. Hutchinson and those who admired her urged that Wheelwright be appointed as a third minister of the Boston church. And that was when she began to arouse opposition.

She wanted Wheelwright to join with John Cotton because she had come to distrust the preaching of John Wilson. Wilson, she told those at her meetings, was preaching that people could prepare themselves to receive grace and be part of the elect for whom Christ died; by leading prayerful and pious lives, they could provide a pure vessel into which the Holy Spirit would be poured. Wilson was also preaching that it was a pretty good proof that someone was one of the elect and had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit if he or she led a moral, upright, and industrious life. The Puritan ethic was defined in terms of piety, morality, honesty, industry, sobriety, and thrift. But while this was a commendable moral ethic, Anne Hutchinson did not believe that moral behavior entitled anyone to church membership or that it was any proof of election. Such beliefs were a corruption of true Christianity, she felt, for they meant that people who lived moral lives from self-interest and people whose thrift, sobriety, and industry helped them grow wealthy would be assumed to be converted by God, when in fact they may well have been spiritual hypocrites or spiritually deceived into believing they were of the elect. Preaching that people could work their way into the church through their good behavior, or could bind God to save them by preparing themselves for salvation, incorrectly interpreted true doctrine; i.e., salvation by faith alone. It also limited God by appearing to make salvation a contractual arrangement between equals: when men or women did their part and lived piously, soberly, and uprightly, then God was obliged to do his part and send them grace.

The Church of England admitted persons on the basis of these beliefs, and this, Hutchinson felt, could only lead backward in New England. As historians can now demonstrate, she was correct, for gradually the spiritual fervor of the early Puritan movement waned. After 1640 Puritanism became institutionalized and routinized. As the New England churches lost their original pietistic spirit, they lapsed into institutions whose members were admitted in adulthood almost as a matter of course; a kind of birthright membership developed. But the leaders of the Bay Colony did not foresee this change. They believed Anne Hutchinson was insulting them and their cause, and they said so.

New England Puritanism contained a number of basic paradoxes and inconsistencies, and Hutchinson adroitly put her finger on these incompatible elements. At the time, however, she seemed to be seeing heresy where there was none. In fact, the logic of her beliefs seemed to undermine all church organization and ritual. Since God’s grace was, for her, unconditional (or arbitrary), it mattered
little how people behaved in their outward lives. In addition, she insisted that even salvation could not wholly save mere humans from sin. Ultimately she claimed that only the truly elect could discern other truly elect persons, and that the elect recognized each other through the mystical operation of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. Worst of all, however, her teachings led to the demigration of the Bay Colony’s civil and ecclesiastical leaders, whom she called false leaders and false preachers.

John Wheelwright was not selected to become a pastor in the Boston church, although Governor Harry Vane supported the Hutchinsonians in their effort to have him appointed. John Winthrop’s opposition proved decisive in this controversy. It now became clear that a major dissension was brewing. Matters were made worse when Wheelwright, in a fast-day sermon soon after his failure to attain office, boldly asserted that the true followers of God would and should do everything in their power to assert control over the colony to save it from corruption. “We must all prepare for a spiritual combat,” Wheelwright said. “Behold the bed that is Solomon’s; there is three-score valiant men about it; valiant men of Israel, every one hath his sword girt on his thigh. . . . They must fight, and fight with spiritual weapons . . . we must all of us prepare for battle and come out against the enemies of the Lord. And if we do not strive, those under a covenant of works will prevail.”

In this sermon the colony’s leaders found a clear threat of insurrection. While Wheelwright specifically said that he spoke only of spiritual and persuasive means of asserting control, his opponents took him to mean otherwise. They put him on trial for fomenting sedition against duly constituted authority. In March 1637 they convicted him. Soon after, the authorities passed a law prohibiting anyone with Hutchinsonian leanings from entering the colony. Six months later John Wheelwright was banished, and all who had supported him were forced to give up their guns. Many were then disfranchised, and other Hutchinsonians were banished also. In most history books this is considered a victory for law and order by practical leaders who rightly saw that only anarchy could result from the presence of two such opposing factions in the colony.

The final act in this drama came when a synod of ministers from Massachusetts and Connecticut made a list of all the erroneous views of the Hutchinsonians. They discovered eighty-two heretical positions dangerous to the stability of the commonwealth and the truth of Calvinism. Several ministers were then delegated to confront Anne with these errors and to persuade her to recant them. Most of the errors were so farfetched—such outrageous perversions of her teaching—that she disclaimed them readily and was indignant that they were ever imputed to her. But there were several presumed errors that she could not deny, especially those that condemned the doctrine of preparation for grace, denied that good works were evidence of election, and affirmed that God’s grace was unconditional. John Cotton at first seemed to defend her position, but he later turned against her. In November 1637 she was convicted of libeling (or “traducing”) the ministers of the colony and sentenced to banishment.

Because she was pregnant, her banishment was delayed, and she spent the winter under arrest. In March 1638 her church placed her on trial for heresy, and she was excommunicated. Later that month she and about half of her followers left Massachusetts for Rhode Island. The leader of this group, which included several of the most influential men of the colony, was William Coddington (another group of her followers went to Exeter, New Hampshire, with John Wheelwright). Coddington and the Hutchinsons received timely assistance from Roger
Williams in Providence, who helped them to purchase Aquidneck Island from the Narragansett Indians.

All that we know of Anne Hutchinson's beliefs we learn from the stenographic report of her trial and from other reports by her enemies. She left no theological writings of her own. Most historians have agreed that the trial was not fairly conducted, that Anne was denied ordinary rights, and that she defended herself so ably that she almost succeeded in thwarting her accusers. But when she said that God revealed various things to her directly, and that one of these was his promise that Massachusetts Bay would be destroyed if its leaders continued to persecute her, she provided a convenient handle for her own conviction. People who believed that God spoke to them directly, and who therefore placed God's voice above the voices of the learned ministers and the duly elected magistrates, were clearly unfit to remain in the kind of Bible commonwealth that the majority favored in 1637.

Hutchinson meant to say that the elect were not bound to obey the law of the Mosaic or Abrahamic covenant, the law that said "Obey my laws and you will be my people." But in her excitement she seemed to be saying that the covenant of grace enabled the elect to know God's will even in future events of a secular nature. To her, the covenant of works, and her opponents' belief that only a learned ministry and God-ordained magistracy knew the truth, were such departures from true religion that they would bring down destruction upon the colony. But she put this badly. It was one of the few times her keen intelligence failed her.

Historians have noted that her banishment was meant to indicate to conservative Puritans in Old England that the New England Puritans were able to use their middle way of church-state relations to control fanaticalism without bishops, church courts, and a king who was head of the church. In addition, banishing Anne Hutchinson made her a cautionary or monitory figure to other females who might assume the right to venture out of their proper sphere.

While a careful reading of her trial record and other statements can show us what the Hutchinsonians stood for in the debate over Calvinist doctrines, we have much less evidence to describe how they felt about organizing a social order. Here we must rely upon what little is known about their own colony at Pocasset [now Portsmouth] in Rhode Island. The records of this community are very scanty, but from what little survives, it does not appear that Anne Hutchinson and her friends were particularly radical. Although they said that they would not persecute anyone for conscience, we know that the Puritans said the same thing, to the Hutchinsonians, as to the Puritans, it was not persecution to whip, jail, or
hang a heretic, for one could only "persecute" a truly good and orthodox person. We know how the Hutchinsonians dealt with Samuel Gorton, an eccentric mystic who believed that women as well as men should be allowed to preach: when Gorton appeared in Pocasset, after being banished from Boston and Plymouth, he was whipped and banished from the town in 1639. We know too that Pocasset, like Boston, was organized in accordance with wealth, education, and social position. The well-to-do were given more land and high office, while the poor were relegated to inferior status. We also know that the Pocasset settlement was not a very stable one. In 1638 Codlington and some of the other leaders were deposed from office and left in a huff for the southern end of the island, where they founded a town called Newport.

It was reported to those in Boston that Anne Hutchinson continued to expound the word of God in Pocasset, but it seems doubtful that she did so outside her own home. There is no record of her leading a church or of any meetinghouse being built in the town. In fact, while it is known that John Clarke preached in Pocasset, there is no record that he founded a church there (though he later did so in Newport). Under the Hutchinsonian theology it is difficult to see how a visible church could have been founded unless everyone was willing to accept the right of those who believed they were of the elect to choose the church's members on the basis of their own mystical knowledge of each other's sainthood.

Antinomianism did not produce religious stability in Pocasset. When John Clarke moved to Newport, he became a Baptist. Anne Hutchinson's sister, Katherine Marbury Scott, went to Providence and convinced Roger Williams to become a Baptist also (he left the denomination after a few months). Some Hutchinsonians questioned the practice of infant baptism, though there is no evidence that Anne Hutchinson ever did. The members of Clarke's church later split over whether to worship on the Lord's Day (Sunday) or on the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday), and this led to the formation of the Seventh-Day Baptist denomination. After 1656 many of Hutchinson's followers joined the new sect called the Society of Friends, or "Quakers." From this history it can be argued that the Puritans were right to see a kind of anarchy inherent in the Hutchinsonian position and a certain confusion arising from reliance upon the teaching of the Holy Spirit dwelling within the heart of each believer. But all of this misses the point. Anne never said she was a system builder. She opposed the idea of institutionalizing the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. And, as we know, Roger Williams did no better when he separated church and state. The proliferation of various ways of being Christian was one of the legacies of both these early Rhode Islanders.

In 1642 William Hutchinson died. He had been Anne's anchor through the years of controversy—always supportive, always loyal. It was reported that Anne had forced him to renounce his position as a magistrate in Pocasset because she had ceased to believe that God had ordained the institution of magistracy. How could saints be governed by secular authority? Why should they be, when the Holy Spirit dwelt in them? It was not, of course, that she believed the elect were perfect and could never sin. On the contrary, she said that they could sin as much as reprobates and still retain their election; she never doubted the Puritan doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. This left her open to the charge of believing that sin must originate with God and that sinners are not responsible for their own behavior because the Holy Spirit is living within them and guiding them. Her strict interpretation of unconditional election led to what some considered a
fatalistic reliance upon God. But for her, fatalism was perfectly consistent with man's fallen state, God's omnipotence, and the necessity of total reliance upon God's will.

The last act in Anne Hutchinson's history began with her decision, after her husband's death, to move with her unmarried children to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam. There she lived at Pelham Bay (southeast of present-day Eastchester) until the Dutch inadvertently stirred up an Indian rebellion. Among the first settlers to be killed by the Indians were Anne and four of her children. And so her life ended, in August 1643, with Anne a victim of the white man's theft of the Indian's land—a sin that Roger Williams had denounced in Boston a decade earlier, but that Anne Hutchinson had never mentioned.14

This, then, was the historical context of the Antinomian movement. It remains to summarize some of the different ways in which historians have been interpreting that movement since then. Here I will be recapitulating some of the important work done by Professor Amy Lang in her fine study Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England. Professor Lang shows very clearly that from Cotton Mather to Nathaniel Hawthorne, the prevailing image of the Antinomian was pervaded by the fact that Anne Hutchinson was a "public woman" and therefore a woman out of her sphere. As Lang demonstrates, early historians of Antinomianism started by connecting her unwomanly conduct with the work of Satan, thus justifying not only her banishment but her final miscarriage after her banishment and her cruel death at the hands of savages.

Later, when the Revolutionary ideology made religious liberty an ideal of the new nation, the Puritans were criticized for failing to tolerate Anne. Nonetheless she was seen as a very eccentric and unstable person, both as a woman and as a theologian. Those who studied her during the nineteenth century tended to find her beliefs of negligible significance and her controversy irrelevant to history; that controversy, it was claimed, was about abstruse points held by Calvinists of an earlier day—points no longer central to Christian thought. But while Anne Hutchinson gradually received more sympathy from historians as a persecuted Christian, she was not exonerated from her unwomanly conduct in leaving the sphere of hearth and home to enter into public debate. In fact, the American Protestants of the nineteenth century (the Victorian era) were convinced that she was more sinful for being unwomanly than for believing in the covenant of grace. Professor Lang makes a good case that Emerson did not really consider her a true forerunner of Transcendentalism (though some Transcendentalists thought she was) and that Hawthorne probably had her in mind when he branded the eccentric (and adulterous] Hester Prynne with a scarlet letter in his novel of that name.

Until the twentieth century the best Hutchinson could obtain from historical study was a concession that she was a pious and godly woman, that her trial was a grave miscarriage of justice, and that her theology was so recondite as to have not been worthy of any trial. Still she remained a cautionary figure in a male world; her real sin was forgetting that she was only a woman and that God had not ordained women to engage in the difficult and learned practice of Biblical exegesis or in the rough-and-tumble of worldly politics. In fact, until the middle of the twentieth century, most historians, being male authority figures, felt that Anne Hutchinson was a rather brazen, arrogant hussy; that however bright she was, she was really guilty of improper behavior, a scandal to the norm of female domesticity. As Professor Lang puts it, "The gender-specific problem of the
public woman figures [in] the dilemma of maintaining the law in a culture that simultaneously celebrates and fears the authority of the individual." Privately we admire Anne Hutchinson as a strong-minded individual, but for male authority figures she was always a threat and her womanhood was therefore held against her.

Beginning with the works of Perry Miller in the 1940s, however, a new set of perspectives began to appear. Miller and his pupils reexamined Puritanism and redefined the importance of the Antinomian movement. Through his emphasis on theology as a major feature of the Puritan community, Miller gave the Hutchinsonians new significance in the history of the Bay Colony. Recognizing and pinpointing the redefinition and institutionalization of Puritanism in the New World, he was the first to depict the Hutchinsonian movement as the turning point in Puritanism's decline. Miller clearly delineated, at last, the significance of the Puritan belief in preparation for grace and in church membership based upon the evidence of good works. He showed that Anne Hutchinson was upholding an older pietistic approach to the Puritan movement, while Winthrop and her other opponents were more interested in order and stability than in theology.

In this line of argument Miller was followed by his pupil Edmund S. Morgan, whose 1958 volume *The Puritan Dilemma* is still the most widely used textbook on Puritanism. Morgan claimed that Anne Hutchinson was Winthrop's intellectual superior in every respect except political common sense. He argued that Winthrop railroaded Anne Hutchinson out of the colony because it was not big enough for both of them, but he concluded his analysis of the movement by claiming that no other choice was possible if the colony was to survive. Writing as a hard-headed neoliberal in the 1950s—in an era when liberals spoke of "the end of ideology" and favored pragmatic solutions to political problems—Morgan had even less sympathy with Hutchinson's theological position than his mentor did. For him, "the Puritan dilemma" was how to live in this world and still be a good Calvinist; in these terms Anne Hutchinson was unrealistic, for she was more concerned with following the logic of her views, regardless of practical consequences, than with accommodating to the world.

Following Morgan's book sociologists and psychologists began to study the Antinomian crisis from other viewpoints, those inspired by Erik Erikson's famous studies of Martin Luther and Mahatma Gandhi. One sociologist, Kai Erikson, concluded in 1966 that Hutchinson and her "odd opinions" deviated too far from the acceptable norms of Massachusetts society. Following Emile Durkheim, Erikson maintained that persecution of social deviants marks the health of society, for it gathers the community into a solid phalanx against those who threaten its accepted beliefs and values. Although few Bostonians understood the theological quibbling that led to Anne's banishment, Erikson believed, they were agreed that her behavior was out of line with what was expected of respectable, decent, orderly, and normal Puritans. He was willing to concede that her being a woman was one of the marks of her deviance, but he also followed Miller and Morgan in arguing that pragmatically speaking, Winthrop stood for common sense and Anne Hutchinson for fanaticism. No one was to blame in such a scenario, however, for society sets its own standards and defines its own deviants. The sociologist simply charts the middle of the road in terms of those who are driven off into the gutter.

A few years earlier Emory Batts had utilized both sociology and psychology to analyze the Antinomian movement in the most intense detail yet provided by a
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historian. In Saints and Sectaries Battis concluded that Anne Hutchinson's behavior was psychologically abnormal. She had too intense a relationship with her father; too emotional a bond with her father-figure, John Cotton; too little concern for her spineless husband, William. Her psychological instability led her to challenge other male authority figures, said Battis. Anne battled for her own psychological needs rather than for theological and ecclesiastical concerns, and the latent psychological meaning of this struggle is more important that the overt civil or theological meaning. 19

Why, then, did so many other, more psychologically stable people in Boston side with Anne Hutchinson? Here Battis pointed out another latent meaning in the controversy, drawing on Max Weber, he analyzed the wealth and social standing of those who supported her. Battis's statistical analysis led him to conclude that most of the staunch Antinomians were merchant entrepreneurs, men of rising wealth, while most of their opponents were landed gentry with more traditional views of social order. The rising merchant class differed from the old landed class in desiring less restraint upon business enterprise. These entrepreneurs chafed under the efforts of the Puritan gentry who dominated the legislature [and who clung to an older, medieval social ethic] to pass laws regulating wages and profits. The entrepreneurs also disliked the clerical denunciations of "filthy lucre" and the clerical insistence that people remain in the social rank to which they were born. Hutchinson's views appealed to these "new" men because these views were closer to a new individualistic, laissez-faire social ethic, one that would limit the regulatory power of the state and exalt the free enterprise of the rising middle class. Anne Hutchinson, it seemed, was not the Thoreau of Massachusetts Bay but the Ayn Rand.

Finally, in the 1970s, a group of feminist historians entered the field and produced important new reevaluations of the Antinomian crisis. For these writers, Antinomianism is one of the earliest examples in our culture of the way in which gender issues govern social power and behavior. Anne Hutchinson's theological contributions to Puritanism, these historians said, were ignored and denigrated primarily because Hutchinson dared to challenge male hegemony. The leaders of Massachusetts Bay decided to make an example of her as a symbol of the danger posed to society when a woman leaves her God-appointed sphere. This feminist viewpoint totally reversed the interpretation of the early nineteenth-century historians. It eulogized Hutchinson for daring to be a woman and daring to assert woman's equal role; it eulogized her as a compelling symbol of the new movement for equal rights for women.

Anne Hutchinson has also become a contemporary symbol of a major gender revolt within our churches, where women theologians like Mary Daly, Rosemary Ruether, and Elizabeth Fiorenza are critical of the patriarchal basis of the Christian church and demand that the Bible itself be reexamined to expose its bias against women. Instead of disparaging Hutchinson's theology as abstruse or mere "quibbling" over Calvinist exegesis, feminists argue that her willingness to stand up as a woman and seek theological change marks Hutchinson as a martyr to both women's history and church history. She is now cited as an example of what is necessary today if the Christian churches are to become relevant again in modern society. Hutchinson preached the priesthood of all believers, and from this ideal derives the equality of women in Christianity and their right to do everything a man can do in church and civil affairs.

I am not personally convinced that Anne Hutchinson was consciously trying to empower women—that is, to give them a special or equal role in the church as
women. In fact, at her trial she made a point of stressing that she never taught theology at the meetings in her home when men attended. Nevertheless her behavior demonstrated her belief that God's message could and should be defended by women as well as by men when it was being perverted, and that women could minister to fundamental human concerns in spiritual affairs as effectively as men could. Just as she was a medical and psychological minister to women in her daily life, so, as a Christian, she asserted a sphere of influence that she believed was not only perfectly legitimate in the Christian order but also obligatory. God spoke through all of his saints regardless of gender, and they were all bound to uphold his truth.

In what I have been saying about historical reinterpretations, I am not simply reciting the truism that every age makes past symbols into relevant examples of contemporary concerns. In seeking a "usable" past, too often we distort it. The study of African-American history, for instance, is not just a search for tools for the present civil rights movement; more importantly, it is an effort to understand how and why black slavery and white racism obtained such a strong hold on our culture. Similarly, studying the Puritans' quarrel with Anne Hutchinson can give us a better understanding of the founding of American civilization and how that quarrel gave it shape. While each new interpretation of the Antinomian crisis may reflect the particular concerns of its age, it can also help us to see more clearly who Anne Hutchinson was and what she and John Winthrop represented both for their times and for ours. Different historians may emphasize different aspects of that affair, but taken together they are all helping us to deal with the living past. As William Faulkner once said, "The past isn't dead; hell, it isn't even past." Anne Hutchinson has thus become, like Christianity itself, a many-splendored thing. She lives because she was with us at a vital crossroads in our past, and because her actions help us to comprehend more clearly the vital religious, social, and feminist crossroads in the present. It is the best possible tribute to her that, though long dead, she still speaketh.
Notes

1. The two most recent books are Amy S. Lang, Prophetic Woman: Anne Hutchinson and the Problem of Dissent in the Literature of New England (Berkely: University of California Press, 1987), and Robert Rimmer, The Resurrection of Anne Hutchinson (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1987).

2. For the significant aspects of "Nonseparating Congregationalism," see Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933).


7. See Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 44, 49-50. Battis suggests that she may have arrived at her Antinomian position during a conversion experience in 1630-31. She held Antinomian views by the time she came to Boston.


9. Quoted in Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 142.

10. Battis states that there were 187 males in the Bay Colony who considered Hutchinsonian. Ninety of them lived in Boston. These may not all have had large families, but even if they had an average family of only 6, that would have been almost half of the 1,200 inhabitants of that small town in 1637. The Hutchinsonians were outvoted in the general election of that year by the voters in the surrounding towns, where Anne had less support because fewer there had ever met her. Saints and Sectaries, 66, 257, 296.

11. Those who first settled in Pocasset signed a political covenant in which they agreed that "We whose names are underwritten do here solemnly in the presence of Jehovah incorporate ourselves into a Bodic Politick, and as he shall help, will submit our persons, lives and estates unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Battis, Saints and Sectaries, 231. See also Rugg, Unafraid, 221.


13. For religious controversy in Pocasset and Newport in these years, see Thomas W. Bicknell, Story of Dr. John Clarke (Providence: printed by the author, 1915), and James, Colonial Rhode Island, 25-83.

14. That she settled near the Indians at Pelham Bay to convert them seems debatable, although some historians have made that claim.

15. Lang, Prophetic Woman, 3.

16. See Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 158-63. According to Miller, "Any orthodox Protestant community would have looked upon her as Massachusetts did, and have disposed of her in pure self-defense."


20. Lang, Prophetic Woman, 42. Hutchinson "reduced herself to a medium through which God spoke," says Lang, "and in this way empowered herself more fully than the men in whom the community vested power," thus "she disrupted the chain of authority that shaped Puritan civil relations."